

more toward the popular reader (primarily a gay one) than the scholar—quite unforgivably, really, for the accessibility of Shively's lively introductory material and the reprinted letters would hardly have been compromised by including thorough notes at the back to indicate provenances of the letters and sources for biographical and historical facts and generalizations, many of which are rather questionable without clear documentation (as are some generalizations made about gay life and relationships, which may mislead some readers less familiar than Shively with these issues).

Shively is not merely a gay poet and journalist, associated with the Boston collective which publishes *Fag Rag*; he is a professor at the University of Massachusetts, with a Ph.D. from Harvard. Hence it is strange that "the importance of accurately reproducing letters as they were written" was impressed upon him, according to his acknowledgements, not by fellow academics but by more populist editors like Winston Leyland of *Gay Sunshine*. One questions his accuracy, however, when it has apparently not spread to the entries from Whitman's notebooks: the two separate appearances of one four-line transcription (pp. 57, 65) reveal no fewer than three discrepancies. Moreover, a familiar line from Whitman is misquoted (alas, a flaw all too common in writings about Whitman), while obvious misprints abound, as do such dreadful terms as "massification" and "prophesized" (p. 63).

A major flaw is the book's final section, a selection of Whitman's poems of gay love for which Shively has conflated manuscripts, early editions, and the familiar final forms of poems from "Calamus" and passages from other poems to achieve "the most erotic reading" (p. 186). But such brilliant—and clearly homoerotic—poems as "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand" and "When I Heard at the Close of the Day" gain nothing, erotically or poetically, from the changes Shively has imposed. Further, the italicized reference following each poem is often incomplete. Shively and his editor, Leyland, might have produced a more attractive as well as a more accurate anthology by following the example of Walter Lowenfels in his edition of Whitman's erotic poetry, *The Tenderest Lover* (1970), which provides textual information only at the end of the volume, clearly indicating there the source of changes in specific lines. Moreover, Lowenfels includes poems from "Drum-Taps," which Shively ignores—an odd omission considering that this book's subjects and Whitman's lovers include several Civil War soldiers.

In sum, this book is an important contribution to Whitman studies and is disappointing primarily for its failure to recognize its own value.

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Horace Traubel, ed. *An American Primer by Walt Whitman, With Facsimiles of the Original Manuscript*, ix, 35 pp. Boston: Small, Maynard & Co., 1904. Reprinted, Stevens Point, Wisconsin: Holy Cow! Press, 1987, with Afterword by Gay Wilson Allen, pp. 37–44. Paper, \$5.95. Cloth, \$13.00.

Around the mid-1850s Whitman wrote out brief notes on the structure and usage of American English that apparently he had intended to use as material for lectures. Nothing came of the lectures, but the separate notes, some a few sentences in length, others full paragraphs, grew to a 110-leaf manuscript, often heavily revised, and

titled "The Primer of Words. . . ." The variety and range of these notes define Whitman's "language experiment" in *Leaves of Grass*. Some of the notes were on left-over sheets of the first (1855) edition of *Leaves of Grass*, and others were written out later.

In an age that insisted upon a language couched in euphemisms Whitman stressed his attraction to "The words of the *Body* . . . *The words of maternity* . . . Kosmos words . . . Tavern words . . . *Words of politics*," as, of course, was evident throughout the first edition of *Leaves*, but especially in "Song of Myself," "I Sing the Body Electric," and "The Sleepers." He was fascinated with the argot of the demi-monde. "I like limber, lasting, fierce words . . . Many of the slang words among fighting men, gamblers, thieves, prostitutes, are powerful words. These words ought to be collected — the bad words as well as the good. — Many of these bad words are fine." He defines "A perfect writer" as one who "would make words sing, dance, kiss, do the male and female act, bear children, weep, bleed, rage, stab, steal, fire cannon, steer ships, sack cities, charge with cavalry or infantry, or do any thing, that man or woman or the natural powers can do."

These notes make fascinating reading. The manuscript was never published in Whitman's lifetime. Traubel made it available in 1904. It was reissued in facsimile in 1969 by the Folcroft Press (Pennsylvania) and a year later by City Lights Books (San Francisco). Both are out of print. The present Holy Cow! Press facsimile of the Traubel edition is attractively bound in green wrappers and boards.

In his Afterword Gay Wilson Allen succinctly defines the probable early influence on Whitman's approach to the language in Emerson's seminal essay "The Poet" (1842), which Whitman had initially heard as a lecture given by Emerson in New York and which he had covered for the *New York Aurora*. Allen also discusses Emerson's important concept of words as symbols within the context of Whitman's poetic diction.

It should be noted that Traubel's approach to the editing of the Whitman manuscript was more or less typical of the time and leaves much to be desired, despite his lofty but erroneous statement that he had "*followed the original manuscript without any departures whatsoever. All its peculiarities of capitalization and punctuation are allowed to remain untouched.*" Fortunately, the "Primer of Words . . ." manuscript has been preserved in the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. It has been edited by William White in the *Daybooks and Notebooks of Walt Whitman*. (New York: New York University Press, 1978), 3:728-757.

Among his other editorial liberties, Traubel replaced Whitman's title with a discarded one, silently dropped the opening paragraph of some 160 words, most of which is repeated later separately in somewhat different forms (see White's note 3341, p. 730, but especially section 45, p. 740, and section 76-77, p. 748), routinely omitted important paragraph headings, and in two instances restored cancelled passages, one of some seventy-five words and the other twenty-five. He dropped several lines of the text. In one instance he ran four separate "catalogue"-type sentences together as one sentence and in another joined separate short paragraphs together as a single sentence. He also departed from Whitman's punctuation and paragraphing.

For the price, and with Allen's excellent Afterword, *An American Primer* is certainly an attractive curio. But for any serious work one must consult White's transcription.