

Gather the Ashes is illustrated by three sketches of vividly imagined flora, done by Nancy Eisen. The clean production of the book was funded by the Louis Ginsberg Memorial Scholarship, awarded by the Chaucer Guild. It is a first book, small and modest, and not without technical difficulties, but the poetry itself is strong and has heart. This may be the planting of a seed that will sprout healthy fruit, from the wasteland's ashes, "turning this nothing/into something."

— Michael Alexander



CRITICAL ESSAYS ON WALT WHITMAN. Edited by James Woodress. Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1983. ix, 338 pp. \$35.00.

Of intense interest to Whitman and the group of comrades in arms who gathered in his little house on Mickle Street was the sometimes acrimonious warfare in the literary world provoked by *Leaves of Grass*. Particularly galling were writers like Lanier and Swinburne who at first praised *Leaves of Grass* only to recant later. How can such treachery be explained? Whitman detected a pattern: "The young fellows seem rather bowled over by me: then they get respectable or something and I will no longer do." There were others equally puzzling who, like Bayard Taylor, lauded Whitman in private letters and attacked him in public. "It would be easy to quote one Taylor against the other," Whitman declared. Of great comfort were critics like Frank Williams ("loyal to the bone") and Clarence E. Stedman (always "sane" in the "general madness"). Thus Whitman and his devoted followers parcelled out the world into enemies, backsliders, hypocrites, and friends.

Today, the critical triumph of *Leaves of Grass* has become so massive that even the most vehement "Whitmaniac," to use Swinburne's term—let's say Horace Traubel or Dr. Richard Maurice Bucke—would surely be satisfied that the war has been won. James Woodress in his "Introduction" to *Critical Essays on Walt Whitman*

points out that, from 1900 through 1975, 1,683 articles and 90 books on Whitman were published. According to a survey of my own, the pace of outpourings of books about Whitman continues to increase: from 1975 to the present, 968 articles and 68 books have been published. Today, Whitman would no longer have to urge "proud libraries" not to shut their doors to him. For some time, now, their doors have been wide open, and their shelves are crowded with volumes by and about Whitman.

There are sufficient examples of blind anger in this selection of essays to justify the paranoia of Whitman and his friends. For example, the Rev. Rufus Griswold, whose narrow Puritanism had earlier destroyed the reputation of Edgar Allan Poe, declared in a review of *Leaves of Grass* that "it is impossible to imagine how any man's fancy could have conceived such a mass of stupid filth unless he possessed the soul of a sentimental donkey that had been disappointed in love." Other early reviewers had difficulty finding language strong enough to express their disgust. "Walt Whitman is as unacquainted with art, as a hog is with mathematics," said one. Another reviewer described *Leaves of Grass* as "these foul and rank leaves of the poison-plants of egotism, irreverence and of lust rampant..." Still another reviewer called the book simply and vividly "the slop-bucket of Walt Whitman." In addition to these reviewers who would be long forgotten except for their amusingly simplistic reactions to *Leaves of Grass*, Woodress's collection contains wrong-headed appraisals by some reviewers who today rank high in the echelon of American writers: to wit, William Dean Howells, Henry James, Willa Cather, and George Santayana. In short, the critical history of *Leaves of Grass* should be a warning to the critic who is tempted to react automatically to the strange and disturbing.

If there were some critics who saw Whitman as a subhuman savage threatening the delicate fabric of taste and morality, others saw him as suprahuman, a modern savior of mankind. Examples of the deification of Whitman in Woodress's anthology are William Douglas O'Connor's *The Good Gray Poet* (selection) and Anne Gilchrist's "An Englishwoman's Estimate of Walt Whitman." In addition, there are essays on Whitman's techniques as a literary artist by Basil de Selincourt and Randall Jarrell; critiques of individual poems by Malcolm Cowley, Leo Spitzer, Richard Chase, and Edwin Haviland Miller; and estimates of Whitman's place in the American literary tradition by

Floyd Stovall and James E. Miller, Jr. Finally, the anthology contains two important additions to the canon of Whitman criticism by Jerome Loving and Roger Asselineau.

I have been able to mention only a few of the themes and critics in this rich and varied anthology. Represented are well-known writers like Emerson, Alcott, Thoreau, Swinburne, Robert Louis Stevenson, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and others, as well as lesser-known authors like Moncure D. Conway, William J. Fox, Therese Bentzon, C. Sadakichi Hartmann, Edmund Clarence Stedman, and others. In addition to Woodress's useful "Introduction," the volume has a bibliography of works by Whitman and an index that provides the reader with a handy guide to the criticism of individual poems and ideas. The fact of the matter is that Woodress has brought together an excellent collection of essays and materials that can be found in no other single publication, and therefore "proud libraries" as well as all Whitman enthusiasts must make room for one more book in the flood tide of Whitman literature.

— Henry B. Rule



WALT WHITMAN: THE MAKING OF THE POET by Paul Zweig.
New York: Basic Books, Inc. 372 pp. \$18.95

Paul Zweig's *Walt Whitman: The Making of the Poet* stands out among products of the Walt Whitman industry like the Taj Mahal among prefabricated tool sheds. It is the study of Whitman that teachers must now consider before they cover Whitman in class again, the work by which Whitman scholars must now test their conceptions. Completed just before Zweig's death, the volume is the kind of monument that every critic must yearn to leave as a memorial. Everyone knows and speaks of Whitman's transmogrification in his late twenties and especially through his thirties, but Zweig establishes more convin-