

mean all those things in each instance of its use. Davis rightfully alludes to Whitman's "use of the term," signalling Davis's awareness of a term's pragmatics, that is, the contexts of its utterance which delimit its meaning. But if we examine the context of "First, O Songs," we plainly see that the term signifies only one thing: the parade drum. That is the only reference for the word in the given line. In no way can the line "Lightly strike on the stretch'd tympanum" refer to the other dictionary definitions. The significance of that reference may be political, social, etc., but the reference itself is single. The linguistic "unsettling" Davis affirms here never happens.

Davis commits these kinds of errors numerous times in the book. Quoting a phrase from a poem on the Union army's return from the war—"as I glance at the faces, studying the masks"—Davis comments, "Like Hawthorne's minister or Alcott's soldiers, these heroes return if not in drag at least in costume" (54). How we move from "masks" to "costume" and near-"drag" remains unclear. Earlier, Davis asserts that "Whitman's romance of medicine corresponds with a romance of democracy, and his writings engage the meaning of political representation at its most urgent level: the representation of the physical body" (31). Where is the evidence that the most urgent meaning of political representation lies in the representation of the physical body? The sentences before and after this one say nothing to substantiate the assertion. Whitman does not articulate this idea, and certainly the majority of his contemporaries would have found representations of political interests or spiritual concerns to have greater urgency than the representation of physical bodies. What are readers supposed to do with such sweeping, but unsupported claims?

It is unfortunate that Davis did not clean up these structural and inferential mistakes in the revision and review process, for the basic hospital thesis merits serious consideration. Simply as a supposition, the hospital as a site of liminal identities and otherworldly imaginings explains much of Whitman's curious and quietly intense hospital writings. In doing so, *Whitman and the Romance of Medicine* opens up a new area of research for Whitman studies. Despite its occasional lapses in argumentation, Davis's study is an important addition to the field and should spawn several ventures into Whitman's post-Fifties poetic and social labors.

Emory University

MARK BAUERLEIN

GARY SCHMIDGALL. *Walt Whitman: A Gay Life*. New York: Dutton, 1997. xxxv + 428 pp.

Gary Schmidgall's inept study is a great disappointment, given the need for an accomplished exploration of this subject. Exhibiting little knowledge of, or respect for, cultural context, the author facetiously projects his own late-twentieth century presumptions and expectations of what it means to be gay onto Whitman's nineteenth-century corpus. The result—a sort of retro-gay caricature—is a poor portrait of Walt Whitman as a man who loved men.

With a nod to the poem "By Blue Ontario's Shore," the book is largely preoccupied with the question, "Where was Whitman inclined to plunge his own

seminal muscle?" (75). But in place of original research into the sexual life of the poet, the author presents well-worn gay readings of Whitman texts. His narrative of the largely unknown decade preceding publication of the first *Leaves of Grass* (1855) seems more picaresque than biographical. Indicative is the author's suggestion that Whitman favored the music hall's cheap seats in order to cruise the upper tiers for sex (131). Unfortunately, such gratuitous speculation will leave many readers longing for the Poet Abstinent of yore.

Surprisingly for a study such as this, Schmidgall doesn't even reference the Chester A. (a.k.a. Gavin) Arthur memoir, in which the amateur sexologist claims to have been told by Edward Carpenter that he was sexual with Whitman. Known primarily as "Allen Ginsberg's oral history" (passed on from Arthur via Neal Cassady and related by Ginsberg in the 1988 *Voices and Visions: Walt Whitman* television documentary), this account was published by Arthur himself in his *Circle of Sex* (1966) and by Ginsberg in a revised form in *Gay Sunshine* (Winter, 1978). (The visit made by Arthur to Carpenter from which this reminiscence sprung is documented in a letter Arthur wrote to Carpenter shortly afterward, thus giving the tale extra credibility.)* Arthur's story is about as close as we have come to actually observing Whitman's sexual behavior and demands greater consideration.

Schmidgall is best at recording the extent to which Whitman's poetry spoke to those men who are often considered the first modern homosexuals. These include such well-known names as John Addington Symonds, Charles Warren Stoddard, and Carpenter, as well as the lesser-known Lionel Johnson, an English correspondent who became part of Oscar Wilde's coterie. But even here, Schmidgall's treatment of these men is largely supercilious and presentist, referring to Carpenter, for example, as "the premier homosexual apologist of his generation"! (301). The author does not permit Whitman to name his own attraction to men, scorning Adhesiveness and Comradship as Whitman's "code-words" for Homosexuality. And unwilling to explore the possible differences in these men's visions of same-sex love and Whitman's, Schmidgall can only glibly deduce that Whitman's resistance to sexual characterization is cloaked subterfuge. The poet whom Michael Lynch credits with imagining the homosexual who, in time, gave birth to gay liberation, deserves better (see "Here is Adhesiveness": From Friendship to Homosexuality," *Victorian Studies* 29 [Autumn 1985]).

The author, whose previous works include *Shakespeare and Opera* (1990), and *Literature as Opera* (1977), devotes a chapter to Whitman's response to singer Marietta Alboni. Following an overly long recitation of Alboni's operatic career and her American reception, Schmidgall offers a few intriguing but insufficiently developed remarks about how Alboni's projection of "aural beauty" (46) and "nonchalance" (52) influenced Whitman's own poetic performance. Schmidgall usefully corrects the biographical record with the observation that

*"The Papers of Edward Carpenter, 1844-1929," in the Sheffield Archives, Sheffield Libraries and Information Services, Sheffield, England, MSS 271/187. The letter is dated September 8, 1923. The correspondent is incorrectly identified in the Paper's Index as "Chislet A. Arthur."

Whitman attended a performance of Donizetti's *Linda di Chamounix* the evening he received news of the attack on Fort Sumter (59)—not Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera*, as suggested by previous scholars.

A chapter entitled "Walt & His Boys" draws a compelling portrait of the poet's relationship with Fred Vaughan. It left me wishing more were known about this man whom Charley Shively suggests was the muse for Whitman's *Calamus* cluster. In his Peter Doyle discussion, Schmidgall should have made greater effort to provide correct biographical information, such as Doyle's birth year (1843, not 1845, 1847, or 1848, as variously posited) and occupation (brakemen on the Pennsylvania railroad, not the Washington streetcars). The Eakins nude photograph of Bill Duckett is included, but researchers unfamiliar with the works of Susan Danly and Ed Folsom will be left wondering how Eakins's model was identified as Whitman's chauffeur.

Curiously, the main body of the book comprises little more than half of the printed mass. In addition to copious notes and a pretty good chronology, the remainder consists largely of an "Annex" focusing on Oscar Wilde, the subject of an earlier Schmidgall book, *The Stranger Wilde* (1994). There's also an autobiographical "Afterwards," in which Schmidgall engages us with stories about his own boyfriends, a favorite uncle, and a landlord/mentor. Clearly, the author's métier is not biography, but the memoir.

The Washington Friends of Walt Whitman

MARTIN G. MURRAY