

interesting re-assessment, but tantalizing examples are given of how the poetry might be read afresh in the light of such a readjustment in thinking. It would be good to have the poetry extensively re-presented in these terms, as proof that (to paraphrase Ginsberg) Whitman's beard—that unerring indicator of the prevailing ideological winds in American culture—is indeed pointing in Maslan's direction tonight.

*University of Wales, Swansea*

M. WYNN THOMAS

STEPHEN JOHN MACK. *The Pragmatic Whitman: Reimagining American Democracy*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002. xxii +182 pp.

Since the 1970s the scholarship on Whitman has expanded exponentially, not only in a veritable cascade of journal articles but also in an amazing number and steady production of books or monographs. Whitman once said that he contained "multitudes," and everybody seems to have found his or her own Whitman to promote. There now exist in book form, for example, the "political" Whitman, the "German" Whitman, the "Emersonian" Whitman, the "solitary" Whitman, the "socialist" Whitman, the "representative" Whitman, the "linguistic" Whitman, the "erotic" Whitman, and of course the "homosexual" Whitman, whose personality permeates all the other Whitmans. Joseph Jay Rubin published *The Historic Whitman* in 1973, and George B. Hutchinson published *The Ecstatic Whitman* in 1986. The first, a rough biography, viewed Whitman as securely tied to political and social history, whereas the second, while acknowledging the poet's historical contexts, found an intriguing connection between Whitman's mysticism and his psychological conflicts.

Since Whitman's own day there has been a shift in this country from the individualist philosophy of Emerson to the collectivist ideology of Franklin Roosevelt, from Transcendentalism to Pragmatism in one form or another, or from a logocentric or foundational point of view to a relativistic one. This major change in ideology, essentially inspired by Darwin, took place between the American Civil War and World War I, and was influenced along the way by Freud and such cognitive pragmatists as John Dewey and George Herbert Mead. Pragmatism, defined as the acceptance of a belief if it allows us to function better, has softened our relativistic landing somewhat, especially through William James's quasi-religious notion that "truth happens to an idea." Whitman, who stands squarely between the ages of romance and realism, certainly had the seeds of pragmatism in his doctrines. Anybody who grew up as poor as he did would have to seek social adjustments—as indeed he did as editor of the *Brooklyn Eagle* in the 1840s. According to Louis Menand in *The Metaphysical Club* (2001), a study of pragmatism and its precursors which has popularized the subject once again, Whitman's main mentor Emerson was also a pragmatist in the sense that he distrusted institutions while appropriating some of their ideas. What Emerson does not share with pragmatism, however, is its questioning in some quarters of the concept of the individual conscience as a transcendental authority. And it is here, I think, that the debate of our time continues.

I have written elsewhere that Whitman was a Transcendentalist above all, but I also tried to show how he embraced realism not only after the war but before it in less obvious ways. Gay Wilson Allen before me viewed Whitman's postwar writings as an anticipation of pragmatism. Now Stephen John Mack in *The Pragmatic Whitman*, a thoughtful and gracefully written study, has stepped forward to demonstrate just how Whitman, or at least the later Whitman, is a pragmatist. Mainly, Mack sees Whitman's "Calamus" emotions and the Civil War as the main catalysts to the poet's movement away from romanticism. Raw nature of the *laissez-faire* type that Mack attributes to Transcendentalism or natural law would find homosexuality "unnatural" and war "natural." Hence, human "agency" is called into play to adjust such phenomena. Rather than simply go with the flow, humankind seeks to democratize it. Taking his cue from Richard Rorty (though specifically quoting Michael Walzer), Mack also sees multiculturalism as a pragmatic adjustment to life and society. Mack's monograph is a study of the poetry as a way of showing how, especially after 1860, Whitman used democracy as a pragmatic method.

The problem with celebrating this later Whitman whose democratic vision rests "not on its correspondence to known fact . . . but on its capacity to produce a worthwhile future," is that it subordinates Whitman's best poetry—the first three editions between 1855 and 1860—to his "Old Age Echoes," so to speak. In other words, the focus is more on the poet's politics and prose than his poetry, and yet without the poetry neither Mack's book nor this journal which now reviews it would exist. Ironically, the poetry that made Whitman famous is now hopelessly Transcendental, and today such metaphysical "agency" is entirely out of fashion. Accordingly, all of Mack's readings of the poetry of the first three editions are based on the supposition that "the soul is nothing like an ethereal entity at all; it is a naturalistic conception of consciousness," in the way of Mead and Dewey.

But Mack's thesis is entirely defensible and admirable. This is, in fact, a Whitman for our time. It may be chronocentric to fit his nineteenth-century consciousness into our modern dilemma, but Whitman did warn us in his greatest poem that he would be forever "around, tenacious, acquisitive, tireless, and cannot be shaken away." Yet he was primarily a Transcendentalist, and that may be the reason why the poet's name is entirely absent from Menand's *magnum opus* on the history of pragmatism.

Texas A&M University

JEROME LOVING