

there is much to celebrate and to condemn, or, as Price notes, “Whitman is not beyond his culture but of it, for better and worse. He invited us to complete him or defeat him. There is much work to be done” (174). This is certainly true, and *Whitman in Washington* is a formidable contribution to that labor.

*Valparaiso University*

MARTIN T. BUINICKI

★

MORTON SCHOOLMAN. *A Democratic Enlightenment: The Reconciliation Image, Aesthetic Education, Possible Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020. xii + 318 pp.

*January 6, 2022*: No prophet or easy alarmist, I write this review on the precipice of a second civil war in the United States. Who, during these toxic times, could possibly think that Walt Whitman—poet of presumptuous if capacious whiteness—might be enlisted as a viable and revisable resource to reconcile our nation’s deep racial antagonisms?

Morton Schoolman, that’s who. Mort (he’s a friend) is a political theorist who, I propose, ought to be recognized as one of the most gifted and accomplished Whitman expositors, any and everywhere. He’s spent a well-wrought career devoted to ever-close readings of Whitman’s poetry and prose. Not many people advance a grand yet pressing vision of democracy’s utopic possibilities, and mean it. Whitman and Schoolman are two who do. They belong together, as poet and professor, both earnest and upbeat, while at the same time nobody’s fool about democracy’s failings.

*A Democratic Enlightenment* is a major work, impressive in its detail and scope. Schoolman lays out a step-by-step case for Whitman as the herald of a radically new enlightenment project, whose all-inclusive affects and sweeping egalitarianism are to supplant the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment that installed reason as the centerpiece for all estimable human affairs. It’s a book bookended by big claims. Schoolman worries, at the outset, that the book’s “core ideas . . . have gone unrecognized” and that he’s broaching his boldly wayward thesis “in our own dark democratic and most unlikely of political times” (1). Still, he accepts that heavy burden of explanation, to the point that readers might detect a measure or tone of compensatory evangelism in his scholarship. Yet, I dare say that even the most captious of readers will nevertheless find many moments and many pages of incisive exegesis and utterly brilliant

argument. Beautiful sentences abound.

For all the high praise I wish to lavish upon the book, I do view certain key aspects as curious and questionable. Schoolman reads and refracts Whitman's all-American poetry through the high-theory lens of Euro-thinkers Voltaire, Diderot, Schiller, Nietzsche, Bergson, Benjamin, Adorno, Barthes, Bazin, Lyotard, Deleuze, and Foucault. It is, at the least, a paradoxical approach: to parse the poetry of "the average, the bodily, the concrete, the democratic, the popular" by way of some of the most arcane philosophy ever produced on the planet. The book's analytic apparatus, once assembled part by part, makes good sense; and it all comes together, though some fits seem Procrustean and the overall approach rather roundabout, but never workaday.

Like an innovative hip-hop artist, Schoolman samples Schiller's proto-democratic notion of "aesthetic education"; Adorno's post-Holocaust turn-around toward "the reconciliation image" in modern artwork; and Bergson's, Deleuze's, and Deleuzian scholar Brian Massumi's fascination with elusive and moving images. Whitman's salutary imagism in poetry can thus be discovered, Schoolman submits, lurking in modern movies, and movies could potentially become the latter-day Whitmanesque vehicle for changing hearts, minds, and perceptions, not just rules and regulations, all in democratically expansive directions. Hollywood, if you scratch below the sex-and-violence and even white-savior plot lines, may save us—or, in Schoolman's words, "my discovery of the reconciliation image in film" might help us appreciate a "possible politics" in which we work toward welcoming difference and embracing otherness rather than doing violence to it (200).

Schoolman attempts to put in words what Whitman apparently passes over in silence. Whitman's own words, Schoolman observes, hint at mystery and the unknowable and performatively attest to the inherent limitations of language to arrest truth. Instead, Whitman's poetry showcases the play of appearances; his poetry is insistently *visual*, eye-centered and image-rich. Appearances are just that, appearances, a little rickety and rather dreamy. Whitman's many inventories of diverse images thereby impart, albeit by indirection, an overall democratic lesson: the human comedy of identity and difference is something of a spectacular shadow play; and, once schooled in images qua images rather than as essential truths, we may become more receptive to each other, or at least less likely to do violence to each other, as fellow shades, no longer certain other persons stand before us as implacable foes deserving destruction. Schoolman's Whitman strikes me as a poststructuralist *avant la lettre*: linguistic missives are self-betraying and thus epistemically suspect and thus conducive toward

all-inclusive doubt inclining toward receptivity to all identities and differences, a kaleidoscopic agglomeration of singular persons who also meld with multiplicity, ergo Democracy.

Much is lost in translation, Schoolman's as well as mine. *A Democratic Enlightenment* deserves more scrutiny and commentary than I've given it here. Reading this formidable work, I find my head nodding far more than shaking. But I want more time to brood. Reading Whitman typically sets me off on bouts of brooding. Schoolman's account of Whitman's poetry and prose, in contrast, often strikes me as too explicative, too didactic, too programmatic. Poetry becomes a puzzle, solvable and to be solved. The "thesis" of Whitman's "Eidólons," says Schoolman, is "life itself is a visual image" (104). All those visual images are, moreover, in constant flux. Hence: "Motion is Whitman's deep ontology" (106). But what exactly is an Eidólón? Schoolman explains that it derives from the Greek verb *eido*, "to see." That etymology evokes the Platonic *eidos*, commonly construed as the ideal model of truth that informs yet lies outside our cave-like world. Deleuze helps us, says Schoolman, get beyond Plato's reality-appearance binary by redirecting our attention to images playing against other images, without then needing to judge any image as defective against a sky-high standard. Schoolman then concludes (the italics are his): "*For Whitman, the inversion of the Platonic 'ideal,' so that it now imitates the 'copy,' is the reconciliation of identity and difference*" (89). And to drive home the point:

Hence Whitman, who must have been thinking of Plato in Deleuze's terms when he not only makes *poesis* the champion of difference and the democratic enemy of the republic Plato imagined it to be but also charges it with the responsibility for the *aesthetic* creation of an entirely new and different world. (89)

Full disclosure: I've never read Plato as a Platonist, but instead as an ironist (as did the young Marx). Hence for me (and I'm already writing too adamantly), the term "inverted Platonism" is too clever by half, too naïve, too assured. As Eva T. H. Brann argues, the term *eidos*, as Plato uses it, is ostensibly ironic, for it combines in one term both the aspect of visibility and invisibility—an intelligible "look"—the "sight" of something that cannot, speaking literally but perhaps too literally, be seen ("The Music of the *Republic*," *St. John's Review*, 29 nos. 1-2 [1989-1990]). Plato's *Republic* is, on that lead, that hunch, an elusive phantasm, scribbles seen on a page about a story staged in an Orphic underworld, a *katabaino* death scene echoic of Homer's, in which Plato bans the poets from his city yet does so, when he does so, in (in the Greek) a hyperbolically mock-Homeric mode (often overlooked by commentators). I would need more time to think

about all that, and to connect it to, or distinguish it from, Whitman's possible politics. But my gut sense in reading "Eidólons" after reading Schoolman is to associate Plato and Whitman as fellow infernal travelers, though Plato's "reconciliation image" is a *gennaion pseudos*, a giant falsehood, which probably doesn't bode well for our troubled times.

*Pomona College*

JOHN E. SEERY

★

NICOLE GRAY, ED. *Leaves of Grass (1855) Variorum*. *The Walt Whitman Archive*, whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1855/variorum/index.html: 2020.

The newest addition to *The Walt Whitman Archive* is a variorum edition of the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* that is both ambitious in its scope and transformative in its insights. The variorum recently received the 2021 Richard J. Finneran Award from the Society for Textual Scholarship, recognizing it as the best English-language critical edition from the previous two years. This is the first time that a digital edition has won this prestigious award, and the accolade is well deserved.

The 1855 *Leaves of Grass* Variorum was created under the leadership of Nicole Gray, a contributing editor at *The Whitman Archive*, along with archive directors Ed Folsom and Kenneth M. Price, associate editors Brett Barney, Stephanie M. Blalock, and Brandon James O'Neil, designers Karin Dalziel, Jessica Dussault, and Greg Tunink, and project contributors Matt Cohen, Caitlin Henry, and Kevin McMullen. As Gray explains in the excellent 13,000-word introductory essay that anchors the variorum, she and her collaborators have brought together "the text of the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*, including variants and insertions; the early manuscripts and notebooks; the reviews and extracts that were printed and bound into some copies; and a bibliography of known surviving copies." This wealth of additional materials expands the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* Variorum beyond the realm of a standard variorum edition, which typically includes a collation of all the known variants of a text. Such a variorum of the major print editions of *Leaves of Grass* has existed since 1980 as *Leaves of Grass: A Textual Variorum of the Printed Poems*, a three-volume set published by New York University Press as part of *The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman*. The NYU Press variorum, however, fails to account for the bibliographic irregularities that, we have learned over the past 20 years, are actually the defining