

as any edited version; he scrupulously acknowledges what he has deleted by allowing the proper empty spaces (once occupied by Milton's other letters) to appear on the page" (84).

The best criticism on Whitman in *The Continuing Presence* functions a lot like Johnson's poems, derived from Milton or from Whitman, and yet different from them, and announcing those differences at the outset, sometimes in their very mode of presentation. Contiguity with a difference, as well as a self-consciousness of our various historical appropriations, engagements, and textual gaps. "His Sex Radicalism and Ours." *The Continuing Presence of Walt Whitman* fruitfully points up what we still have to learn about our ever-elusive Whitman and what Robert Martin memorably calls "the crazy quilt of his never-masterwork" (xxii).

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WALT WHITMAN. *Leaves of Grass*. Brooklyn, NY: 1855; rpt. New York: Library of American Poets/Collectors Reprints, Inc., 1992. xii + 95 pp.

My first reaction on picking up this striking facsimile reprinting of the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* was that I now knew what it felt like to hold Whitman's remarkable 138-year-old volume *new*. Over the past couple of decades, in various collections, I've held and leafed through at least twenty-five copies of the first edition of *Leaves*. They are all in relatively fragile condition, with the pages brittle and yellowed. This new facsimile has the exact heft and feel of the original, but the pages are supple and clean, the goldstamping bright and sharp. It's a breathtaking moment—bibliophilistic time-travelling—to encounter a copy that looks both real and new.

In 1855, 795 copies of Whitman's book were printed; they appeared in at least three different bindings (including paperback) with different endpapers, a variety of goldstamping and gilding, different styles of frontispiece, etc. It would be useful to know just how many copies of the original edition survive; to my knowledge, no one has attempted an inventory, but it's clear that a remarkably large number of them are extant. Many research libraries own a copy, and a sizable number are still in private collections. Every year or so, one goes on the market; last year a copy sold for over \$20,000 (over ten thousand times its original cost!). Since a personal copy is beyond the means of most of us, accurate facsimiles offer the best chance we have of living with an exact copy of the book that altered American literature.

There have been several attempts during the past century to create an authentic-feeling facsimile. For scholars and students today, of course, the most common encounter with the 1855 *Leaves* is through Malcolm Cowley's 1959 edition, kept in print by Penguin. It is not a true facsimile, however, since it adds section numbers and titles to the poems, and makes no effort to recreate the actual typeface, page size, binding, etc. Many people own a copy of the Chandler Facsimile Edition, published in 1968. This was a paperback edition, based on a copy of the first edition housed in the University of California at Berkeley collection. The cover of the Chandler facsimile reproduced a photo-

graph of the cover of the Berkeley copy. The page size was accurate, but the light green paper cover was disappointing (I always wondered why Chandler, once the decision was made to publish a paperback facsimile, did not simply reprint the very plain cover of the rare original 1855 *Leaves* that was issued in a paper wrapper, thus creating a more compelling facsimile). There have been other half-hearted attempts to publish a facsimile, including a tabloid-size supplement in the *American Poetry Review* a few years ago.

The most accurate facsimile up until this new Library of American Poets edition has been the one published by The Eakins Press (1966). It was reproduced from a copy at Yale University, with certain features added from a copy in the Pierpont Morgan Library. Its cover was based on details of the copies in the New York Public Library and Harvard's Houghton Library. The Meriden Gravure Company printed the volume and Russell-Rutter produced the binding. The result was an excellent replica of Whitman's book, but the decision to meld features from several copies produced a facsimile of the 1855 *Leaves* as it never existed—no actual copy ever had the same combination of features that the Eakins Press edition had. The Eakins Press understandably tended to choose the least expensive options, so on the cover only the title on the front is goldstamped; the back-cover title and the triple rule borders on both front and back covers are left blindstamped; the paper edges are plain; and the end papers are pale and plain. These choices are accurate enough, since many of the original 1855 copies were printed with minimal goldstamping, plain edges, and blank end papers. The Library of American Poets facsimile, however, opts for the more striking set of features: goldstamped title and borders on both front and back covers, marbled end papers, gilt edges on the pages.

In this new replica, then, we are given the most opulent version of the 1855 *Leaves*. The dark green color of the cover is the most accurate reproduction I've seen, eclipsing the lighter green Eakins cover (but the grain on both the Library of American Poets and the Eakins covers are nowhere near as distinctive as the grain on the original, and in fact in this regard the Eakins cover comes closer to the original). Many of the details on the Library of American Poets book are very effective, especially the facsimile marbling on the end papers and the tissue paper facing the nicely reproduced frontispiece portrait.

The most noteworthy aspect of this new facsimile is the mode of printing. As the publisher says, Whitman's book was produced "in a day when printing meant 'imprinting.' It involved the physical pressure of type on paper which leaves a permanent mark on the surface to hold the ink. You can touch and feel the words, not just see them." So, to their credit, the Library of American Poets publishing group contracted with The Stinehour Press, a master letterpress printer, and had new letterpress plates made from a copy of the 1855 *Leaves* in the New York Public Library Berg Collection. This new facsimile, then, is different in kind from earlier attempts; instead of creating fidelity to the original by photo-offsetting the 1855 version, this edition creates fidelity in a literally more impressive way, capturing what the publisher calls the "viscerally tactile" quality of Whitman's first edition. The poet's goal, says the publisher, was to have his "poems press into us" just as they pressed into the page on which they were printed. The result is stunning; you *can* feel the words

pressed onto these pages, and you become aware why the word "press" was so vital for Whitman: "The press of my foot to the earth springs a hundred affections"; "This is the press of a bashful hand"; "I merely stir, press, feel with my fingers, and am happy"; "O truth of the earth! I am determin'd to press my way toward you." Always for Whitman, the key was to have more than a superficial (offset!) encounter, to leave an impress, to "feel through every leaf the pressure of your hand." On every leaf in this book, we can feel—in a double sense—the pressure of Whitman's words.

The Library of American Poets has printed 2,500 copies of the facsimile and is offering it for \$95.00 per copy (plus \$5 for shipping and handling). For subscribers to the Library of American Poets series (which will include facsimiles of books by Robert Frost, T.S. Eliot, Emily Dickinson, and others), the cost is \$75.00. The original sold in 1855 for between seventy-five cents and two dollars, but by today's standards, less than a hundred bucks is a small price to pay to come so close to the original.

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PHILIP AKERS. *The Principle of Life: A New Concept of Reality Based on Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass*. New York: Vantage Press, 1991. vi + 186 pp.

Writing in the heyday of American Marxism in the 1930s, Newton Arvin predicted that "what is weakly transcendental" or "waywardly personal" in *Leaves of Grass* will be "rapidly discarded and forgotten" (*Whitman*, New York: Macmillan, 1938, p. 289). But today, the personal aspects of Whitman's work (wayward and otherwise) continue to stimulate new biographical studies, and the transcendental claims of the poet-prophet still command attention—not only among professional writers and scholars in the high culture, such as Lewis Hyde, George Hutchinson, and David Kuebrich, but also among popular readers and amateur scholars. After all, it was by such people—the likes of William Douglas O'Connor and Richard Maurice Bucke—that the tradition of Whitman studies was founded.

Both O'Connor and Bucke admired just the aspects of the Whitmanian character that set Arvin's historical-materialist nerves on edge. Whereas Arvin claimed that the "flaccid irrationalism" and spiritualist pretensions of *Leaves of Grass* threatened to undermine the poet's insistence that his book was "per-vaded by the conclusions of scientists" (174), O'Connor and Bucke interpreted Whitman's contribution to Western culture as primarily religious; and Bucke in particular saw in *Leaves of Grass* a powerful synthesis of universal spirituality or "cosmic consciousness" and the key principles of modern science, above all evolution. He championed Whitman as an exemplar of the higher consciousness toward which he believed all human life evolves. Bucke presented his case first in *Walt Whitman*, published during the poet's lifetime in 1883, then in *Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind* (1901), a book still available in print (as a Dutton Paperback since 1969) and now a classic among "New Age" enthusiasts.