



Whitman, Walt. Poetry and Prose (Library of America) Ed. Justin Kaplan [review]

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REVIEWS

WALT WHITMAN, *Poetry and Prose*. Edited by Justin Kaplan. New York: Library of America College Editions, 1996. 1,407 pp.

Aside from the physical qualities of the books, there are two differences between the original hardbound Library of America Whitman* and this new paperback College Edition. The most important change is in the contents. Both editions contain the 1855 and the 1891-1892 *Leaves of Grass*, the 1892 *Complete Prose Works* and a short section of *Supplementary Prose* made up of "The Eighteenth Presidency" and two short and relatively negligible late prose pieces from *Lippincott's* magazine. The texts are supplemented with a brief chronology of Whitman's life and four pages of end notes, primarily devoted to textual variants. To these, the College Edition adds a section of *Supplementary Poems* and another half-page of notes related to the supplement. The supplement contains sixteen poems and one passage from a poem, all of which Whitman had included in one or more of the editions of *Leaves* that he issued between 1856 and 1876, but which he excluded from his final revision. Compare Blodgett and Bradley's much longer sections (*Leaves of Grass: Comprehensive Reader's Edition* [New York: New York University Press, 1965]): *Poems Excluded from Leaves of Grass* (585-622, 42 poems); *Passages Excluded from Leaves of Grass Poems* (623-641, 27 passages); *Uncollected Poems* (642-674, 44 passages); *Unpublished Poems* (676-686, 22). The College Edition supplement does include the most important poems that were omitted (and are still omitted) from the hardbound edition, most notably, "Respondez!" and, from the 1860 *Calamus* sequence, "Who is Now Reading This?," "I Thought That Knowledge Alone Would Suffice" and "Hours Continuing Long."

So far, so good. There are, however, still surprising lacunae in this expanded edition. Among the missing is the third annex, "Old Age Echoes," which, as attested by Traubel's "An Executor's Diary Note" (Bradley and Blodgett, 575), Whitman had authorized for publication as an appendix in future editions of *Leaves*. It is hard to understand the rationale for omitting these fully canonical poems written during the last months of Whitman's life. Another odd omission is "Pictures." Since Kaplan has already set the precedent of including unpublished (prose) texts in the volume, why exclude "Pictures" (and "An American Primer," also missing), surely the most significant of all the texts unpublished in Whitman's lifetime. Kaplan himself,

*For my critique of the original edition see my introduction to *The Neglected Walt Whitman* (New York, Four Walls Eight Windows, 1993) and my "What is this you bring my America?"—On the Library of America Whitman," *Modern Language Studies* 26 (Spring/Summer 1996), 21-47.

in his Whitman biography (*Walt Whitman: A Life* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980]) underscores the crucial importance of “Pictures” as a “decisive preliminary study” for *Leaves*.

The other interesting change is on the title page. The original Library of America Whitman title page reads (as late as the ninth printing, the most recent on the shelf at my local Borders) “Complete Poetry and Collected Prose,” while the College Edition, containing more (though still far from all) of Whitman’s poetry, is entitled more simply and more accurately “Poetry and Prose.”

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