

the obscurities and innuendoes of his petition.” He then goes on to speculate at length about what Whitman’s letter might have said and what his reaction may have been when Emerson agreed to recommend him. But, in fact, Whitman’s letter *has* survived and has been printed several times recently: in the *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* in 2000 and in 2002 and in Ted Genoways’s recent supplementary volume of Whitman’s *Correspondence*. Other basic factual errors mar this study also. For example, the so-called Blue Book, Whitman’s annotated copy of the 1860 *Leaves of Grass*, is mistakenly referred to as a proof copy.

The strength of Epstein’s book is in some of its formulations: “‘Song of Myself’ not only belonged to the future, it had been called into being by poems that were yet to be written.” “It seemed that the entire Union was tilting toward Virginia and men were spilling into a deep ditch near Richmond, where Grant smoked cigars and whittled, waiting for the abyss to fill so he could march across it and finish the horrid war.” This book makes for pleasant reading for popular audiences, but those who come to it expecting rigorous analysis of Whitman or Lincoln or their relationship will be disappointed.

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M. WYNN THOMAS. *Transatlantic Connections: Whitman U.S., Whitman U.K.* University of Iowa Press, 2005. xvii + 289 pp.

M. Wynn Thomas’s previous book, *The Lunar Light of Whitman’s Poetry* (Harvard University Press, 1987) is one of the most important and influential scholarly studies of Whitman; *Transatlantic Connections* is, in many respects, a sequel or companion to this book, and, as such, it is invaluable to any Whitman scholar.

Part of the Iowa Whitman series, *Transatlantic Connections* gathers, revises, expands, and interconnects several previously published essays and two significant essays that I, at least, have not seen before in another form: one chapter on the Whitman-Longfellow relationship and another on Whitman and Edward Carpenter. The chapters stand well individually, but they also illuminate each other within the larger trajectory of Thomas’s scholarship on Whitman. *Transatlantic Connections*, according to Thomas, “is intended to suggest, if not to trigger, a transition in Whitman studies from the historical to new approaches” (xiv). It also represents—or, rather, anticipates—a reorientation in Whitman studies that parallels recent moves towards cultural comparatism (e.g., the cultural history of the Atlantic rim) and away from studies of national cultures in isolation.

The book is divided into two sections: “Whitman U.S.” and “Whitman U.K.,” with somewhat more space given to the former section (about two-thirds of the book). The first section considers Whitman in an American context, interpreting his poetry as the “peculiar product of a new urban experience, a kind of unique inscription of New York politics, a textual attempt to unify national consciousness, a poetic exercise in building labor relations, and

a singular record of intimate war experience" (xvii). The second section, for which Thomas makes larger claims, considers Whitman in England as a telling instance of the "the phenomenon of cultural translation" (xvii). In the first section, Thomas shows how Whitman is the product of a specific time and a local culture, but the second section investigates how Whitman's poetry was "translated" by readers in another culture with different political, social, aesthetic, and sexual concerns, as well as different forms of the English language.

Overall, Thomas's narrative is one of simultaneous decline and ascent: Whitman's poetry was inadequate to the circumstances of American life after the Civil War (an argument readers will recognize from *Lunar Light*), but his poetry continued to play an important role in other cultures such as Wales through the twentieth century. Others would carry the torch that Whitman had lit in 1855 but could not carry himself.

There are five chapters in the first section of *Transatlantic Connections*. In the first, "A Tale of Two Cities," Thomas negotiates the tension between the troubled New York of Whitman's journalism and the visionary "Mannahatta" of his poetry. Whitman's creative ambivalence reflects a "divided social allegiance" within a writer who was both a progressive journalist and a nostalgic, socially displaced son of the artisanal class (6). "Many of his greatest poems," Thomas argues, "were the outworking of these tensions" (8). Whitman's poetry was historically specific (1850s New York), but it also contains a democratic vision that transcends place and time.

In the following chapter, "The New Urban Politics," Thomas expands on the notion of a contradictory Whitman, who generally held local politics in contempt yet managed to maintain an optimistic, almost millenarian, view of the future of democracy in America. In this sense, Thomas shows—with even more historical evidence—how Whitman's poetry is not only a response to American national politics—as it is most often interpreted—but also to specific local influences such as the career of notorious New York mayor Fernando Wood. In an extended discussion of the urban processional, Thomas also examines Whitman's ambivalence about immigrants whom he simultaneously embraces as fellow human beings and attacks for changing the culture of his city. In this sense, Whitman's poetry was an attempt to integrate them "seamlessly into the general, racially and culturally undifferentiated, panorama of contemporary American life" (47). Nevertheless, the tension remains unresolved, and he swings between a "rhetoric of consensus" and a "rhetoric of apocalypse" (49).

The third chapter, "*Leaves of Grass* and *The Song of Hiawatha*," moves away from urban studies and towards literary history by considering the relationship between Whitman and the most celebrated American poet of the nineteenth-century. Thomas gives more attention to Longfellow than to Whitman here, showing how *Hiawatha* is more than "the nineteenth-century equivalent of a Walt Disney kiddies' classic," and how it shares many of the wellsprings the nurtured *Leaves*: the American epic, generic fusion, experimentation with language, folkishness, the notion of poetry as "song," a desire for an "authentic" connection to the land, and a "poetics of unification" (61, 73). Thomas also complicates notions of Longfellow as merely an escapist or imperialist by showing the complexity of his mind-altering verse form and by

arguing for a more “flexible understanding of fantasy as a potently ambivalent mental (and political) activity, every bit as enabling as it may become disabling” (72). “Longfellow,” Thomas writes, “may be thought of as the J. R. R. Tolkien of his day, an apparently dry-as-dust scholar, linguist, and cultural antiquary who nevertheless managed to produce one of the most magical, best-loved books of his century” (75). Along with a valuable paralleling of these two seemingly opposed poets, Thomas provides brilliant and extensive close readings of Longfellow, who suddenly seems renewed and worthy of more sustained scholarly attention.

The fourth chapter, “The Dreams of Labor,” examines how Whitman’s toleration of slavery in the American South grew from his hopes for free labor in the American West. This led to a “rhetoric of conciliation” in the 1860 edition of *Leaves*, which reflects a general pattern of decline in Whitman’s engagement with politics. The postwar period was one of disorientation for Whitman in which the heroism of northern workers (confirmed by their sacrifice during the Civil War) conflicted with the reality of capitalist culture in the Gilded Age. Nevertheless, the elderly Whitman refused to support socialism, became a beneficiary of Andrew Carnegie, and a sentimental admirer of Millet’s paintings of humble laborers. For Thomas, Whitman’s conciliation of slaveholders and capitalists was based on a mistaken notion that the American West would be filled with “numberless members of the wage-earning underclass” rather than “the financiers, entrepreneurs, and assorted ‘yuppies’ who were the real leaders and beneficiaries of the new enterprise culture of America in the 1850s” (95).

In chapter five, “Fratricide and Brotherly Love,” Thomas shows how Whitman’s responses to the Civil War were shaped by his relationship with his brother George, a distinguished Union soldier. This relationship, Thomas argues, “supplied the deep structure of his war poetry,” and, in particular, inspired Whitman to “record the achievements and sufferings of the ‘unknown’ soldier,” and, in so doing, to restore the individuality of sacrifice in the context of a massive historical transformation (115, 124). Thomas also addresses the complications aroused by Whitman’s noninvolvement in the actual fighting and the failure of the “intimate, comradely relationships” the war encouraged to improve American civic life in the postbellum years (131).

Chapter six, “Weathering the Storm,” considers Whitman’s preoccupation with weather in his Civil War writings. Whitman’s use of meteorological metaphors links him to the ancient “prescientific and pantheistic” sense of weather but also to the scientific speculations of nineteenth century, for weather was crucial in military planning. Moreover, weather was central in Whitman’s developing “rhetoric of reconciliation” (succeeding the antebellum “rhetoric of conciliation”), most clearly expressed in Thomas’s important re-reading of “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d,” in which Whitman attempts to “treat what was in stark reality a gulf in ideology (between the Yankee business ethic and Whitman’s ethic of redemptive sacrifice)” (138). Whitman’s “emotional survival,” Thomas contends, “depended on maintaining a teleology of conflict, on being credibly able to make the bewildering story of the war, as it actually unfolded, conform to Whitman’s majestic vision of history”

(137). Weather functioned as a metaphor for the direct intervention of transcendent forces in the preservation of the Union.

The second part of *Transatlantic Connections*, “Whitman U.K.,” begins with a welcome essay on Edward Carpenter (1844–1929), whose major collection of Whitman-inspired poems, *Towards Democracy*, is generally regarded as derivative and second-rate. Just as Thomas reasserts the value of Longfellow, he defends Carpenter, who “deserves to be treated with proper respect and close attention by Whitman scholars” (191). With careful attention to the sexual politics of the nineteenth- and early-twentieth centuries, Thomas reasserts the importance of Carpenter within English socialism, explains his sense of kinship with Whitman, and gives serious consideration to Carpenter’s poems. Thomas describes *Towards Democracy* as “the most radical, original, and striking instance of Whitman’s influential presence in British literary and political culture” (170). Though inspired by Whitman’s poetry, Carpenter’s vision of international socialism required the rejection of American nationalism and a more open embrace of homosexual relations than the older Whitman was willing, publicly, to accept. Still, *Towards Democracy* shows how Whitman’s poetic form could be reproduced with English content, and it serves, compellingly, as “Exhibit A” in Thomas’s presentation of the “cultural translation” of Whitman into England (171).

The penultimate chapter, “Lawrence’s Whitman,” originated as a review of D. H. Lawrence’s *Studies in Classic American Literature*, edited by Ezra Greenspan, Lindeth Vasey, and John Worthen (2003). Thomas examines Lawrence’s changing views on Whitman as reflected by the various versions of the famous chapter on the poet in *Studies*. Lawrence was deeply influenced by Whitman, but, according to Thomas, he also struggled with “his homoerotic inclinations and his disgust at what he (mis)took to be established homosexual practice” (216). Lawrence wanted, in particular, to undermine Carpenter’s vision of Whitman’s homoerotic politics, and the lengths to which Lawrence went in his unpublished essay, quoted by Thomas, are quite shocking and new to me: Whitman “used to walk in his little back yard—he lived in a row—stark naked and fat and excited with own nudity . . . he used to stop the little girls coming home from school, with senile amorosness” (217). Unlike Carpenter’s Whitman, Lawrence’s Whitman is, first of all, an “American” who represents an escape from the elements of English culture Lawrence despised. Despite Lawrence’s sexual preoccupations, Thomas concludes that he and Whitman had much in common as prophetic authoritarians and “healing integrationists, holistic in their vision” (224).

In the final chapter, “What a Welshman You Would Have Been,” Thomas presents an extended interpretation of Whitman’s reception and influence among several major Welsh writers, including Ernest Rhys, Amanwy (David Rees Griffiths), Niclas y Glais (T. E. Nicholas), Waldo Williams, Glyn Jones, Dylan Thomas, and R. S. Thomas. Obviously, this chapter brings together two of Thomas’s major scholarly interests, but Whitman in Wales is also a remarkable case in point of the complexity of reception in a relatively small, culturally unified location over more than a century. It is a particularly rich example of the influence one author can have in another culture, and, to

be sure, it implicitly proves the larger claims set forth by Thomas in his introduction.

Overall, *Transatlantic Connections* is a deeply researched, persuasively argued, cross-cultural reception study combined with historical contextualization (drawing upon biography, urban studies, and literary history, among other fields). Thomas's cultural-contextual analyses almost always function to deepen our understanding of the poems, and this book contains many fresh readings of familiar and relatively neglected works by Whitman, along with poems by Longfellow, Carpenter, Lawrence, and a series of important Welsh poets. Thomas generally writes in a lucid, jargon-free style; however, there are moments when the multiplication of sub-arguments and supporting examples can seem bewildering, particularly given the backwards-and-forwards chronologies and repetitions of the "Whitman U.S." section. The first chapter, for example, seems to conclude more times than the film version of the *Return of the King*. On the whole, the book reflects its origin as a series of separately published essays rather than a planned monograph.

Of course, it hardly needs saying that *Transatlantic Connections* amounts to more than a collection of discrete essays; each of the nine chapters illuminates the others in highly productive ways (particularly one, two, and four, five and six, and seven and eight), but, I think, this is a case in which two books might have been better than one. I am reluctant to agree with Thomas's view that historical contextualism is reaching a point of "diminishing returns"—particularly given the ample evidence he provides to the contrary—but I did wish for a more fully realized example of the kind of innovative, intercultural projects on Whitman for which Thomas calls in his introduction (xiii).

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ARNIE KANTROWITZ. *Walt Whitman*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2005. 181 pp.

In 2005, Chelsea House Publishers inaugurated a Gay and Lesbian Writers Series with six titles. To judge from Arnie Kantrowitz's *Walt Whitman*, the series is intended to offer compact, impressionistic, neophyte-friendly biographies that are attentive, as the publisher announces, to how "well-known writers . . . struggled with the perceptions created by their sexual preferences." The format is modest: ten brief chapters (with a sprinkling of compact sidebars on such topics as phrenology, Whitman's notebooks, and Lincoln's assassination), no illustrations, no endnotes, a bare-bones chronology, and a very selective bibliography. Whitman's company in the series' class of 2005 includes James Baldwin, Allen Ginsberg, Adrienne Rich, Sappho, and Oscar Wilde.

Though Kantrowitz is a longtime professor of English at CUNY's College of Staten Island, he is better known as a post-Stonewall activist. He was a vice president, in 1971, of the pioneering Gay Activists Alliance, then a founder of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) in 1985. He has also authored *Under the Rainbow: Growing Up Gay* (1977) and countless