[review]

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comment (rarely exceeding one hundred words) is appended to each entry. Generally, only the introductory sections of editions and collections are commented on, so that their scope is not easily discernible. On the basis of these entries alone, a reader might be hard put to single out the more important works of Whitman scholarship.

Unlike Scott Giantvalley's companion volume covering the 1838–1939 period (see WWR, 28: 101–103), Kummings does not include allusions or minor references but he does record items in foreign languages. Works in French and German are accorded English-language comments, a very helpful practice; but works in other languages are not. Typically, Fernando Alegria's Walt Whitman en Hispano-américa, a 422-page book, receives only the comment: "In Spanish." Nonetheless, Kummings's inclusiveness and workmanship are commendable. In a casual survey of the entries for two comparable years in Kummings's volume and Jeanetta Boswell's Walt Whitman and the Critics (see WWR, 27:46), I found Kummings's entries more accurate and far more numerous. Very commendable too is his extensive analytical index, an extraordinary research tool, with over one hundred subject headings exclusive of proper names or the titles of Whitman's poems. Where else can one locate two articles on Walt Whitman and the calendar, or five articles on Whitman's humor, or forty-five pieces devoted to "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking"? All in all, this is an indispensable contribution to Whitman studies, deserving a place in every library.

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So much praise has been heaped upon The Library of America series that further accolades seem superfluous. Clearly this ongoing project to give America attractive, durable and available collected editions of the works of its best authors is one of the most noteworthy publishing endeavors in our history. Whitman scholars can be thankful that the Library of America edition of Whitman's poetry and prose was chosen as one of the inaugural volumes (with volumes of Hawthorne, Melville, and Stowe) in the series. Walt Whitman: Complete Poetry and Collected Prose sets out to do for the general reader what the more elaborate ongoing New York University Press Collected Writings of Walt Whitman sets out to do for the specialist: to offer in one convenient place all the material that the user could possibly want. The Library of America edition is edited by Justin Kaplan, and he has chosen the material wisely. He includes the complete 1855 Leaves of Grass in facsimile (a true facsimile here, without the bracketed later titles and later section markings that we get in Malcolm Cowley's Penguin edition of the 1855 Leaves), the complete 1891–92 "deathbed edition" (the 1881 Leaves with its two old-age annexes and "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads"), the Complete Prose Works, 1892 (Specimen Days, Collect, Notes Left Over, Pieces in Early Youth, November Boughs, Good-Bye My Fancy, and Memoranda), and a bonus section of "Supplementary Prose" including "The
Eighteenth Presidency!,” Emerson’s 1855 letter to Whitman and Whitman’s “Master”-letter response, along with several Whitman notes to various editions of Leaves. Kaplan adds a chronology of Whitman’s life and some random minimal textual notes. The book is 1380 compact pages, certainly the most extensive one-volume collection of Whitman every printed. (The one puzzling omission here is “Old Age Echoes,” the posthumously added annex; it’s troubling that the most complete single-volume Whitman doesn’t have “A Thought of Columbus” in it.) There is some material included here that has yet to find its way into the vast and increasingly bewildering web of The Collected Writings, so the volume is a useful adjunct even for those scholars who own the New York University Press volumes. The book is designed to last, to be passed on: acid-free paper, clear and clean typography, hand-sewn binding which allows the book to stay open where it is opened to. And all of this for $25, with a special price of $20 available to students.

At this price the book does in fact become a real contender for classroom use. Whitman studies are blessed at present with numerous good editions of Leaves. From the inexpensive Signet New American Library edition edited by Gay Wilson Allen to the overpriced but indispensable Norton reprint of the New York University Press Comprehensive Reader’s Edition, edited by Harold Blodgett and Sculley Bradley, instructors have a wide variety of price ranges and formats to choose from. For advanced courses in Whitman, the Norton Critical Edition has been essential since it reproduces the standard scholarly edition of Leaves and retains (through the poetry section) the exact pagination of the New York University Press edition; graduate students can depend on it as a scholarly resource and cite it in their graduate work. But for less advanced courses, the Norton has priced itself out of competition, and instructors using Leaves as one of numerous texts in a course must seek out a more reasonably priced edition. The following list suggests various features of most of the major paperback text editions of Leaves that are now in print (listed in chronological order of date published):


Annotations: Brief explanatory. Prose: 1855 Preface, brief selections from Demo­
cratic Vistas, a few selections from Specimen Days. Criticism: None. Introduction:
Critical; short guide to further reading.

Age Echoes, Excluded poems and passages, Uncollected poems (not including
early pre-Leaves verse), selection of ms. fragments. Annotations: Extensive explana-
tory, bibliographical, exegetical. Prose: Prefaces, Backward Glance, selection of
Whitman’s comments on his work. Criticism: Extensive gathering, from early re-
views through recent criticism. Introduction: Extensive bibliographical. Also in-
cludes several Whitman photographs.

7. The Portable Walt Whitman, ed. Mark Van Doren, rev. Malcolm Cowley (Pen-
Extras: None. Annotations: Brief introductory notes to sections of prose and poetry.
Prose: 1855 Preface, Backward Glance, Democratic Vistas, Specimen Days (complete).
Criticism: None. Introduction: Critical, biographical (by Van Doren); chronology
and bibliography (by Gay Wilson Allen).

892 pp. Text: 1891–92, complete. Extras: Old Age Echoes, Excluded poems,
Early (pre-Leaves) verse, “Song of Myself” in its 1855 version. Annotations: Ex-
tensive explanatory and bibliographical. Prose: Prefaces, Backward Glance. Criti-
cism: None. Introduction: Very brief; table of dates; brief bibliography.

Annotations: None. Prose: Prefaces, Backward Glance, Democratic Vistas, “Poetry
To-day in America,” Specimen Days (complete). Criticism: Short “Documents”
section with excerpts of early reviews; pieces of Randall Jarrell essay. Introduction:
Critical, short; brief annotated bibliography.

Many editions for many uses: with the proper combinations of texts, seminars
can study the changes among the 1855, 1860, 1881 and 1891–92 editions (the 1891–92
is identical, of course, to the 1881 except for the addition of the annexes); the Pen-
guin volume edited by Murphy lets students study “Song of Myself” in its first and
last incarnations within the covers of the same book. But the Library of America
edition must now be considered a prime candidate for adoption, at least in advanced
courses where Whitman’s prose needs to be discussed in some depth. To get the
material that is gathered in this edition, students would have to buy the Penguin
1855 Leaves, the Penguin Portable or Modern Library edition, and the Norton, and
they would still come up far short of the amount of prose in the Library of America
volume; students would also spend well over the $20 Library of America student
price, and they would be left at the end of the course—if they were properly enthu-
siastic about their reading—with worn and broken volumes more suited for the trash
than for re-reading. With the Library of America volume they would have a cloth-
bound collection of Whitman’s work that they could return to, as they no doubt will
want to, for a lifetime.

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