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Charles M. Oliver. *Walt Whitman: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*. New York: Facts on File, 2006. viii + 408 pp.

Charles Oliver, the author of *Ernest Hemingway A to Z* (1999), has compiled another large reference guide, this one devoted to Whitman. His new Whitman *Literary Reference* contains a brief (twenty-five page) biography; an alphabetical list of "Works," containing publication information and short descriptions of Whitman's individual poems, most of Whitman's books, and his short stories; an alphabetical list of "Related People, Places, Publications, and Topics," containing brief descriptions of people Whitman knew, places associated with Whitman, newspapers and magazines in which he published, poetic terms, and historical events; a chronology of Whitman's life and times; a "Journalism Chronology" tracking Whitman's journalistic jobs from 1831 to 1859; a list of "Newspapers and Magazines That Published Whitman's Articles and Editorials"; a list of Whitman's known addresses and places of work; a very brief and eccentric "Glossary of Whitman Terms"; Whitman's "Last Will and Testament"; a Whitman genealogical chart; and a bibliography of primary and secondary sources.

This guide inevitably will be compared to J. R. LeMaster and Donald D. Kummings's *Walt Whitman: An Encyclopedia* (1998). The two books at first glance look like similar reference tools, but the LeMaster/Kummings *Encyclopedia* is the compilation of work by more than 200 scholars who contributed entries, and the entries in the *Encyclopedia* are far more complete, detailed, and scholarly than those in Oliver's *Reference*. (The *Encyclopedia*'s nearly 850 densely-packed pages dwarf the *Reference*'s 400 smaller pages.) Oliver's guide has the advantage and disadvantage of being written by one person; the voice is more uniform throughout, but the limitations of the author's knowledge of the full range of Whitman materials are thereby highlighted. If there are some inconsistencies and contradictions in the *Encyclopedia*, they are the result of active critical debate among the scholar-contributors, and readers are at least thereby introduced to some of the key issues in contemporary Whitman scholarship. I was struck that nowhere in Oliver's book (including the bibliography) does he even indicate he is aware of the *Encyclopedia*, let alone offer an explanation of what his book offers that the *Encyclopedia* does not. I would have imagined that Oliver might have wanted to position his work in relation to that of LeMaster and Kummings so that readers and potential purchasers would know just what his book has to recommend it.

One would assume that Oliver's book is the more current of the two reference guides, reflecting the most recent discoveries in Whitman biography, bibliography, and criticism, since it was published eight years after the *Encyclopedia*. This would have been one of the few justifications for publishing an encyclopedic reference work on Whitman so soon after the *Encyclopedia*. Unfortunately, however, there is an odd sense in Oliver's guide that Whitman criticism, for all practical purposes, stopped in the 1970s. The bibliography of secondary sources includes no mention of work by Betsy Erkkila, M. Jimmie Killingsworth, Jerome Loving, Michael Moon, Vivian Pollak, Kenneth Price, David Reynolds, M. Wynn Thomas, and other figures who have been central in developing Whitman scholarship in the past twenty-five years. The only recent

criticism listed consists of two excerpts from books by Harold Bloom. In an odd section of the bibliography, Oliver lists what he calls "Selected Foreign Critical Editions," which apparently is meant to indicate works that discuss Whitman's reputation in other countries; again, the most recent work listed is from the early 1970s, and the first book listed is Gay Wilson Allen's *Walt Whitman Abroad* (1955), with no indication that Oliver is even aware that Allen completely revised and expanded that work (co-edited with Ed Folsom) as *Walt Whitman and the World* in 1995. Seminal work on Whitman's absorption in other cultures—by Fernando Alegría, Erkkila, Walter Grünzweig, and Guiyou Huang, among others—is completely ignored. Oliver's *Literary Reference* thus seems far more outdated than the eight-year-old *Encyclopedia*.

Walt Whitman: A Literary Reference will no doubt find its way onto a lot of high school library shelves, where it will offer students and teachers quick access to (occasionally inaccurate) "facts" about Whitman and his works. Scholars and advanced students of Whitman, however, will find little here that is new and, if they use it, will need to do a lot of updating and supplementing on their own.

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