

GEOFFREY M. SILL AND ROBERTA K. TARBELL, eds., *Walt Whitman and the Visual Arts*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992. xxi + 199 pp.

This book is oddly structured and annoyingly disappointing. Any impression given by the title of an overview of Whitman's relationship to the visual arts, either as a source for his work or as influenced by his work, is misleading. In fact, the volume is a collection of heterogeneous essays, joined together by the fact that most of them were apparently offered as papers at a colloquium organized by Tarbell and David Reynolds (who has contributed to this volume a bibliographical essay, although *not* one on Whitman and the visual arts, which is instead contributed separately by Ruth L. Bohan). The result is a deeply unsatisfying work that leaves out more than it includes.

The principal focus is on Whitman's relation to realism, a somewhat odd approach these days, although one that can lead to placing Whitman in a French nineteenth-century tradition. To a considerable extent, this emphasis neglects other, equally significant elements. Eakins, for instance, the artist with whom Whitman had the most personal contact, is seen only as a realist, looking for a "return to truth" and not as the principal figure in the development of the male nude and the representation of homosexual desire. Whitman's impressionism is not considered, despite Barton St. Armand's 1979 essay on the subject.

The treatment of Whitman's relation to American modernism is superficial. Stieglitz (spelled Steiglitz in the index) is mentioned only in passing, while the crucial role of Whitman as a source for Stuart Davis merits only a half-page discussion. Some time ought to have been allowed to deal with Davis's masculine iconography, as seen in his various cigarette paintings and particularly his mural "Men without Women," now at the Museum of Modern Art. Marsden Hartley, one of Whitman's most devoted followers, is only mentioned in passing, despite his early homage to Whitman, or his later paintings of the heroic male nude that owe so much to Whitman. Indeed, Matthew Baigell finds the enthusiastic modernist response to Whitman "surprising," despite the many parallels among writers, including Pound, Eliot, Stevens, Amy Lowell, Hart Crane, and others. Whitman in many ways made modernism, for better or worse, possible, despite his sentimentality, but one would never suspect that from this collection.

Whitman's illustrators also go largely unmentioned. I would have liked to see an essay on Rockwell Kent, whose images determined Whitman readings for many years, as well as one on the less known (in North America) Frans Masereel, the Flemish socialist. Both of these artists were responding to a radical Whitman who is absent from these pages.

Wanda Corn argues that "very few" women responded to Whitman by making him a source of their art and suggests that some of this lack of interest may be due to early women artists' resistance to the bohemia of Whitman and his male readers. One needs, she claims, to "correct the bias of gender" in order to revise a modernist view of Whitman, but the book as a whole is unwilling to take on the issue of gender, both as male and female and as straight and gay. Corn, for instance, refers in a note to Jasper Johns, without indicating Johns's role as a gay artist responding to a gay precursor. Attention to this

gay tradition might have led the authors to some consideration of the work of Paul Cadmus, whose radically sexualized urban landscapes clearly owe something to Whitman's bodily democracy.

The publishers have not done the authors any service: this book should have been substantially rewritten to offer greater coverage of these issues and to provide a guide to further work in the field. Instead, we have the sense of a volume put together somewhat arbitrarily and in haste: not least when we read that R.M. Bucke published Whitman's *Notes and Fragments* in "London and Ontario, Canada," for "London, Ontario, Canada"!

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