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and Whitman's homosexuality, Thoreau's total response to Whitman was friendlier than Loving's quotation displays.

The historical approach requires an account of the decline of each into age. This is hard on people, since they all get older as I unfortunately know. Even so determined a man as Wallace Stevens, who kept getting better with age, turned to religion at the end though unlike Emerson and Whitman he did not preach in his poems.

Somewhat different is the view of Stanley Cavell. As a philosopher himself he calls Emerson a philosopher. Loving does not because his interest is psychological rather than mental. He is more interested in responses than in mental activity, so he includes entire careers, while Cavell can select from the peak of their careers the ideals that appeal to him.

Conversely Loving emphasizes the personal relations of these poets, their biographers, and their attempts at the self-begetting of the American Sublime. So Harold Bloom, especially, and Erik Erikson both are quoted. While he makes value judgments, Loving is not primarily a critic who makes formal analysis or gives a detailed description of imagery. And, of course, considering his topic, Loving does not hold the bias against optimism, romanticism, and the common man of the Brooks and Warren school.

What Loving sets out to do he accomplishes exceptionally well. Despite a tendency to repeat its arguments, the book is not boring because the illustrative material keeps changing. So this is a major book on a major subject by a major scholar.

The University of Iowa ALEXANDER C. KERN

Meena Alexander. *The Poetic Self: Towards a Phenomenology of Romanticism.* Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, Inc., 1979. 280 pp. $14.75.

In this study of five romantic poets—Coleridge, Wordsworth, Arnold, Whitman, and Baudelaire—Meena Alexander examines ways in which 19th century poetry attempted to construct a self; its ways of making a meaning independent of traditional beliefs. For the English poets, the great Romantic quest for selfhood was that of relating subjective consciousness to the outer time of the world and its shared space. For them the unifying force was memory, binding present perceptions to moments in the past and anticipations of the future, and locating past, present, and future firmly in spatial terms. The lyric meditation, like Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight," was the typical form in which they achieved such selfhood. Wordsworth's "The Prelude" and Arnold's "Empedocles on Aetna" are other instances of this romantic quest for the self.

In contrast to their emphasis on the role of time and memory in this quest, Whitman, faced with the same problem, addresses it in terms preeminently spatial. In "Song of Myself," the problem of poetic identity is given in new, non-linear terms, directly related to the vastness of the America continent. The logic of the poem is given by a struggle between the "vatic" voice—"the expansionist desires of the embodied self" as Ms. Alexander puts it—expressing itself in the great catalogues in

which the poet identifies himself with all the varieties of experience, human and non-human, in the universe, and the voice of inward consciousness or "soul." The two great crises of the poem are a result of the struggle between the two voices, "the radical disjunction between consciousness located in the lived body and the expansive disembodied voice of the poet-prophet." This struggle is one which Whitman never really succeeds in resolving.

Ms. Alexander has some interesting things to say about Whitman, but on the whole this book will inevitably be of more interest to the philosopher than the lover of poetry; particularly as its metaphysics is too often expressed in extremely abstract, not to say turgid, terms.

Oakland University GERTRUDE M. WHITE