

overall employment in the printing trade did increase in the second half of the nineteenth century. It is also true, however, that in this period the production and consumption of printed text and images increased enormously. Aside from increases in population, literacy and leisure time, consumption also grew in response to falling real prices, as employing printers exploited new technologies that reduced unit labour costs. Such factors accounted for a resurgence in typesetting employment, which had briefly plummeted after the introduction of linecasting machines in the early 1890s. Further research might reveal a similar dynamic operating in the engraving and lithography industries.

One final criticism, in a review that might seem overly critical, is that the presentation of illustrations in *Art and Work* is disappointing, given the centrality of images to the subject matter. The publisher has chosen to print all illustrations in the front matter and has not keyed them to relevant passages in the text. Reproduction of these images, printed offset on the same paper stock as the text, is indifferent. These problems, like the others cited

above, may be attributable to the circumstances of the book's publication. If not for Angela Davis's untimely death while *Art and Work* was being prepared for publication, many of them would certainly have been addressed by her.

All of this does nothing to refute Davis's main argument. In the British tradition of cultural studies, which descends from John Ruskin by way of William Morris and Karl Marx to Raymond Williams, she demonstrates that the distinction between high art and commercial art is arbitrary. In Canada before 1940, the elite painter and the commercial artist were one and the same person. The skills applied in one endeavour were not inherently diminished when applied in the other. Unfortunately, in integrating social history with the history of art, *Art and Work* speaks more to the art historian than it does to the historian of material culture. Nevertheless, *Art and Work* helps fill several gaps in our knowledge of the graphic arts in Canada. In her study of the Brigdens and the Toronto Engraving Co., Angela Davis will encourage others to continue the enquiry.

## Betsy Erkkila and Jay Grossman, eds., *Breaking Bounds: Whitman and Cultural Studies*

DAVID JARRAWAY

Erkkila, Betsy, and Jay Grossman, eds. *Breaking Bounds: Whitman and Cultural Studies*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. x + 292 pp., illus., paper \$28.50, ISBN 0-19-509350-X.

In what is now the third centennial collection of essays on America's arguably most celebrated poet<sup>1</sup> (the results of a three-day symposium on Walt Whitman held at the University of Pennsylvania in 1992), co-editor Betsy Erkkila's "Introduction" to *Breaking Bounds: Whitman and Cultural Studies* predicts that readers will likely be most struck by this new book's sensational cover.

There, we are given two sepia-toned frontal views of a completely naked "old man," extracted from nineteenth-century American painter Thomas Eakins' notorious collection of nude photographs dating from the 1880s. Eakins painted a famous portrait of Whitman in 1887. And Ed Folsom, in the essay "Whitman's

Calamus Photographs," thinks it might be possible for Whitman to have posed for the painter's camera as well.

But what intrigues me, especially, after long pondering these photos, is how they so shrewdly capture the sense of a "cultural studies" aura that has been gradually overtaking the field of Whitman studies — and much else in American literary scholarship — the past few years. For consider: on the left, an ancient decrepit figure seemingly pulled rigidly to attention with eyes tightly closed, head slightly bowed, and arms behind back in an attitude of defensive introversion; while on the right, a more extroverted figure with eyes opened wide, legs spread apart, and arms held behind but emphasizing now a slight lean at the hip, as if the first image had freely ambled into the second, and was about to follow the old man's gaze into a third, just *beyond* the photo's frame.

In this arresting pictorial transformation of American literature's Ancient-of-Days, from a posture of close self-containment to one of more open and free self-disclosure, we detect a clear allegory for the recent transformation within English studies itself, under the impress of material history. For long gone are the days when it seemed perfectly reasonable to adopt the traditionalist's view of Whitman's extraordinary "poetic genius" — a genius that, according to Malcolm Cowley (cited in co-editor Jay Grossman's "Epilogue"), "existed *apart* from the rest of his character" throughout much of this century (p. 253, emphasis added). Today, with so much renovation of the academy taking place in the name of "cultural studies," the traditional humanism represented by Cowley more and more fades into distant memory since the field of cultural studies "rejects the exclusive equation of culture with high culture and argues that all forms of cultural production need to be studied in relation to other cultural practices and to social and historical structures."<sup>2</sup>

For the student of literary texts in particular, this shift in interpretive procedure acknowledges, following Henry Giroux, "how knowledge, texts, and representations are produced, circulated, and used within institutions of power," thereby "necessitat[ing] a focus on interdisciplinary issues...refracted through the dynamics of gender, sexuality, national identity, colonialism, race, ethnicity, and popular culture."<sup>3</sup>

Not too long ago, I had occasion to purchase a greeting card for a colleague in the English department where I work. She had just given birth to a new baby girl, and I can remember a time, perhaps four or five years ago, when the sending of a simple congratulatory note might have seemed the easiest thing in the world. Now, to the degree that our consciousness has been raised by the impact of cultural studies on the university, nothing is easy on the greeting card front these days. In desperation, I settled for the department store's least innocuous item — one depicting on the outside a baby rummaging through a number of alphabetical building blocks that gradually came to form the words "Charge It," with the rather coy message tucked on the inside: "Yes, indeed, it is a girl!"

Hence, the hastily penned apology to my colleague (an ardent feminist, as it turns out) for this particularly hapless selection beneath my signature speaks quite directly to just how sensitive we've become in our scholarly work concerning the dynamics of gender, as Henry Giroux describes them, and to the significant social and political implications, for better or worse,

that their production and circulation seek to register as much in the domestic (and the ivy-clad) as in the commercial so-called "institutions of power."

My generalizing about how academic sensibilities are increasingly being heightened and reshaped by cultural studies by means of a simple greeting card might strike readers as somewhat banal. But in the broader context of gender politics, such an object sets us materially within the very history of their dynamic unfolding, and licenses us further to explore ways in which our exclusive focus on the artifacts of high culture might be opened out to those other social and historical structures, noted previously, which then become alternative sites of interdisciplinary learning and scholarly inquiry. As in the case of an ordinary greeting card, therefore, as Giroux further notes,

*cultural studies has stressed the importance of developing contextualized inquiries that address how popular texts such as rap music, media news, popular films, and rock music are taken up within situated contexts and provide political possibilities "for the recovery of and attention to actual histories of/insubordination" [according to Bentia Perry]. [Hence,] Culture is where the social gravity of power is organized in both the circulation and use of representations and in the material experiences that shape everyday life.*<sup>4</sup>

It should not surprise us, consequently, to discover in the present collection of essays under review, contributions straddling a wide range of interdisciplinary discourses — literature, art history, gay studies, international politics, social theory. Nor that the "breaking bounds" in its catchy title should extend to South as well as North America.

Hence, in this cutting-edge collection of fifteen essays, contributions straddle a wide range of interdisciplinary discourses — literature, art history, gay studies, international politics, social theory — and thus extend the "breaking bounds" in their catchy title to South as well as North America, to Europe, and, according to Walter Grünfweig in his "For America — For All the Earth": Walt Whitman as an International(ist) Poet," perhaps "beyond even the boundaries of the planet" itself (p. 240).

The prospect may appear somewhat vertiginous. However, the "disciplinary blurring" (p. 262) enacted by the move away from a conventionally closed image of the Good Grey Poet, so long inspired by a tradition of "close reading," to a more open and iconoclastic Good

Gay Poet, newly underwritten by a highly protean field of cultural discourses — such interdisciplinarity *does* have a degree of consistency, if this volume is any indication. In Whitman's particular case, over and over again, these essays collectively return us to what Folsom, in the piece already cited, describes as “the staging of radically new versions of the self...that destabilized traditional categorizations of human relationships...that [the poet] knew an emerging democracy would demand” (p. 194). Thus Michael Davidson, in his “When the World Strips Down and Rouges Up”: Redressing Whitman,” invokes the “transition from a modernism of miraculist unities to one of constructed differences” often ascribed to cultural studies, and like Folsom, writes eloquently about “the multiplicity of erotic possibilities made possible” through “a series of theatrical roles” in Whitman, and in more recent gay poets (Hart Crane, Frank O'Hara, Allen Ginsberg) deeply implicated in Whitman's identity politics (pp. 233, 225, 228).

A further consistency shared among essays moving from a closed to a more open image of the poet is suggested by Allen Grossman in his “Remarks on the Endlessly Repeated Rediscovery of the Incommensurability of the Person.” Responding movingly to Whitman's “Calamus” poem, “Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand” (from *Leaves of Grass*), Grossman supplies us with a “Whitman principle” that we also ineluctably associate with cultural studies: namely, the subject (a “lover” in this case) who is “carried by the grace of the other into the absence of the other” (p. 120). Being open to Otherness<sup>5</sup> — “a permanent, agitating need for the other,” as Alan Trachtenberg aptly puts it in “Whitman's Lesson of the City” — assures a continuously perspectival take on experience that is solely conducive to the multiple stagings of subjectivity just described, not the least among which “comes with recognition of oneself in others” (pp. 171, 173).

And it is perhaps this chiasmatic relationship between Self and Other that has suggested to the editors of this collection a handy method for ordering eight of its essays within the two middle sections: “America's Whitmans” and “Whitman's Americas.” An opening “Genealogies” section, and a concluding “Legacies,” rounds out this artful arrangement with the additional seven papers.

It is precisely Whitman's openness to the Other, moreover, that some would claim makes the poet's texts so “scandalous” — Thomas Yingling, for instance, in his posthumous

contribution, “Homosexuality and Utopian Discourse in American Poetry.” Indeed, Yingling argues that Whitman “writes of not just what cannot be politely written of, but what in some sense cannot be written of at all because it does not yet exist” (p. 143). Thus, Michael Moon and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in their jointly authored “Confusion of Tongues,” claim to have discovered an “openness to further transverse desires” in Whitman's writing that each is anxious to explore in the near future: for Moon, the “incestuous desire” shared between Walt and his retarded younger brother, Eddy; and for Sedgwick, the “great mimetic power” of their mother, Louisa Van Velsor Whitman, as a “woman-loving woman” (pp. 28, 27, 29).

By contrast, Jorge Salessi and Jose Quiroga, in their jointly authored “Errata sobre la erotica, or the Elision of Whitman's Body,” reveal how a certain moral panic has for a long while settled over Whitman's influence on canonical Latino authorship (Pablo Neruda, Jorge Luis Borges, Octavio Paz). Sylvia Molloy's astute “José Martí Reads Whitman” suggests something quite similar. For a newer generation of writers like the openly gay Mexican poet Xavier Villaurrutia, therefore, the challenge from the direction of otherness consists in “opening up the closet of literary and critical representation” in order to get past the frightfully censorious “gay nonreading of Whitman in Latin America” (p. 131).

Elizabeth Johns, in her fascinating “America on Canvas, America in Manuscript: Imaging Democracy,” writes about a somewhat parallel case in the United States a century earlier. For then it was the newer generation of Winslow Homer and Thomas Eakins who carried artistic endeavour past the misogyny and racism of elitist patronage hived in the exclusionary culture of the northeast, and opened up post-bellum American painting to the poet's own “affection for the human being with his subtle destabilizing of individual identity” (p. 156).

Given the multiple stagings of subjectivity in response to an otherness both present and past, in America and elsewhere, I must confess I'm at a dead loss to fathom the editors' decision to include Wai Chee Dimock's “Whitman, Syntax, and Political Theory” in this timely selection of essays on Whitman. For it is Dimock's contention, extrapolated mainly from John Rawls's theory of noncontingent justice, that central to Whitman's democratically rationalized view of selfhood is the recovery of “a truly foundational subject, one whose democratic dignity is absolute, transcendent, and unconditional”

(p. 70). It's certainly possible to tease out of Whitman's various representations of subjectivity "an insistence on formal universals" that would align it with "the entire Western philosophical tradition from Immanuel Kant to Noam Chomsky and John Rawls" (pp. 76, 78).

Such a view, however, puts Dimock's essay considerably at odds with a fair number of others that, under the cultural studies rubric, are pleased to attach themselves to that "vast fluid identity" Whitman himself propounds in *Leaves of Grass*. Unlike Dimock, they thus advance the case for a human subject position which is "unstable and shifting," in Folsom's words again (p. 194) — what Michael Warner in "Whitman Drunk" accurately describes as "the imperfect success of selfing" (p. 39), or Michael Moon, in the essay already noted, cleverly calls "the practice of 'eddying' in Whitman's poetry" (p. 28). Rather than espousing an absolute standard of truth derived from the Western philosophical tradition, Whitman's representations of subjectivity appear much more coordinate with America's own nativist tradition of philosophical pragmatism since, according to Alan Trachtenberg, Whitman seems to intuit so well the pragmatist view, contrary to Dimock, "that truth is plural and partial, subjective, fragmented, scattered," one which is "too great for any one actual mind" ("Lesson of the City," pp. 166, 165).<sup>6</sup>

By overlooking Dimock's essay, we should not, in conclusion, expect to end up with an absolutely irreproachable Whitman, a figure of such total openness that he seems to have no connection at all to that figure of closure on our book-cover from which we would like to imagine cultural studies has emancipated him. In perhaps the finest essay in this gathering, Vivian R. Pollak argues powerfully and passionately,

in "'In Loftiest Sphere': Whitman's Visionary Feminism," that Whitman did not entirely escape the patriarchal sexism of his own day (or ours). "In Whitman's poetry," Pollak contends, "the ideology of woman as mother tends to produce the ideology of woman as Gratified Mother," so that its boast to empower women merely ends up "reinscribing them within fixed social roles in which they are always potentially subordinated to men" (p. 99, 92).

Here, I'm finally reminded of yet another photograph of Whitman, an 1888 view of him enacting the role of the "father" amidst the wife and three children of Francis Williams, whereon the face of Mrs Williams has been inexplicably scratched out. According to Folsom, the effacement of Mrs Williams is appropriately theatrical, and "allows Whitman to occupy not the expected role of emblematic father but the transgressively blended role of father/mother" (p. 196). Perhaps. But set in the context of Pollak's argument, the photograph takes on a much darker and more closed set of sinister inferences — ones more in tune with that "genuinely ambivalent mentality" that, recently, David Reynolds exhaustively documents throughout the greater part of Whitman's postwar writings.<sup>7</sup> Yet the "situation of ambivalence" expressed towards women proves to be "discursively productive" for Whitman, according to Pollak in her conclusion (p. 109).

To my mind, this glowing insight proves also to be the case for each of the productive contributors to this excellent collection of essays, when their attention revolves more generally about two radically opposed images of Whitman — a situation of ambivalence, indeed, on which American cultural studies, today, quite obviously seem to thrive.

#### NOTES

1. The collection is preceded by Robert K. Martin, ed., *The Continuing Presence of Walt Whitman: The Life After the Life* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992) and Ed Folsom, ed., *Walt Whitman: The Centennial Essays* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1994), all of which considerably update Jim Perlman, Ed Folsom, and Dan Champion, eds., *Walt Whitman: The Measure of His Song* (Minneapolis: Holy Cow!, 1981).
2. Cary Nelson, Paula A. Treichler, and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., "Cultural Studies: An Introduction," in *Cultural Studies*, eds. & introd. by Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler, 1–22 (New York: Routledge, 1992), 4.
3. Henry A. Giroux, *Fugitive Cultures: Race, Violence, and Youth* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 17.
4. *Ibid.*, 15.
5. On this point, see Peter Hitchcock, "The Othering of Cultural Studies," *Third Text* 25 (Winter 1993/1994), 12–22. For an extension of the principle in the cultural studies context of African-American literature, see my "'Montage of an Otherness Deferred': Dreaming Subjectivity in Langston Hughes," forthcoming in *American Literature* (Winter 1996).
6. The brand of liberal "individualism" espoused by John Rawls's theory of jurisprudence links up more generally with a modern tradition of "analytical philosophy" in America that would rigidly isolate philosophical discourse from the history of both society and culture. According to John McComber ("Time in the Ditch: American Philosophy and the

McCarthy Era," *diacritics* 26 (Spring 1996): 33–49), it was Rudolph Carnap's 1936 article "Truth and Confirmation" (privileging a form of timeless, selfless truth) "which helped bring about the 'defeat' of Pragmatism and the subsequent triumph of analytical philosophy" that came to prominence in America in the early 1950s (pp. 43, 35). For a further critique of Rawls's legalistic liberalism and its

commitment to an abstraction from the empirical or "situated" self so contrary to a Whitmanian pragmatism, see Drucilla Cornell, *Transformations: Recollective Imagination and Sexual Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 2–3.

7. See David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 452.

## David Morgan, ed., *Icons of American Protestantism: The Art of Warner Sallman*

PAUL NATHANSON

Morgan, David, ed. *Icons of American Protestantism: The Art of Warner Sallman*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996. 246 pp., illus., cloth \$35.00, ISBN 0-300-06342-3.

### Introduction

*Icons of American Protestantism*, edited by David Morgan, is a collection of six essays on the massively popular paintings of Christ by Warner Sallman (1892–1968). Sallman was a commercial artist by profession but an evangelist by vocation; he proclaimed the gospel visually rather than verbally. And he was extremely successful. By the 1950s, his images of Christ had become by far the most familiar ones to generations of American evangelicals. Sallman's *Head of Christ* (1940) has been reproduced, in a variety of pictorial contexts, approximately five hundred million times. Because Sallman was (and is) shunned by the art critics of elite culture, though, his name will probably be unfamiliar to most readers of this book.

Thirty years ago, this book would never have been written at all. No one would have taken Sallman seriously as a subject worthy of scholarship. Both popular culture in general and popular religion in particular were anything but popular in academic circles. Anthropologists, of course, had always been interested in the folk culture of non-literate societies. And historians of Western society had begun to examine medieval folk culture and early modern popular culture. Only in the past fifteen or twenty years, though, has it been generally acknowledged that the popular culture of our own society is worth studying. Unfortunately, the *reason* for this change of mind is not always one that generates good scholarship (which I define in

very general terms as the sincere attempt, no matter how inadequate, to learn something new about what is "out there"). Those who align themselves with what has come to be known as "cultural studies," which has far more to do with ideology than anthropology, have a distinct tendency to begin by assuming that popular culture should be studied not because it might have any intrinsic value, or even because it might reveal something interesting about the way people experience everyday life, but because it might provide evidence to support their own political perspectives. Maybe that has always been done, but it is now done more deliberately and openly.

Fortunately, most of the essays in this book are both scholarly and well written (except for what some authors consider obligatory references to "social constructions," "dominant discourses," and other examples of fashionable jargon). The authors work in a variety of fields — art history, church history, and the history of material culture. They examine not only the life and career of Sallman himself but also the role that imagery has played in the piety of American evangelicals over the past fifty years.

### The Book

In his introduction, David Morgan discusses the visual tradition inherited by Sallman: Protestant art. The latter is not as oxymoronic as it sounds. Morgan points out that Protestants, no less than Catholics, have always made use of images. Until recently, though, they have rejected the possibility of using images specifically in the context of *worship*. (The same is true, I might add, of two other reputedly iconoclastic traditions: Judaism and Islam.)