



Volume 17

Number 1 (1999)

Special Double Issue:

The Many Cultures of Walt Whitman: Part Two

pps. 78-79

Krieg, Joann P. A Whitman Chronology [review]

Geoffrey Sill

ISSN 0737-0679 (Print)

ISSN 2153-3695 (Online)

Copyright © 1999 Geoffrey Sill

Recommended Citation

Sill, Geoffrey. "Krieg, Joann P. A Whitman Chronology [review]." *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 17 (Summer 1999), 78-79.

Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.13008/2153-3695.1575>

ity, a principle that seems to me the right one in a volume likely to become a standard reference work. It sacrifices new insights—of which there are few—to consolidation of the work of earlier scholars and critics. It generally avoids issues posed by critical theory. It also generally avoids polemics. Although there are instances of obvious generational and ideological differences over such matters as critical taste and practice and Whitman's radicalism/conservatism (on which George Hutchinson is particularly sound), an inevitability when drawing on a broad spectrum of contributors writing in critically fractious times, the editors have managed by and large to preserve a loose critical and practical harmony without overreaching for consensus.

As a consequence of this editorial policy, the volume is in general intellectually conservative, despite the fact that it is broadly conscious of the national and academic politics of the last generation in its solicitude toward changing ideas about race, gender, and ethnicity. One exception is Walter Grünzweig's suggestive entry on "interculturality," which, as he knows, draws on the internationalism strand already well developed and likely to grow stronger in Whitman criticism. Another is Kummings's good but underdeveloped entry on "Whitman on the internet," which mentions but does not delve into the pathbreaking *Walt Whitman Hypertext Archive* currently under construction by Ed Folsom and Kenneth Price. That project, like the equally monumental *Emily Dickinson Electronic Archive* overseen by Martha Nell Smith, has profound implications for the future of literary studies, raising complicating, comparativist issues of textuality, evidence, mediacy, and sequentiality meaningful to the study of literary culture in general but bearing a particular relevance to the medium-conscious poetry of *Leaves of Grass* and its convoluted textual history. For that matter, it also complicates the status of the *Encyclopedia* itself.

The *Encyclopedia* is clearly a reflection, as I have suggested, of a state of maturity in Whitman studies, but it is also itself a significant contribution to that corpus of work—to which, to invoke a Whitmanism, it adds "sinew." This is a volume that both institutions and individual scholars will wish to have on their Whitman bookshelves, where they will soon find it an indispensable resource.

University of South Carolina

EZRA GREENSPAN

JOANN P. KRIEG. *A Whitman Chronology*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1998. xxii + 207 pp.

When and where did Whitman first meet William O'Connor? How long before the appearance of *Leaves of Grass* did he publish his first poem? How many times did Whitman attend operas by Gaetano Donizetti, and which ones did he see? To anyone who has ever confronted the need to know such details of Whitman's biography, perhaps in the heat of writing an article or lecture, the usefulness of a one-volume chronology must be immediately apparent. With the facts of Whitman's life now spread across at least five biographies, seven volumes of correspondence, nine volumes of conversations with Horace Traubel, and nine more of notebooks and manuscripts, a shortcut to what is known is almost indispensable.

At five inches wide by nine inches tall, and barely half an inch thick, this volume appears designed to be slipped in the pocket of a jacket, backpack, or purse to accompany the Whitman reader out of the study and into the field. As its title promises, it delivers a year-by-year record of the memorable (and many rather ordinary) events in Whitman's life, divided into eight chapters that cover from four to seven years each (except for the first, which covers thirty-five years). The individual entries are brief, but parenthetical references guide the reader to sources and more extensive discussions. Each chapter is headed by a summary narrative, and two indexes provide ready access to the proper names and titles of works that appear in the chronology.

The information in *A Whitman Chronology* is encyclopedic and up-to-date, leading even knowledgeable readers into some surprising discoveries. But the book is more than just an exercise in pursuit of trivia; out of the dates and names, the shape of a narrative sometimes arises. One example may be the extent of Whitman's effort to establish himself as a writer of fiction before turning to poetry, a biographical thread that emerges from the chronology of his early publications. Another is the degree to which Harry Stafford supplanted Peter Doyle in Whitman's affections, which is startlingly evident in the chronology of visits, gifts, and letters that Whitman lavished on Harry between 1876 and 1884, when the relationship suddenly cooled upon Harry's marriage to Eva Westcott. There is, of course, some editorial selectivity at work here, but by and large *A Whitman Chronology* lets the facts speak for themselves, making it perhaps the most immediately useful biography yet produced.

Rutgers University, Camden

GEOFFREY SILL