exactly what Karcher’s book does, and this is why *The First Woman in the Republic* is not only a good book, but also an important one.

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With the current influences of popular culture and New Historicism upon literary criticism, we can find the origins of Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* just about everywhere in American life of the nineteenth century. As a journalist in the 1840s and 1850s, Whitman was exposed to practically all its elements. We no longer can separate the poet and his imagination from the culture, material or otherwise. We used to say that there were three primary influences on Whitman’s singular development as a poet: the Bible, Emerson, and opera. Today that list has been democratized and extended indefinitely, to include the women’s movement, the antislavery movement, the workers’ rights movement (or lack thereof), the proto-gay rights movement, French culture, journalism, carpentry, printing and bookmaking, phrenology, and so on.

With a book that we would not, at first glance, think strikingly original in this climate, *Walt Whitman’s Native Representations*, Ed Folsom, editor of the *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review*, adds to the list of influences: dictionaries, baseball, America Indians, and photography. Folsom is original, not in claiming primacy for his sources (as a good new historicist, he does not), but in arguing for their metonymical value. He departs from the old, more empirical ways by not tying the source directly to the thing influenced or the part to the whole. It is, of course, helpful to show that Whitman had a definite interest in baseball, or any of the other “representative” influences, but Folsom’s book goes far beyond an “influence study” to suggest how these things work as part of what we vaguely call culture. *Leaves of Grass* fully absorbed the life around its creator. Folsom could have picked any four items and written the same book, which is precisely the point of the book he has written. Whitman’s sources were as diverse as the democracy he celebrated (or as “diverse” as the democracy was supposed to be—and wasn’t, of course, in its treatment of that “native representation” now known as the Native American).

*Walt Whitman’s Native Representations*, then, is a “random” assessment of the poet and his American culture. Folsom sees the poet’s famous catalogs that include everyone as “the poetic equivalent of a turnstile, admitting a diverse group of individuals” (45). Even Indians played baseball, but otherwise they suggested to Whitman the elusive American origin. Whitman the person could relate to the phenomenon of “Indian-hating” that Melville so deftly describes.
in *The Confidence-Man* (1856). Depending on his moods, Folsom writes, “Indians could be [for Whitman] . . . the primitive versions of American selves that were left far behind” (92).

The study opens with a chapter on dictionaries, followed by chapters on baseball, American Indians, photography, and, finally, as almost a long postscript, the photographs of the poet from early manhood to old age. Whitman once said, as almost everyone who writes on the barbaric bard reminds us, that *Leaves of Grass* was “a language experiment.” Folsom suggests in this study that it was an experiment in (or with) slang and the culture that feeds the vernacular. “Whitman and Dictionaries” introduces this idea by first focusing on Noah Webster’s campaign to legitimize the American neologism and then discussing Whitman’s “composting” of words out of the chaos and diversity of the crowd. The subject of this chapter merges easily and gracefully with the chapter on baseball and the crowd (one of Whitman’s favorite words), crowd control, and, eventually, the corruption of the “game.” This chapter in turn sets the stage for the corruption of the Indians (which Folsom sees, perhaps viscerally, as another “native heritage”).

“Whitman and Photography” is one of the best chapters in the book because the “portable technology” was immensely suggestive to the poet. The photograph, and later the “snapshot,” made everybody a “celebrity” while at the same time decentering “reality”—deformalizing it in the way of the French impressionists later in the century. The emphasis on the poet’s use of photographs in place of his name on his early title pages of *Leaves of Grass* underscores and sums up (as Folsom writes in his introduction) Whitman’s “attempt to give ultimate vivification to cultural acts” (2) in a democracy. The ultimate cultural fact for Whitman, of course, was himself, whom he attempted to put on record as “a Person, a human being . . . in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century” (4).

Whitman’s poetic narcissism is best illustrated in the final chapter, “Whitman and Photographs of the Self,” a guided tour of Whitman’s photographs and poetic uses from early manhood to old age. The book presents fifteen of the more than 130 extant photographs of Whitman. The rest are available in Folsom’s photograph issue of the *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* (Fall/Winter 1986–87).

With or without photographs, this book is an excellent example of a study of material culture and literature because it never asks too much of its evidence or becomes fashionably neo-Marxist in its criticism of the system that the “Poet of Democracy” celebrated. Rather, Folsom’s method is to explore the metonymical influence. Dictionaries, the national pastime, Native Americans, the daguerreotype, and everything else, as Whitman said, were united: “I see in them and myself the same old law” (“Song of Myself”). The idea of the connection of all things became more pronounced in the second edition of *Leaves of Grass*, where its best poem, “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” (then called “Sun-Down Poem”), denied the separation of time and space. Folsom has been both scholarly and imaginative in showing how the material gets into the culture, and so cultures the poetry. For this reason alone, not to mention the way the study provides an enlivening perspective for future analyses of *Leaves of Grass*, *Walt Whitman’s Native Representations* is one of the best studies of Whitman since the era of New
Criticism, when neither Whitman nor culture mattered that much in the study of literature.

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In her own time, Charlotte Perkins Gilman was best known for her nonfiction, especially her cogent analysis of women’s subordinate status in society, Women in Economics (1898). The current Gilman revival, however, beginning with the republication of “The Yellow Wall-Paper” by the Feminist Press in 1973, has been driven by literary scholars rather than by sociologists or economists. Some of Gilman’s nonfiction has been republished, most recently in a collection edited by Larry Ceplair (1991), but reissues of her fiction—which includes nine novels and nearly two hundred short stories—have predominated. Denise D. Knight’s current edition of short stories is the fourth collection of Gilman’s fiction to appear, and the third in five years.

Knight reprints twenty-five stories, including the by-now mandatory “The Yellow Wall-Paper,” which Gilman published between 1892 and 1916. All but five of the stories originally appeared in The Forerunner, the magazine that Gilman singlehandedly wrote and produced from 1909 to 1916 as a vehicle for her social criticism. All the stories are informed by the didactic intent that led her to write fiction in the first place. Aesthetically, the stories—except for “The Yellow Wall-Paper”—are undistinguished. Gilman herself disclaimed any “literary” quality for her fiction, and Knight admits to Gilman’s “occasionally heavy-handed politics,” “prosaic and awkward” dialogue, and messages emphasized at the expense of characters (23). Knight presents the stories as a sampling of Gilman’s versatility in the short story form and as a body of fiction that was in many ways unique for its time—fiction that makes women central characters and invests them with agency and possibility in order “to demonstrate viable alternatives to long-ingrained and oppressive social habits” (25).

Gilman wrote with great rapidity; she wrote prolifically; and this collection clearly demonstrates, as Knight claims, that Gilman could write in a variety of fictional forms. Collected here are stories of domestic realism, adventure stories, satires, fantasies, fables, and a few early experiments in imitating the styles and subject matter of other writers, such as Mary Wilkins Freeman and Hamlin Garland. Most of the stories deal with familiar Gilman concerns: white middle-class women trapped in stifling marriages; women’s need for meaningful work in the world, and for physical, as well as intellectual, activity; and the value