Interestingly, *Calamus Lovers* has almost nothing to say about Whitman and women. Shively ignores them when they are mentioned in the letters, and he ignores the role of women in Whitman's life. Although he makes much of the ring Whitman gave to Harry Stafford, he fails to mention that the poet's ring also caused misunderstanding with both Helen Price and Anne Gilchrist. (Helen Price seems to have been as tormented over the ring as Stafford was.)

Shively has edited these letters in a casual fashion. He contends that these letters are of considerable importance, yet he undercuts his own claim by failing to annotate them and by failing to note the location of individual manuscripts. Although Shively is proud of his "excesses," believing that they "have made this a better book," these very excesses have undermined an intriguing project.

—Kenneth M. Price
Texas A & M University

Horace Traubel, ed. *An American Primer by Walt Whitman, With Facsimiles of the Original Manuscript*, Afterword by Gay Wilson Allen. Stevens Point, Wisconsin: Holy Cow! Press, 1987. ix, 44 pp. paper, $5.95. Cloth, $13.00.

Walt Whitman once remarked to Horace Traubel that "this subject of language interests me—interests me: I never quite get it out of my mind." Though during his lifetime the poet published on language just two essays, "America's Mightiest Inheritance" (1856) and "Slang in America" (1885), he nevertheless manifested his preoccupation with the subject in many other places—in jottings and lists tossed off in unpublished papers, in a notebook entitled *Words,* in passages scattered throughout the poetry of *Leaves of Grass* and the prose of the Prefaces and *Democratic Vistas,* in his contributions to *Rambles Among Words* (1859; rev. ed. 1872), a book ostensibly authored by William Swinton, and in *An American Primer*, a disjointed but provocative series of notes edited and published by Traubel.

Long neglected, Whitman's language studies and theories have begun to attract critical and scholarly attention. Consider some of the recent work by Michael R. Dressman: "Walt Whitman's Plans for the Perfect Dictionary" (SAR, 1979); by Robert Forrey: "Whitman's 'Real Grammar': A Structuralist Approach" (WWR, 1981); by Sherry G. Southard: "Whitman and Language: An Annotated Bibliography"(WWQR, 1984); by James Perrin Warren: "Dating Whitman's Language Studies" (WWQR, 1983); and "Whitman as Ghostwriter: The Case of *Rambles Among Words*" (WWQR, 1984); and by C. Carroll Hollis: *Language and Style in Leaves of Grass* (Louisiana State University Press, 1983), "Rhetoric, Elocution, and Voice in *Leaves of Grass:* A Study in Affiliation" (WWQR, 1984), and "Is There a Text in This Grass?"(WWQR, 1986). In light of the burgeoning interest in Whitman and language, the reprinting of the *Primer* is an event of some importance.

An American Primer consists of 110 separate notes that Whitman wrote during the 1850s, tentatively entitled "The Primer of Words," and viewed mainly, it seems, as materials for a lecture. At the time of the poet's death, 1892, the lecture remained undelivered, the notes unpublished. Not until the early years of the 20th century did Traubel edit the notes, devise the title by which they have become known, and make them available to the public. They were published in 1904 by Small, Maynard & Company (Boston). Since its initial appearance, *An American Primer* has been reprinted by the Folcroft Press (Pennsylvania, 1969), by City Lights Books (San Francisco, 1970), by Penguin Books (*Walt Whitman: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Francis Murphy, Baltimore, 1970), and now by Holy Cow! Press (Wisconsin, 1987). Scholars will want to remind themselves, however, that in 1978, in Volume III of his edition of Whitman's *Daybooks and Notebooks* (New York University Press), William White provided an exact transcription of "The Primer of Words," i.e., the poet's original 110-leaf manuscript.

To be discovered in *An American Primer* is a true Whitmanian melange. A reader encounters the poet's belief in the spirituality of words; his passion for language expressed by the human voice; his fascination with colloquialisms, jargon, slang, even profanity ("Many of these bad words are fine."); his thoughts on sources of

an autochthonous vocabulary ("These States are rapidly supplying themselves with new words, called for by new occasions, new facts, new politics, new combinations."); his conviction that "words follow character"; his principles of onomastics ("Names are magic.—One word can pour such a flood through the soul."); and his concern with expunging from democratic America what he views as linguistic vestiges of "feudal" Europe ("I think I am done with many of the words of the past hundred centuries.—I am mad that their poems, bibles, words, still rule and represent the earth, and are not yet superseded."). Of particular interest, perhaps, since they bear directly on linguistic issues of the 1980s, are Whitman's comments pertaining to women, the relations of friends and lovers, and censorship.

Many writers and speakers in recent years have complained of the language of sexism. They have shown how words both reflect and help to perpetuate prejudicial attitudes toward the roles and status of women. They have vowed to "raise linguistic consciousness" and, toward this end, have campaigned against sexist usage. One aspect of this reform effort has been the invention of new words. Having such developments in mind, one may be surprised to learn what Whitman had to say back in the mid-nineteenth century: "In America an immense number of new words are needed . . . words to answer the modern, rapidly spreading, faith, of the vital equality of women with men, and that they are to be placed on an exact plane, politically, socially, and in business, with men."

One may be surprised as well by Whitman's observations on friendship, love, and the English language: "Probably there is this truth to be said about the Anglo-Saxon breed—that in real vocal use it has less of the words of the various phases of friendship and love than any other race, and more friendship and love." About the language of male friendship specifically he maintains that "this is to be said among the young men of These States, that with a wonderful tenacity of friendship, and passionate fondness for their friends, and always a manly readiness to make friends, they yet have remarkably few words [or] names for the friendly sentiments . . . they never give words to their most ardent friendships." In contemporary America, many individuals, but men in particular, struggle

with the fact that there exists a wide range of emotional attachments and sexualities. Whitman identifies a neglected dimension of this struggle when he focuses on the relative absence of a lexicon of love and friendship.

Not at all uncommon in the present era is the editorial sanitizing of movies and television programs, the purging of high school reading lists, the bowdlerizing of textbooks and other classroom materials, the "regulation" of so-called adult bookstores, and the removal of books from library shelves. Usually performed in the name of wholesomeness or morality, such practices often reflect instead a lack of candor, prudery, intellectual dishonesty, and ignorance of the concept of aesthetic integrity. Acts of censorship also afflicted the 19th century, and Whitman roundly condemns them in *An American Primer*: "The blank left by words wanted, but unsupplied, has sometimes an unnamably putrid cadaverous meaning. It talks louder than tongues. What a stinging taste is left in that literature and conversation where have not yet been served up by resistless consent, words to be freely used in books, rooms, at table, any where, to specifically mean the act male and female."

Although fragmentary, rambling, and occasionally marred by loutish assertions (e.g., "masturbation [and] inordinate going with women . . . rot the voice"), *An American Primer* makes for delightful and stimulating reading. Perhaps above all else, as Gay Wilson Allen states in his eight-page "Afterword," the booklet is "really a prose poem." The Holy Cow! Press deserves congratulations for getting the work back into print.

—Donald D. Kummings
University of Wisconsin—Parkside

Edward F. Grier, ed. *Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts*, by Walt Whitman. New York: New York University Press, 1984. 6 vols. 2354 pp. $395.00.

Whitman's idea of inventing "A New Way" of writing "History Geography Ethnology Astronomy &c &c &c by long lists, dates,