

transgressive spectrum of alternative erotic choices and locales" (p. 260). Emerson called for such transcendence but never strayed far from his family, servants, and library in Concord. Whitman scoured the streets of Brooklyn, New York, New Orleans, Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, and Camden. What he found there still is news.

Fone's identification of Whitman's "masculine landscapes" (or perhaps, in the 29th Bather, "seascapes") provides a careful discussion of masculine and feminine landscapes. He uses with good effect Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's readings of the Davy Crockett Almanacs in *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (1985). He could have benefited from Susan Griffin's and Carolyn Merchant's trenchant discussions of this contested territory as well as Annette Kolodny's *Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (1975) and *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860* (1984). *Masculine Landscapes* nonetheless gives thoughtful attention to the relationship between women, nature, and Whitman's texts. The discussion of race, however, is not nearly so subtle. That Whitman found a black driver erotic raises many unanswered questions about race, democracy, sex and Whitman. Here Melvin Dixon's *Ride Out the Wilderness: Geography and Identity in Afro-American Literature* (1987) might have enriched this discussion.

I agree heartily with most of Fone's readings, and I have learned much from his work. I would, for instance, now put more emphasis on Whitman's anal sexuality as well as the S/M qualities in his text. However, I cannot accept Fone's labelling of Fred Vaughn as "ignorant." Vaughn drank too much; after his visit to Camden in 1890, Whitman sighed, "Yes: I have seen him off and on—but now, poor fellow, he is all wrecked from drink" (WWC 6:399). But Whitman's manly love cannot be conflated with Oscar Wilde's and John Addington Symonds's, using working class boys as "cultural and social though not sexual opposite" (p. 159). Whitman identified with his rough trade in a way significantly different from Symonds, and he repudiated the Englishman's effort to make him another "case" in the cabinet of "inverts." Whitman looked down not on his beloved "roughs" but instead on Symonds, whom he said had "got into our group in spite of his culture" (WWC 1:388).

While every reader true to Whitman must respond to *Leaves of Grass* uniquely and personally, Robert K. Martin's advice remains as timely today as in 1979. We must "insist upon the homosexuality of a homosexual poem because it has so often been ignored or invalidated." In this tradition, Fone's work remains essential not only because it provides "a better (more accurate) reading," but also because it can transform all our lives.

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LI YEGUANG. *A Critical Biography of Whitman*. Shanghai: Shanghai Literature and Art Press, 1988. 477 pp. [In Chinese.]

Up to the mid-1980s, Chinese studies of Whitman were led by two influential translators: Chu Tunan and Zhao Luorui. Recently their conscientious work on Whitman has been supplemented by Li Yeguang. A poet and research fellow at

the Foreign Literature Institute of the China Academy of Social Sciences, Li has devoted the past ten years to studying Whitman with fruitful results. In 1983 he published a ten-stanza poem entitled "To Whitman" that catches Whitman's American spirit. In August 1988, one year after the appearance of his and Chu Tunan's combined translation of *Leaves* in two volumes, Li edited and published *Studies in Whitman*; in the same month, his energetic effort resulted in the publication of a more important work, *A Critical Biography of Whitman*. This biography is the most systematic and comprehensive study of Whitman to have appeared in China.

In his *Studies in Whitman*, Li rightly calls his biography "a new effort" because no Chinese scholar has ever written a biography of the American poet. In fact very few foreign writers have had their biographies written in China. Writing the biography was a considerable challenge for Li, who, at the time the book was published, had never stepped onto an English-speaking land. He spent five years, while translating *Leaves*, digging into documents in English, Chinese, and translations of Russian works to make his work readable and reliable.

*A Critical Biography of Whitman* consists of seventeen chapters and a conclusion. The first, "The Beginning of 'A Great Cause'," opens not with the birth of a man but with the birth of the book that made the man great, *Leaves of Grass*. Li imagines the customers' reactions to *Leaves* at 308 Broadway in New York on July 4, 1855:

Curious customers picked it up casually but soon put it down after a look; only a few thumbed through and looked at it with patience, recognizing it as a collection of poetry. What is strange is that these poems do not bear any titles nor the author's name.

He also quotes Emerson's letter to Whitman in full, commending him for his wisdom and judgment for first recognizing Whitman as an extraordinary poet. Chapter two, "On the Beach," flashes back to the poet's birth:

In a village called West Hills of Long Island off the east coast of America, on May 31, 1819, Whitman's cries at birth merged with the distant, unceasing sounds of waves. It is the forty-fifth [sic] spring the Star-Spangled Banner had welcomed, three-hundred odd years after Columbus discovered the New Continent, another day history accepted that would soon go by. What on earth did it bring? What was its legacy? For years people have argued, debated, and perhaps they will continue to do so like the unceasing waves.

1819 was a special year—the same year also witnessed the death of Napoleon, the birth of Herman Melville, James Russell Lowell, and the English princess, Victoria: the world was changing and Whitman's birth was part of the transformation.

Chapters three ("Time, Society, and Life") and four ("Long Preparation, Momentous Turn") focus on Whitman's life in New York, New Orleans, and his return to Brooklyn. Li rejects the English biographer Henry Binns's allegations that Whitman was romantically involved in New Orleans, but he holds that the less-than-four-month trip to the South hastened the poet's maturity, which he gained after having seen much of the American land and reading many classic and contemporary writers, including Carlyle. Li contends (as have

others) that "Song of Myself" in a way reflects the English philosopher's *Sartor Resartus*: "Many Transcendentalist viewpoints and phrases in *Leaves of Grass* may have come directly from Carlyle instead of from Emerson." However, Whitman's ideas on literature then were largely influenced by Emerson. According to Li, *Leaves* was not the product of a sudden epiphany but of thirty-five years of life experiences and ten years of literary preparation.

Chapter five, "'Salut au Monde!'," deals with the second edition of *Leaves*, which brought Whitman some confidence and comfort for the following two years. "Struggling under the 'Dead Skin'" is the sixth chapter and addresses "Calamus" and "Children of Adam." Li regards the "Calamus" poems basically as the poet's praise of the American nation. Yet he evaluates "Children of Adam" more highly, emphasizing Whitman's respect for women and maternity. The unifying force of Whitman's "scientific view of sexual love and his ethical view of democracy is the basic idea that men and women are born equal." Li asserts that these two groups of poems are indeed the products of Whitman's spiritual crisis or of a "dark age"; they are "not so healthy yet possess relatively high artistic merit." The next two chapters, "The Age of Shooting Stars, Amidst Drum-Taps of Battle" and "The Ordeal of Blood and Fire," center on the Civil War. Whitman at this time "not only acknowledged the historical origins of the relations in the development of Eastern and Western cultures, but also began to march toward the ideal of world culture and international friendship and love." Li uses Marxist theory in his analysis of the war and Whitman's service as a nurse, examining the political and social ties between the poet and Lincoln, and Whitman's ambiguous attitude toward "the heroic death of John Brown." The poet in these pages is seen as an enthusiastic abolitionist and supporter of President Lincoln.

*Drum-Taps* and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" are the topic of chapter nine, "'The Good Gray Poet.'" The firing of Whitman from the Department of Interior because of his political differences with the new secretary caused William O'Connor to write *The Good Gray Poet* in defense of the poet. Li finds O'Connor's refutation generally sound but "a bit too radical to produce due effect." Li finds "Lilacs" to be an enjoyable poem, full of "profound meditation, intimate personal reminiscences, and broad associations; it has an epical spectacle, philosophical summarization, and dream-visionary tones." Li regards *Drum-Taps* as an "epic of the Civil War" and notes the changes in the poet's thought and technique as reflected in these poems: idealism, mysticism, and cataloguing tend to give way to the sharply detailed description of Whitman's realistic sketches.

Chapter ten, "Before and After the March to Europe," considers the English response to Whitman's poetry. Li stresses the roles Rossetti, Swinburne, and Mrs. Gilchrist played in making the poet better known in England. However, the major concern of the chapter is *Democratic Vistas*, which Li calls "the highest achievement in Whitman's prose, holding a place akin to 'Song of Myself' in his poetry. Yet the prose work has more social and political significance than the poem, so much so that it is a great contribution to the bourgeois democratic theory." Like Maurice Mendelson in his *Walt Whitman: A Soviet*

*View*, Li emphasizes the progressive and revolutionary nature of Whitman's work, praising him for his support for the French Paris Commune and European Revolution.

Chapter eleven, "Friendship and Love, Illness and Mother's Death," portrays Whitman as another Columbus who paid dearly for love and friendship and suffered an enormous loss with his mother's death. The following chapter, "The Fortunate Wind' and the Journey West," deals with the different fates of the 1876 and 1881 editions of *Leaves*. With the 1876 edition, Whitman was still seen as a second-rate poet, though the fortunate wind from England brought him some money and fame. The 1881 edition sold better, and the poet won a victory over the banning of his book in Boston with friends' support. Chapter thirteen, "The Camden Career," addresses Whitman's life in Camden and *Specimen Days*. Life in Camden is characterized by visits and conversations with admirers from both sides of the Atlantic. Li stresses Traubel's "precious contribution" to American literature in recording Whitman's conversations, and he stresses a side of Traubel sometimes ignored by Western critics—his "enthusiastic" welcoming of the Soviet Revolution of 1917. Like Mendelson, Li notes that Gorky listed Traubel and Whitman as socialist-oriented writers. In chapter fourteen, "Solemn Exhortation, Immortal Home," Li spends several paragraphs on Whitman preparing his own tomb: it is "twenty by thirty feet, modeled upon the design of Blake's symbolist inscription 'The Door of Death'; a triangular arch-stone hangs above. Whitman had never admitted any spiritual ties with Blake, but here they are disclosed."

The biography could have ended here at Whitman's death, but then its most original parts would have been missed. Li devotes the last three chapters to three major issues in Whitman's life and art. Chapter fifteen, "'I am large, I contain multitudes,'" deals with the poet's philosophical and social ideologies. Li observes that philosophically Whitman was first influenced by Hegel whose theory was introduced into America by Carlyle and Emerson. The second source of his philosophical ideas is Transcendentalism represented by Emerson, though he is different from his mentor in being defiant of authorities, just as he differs from Carlyle, a despiser of mobs, in his enthusiastic celebration of the masses. The third source is Eastern philosophy. Li's final analysis is: "Whitman's philosophical thought contains both idealism and materialism, subjective idealism and objective idealism, dialectics and metaphysics, general pantheism and mysticism and even some superstition." Another aspect of Whitman's thought Li examines is his political ideas, which are "more realistic and clear than his philosophical ones." "Equality and freedom, particularly personal equality and political freedom, are the two major props of Whitman's democratic thought."

The second major issue, Whitman's ideas on literature, is treated in chapter sixteen, "Expressing 'My Time' and 'My Country.'" Whitman's tenets of creation are to write about his own time, country, and ideals. To Li, this is thorough realism. The seventeenth and final chapter discusses Whitman's poetic artistry, the third major issue concerning his art. Here we find the most subjective statement the biographer has to make about Whitman's art: "Personally speaking, I am particularly appreciative of the strong and masculine sense of rhythms in some relatively long lyrical poems; it naturally forms a

vigorous and resounding melody with the poet's surging passions, lively imagination, and various glittering arguments."

The conclusion is a brief discussion of "Whitman from America to China." Li summarizes Whitman's impact on Chinese poetry, adding that, "In the past, Whitman was mainly studied from political and ideological perspectives as a 'democratic poet' or 'the people's poet'; now studies are undertaken in every aspect of the poet, especially his artistic achievement and influence on the Chinese New Poetry Movement."

Li Yeguang's biography is a solid study of Whitman the man, the poet, and to some extent, the influence. It makes a substantial contribution to Whitman scholarship for Chinese students and teachers and is particularly useful to those who study American literature in translation. The biography covers extensive primary and secondary materials, including works by Gay Wilson Allen, Roger Asselineu, James E. Miller, F. O. Matthiessen, Ed Folsom, and so on. The author provides his own translations of Whitman's work, and they are effective and graceful. Unlike most shorter Chinese studies of Whitman, Li's biography is scholarly and not dominated by political concerns, though the author does use Marxist theories. As a work meant for the Chinese audience, the author assembles as many events related to China as available and works them nicely into the larger context. Considering that the book was written with little access to materials beyond the Chinese borders, I can sense the difficulties and frustrations its author had to face in the course of writing. For example, Li avoids discussing Whitman's homosexuality, an issue that is central to the work of many Western critics. Like most Chinese books, the biography lacks an index; it provides some pictures of the poet in the front pages and a chronology of his life at the end. The title page shows a strong and handsome bird flying against a sky-blue background, which reminds me of Gay Wilson Allen's "Solitary Singer," but this time the singer is chanting half way across the Pacific Ocean. Solitary, yes, but I also hear, in a volume like this, an eloquent responsiveness from over the ocean.

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