Hutchinson does not claim that Whitman thought of himself in relation to shamanism specifically, but he shows that Whitman looked back to ancient models and worked "to train himself as a charismatic." "Impelled by inner necessity," Hutchinson says, Whitman "taught himself the secrets normally passed from master to initiate." One can easily imagine Whitman being asked if he had ever studied shamans and replying, as he did when Thoreau asked him if he'd read the Orientals whom he was "wonderfully like," "No: tell me about them." Hutchinson calls the chapter in which he details Whitman's transformation or self-initiation "Sorcerors' Apprentice," and it is a strong chapter.

It was while reading *The Ecstatic Whitman* that I noticed an odd but startling resemblance between the Whitman portrait of the first *Leaves of Grass* and the Antlered Dancer of the paintings on the walls of the cave of Trois Frères, thought by most to be a representation of a Paleolithic shaman: Whitman's crooked elbow extending to the left like the dancer's paws, the penetrating eyes, the gaze more fierce than friendly, the beard, the broad-brimmed hat at an angle like that of the antlers. Just an odd resemblance, an intuition, the power of suggestion maybe. The firmer pinnings of intellect and scholarship for Whitman as shaman are found in George B. Hutchinson's interesting, illuminating, densely worked book.

—Howard Nelson

Charley Shively, ed. *Calamus Lovers: Walt Whitman's Working-Class Camerados*. San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press, 1987. 223 pp. paper, $10.00.

Charley Shively's *Calamus Lovers: Walt Whitman's Working-Class Camerados* seeks to provide a new perspective on the poet by presenting selected letters written to him by his laborer and soldier friends. Shively contributes a lively general introduction, and he intersperses additional commentary throughout the book. What guides Shively's work is the belief that Whitman was an active homosexual with a series of lovers from the 1830s to the 1880s, perhaps even the 1890s. Shively argues that "the first question must not

be whether but when and how did Whitman begin loving men so intensely?"

Shively is frustrated with literary scholars who, he contends, have consistently denied Whitman's homosexuality. He objects, for example, that, in discussing the Harry Stafford-Whitman friendship, Justin Kaplan and Edwin Miller "suggest that the relationship was not physical (perhaps not even homosexual). Had they one-tenth as much evidence for a young woman, their Lolita imaginations would have run wild." But Shively himself is given to running wild, and in his treatment of other Whitman critics, here and elsewhere, is decidedly unfair. Certainly he has distorted the overall look of Whitman criticism, for in the last dozen years there has been no shortage of critics reading Whitman's poetry as homosexual in orientation (one thinks immediately of the work of Robert K. Martin, Michael Lynch, Myrth Jimmie Killingsworth, Joseph Cady, and many others). Major scholarly questions now are to what degree was the poet either comfortable or tormented by his sexuality, did he repress or act on his clearly homoerotic desires, and—above all—how did his psychosexual outlook affect his poetry? If some early Whitman critics—people working before Kaplan and Miller—were prone to discount the sexual aura surrounding Whitman's male friendships, Shively, on the other hand, seems to believe Whitman was engaged in as many love affairs as he can find names in the poet's notebooks.

Shively holds that, along with denying Whitman's homosexuality, critics have refused to acknowledge the poet's "working-class background and consciousness; thus they invent intellectual genealogies on the most dubious evidence in order to offset Whitman's not being a university graduate." But critics did not "invent" these genealogies; Whitman and his cronies labored mightily to establish the link with Emerson, a connection that still figures largely in critical debates. Although Whitman's indebtedness to Emerson is often overstated, I find the evidence employed in influence studies to be more persuasive than what Shively produces in support of his claims for innumerable sexual encounters. Understandably, Shively has little material to work with: it is often difficult to tell how much sexual activity an author has engaged in because of the private, fre-

quently secretive, nature of sexual experience. What is not so easily understood is why Shively adopts a tone of certainty when dealing with scanty and ambiguous evidence. Here is one fairly innocuous example of Shively's recklessness: "All of Whitman's sexual partners . . . were younger than he and working class." Other than the poet himself, who could possibly verify such a claim? (And could we trust the poet even if he *had* told us such a thing?)

Indeed, what is most striking about this book is its thorough-going attempt, with intermittent regard for "evidence," to support a particular thesis. Determined to make Whitman into a lover of "rough trade," he mocks the recent claim made by David Cavitch that (the middle class and intellectual) William Douglas O'Connor was the person who inspired the " 'rapturous description of journeying to a symbolic India.' " Yet Cavitch's claim seems at least as plausible as Shively's assertions, for O'Connor's letters to Whitman *are* marked by passion, a characteristic often lacking in the letters in *Calamus Lovers*.

One develops skepticism about Shively's general points in part because his argument is so self-serving. He paints a Whitman who was "unbridled, wild, and promiscuous"—a portrait that, in light of available biographical evidence, has to be described as distorted. (Whitman's persona was "wild," "uncouth," "savage"; the character of the man was quite different.) Shively asserts that a sort of cross-century character transfer has occurred between himself and Walt Whitman. And while few will object to his remark in "Acknowledgments" thanking a series of friends for teaching him "about being a poet and thus about being Walt Whitman," some will find it outlandish for Shively to imply that because he engaged in fellatio with a passing stranger in Washington's Lafayette Park that Whitman probably used the same park for "cruising."

Shively's extremism should not, however, be used to obscure certain important points he makes that merit further study. For example, he claims that he has identified the lover (Fred Vaughan) who inspired Whitman's "Calamus" poems. Predictably, the evidence is more complex and ambiguous than Shively allows, but it is clear that the whole matter deserves more investigation.

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.

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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.