

readers. A beginning student, over-inclined perhaps to respond to the yawp and gab of Whitman's poetry, might profitably note that he was for the most part a halting speaker who chose his words painstakingly, and that he left pieces of paper about the place on which he'd worked his way through a list of synonyms before finally deciding on the precise term needed. A specialist might usefully ponder the myth Whitman evolved towards the end of his life to explain his pitiful, paralyzed state. Perhaps, he suggested to his doctors, all his animal vitality had been channelled into mental activity, leaving his body unanimated and torpid. It is a theory which—as well as providing a sadly ironic postscript to "Song of Myself"—would seem to throw some light on both the thematic content and the structural patterning of the two late collections, "Sands at Seventy" and "Good-bye my Fancy."

Although "Whitman in His Own Time" could prove to be a slightly misleading title ("Whitman as Seen by His Contemporaries" would perhaps be more accurate, given that so many central aspects of the age scarcely get a look-in), this collection is a genuinely valuable one. For the first time in *our* time important and attractive primary sources for the study of Whitman's life are made easily available to student, specialist and general reader alike. At a juncture when the volume, not to mention the ingenuity, of critical commentary on Whitman is threatening to get out of hand, it is refreshing to be given a book that is plainly serviceable and indubitably worth the paper on which it's printed.

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BYRNE R. S. FONE. *Masculine Landscapes: Walt Whitman and the Homoerotic Text*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992. xiv + 306 pp.

Byrne Fone recovers and reconstructs a remarkably compelling Whitman landscape. Utilizing the groundbreaking work of Robert K. Martin, Edward F. Grier, Betsy Erkkila, M. Jimmie Killingsworth, and Michael Moon, *Masculine Landscapes* offers the most extensive and convincing homoerotic readings yet offered of Whitman's early writings, his journals, and "Song of Myself."

Gay, lesbian or homosexual readings of Whitman's life and or poetry will always be as multitudinous as Whitman's vast cosmos. The diverse responses of John Addington Symonds, Edward Carpenter, Newton Arvin, Edward F. Grier, Robert K. Martin, myself, Michael Moon, and Byrne Fone have but one thing in common: the constant presence of homophobia—in our lives, in our employment, in our writings, and in the reception of our work. Homophobes would exterminate evidence of our own and of Whitman's homophilia just as they would exterminate our love. Justin Kaplan, Paul Zweig, Harold Bloom and others claim Whitman had little or no homosexual experience. Others who acknowledge such intercourse cannot accept it as human. In his *Manhood in the American Renaissance* (1989), David Leverenz confesses that Whitman's sexuality made him "as a heterosexual male, recoil" (p. 14).

Fone sets exact but not always observed limits for his "antihomophobic narrative": (1) to confine critical analysis to the earlier Whitman: "The letter Whitman wrote to Emerson and included with the poems of the second edition

of *Leaves of Grass* (1856) provides a terminus for my study” (p. 20); and (2) to exclude biography. Fone warns at the outset, “I have no interest in nor do I intend to search for that as yet undiscovered biographical fact” (p. 2), and later concludes that “the immateriality of argument about his sexual actions is obvious” (p. 256). The index, however, contains eighty entries for the 1856-1860 *Calamus* poems. And Fone uses the biographies both of Whitman and of other homosexuals in his analysis. For example, he sets the early poem “Young Grimes” within the context of William Caldwell and Charles A. Roe. His “Brethren and Brothers” chapter connects *Leaves of Grass* somewhat unconvincingly with the “little epiphanies in Havelock Ellis’ and John Addington Symonds’ *Sexual Inversion* (1897)” (p. 229).

Fone fits *Leaves of Grass* rather awkwardly inside the currently popular frameworks of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. Whitman’s own effort to unite his body, his poetry, the history of his times and of “America” deny virtually every post-modern axiom (“Camerado, this is no book, / Who touches this touches a man”). Among the post-moderns, experience, biography and even texts have been marginalized, and contemporary critics claim a “privileged” position over their subjects. If there be a canonical writer, it would be Frederick Nietzsche or perhaps Michel Foucault. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her influential *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), for instance, prioritizes Nietzsche and marginalizes Whitman.

Fone follows Sedgwick in approving Gayle Rubin’s warning that “although sex and gender are related, they are not the same thing” (p. 258). One wit defined a gay poem as one that has sex only with other poems; a corollary to the Rubin doctrine could consequently be deduced that “although sex and text are related, they are not the same thing.” Fone enters a dark cave where he conflates text and sex: “Like the discourses that constructed sexuality, Whitman is his own constructing text, in which he creates, defines, and engages in the textual realization of homosexual desire. The text is sexuality; the text is sex” (p. 256).

Whether inadvertently or not, in following Foucault, Fone transforms both our understanding of Foucault and of Whitman. Most Anglophones have been quiet about Foucault’s rehabilitation of De Sade, but Fone provides a gripping reading of Whitman’s “Fierce Wrestler” (pp. 63-114) which brings out the anal sexuality and the sadomasochistic qualities in Whitman. Fone links Whitman’s fantasies of anonymous and promiscuous comrades with the “forbidden and hidden sexualities, rape, prostitution, masturbation, and homosexuality” (p. 71). Although Kinsey found that 97% of his men reported masturbation, Harold Bloom has argued that autoeroticism “more than sadomasochism remains the last Western taboo” (*New York Review*, 16 April 1984). Today rape, intergenerational sex and incest vie for that honor on the slippery slope of forbidden lusts. Fone sensibly sidesteps debate over the most loathsome pleasures and instead demonstrates that it is only through the portals of secret desires that “the ecstasy of mystical experience can be attained, and spiritual rebirth can be achieved” (p. 72).

*Masculine Landscapes* provides some frank and fresh discussions of dominance/submission, transvestism, and man/boy love. Fone credits Whitman with wresting sexual identity from its moorings and inscribing it “within a

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