

Brown (163-165). His democratic realism is a form of verbal photography (168-170), his seascapes are analogous to those of Eakins and Homer (178-183), his anti-traditionalism an inspiration to the "Stieglitz circle" (188). These are suggestive interpretations, useful to students hoping to pursue Whitman studies across genres and art forms.

The final essay, "Whitman the Democrat" by Kenneth Cmiel, accepts Whitman's pose as prophet of democracy, but asks "What *sort* of democrat was Whitman?" (205). Arguing that "Whitman [is] a bit less radical than is often portrayed" (206), Cmiel returns to nineteenth-century political theory to examine concepts of sovereignty, the state, liberalism, and popular rule as they circulated in Whitman's time. The essay is particularly rewarding in its placement of those concepts within contemporary debates over the nature of freedom and constitutionalism in a range of political thinkers whose names are unknown to most literary scholars today.

As a whole, the volume offers a rich fund of source materials and historical contexts. Although most of the contents can be found in Reynold's "cultural biography," Folsom's "native representations" book, and Loving's recent opus, for undergraduates and beginning graduate students, *A Historical Guide to Walt Whitman* is one of the best places to start.

Emory University

MARK BAUERLEIN

ROY MORRIS, JR. *The Better Angel: Walt Whitman in the Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. ix + 270 pp.

In *The Better Angel: Walt Whitman in the Civil War*, historian and biographer Roy Morris, Jr., tells us that he undertook this highly readable and generally reliable study because "Until now . . . no one has seen fit to devote more than a passing chapter, at best, to Whitman's Civil War years." This is true in the sense that Charles I. Glickberg's *Walt Whitman and the Civil War* (1933), Walter Lowenfels's *Walt Whitman's Civil War* (1960), and John Harmon McElroy's *The Sacrificial Years: A Chronicle of Walt Whitman's Experiences in the Civil War* (1999) are collections instead of narratives, but the wartime adventures of Whitman have been to one extent or another rather thoroughly treated in the major biographies by Gay Wilson Allen, Justin Kaplan, David S. Reynolds, and most recently myself. Readers of these books will not discover anything new in *The Better Angel* pertaining specifically to Whitman, but they will find that Morris has wedded all of the biographical facts to the facts of the war in an intelligently written narrative. For what Morris brings to the canon of writings about Whitman is both his knowledge of the Civil War and his seasoned talents as a writer. He is not a Whitman scholar *per se* or even a professor of literature at a university; he is the editor of *America's Civil War* magazine and the author of biographies of Ambrose Bierce and General Philip Sheridan.

*The Better Angel*, consisting of six chapters and an epilogue, portrays Whitman as stagnating in New York while the war rages for almost its first two years, going to Washington and Fredericksburg to find his wounded brother, and returning to Washington, where he began his long and noble career as hospital

visitor and “wound dresser.” Morris fills these sequences with much vivid detail, especially relating to the kind of medical treatment the soldiers received in the pandemonium of wartime Washington. Following the assumption that hospitals killed as many as they saved (possibly more, especially Confederate hospitals), he relates that Civil War physicians were “apt to prescribe a bewildering and generally ineffective array of drugs at the first sign of illness.” Diarrhea, which killed as many as anything else in the war, was bombarded with such medicines as laxatives, opium, Epsom salts, castor oil, ipecac, quinine, strychnine, turpentine, camphor oil, laudanum, lead acetate, silver nitrate, red pepper, and whiskey. We already know about the high rate of amputations, but Morris reminds us why. “The wounding agent,” he writes in the chapter called “The Great Army of the Sick” (Morris takes his title from Whitman’s greatest newspaper piece on the war), “was almost always a bullet—surprisingly, only 6 percent of wounds were caused by artillery fire.” And they were inflicted by Minie balls, 58-caliber projectiles that were “wrongly called balls.” His description of the terrible nature of the injury the cone-shaped lead ball caused, resulting in “jagged wounds, copious bleeding, and catastrophically shattered bones,” reminds me as a veteran of the Vietnam War of the rounds of the M-16 automatic rifle, which tumbled after a certain distance so as to do as much or more internal damage. George Whitman claimed he took a Minie ball through the cheek, but shrapnel was the more likely culprit: his wound was among the six percent caused by artillery. This chapter, by the way, is the finest for both vivid detail and authorial empathy; it deserves to be reprinted somewhere, someday.

One of Morris’s strengths in this study is to interweave Whitman’s letters to soldiers, his *Drum-Taps* poems, and his diary observations into the whirlwind of the war and its consequences. In discussing the poem “Cavalry Crossing a Ford,” he connects it to a notebook entry dated “Christmas Afternoon, 1862” to show the horsemen taking “‘a serpentine course’ identical to that of the supply wagons mentioned in the notes.” It confirms what I have noted in my treatment of the war poems in my biography that many of the *Drum-Taps* poems reflect a historical immediacy not found elsewhere in *Leaves of Grass*. It was probably the reason Whitman chose not to tinker with these poems either at all or nearly as much as he did the rest of his book in later editions. Morris is particularly insightful on “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d” in his final chapter, calling the poem not only a threnody for Lincoln “but for all the bruised and broken men who over the past four years had given their lives to the Union cause.” It was also, he adds significantly, “an elegy to the poet himself,” who too had come a long way in the war. And he joins his historical background with moving narrative to describe the horrendous hospital scenes Whitman witnessed and absorbed into his poetry. Whitman, as Morris notes, told Traubel that war was one part glory and ninety-nine one hundredths diarrhea.

The weaknesses of this book have mainly to do with its lack of research in the vast Whitman archives. Most of Morris’s sources here are secondary rather than primary. He assumes, for example, that Whitman was a homosexual, whereas that assumption can only be safely based on Freudian readings of same-sex relationships in the nineteenth century. Hardly anyone of that era

thought “Calamus” homosexual in theme. It was the “Children of Adam” poems that made Whitman a scandalous poet in an age when everything was covered, including piano legs. But someone outside our discipline, such as a Civil War historian, would never know this from recent critical studies, which merely assume without bothering to demonstrate Whitman’s active homosexuality. Morris, however, isn’t ready to follow this assumption without qualification. It was pioneered by such modern gay writers as Charley Shively, whose *Calamus Lovers* (1987) and *Drum Beats* (1989) support the notion that Whitman was an unembarrassed, cruising gay in the nineteenth century. Morris doesn’t believe, as Shively does, that Whitman acted on his allegedly gay impulses with the sick and wounded soldiers. Indeed, he thinks that the mere idea is highly unlikely if not ridiculous, given “the tenor of the times and the sheer physical overcrowding of the hospitals.” Furthermore, though he notes that Whitman’s fascination for the soldier Tom Sawyer “exceeded wartime camaraderie,” same-sex affection had not yet become eroticized, and “overt demonstrations of affection—kissing, hugging, stroking, and petting—were commonplace” and thus went virtually unnoticed.

Morris is nevertheless convinced that Whitman was homosexual. One piece of evidence he cites is the alleged incident in the 1840s, used in Reynolds’s biography, where Whitman was supposedly tarred, feathered, and run out of town on a rail for attempting to seduce a male student. The “facts” of the incident, which consist of several layers of hearsay and outright fabrications, were collected in a pamphlet by Katherine Molinoff entitled *Whitman at Southold* (1996). As I pointed out in this journal (*WWQR* 12 [Spring 1995], 259-60) while reviewing *Walt Whitman’s America*, the main reason biographers have otherwise passed over this rumor is that Whitman’s location in the winters of 1840 and 1841 is fairly well documented as being at the western end of Long Island from Southold—a town next to Smithtown, where the poet did teach in the fall and winter terms of 1837-1838. Molinoff, who is better respected for her groundbreaking pamphlet in 1941 on the Whitman family background (*Some Notes on Whitman’s Family*), admits in *Whitman at Southold* that there is no evidence of Whitman’s having taught any farther east than Smithtown, but then subsequently contradicts that statement to say that “several eminently reliable residents” document his teaching at the Locust Grove School in Southold. But it all turns out to be based on the testimony of a local historian described in one of the many letters Molinoff quotes as a demonstrable liar who “had an alarming ability to get facts where none existed.” The damage to the truth in such cases where something asserted is insufficiently proved, of course, comes from speculation in biographies and critical studies as to how the imagined event shaped the poet’s future. The commentary on Whitman as a homosexual is rife with such assaults on empirical scholarship.

Morris also thinks Whitman was a racist and cites on this issue (to support his repeated hints of the belief) Whitman’s statement in the *Brooklyn Daily Times* of May 6, 1858, to wit: “Who believes that the Whites and Blacks can ever amalgamate in America.” He cites the editorial in Emory Holloway’s edition of *I Sit and Look Out* (1932), which, as I point out in my biography, silently drops three paragraphs of the editorial. Holloway didn’t want Whitman to be perceived as gay and apparently tinkered with the evidence in his 1926

biography. In the 1930s, when *I Sit* appeared in the wake of the seemingly successful Russian Revolution, he tended to emphasize Whitman's nineteenth-century American attitudes toward minorities. With the paragraphs restored to the *Times* piece, the question is no longer rhetorical but literal—with the painful admission that blacks will never be able to overcome white prejudice by staying in this country.

The restoration does not, however, relieve Whitman of the casual racism towards blacks in the nineteenth century. His "divine average" was primarily white in that he shared the same prejudices as the Great Emancipator who thought blacks ought to be re-colonized in Africa. Yet, like Lincoln, he was clearly opposed to slavery, not on abolitionist principles alone, but on the Free Soil ones that a democracy could not flourish in a land in which one did for money what the slave did for free. In one instance, Morris misrepresents Whitman's racial attitudes by making his brother George look more sensitive according to twentieth- and twenty-first century views. When Lieutenant Whitman heard in September 1862 of the coming Emancipation, he pointed out to his brother, according to Morris, the inherent flaw in Lincoln's plan of freeing only the slaves in the rebellious states and not the friendly border states. But actually George, who suffered that "New York feeling" of racism as much as other northern soldiers (most of whom would not have enlisted if Lincoln had initially called it a war to end slavery instead of one to keep the Union together) thought Lincoln ought to free none of the slaves: "I dont know what effect it is going to have on the war, but one thing is certain, he [Lincoln] has got to lick the south before he can free the niggers, and unless he drives ahead and convinces the south, before the first of January, that we are bound to lick them, . . . it would be better for them [the Confederate states] to behave themselfs and keep their slaves." Indeed, this was Lincoln's initial idea in the preliminary proclamation of emancipation. As Lincoln told Horace Greeley in his famous open letter to the *Tribune*, he would save the Union first and then take care of slavery.

Of course, Morris could not have known about Holloway's faulty editing of the *Brooklyn Times* editorial without reading my biography—which was published while *The Better Angel* was already in production—or without reading the obscure book in which the editorial was first correctly reprinted, *Race and the Romantics* (1971), edited by Vincent Freimarck and Bernard Rosenthal. Nor could he know of my argument there that Holloway's assertion in *I Sit and Look Out* that Whitman was the editor of the *Times* is unfounded. When I examined that claim, I found it almost completely baseless, and I now believe it ought to be stricken from the standard Whitman chronology.

Morris also exaggerates the intensity of Whitman's discussions over the topic of slavery with his friend William Douglas O'Connor. Never specifically discussing their 1872 quarrel over the merits of the Fifteenth Amendment, which Whitman opposed because it gave uneducated black males the right to vote, he insists that it was such an obstacle to their friendship during the war that John Burroughs replaced O'Connor as the poet's best friend. Nobody ever replaced O'Connor as Whitman's best friend; indeed, together they criticized Burroughs for being too friendly with the literary establishment. And while we're on the subject of O'Connor, it should also be pointed out that there is no concrete evidence that O'Connor was a philanderer (though I myself speculated in *Walt*

*Whitman's Champion* [1978] that he may have contracted a venereal disease). Citing Edward J. Renehan's mediocre biography of Burroughs, Morris imagines O'Connor smoked "cigarettes" (they were cigars) and sneaked women into his flat in the Burroughs attic when his wife was not home. This last unfounded detail comes from Rehehan's book, where absolutely no evidence or sources are provided.

Even though *The Better Angel* occasionally has the feel of a TV docudrama (at one point Whitman is scuffling with another patron at Pfaff's), it is an honest and for the most part reliable portrait of the Good Gray Poet who may have also been the Good Gay Poet. The operative word here, however, is "good," for nobody gave himself to his country and its "good cause" of democracy with any greater love and risk than Walt Whitman did during the Civil War. We've had this tale in pieces thus far, either in editions of his wartime sayings or passing chapters of biographies, but Morris now sums it up beautifully and effectively in one work. The book reminds me in its style and verve of Haniel Long's meditation on the bard in *Walt Whitman: The Springs of Courage* (1938). *The Better Angel* is a most welcome addition to the important and useful books on this great poet.

Texas A&M University

JEROME LOVING

BRYAN K. GARMAN. *A Race of Singers: Whitman's Working-Class Hero from Guthrie to Springsteen*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000. xi + 338 pp.

Bryan Garman takes his title from "A Backward Glance o'er Travel'd Roads," where Walt Whitman calls for "a race of singers" to limn the "land and people and circumstances of our United States." But the spirit of Garman's book is best captured by an image: the representation of a man that prefaced the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*. His hat cocked, his body at arrogant ease, he wears the casual clothes of a workingman. It is an image shot through with contradictions: the figure is anonymous, it is a picture of Walt Whitman; it is a representation of a workingman, it is a portrait of a poet; it celebrates the working class, it idealizes an individual. *A Race of Singers* explores allied contradictions in Whitman and his work, in his reception among the twentieth-century American Left, and in his political and artistic heirs—particularly in Woody Guthrie and Bruce Springsteen, who rank among America's best-known, most Whitmanesque, and most deeply conflicted artists.

The conflicts within Whitman's heirs reflect conflicts within the poet they idealized as a "heroic spiritual grandfather," in the words of Michael Gold. Whitman was the most radically democratic of nineteenth-century American poets, but his politics were shaped by the antebellum ideal of the artisan republic. Whitman's vision was inclusive, embracing black as well as white, the woman equally with the man. Yet the artisan republic imagined a community composed of equally privileged white men.

Early twentieth-century socialists attempted to turn Whitman, a product of Jacksonian democracy, into a fellow traveler. First, they had to deal with his