

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 transfiguration in his late twenties and especially through his thirties, but Zweig establishes more convincingly,

with more detail, insight, and grace than anyone before, what that act of will and psyche entailed. Whitman "was writing in his notebook and thinking, a man awakening from a lifelong sleep. But how? Why?" Those are the questions that Zweig answers—actually answers. We always knew that the poet and the man were essentially one, in a way that cannot be said of any other writer. When we finish *Walt Whitman: The Making of the Poet*, we know to a depth never before made available, how and why that fusion occurred. We know an astonishing amount about the forces at work on Whitman inside and outside of his mind during the late 1840s and 1850s, "the years... filled with elusive activity—the kind that leaves a man changed, yet no one has seen it happen, and nothing has happened: an ordinary man has become extraordinary, a conventional writer has become a genius." The volume is nothing less than the solving of the riddle of the reshaping of a hack journalist and sometime fiction writer into "America's most original poet."

The scope of Zweig's exploration is astonishing. How did he pack so much information and acute interpretation into a volume that can be hefted with a single hand, yet cause it to be so clearly written and resonant that it is a pleasure to read? Did he omit anything at all of interest or importance? It all seems to be there—the family life, the traveling, the obsession with health, the social and historical milieu, the politics, the Americanness, the newspaper pieces, the short stories, the music, the art, the reading, the anti-bookishness, the phrenology, the walking, the young men, the notebooks, the quirks of personality observed and inferred, the experiments with language, the mutation of editorials into prototypical poems about 1850—all of those and more. And part of the joy of reading *Walt Whitman: The Making of the Poet*, one source of the volume's profound credibility, resides in following Zweig's mind as it ranges over the great length and breadth of material, illuminating, circling, linking, briefly digressing, finding its own inevitable conclusions. The subtle connections are everywhere in the book—for example, the roots in Whitman's art criticism of the poet's advocacy of "indirect" and "subjective" poetry as preferable to narrative and linear verse, archeology and geology as bases of Whitman's fascination with vast numbers, Jacksonian rhetoric and even phrenology as sources of Whitman's optimistic, romantic world view.

Zweig's treatment of Whitman's homosexuality is suitably delicate, the inferences irresistible. He discusses the poet's cryptic sexual

torment as a major force behind the work:

Whitman's genius was not, finally, for love but for poetry, and for the obscure moral courage that keeps the deep source of emotions fully alive, even when the familiar sentimental satisfactions are lacking. For a dozen years and more, Whitman lived on the precarious edge. From the body of the "truculent giant"—Whitman's figure for democratic America—he turned to his own large-boned body. And the two bodies, in a conceptual leap that remade American literature, became one.

Whitman's gift, Zweig points out, was "to shape his deepest musings; to become the man of his words....From the crucible of the erotic, he made a new form and a new tone,... sometimes expanded to embrace a phantasmic, yet vividly various lover: the world."

Zweig not only roots Whitman in the circumstances of the poet's own life and era, but he clearly shows how the poet in *Leaves of Grass* contributed to all of modernism. In collecting the scraps of his life—many from the famous trunk that held "a strange miscellany"—Whitman pointed the way for the Surrealists, for Picasso, for Eliot, Pound, Joyce, for Henry Miller, Allen Ginsberg, Kafka, all of those who have used "the fragment—in a wayward pastiche of other fragments, a quilt of moments accidentally yet somehow harmoniously thrown together—[as] an element of style—the basic molecule...in a new idea of form."

Others may refine Zweig's insights, but his fine study explains quite definitively the self-manufacture of the poet and the person, the two-in-oneness that was the singular Walt Whitman.

—Alan Shucard

