

allegory and typology against themselves" (14).

Thompson concludes that the *Provincial Tales*, "rather than being merely sentimentalized or purely patriotic pieces, were instead negative romances framing a counterpoised tension of positive and negative attributes of the American forebears" (202). Although focused on American geography and its history and legends, the sketches and tales, which significantly play off each other, are not "provincial" in the sense of crudity or naiveté. They instead are skillful manipulations of existing literary conventions by an author writing from an ironic distance. The mistake of most critics, has been to approach Hawthorne with an "either/or" attitude—for example, to characterize a text as either historical or a romantic. Either/or thinking, according to Thompson, "exemplifies exactly the epistemical categorization problem that Hawthorne was exploring in the mind-sets of his contemporaries; and it ignores the interpenetrating, loosely contrapuntal design...of the provincial narratives as part of a story cycle" (80). Hawthorne's experimentation with narrative conventions blurs the distinction between such binary oppositions as romance/realism, history/literature, and reality/imagination, foregrounding "the fictionality of history and the ironies and ambiguities of romance" (20).

Thompson's text is impeccably researched and his command of the field of Hawthorne criticism is impressive. His analysis is meticulous, patient, and incisive. By focusing on the provincial tales as narrative cycle, Thompson is able to recuperate intertextual references that reveal Hawthorne's preoccupation with framing strategies and variations on authorial presence. Thompson's terminology introduces a new degree of specificity to the discussion of the early narratives. At times, Thompson seems to overstate the case—his formalist corrective runs the danger of reinscribing Hawthorne as a god-like controlling figure whose every move is deft and calculated, as in the following statements: "It is almost as if Hawthorne has anticipated or proleptically manipulated the ensuing debate, [and] one wonders if he has not somehow engineered it, slyly incorporating diverse monological reader-responses into the structure of the narrative" (121); and "Rather than seeing ['The Hollow of the Three Hills] as flawed by its indefiniteness, we might say instead that the narrative skillfully maintains both indefinite locale and an American locale." However, Thompson's text is a forceful and compelling contribution to the analysis of Hawthorne's works and constitutes vital reading for scholars interested in Hawthorne's oeuvre. Jeffrey A. Weinstock, *George Washington University*

Geoffrey M. Sill, ed., *Walt Whitman of Mickle Street: A Centennial Collection* (Knoxville: U Tennessee P, 1994), xvii + 318 pp., \$36.00 (cloth), \$18.95 (paper).

Whitman writes in "Leaves of Grass," "I am large, I contain multitudes." Containing twenty-six essays, *Walt Whitman of Mickle Street* takes the good gray poet at his word. In fact, a more appropriate title for this collection would be *Walt Whitmans of the World*, in as much as included essays chart the reverberations of Whitman's barbaric yawp in Germany, Latin America, the former Soviet Union, and Iceland. The essays also more problematically take Whitman's multitudes in the sense intended by the poet. Whitman writes, "Do I contradict myself? Very well I contradict myself." In several instances, these essays on Whitman enact this contradiction by contradicting one another. The extent to which one can dismiss textual schizophrenia as easily as Whitman dismisses his own multiplicity is debatable. At the most generous, these conflicts establish productive tensions that alert the reader to areas of on-going debate in Whitman studies and force the attentive reader to assess the opposing viewpoints with an eye towards rhetoric and support. Less generously, the reader whose "small mind" is still pestered by that hobgoblin consistency might be somewhat disoriented both by essays in conflict and by the general breadth of the included essays.

The latter is less of a concern than the former because it is unlikely that most readers will read the text from cover to cover. Although published in 1994, the text is composed of papers presented at the series of conferences organized by the Rutgers University Whitman Studies program, beginning in 1985. The included essays have all been published within *The Mickle Street Review*, and are reprinted, in most cases without apparent revision, in honor of the centennial of Whitman's death. Thus, the essays will be familiar to scholars acquainted with *The Mickle Street Review*, as will the list of included authors.

The volume itself is a who's who of Whitman studies, including essays from David Reynolds, Sandra M. Gilbert, Betsy Erkkila, Tenney Nathanson, Ed Folsom, Jerome Loving and Whitman biographers Gay Wilson Allen and Justin Kaplan. However, averaging eleven pages each, including endnotes and works cited, the essays gesture towards the more substantial works that many of these authors have produced, but are generally unsatisfying as free-standing studies. For experienced Whitman scholars, the specificity of certain essays, such as Kenneth M. Price's "Whitman's Influence on Hamlin Garland's *Rose of Dutcher's Cooly*" or Yassen Zassoursky's "Whitman's Reception and Influence in the Soviet Union" may be valuable for focused studies. The main value of the text, however, will be for researchers less familiar with Whitman scholarship who desire quick "soundbites" to aid in

familiarizing themselves with the field and to direct them to more substantial studies. In a classroom context, several of the essays on more general topics, such as David Reynolds' "Whitman and the Nineteenth-Century Views of Gender and Sexuality" and Betsy Erkkilä's "Whitman and American Empire," are suitable as supplementary readings for undergraduates.

Although Geoffrey Sills in the introduction foregrounds the timeliness of many of Whitman's concerns, including racial and sexual tolerance, unfortunately the essays themselves fail almost totally to address Whitman in the present. The final essay of the collection, William Heyen's "Piety and Home in Whitman and Milosz," makes the only sustained attempt (if one can refer to six pages as sustained) to explore the applicability of Whitman to contemporary life. Heyen establishes the writing of Czeslaw Milosz as paradigmatic of the contemporary ethos of homelessness and loss of faith. In contrast to this pervasive despair, Heyen opposes Whitman's "cosmic optimism" (295). In the process, Heyen replicates a disturbing pattern evident in the text as a whole—that of deifying Whitman as a god of hope, love, and faith. Heyen concludes his essay by relating that the doctor weighing Whitman's brain dropped it on the floor. Heyen imagines this brain as shattering glass, "radiating outward from its burst center in a billion billion particles of material light" (296). Here, George Bush's thousand points of light collide with new age mysticism to establish Whitman as Holy Spirit, spreading outward to challenge the forces of homelessness and despair.

Were Heyen's essay the only one to adopt such a worshipful tone, it perhaps could be accepted as a celebratory, if overly dramatic, conclusion to a volume dedicated to Whitman. However, Xilao Li's essay "Whitman and Ethnicity" prepares the reader for Heyen's conclusion, stating, "The Notion of the 'Other' has been expelled from the republic of Whitman's human sympathy. The alienated, the discriminated against, the deprived, the oppressed, the weak, the poor need not apologize for their existence. As for ethnic people, foreign immigrants, they need not seek excuses for being in America. They *are* America" (114). In the course of Li's essay, Whitman is lauded as "the voice of a multiethnic, multicultural, multivocal people" (110), and detailed as refusing Anglo-Saxon bigotry, criticizing the treatment of Native Americans, and actively hoping that white, red, and black "[can] live together as brethren, as equals" (114).

It is against such uncritical approbation of Whitman that Betsy Erkkilä's "Whitman and Empire" appears as a much-needed corrective. In a volume of essays either blind to or bending over backwards to excuse any faults in Whitman, Erkkilä compellingly reinscribes the link between Whitman's ideals of American republic and the ideology of westward expansion. Stressing that contemporary academia has purified Whitman of political designs, Erkkilä focuses on "the ways in which Whitman's celebration of an ideal artisan republic of strong, healthy, and virtuous farmers and laborers becomes simultaneously bound up with a national imperial policy of expansion, conquest and violation" (57). Directly opposing Li's essay, Erkkilä maintains that Whitman *does* celebrate the Anglo-Saxon race as superior. Furthermore, in an especially insightful reading of *Leaves of Grass* Song 33, (which Li, as well as Norma Wilson in her essay "Heartbeat: Within the Visionary Tradition" allude to in laudatory fashion), Erkkilä examines the ways in which "The Trapper's Bride" sequence suggests "both the violence that accompanied American continental expansion and, more disturbingly, the ways in which the Indian woman, who is erotically figured and placed between white man and red man, was made to serve as an object of commerce and exchange through which and across which the values and interests of the American republic would be negotiated" (63). One hopes that the other contributors to the volume read Erkkilä's cogent analysis.

If the Erkkilä quotation above suggests Lévi-Strauss's insights in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, it is as close as any of the included essays come to engaging with or employing contemporary critical insights. In some cases, the omission is particularly glaring. In particular, Louis Simpson's "Strategies of Sex in Whitman's Poetry" could benefit from a close reading of gender and queer theorists such as Halperin, Sedgwick, Foucault, and others. Simpson's argument that Whitman encodes homosexual desire in his texts in such a way so as to disguise it from the general public belies his problematic assertion that the common reader in Whitman's day could hardly imagine that such as thing as homosexual love existed (31). The latter being the case, why the need to encode? This assertion of innocence on the part of the nineteenth-century reader, however, is undermined in the following essay from David S. Reynolds, "Whitman and Nineteenth-Century Views of Gender and Sexuality," in which Reynolds identifies a strain of "subversive" popular literature which deals with homosexuality, among other "lurid" topics. In other essays, Tenney Nathanson approaches the speech/writing opposition and the longing for presence while dismissing Derrida, and Justin Kaplan attempts to distinguish the "biographical" Whitman from the dramatic persona of the text without mentioning Foucault and the notion of the "author function."

The failure of these critics to utilize contemporary theoretical tools where they profit-

ably could be employed encapsulates in method the thematic thrust of the text: the text is a backwards glance over the field of Whitman studies. If little emphasis is paid to the relation of Whitman to the contemporary social and political climate, no reflection is evident on the future directions of Whitman studies. Especially since the volume is a collection of essays gathered over roughly a nine-year period and assembled to commemorate the centennial of Whitman's death, some commentary on evident trends in Whitman studies seems appropriate, at least in Sills' introduction. As it stands, *Walt Whitman of Mickle Street* is an arena of competing voices gathered together to cheer Whitman. The Whitman at the center remains "protean, elusive, and multitude" as Daniel Hoffman notes in the opening essay "'Hankering, Gross, Mystical, Nude': Whitman's 'Self' and the American Tradition." Jeffrey A. Weinstock, *The George Washington University*

## URBAN HISTORY

Camilo Jose Vergara, *The New American Ghetto* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers U P, 1995), 235 pp., \$49.95 (cloth).

Camilo Vergara's examination of the ravages of urban decline in America is both timely for its potential to expose the empty rhetoric that currently masquerades as urban policy—most notably "welfare reform"—and timeless in its ability to capture the enduring human spirit in spite of the worst kinds of adversity. Provocative in its visual representation as well as in its text, this book, as well as the exhibit that has circulated in conjunction with its publication, seeks to remind Americans of the terrible conditions of the inner city they are inclined to push out of their minds in the hope that the lives of those still living there finally can be improved.

Vergara's approach fits well into an established American reformist tradition: of Progressives Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine, of the New Deal's Farm Security Administration photographers, and of Dale Maharidge's depiction of the devastating effects of deindustrialization, *Journey to Nowhere*, that inspired Bruce Springsteen's recent *Tom Joad* album. A Chilean immigrant, who after studying at Notre Dame and Columbia settled in the United States, Vergara has drawn comparisons especially to Riis, another immigrant who startled his middle class audiences with stunning images of how "the other half" lived.

Vergara eschews some of Riis's heavy-handed technique. In contrast to Riis, he avoids using the kind of dark shadows that can give subjects the aura of being trapped in a sinister environment. He is much more inclined to record signs of hope: a family's carefully crafted interior space in a decaying building or graffiti defying the forces bearing down on the inscriber's life. But like Riis, Vergara wants his adopted country to rise up and do something dramatic about the conditions he describes, namely get rid of them. Vergara does not go so far as to seek the elimination of all signs of this degraded environment. Quite the contrary, he seeks both to catalogue decay and preserve its memory. He would, in fact, preserve Detroit's now virtually abandoned cluster of older skyscrapers to remind the public of the changes that have come to our cities, an idea he acknowledges himself in the book that has not been well received.

In building a record of decay over a twenty year period in such key cities as Newark and Camden in New Jersey, Chicago and Detroit, and the South Bronx section of New York City, Vergara presents a striking picture of the physical signs of disinvestment. Once elegant monuments to a more vital stage in urban civilization stand today, if at all, in diminished states, converted to marginal uses or abandoned all together. Once serviceable if poor buildings give way to total disuse. Where new building goes up in the heart of these inner city areas, they assume the elements of fortresses, wary of the immediate areas around them. Not exempt from commercialism, these areas nonetheless receive the most ironic messages as, for instance, the billboard in an area where whites are virtually absent showing a photograph of two children, one black, one white, embracing under the slogan "Nobody's a Bigot."

Although Vergara embraces the many signs of vitality that emerge in such circumstances, he is hostile to efforts to gild the ghetto through such vehicles as community development corporations and the substitution of subsidized townhomes for highrise apartments. Quite rightly skeptical of the claims made for efforts such as those promoted in Newark, where improvements have also meant the displacement of existing residents, he writes, "as we once did in the 1960s, we need to convince ourselves that as a nation we have the power not just to improve the ghetto, but to abolish it... Townhouses, while keeping some working families in the ghetto, do so by creating isolated, largely homogeneous communities. Instead of creating neighborhoods that exclude the poor, the challenge facing us is to build economically and racially integrated communities connected to the mainstream of our society."

Vergara's desire to see the ghetto dispersed, and to make its residents more acceptable