

# MICKLE STREET REVIEW #8:

## THE PROOF OF A POET

In 1855, Walt Whitman closed the preface of his new book, *Leaves of Grass*, with the words, “The Proof of a poet is that his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it.” America’s embrace of Walt Whitman was slow in coming, and is not yet entirely complete, but the dedication of the Walt Whitman Library at 328 Mickle Street in Camden on October 14, 1984, marked a significant step in the recognition of Whitman as America’s poet. How many other poets, we may be excused for asking, have libraries dedicated exclusively to the study of their works and influence?

The present issue of *The Mickle Street Review* offers the remarks made on that occasion by Whitman’s biographer, Justin Kaplan, and by a poet in the Whitman tradition, Douglas Morea. But as that day was only a beginning, so the Walt Whitman Association has persevered in the task that had engaged its forerunners while Whitman still lived—that is, to present the best that there was to say about Whitman, and to answer the worst. Essays by a deconstructionist critic, Tenney Nathanson; a feminist, Patricia Falk; and a much-distinguished man of letters, Daniel Hoffman, round out an issue that we hope will be helpful to teachers and to writers who must answer for themselves, and for others, the question, Of what real and contemporary value is Walt Whitman’s poetry?

Besides critical essays, there are other ways of estimating the degree to which a country has affectionately absorbed its best poet. These ways are—as they have been throughout the life of this *Review*—the *allusive* poems that pay tribute to Whitman directly, and the *emulative* poems that capture something in the Whitman spirit or manner, without being imitative, and prove Whitman’s relevance to contemporary poetry by revealing his continuing influence in it.

Finally, our usual offering of reviews of new books of poetry and Whitman scholarship is this year buttressed by seven review essays by members of the first Whitman seminar at the Walt Whitman Library, given in 1986 under the auspices of the Graduate School at Rutgers University in Camden, instructed by Professor Betsy Erkkila of the University of Pennsylvania, and supported by a grant from the New Jersey Department of Higher Education. The DHE also funded the cataloging of the Whitman Library collection, which will be published as a special issue of *The Mickle Street Review* in the near future.



### **Gilbert Allen**

#### **SONNET \$9.95**

An Arrow knit shirt, regular eighteen  
fifty, a kitten from the animal  
shelter, eight pounds of hamburger, cheap jeans,  
a rose bush with bare roots, a cardboard doll

house without the doll, five minutes of  
Wanda, a watch, sixteen quarts of milk,  
three good books, two books, one book of love  
poems (with pictures), half a shoe, one silk

tie, a royal breakfast, a decent lunch,  
supper in Rock Hill, a laugh from a mechanic,  
thirteen light bulbs, a toaster, a small bunch  
of odd flowers, enough candy to get sick,

a month of newspapers, nine gallons of gas,  
a fully illustrated *Leaves of Grass*.