

and the squalid social conditions of post-war America, as discussed in Whitman's *Democratic Vistas*. In the end, Whitman was divided between unrealistic dreams of the future and nightmarish memories of the past. Vacillating between myth and memory, he lost his poetic self-confidence and triumphed only occasionally in his later poetry.

There are some minor flaws in this book. Thomas relies too heavily on secondary historical accounts of nineteenth-century America, especially those of Sean Wilentz, Edward Pessen, and Barbara Novak; one wishes that Thomas had done a bit more research of his own into nineteenth-century primary documents. Also, the book is somewhat limited in scope, focusing on social and economic themes while saying little about philosophical, religious, and sexual dimensions of *Leaves of Grass*.

Despite these drawbacks, Thomas should be commended for a fine job. His historical approach yields valuable rereadings of such well known poems as "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" and "Song of the Broad-Axe." Thomas makes good use of Whitman's prose writings and occasionally complements his socioeconomic interpretations with intriguing discussions of links between *Leaves of Grass* and nineteenth-century painting. He also makes acute (if undeveloped) comparisons between Whitman and foreign authors, particularly the British Romantics. This book is a welcome addition to Whitman scholarship.

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Walt Whitman: Modern Critical Views. Edited by Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House Publishers. 1985. 177 pp. \$17.95.

Professor Bloom's collection of critical essays on Whitman is by my count the ninth anthology of previously published Whitman criticism. The first was Roy Harvey Pearce's *Whitman: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1962) and the most recent prior to Bloom's edition was James Woodress's *Critical Essays on Walt Whitman* (1983). In

between were Edwin H. Miller's *A Century of Whitman Criticism* (1969), Francis Murphy's *Walt Whitman: A Critical Anthology* (1969), Milton Hindus's *Walt Whitman: The Critical Heritage* (1971), Richard H. Rupps' *Critics on Whitman* (1972), Gay Wilson Allen's *The Merrill Studies in "Leaves of Grass"* (1972), and Arthur Golden's *Walt Whitman: A Collection of Criticism* (1974). The criterion for membership in this list is that the book consist primarily of already published Whitman scholarship. Excluded are other types of anthologies such as Hindus's *Leaves of Grass: One Hundred Years After* (1955), which contained essays commissioned for that volume; the published papers of conferences such as R.W.B. Lewis's *The Presence of Walt Whitman: Selected Papers from the English Institute* (1962) the *Leaves of Grass: Norton Critical Edition*, eds. Sculley Bradley and Harold Blodgett, with its attendant collection of critical essays and Jim Perlman, Ed Folsom and Dan Campion, eds., *Walt Whitman: The Measure of His Song*, a fascinating collection of essays by subsequent poets who have found it necessary to respond somehow to Whitman's persistent omnipresence.

Not surprisingly, certain essays have proven especially pleasing to anthologizers. Most frequently included are the responses of three literary figures to Whitman: Emerson's 1855 letter, Pound's "What I Feel about Walt Whitman" (1909), and Lawrence's "Whitman" from *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923). Next most popular of the remarks by writers are Hopkins' letter to Robert Bridges, Jarrell's "Some Lines from Whitman" (1953) and Whitman's self-reviews. Scholarly favorites are Matthiessen's "Only a Language Experiment" (1941), Whicher's "Whitman's Awakening to Death" (1962), and Pearce's "Whitman justified: The Poet in 1860" (1961). The most frequently anthologized scholars are Gay Wilson Allen, Roger Asselineau, Richard Chase and James E. Miller, Jr., but no particular selection from their writings appears as often as those mentioned above; perhaps this is because these prolific Whitman critics have given editors more from which to select.

Of the nine critical anthologies, strictly defined, the most valuable in this reviewer's opinion are the ones by Miller and Woodress. Both are comprehensive in scope, presenting samples of the best or most representative scholarship from 1855 onward. Miller's is especially

noteworthy for its substantial introduction which relates each essay to its historical context and indicates its significance to Whitman studies. Furthermore, Miller annotates the essays with sound editorial judgment, explaining materials that might otherwise be lost to the reader. Unfortunately, Miller's collection is now out of print, but Woodress's more recent anthology is readily available.

I mention these collections of criticism along with a suggestion of their contents to establish a context for considering Bloom's anthology. If we ask what is included in this book that was not in the others, the answer is not a great deal. Bloom's slender volume contains only eight articles and six of these appeared in the earlier anthologies. The new ones are excerpts from Paul Zweig's *Walt Whitman: The Making of the Poet* (1984) and Bloom's *Agon* (1982).

While quite short, Bloom's preface does make some judicious and welcome remarks. In contrast to recent scholarship which depicts a neurotically insecure, sexually conflicted and mendacious Whitman, Bloom sees a complex, evasive personality but also reminds us of Whitman's unusual degree of altruism and civic virtue, which was, he points out, extraordinary for a major artist: "I cannot think of a Western writer of anything like Whitman's achievement who ever gave himself or herself up so directly to meeting the agonized needs of the most desperate." Bloom's introduction also provides a counterpoint to the tenor of much recent criticism in two other respects: he subscribes to an older view of Whitman as a would-be prophet of a post-Christian religion; and he believes that Whitman was not an active homosexual and that his poetry is "auto-erotic rather more than it is homo-erotic." But Bloom's introduction fails to situate the selected articles in the history of Whitman criticism or to explain why they were chosen. A not very helpful prefatory note simply states that the essays "chronicle the major phases in which an advanced view of Whitman's nature and achievement as a poet have evolved." In light of this assertion, one cannot help but note the absence of selections from the scholarship of Allen, Asselineau and Miller.

Turning to the essays themselves, the collection begins with Lawrence's eccentric and ebullient "Whitman," which sounds several themes developed in greater detail by subsequent articles, including Lawrence's indictment of Whitman for "mentalizing" and his obser-

vation that the love poetry leads to death. This is followed by Kenneth Burke's "Policy Made Personal," a suggestive discussion of Whitman's special vocabulary — especially intriguing is Burke's analysis of Whitman's symbolic use of fragrances — and how his political discourse resonates with private meanings. Third is Chase's provocative discussion of *Democratic Vistas*, which argues that far from expressing a radical ideology (the conventional view), it is actually "conservative, individualistic and unhistorical." Next is Roy Harvey Pearce's influential "Whitman Justified: The Poet in 1860," which more than any other single piece of scholarship established the present critical preference for the lyrical, autobiographical, finite and "humane" poet of the first three editions over the later "prophet" of conventional political and religious pieties.

James Wright's, "The Delicacy of Walt Whitman," a refreshing change from the more frequently anthologized essay by Jarrell, provides an apt discussion of the "restraint, clarity, and wholeness" of Whitman's prosody, diction and form. Pearce's favoring of the three early editions is reinforced by R.W.B. Lewis's "Always Going Out and Coming In," a succinct overview of the relations between Whitman's autobiography and the content of the various editions. Zweig's recent well written and well received study sensitively combines some of the best scholarship on Whitman's "long foreground" (for example, Joseph Rubin's *The Historic Whitman*, 1973, and Floyd Stovall's *The Foreground of Leaves of Grass*, 1974) with the critical assessments of Pierce, Lewis and others in terms of what Zweig refers to as Whitman's dual struggle: how to depict the ideal new American in his poetry and to become him in his real life. In the selection excerpted from the last chapter, Zweig adopts the view of Allen and others that Whitman's service in the war hospital allowed him to sublimate his homosexuality into public service, and Zweig argues that this brought to closure not only Whitman's personal and philosophical experimentation of the previous decade but also the period of his great poetry.

It is hard to see how several of these essays — the ones by Burke, Wright, Lewis and Zweig — mark a new stage in our understanding of "Whitman's nature and achievement," and it is doubly difficult to see how this is true for Bloom's "Whitman's Image of Voice: To th

Tally of My Soul," which is the most unsatisfying of the eight essays. My reservations are induced in part by the difficult idiosyncratic nature of Bloom's critical vocabulary. (At one point Bloom himself finds it convenient to cite John Hollander "rather than rely upon as recondite a theorist as myself.") More important, Bloom's discussion of the "Lilacs" elegy is built upon a partial reading of Whitman and redounds in psychoanalytic reductionism. Bloom may be correct in arguing that Whitman's sexuality was primarily homoerotic, but he is surely wrong in insisting that masturbation — not nature, not music, not manly love — is the only source of Whitman's spiritual ecstasy and inspiration. In applying this view of Whitman to the Lincoln elegy, Bloom reads the line in section 2, "O cruel hands that hold me powerless," as referring to a "failed masturbation." This impotence is caused by repressed guilt rekindled by Lincoln's death which reminds Whitman of his father's death. Whitman mourns for Lincoln but more important to him and our understanding of the poem is his mourning for his poetic voice. The poem is resolved not by the poet overcoming his anxiety for the Union or his grief for Lincoln and the fallen soldiers but by his achieving "a restored Narcissism and the return to the mode of erotic self-sufficiency."

There is no basis for asserting that this anthology fills an important need in Whitman studies or that it will be of great benefit to either the scholar or the general reader. Yet at the same time there is no reason to lament the arrival of another collection of Whitman criticism when it contains several articles of particular merit. It is worth noting, however, that the value of this book is made somewhat dubious by the fact that most of the selections are easily available in earlier anthologies which are more helpful to the reader.

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