read Whitman's lines given these new insights? Are they discrete and fungible? Infinitely cut-and-pasteable like Raymond Queneau's "One Hundred Thousand Million Poems"? How did Whitman think of his poetic lines? How should we? The variorum doesn't offer the answers, but that's not its job. Instead, Gray and company have invited us to ask the right questions about this consistently surprising, endlessly wonderful work.

Lehigh University Edward Whitley

⋆

Caterina Bernardini. *Transnational Modernity and the Italian Reinvention of Walt Whitman, 1870-1945*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2021. xii + 281 pp.

Translators know intuitively that the meaning of an utterance never depends only on the meanings of the words uttered: context is everything, and context depends on situations and on people, i.e., on where and when a particular combination of words appears in the world, and on who the individuals involved are, what they know about each other, and why they have brought these words to this place at this time. This principle remained with me throughout my reading of Caterina Bernardini's *Transnational Memory*, which provides a rich and nuanced exploration of the reception and resonance of the poetry of Walt Whitman in Italy from the latter half of the nineteenth century to the end of the second world war. Bernardini's account elucidates not only what Whitman's poetry meant to people but how it did so, both in the limited context announced in its title and in the broader context of the poet's European reception and dissemination.

Bernardini achieves a remarkable synthesis of historical, political, and cultural context with analyses of the work of the individual literary and public figures who made sense of Whitman's poetry—interpreting it, translating it, and finding parallels between it and the Italy of their day. It balances an approach to the interpretation of Whitman in a European context with an attempt to measure the longer-term inspiration that Whitman provided to Italian (and not just Italian) poets, fiction writers, and cultural figures. A major part of this inspiration, Bernardini makes clear, is conditioned upon the degree to which Whitman's searching attempts to define and describe an "American" identity resonated within the contemporaneous search for a modern Italian one, a

phenomenon that repeated itself for more than one generation and thus yielded different Whitmans in the chronology of her study, as he became by turns a proto-modernist, a futurist, an anti-fascist, and a democrat.

A frequent theme in such encounters is the tendency for Whitman's work to serve as a mediation point for authors operating on the shifting ground between tradition and innovation, a position Bernardini explores through the poetic experiments of, among others, Giosué Carducci (especially his late nineteenth-century *Barbaric Odes*), Gabriele D'Annunzio, Dino Campana, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Giovanni Pascoli, and, in two of the broadly comparative analyses in the book, Ivan Turgenev, in his 1882 *Poems in Prose*, and the Russian futurist Velimir Khlebnikov.

Translation frequently serves as a nexus for the book's tracing of the many complex interconnections that make up Whitman's changing face. The Sicilian Luigi Gamberale, who in 1907 produced the first complete translation of Whitman's work into any European language, receives a delightful chapter unto himself. Indeed, the book can be said to pivot on the self-taught Gamberale's lifelong work of translating Whitman, to which he dedicated himself after retiring from a career as a teacher and school principal. Bernardini's full and varied treatment explores questions of motivation and interpretation, sources, and methods, furnishing close readings of specific choices made by the translator and an overview of responses he received—some quite fascinating and accompanied by the publications of the letter writers. In 1913, one arrived from Marinetti, thanking the translator for his work and enclosing a copy of the newly published *I poeti futuristi* (The Futurist Poets), which contained his "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature." Marinetti gets his own extended treatment in the book's second to last chapter, "Whitman, the Futurists, and the Birth (and Death) of Free Verse," while the letter itself helps to show another aspect of Bernadini's project, which is to trace a web of circulation networks, often with cosmopolitan, multi-lingual figures at their centers: Enrico Nencioni, the Sicilian Girolamo Ragusa Moleti, d'Annunzio, the writers associated with the Florentine periodical *La Voce*, Cesare Pavese.

How its various threads fit together is part of the book's fascination, as Bernardini traces the trajectory of the adoption of Whitman-inspired innovations, especially the liberation of free verse, first by Marinetti (including in the anthology he sent to Gamberale in 1913), then in the Russian Futurist experiments of Khlebnikov in the mid 1910s and early 1920s, and the polyglossia of Mina Loy's poems of the 1940s. In following such lines, Bernardini is careful to point out the complexity of this Futurist "reinvention" of Whitman, which

is not limited to simply channeling the poet's "audacity and energetic faith in the future" but extends to a new, more authentic poetic language, capable of expressing "crucial aspects of individuality, such as one's sexuality" (190).

While it is rooted in the context of the search for a modern Italian identity, a process in which Whitman's image and work provided important rallying points, the book's comparative methods and cross-cultural emphases cut against the grain of national literatures and contrast the impulse to write and rely on them, an impulse that is not likely to fade in the foreseeable future for most of world literature today, where having a distinct literature, like having a distinct language, is often understood as a marker of sovereignty and cultural legitimacy.

The book's tenth and final chapter is devoted to Cesare Pavese and provides both an important bridge, as Pavese was instrumental in the appearance of a new unabridged translation of Whitman into Italian, by Enzo Giachino in 1950, and yet another mediating influence in the interpretation of Whitman's work for a global audience. Here the notion of Whitman's "barbarism" or "primitivism," already evident in the understanding of Marinetti, Khlebnikov, Campana, and others, gets a new face. By contrast to these earlier readers of Whitman, who tended to see Whitman's expressive exuberance and poetic expertise in sharp relief, Pavese characterized Whitman as a poet who both "knew what he was doing" and who was "his own best critic" (197). For Pavese, in his translations and criticism, and, more complexly, in his creative works, Whitman's apparent primitivism turned out to be the manifestation of an expressive problem most of all, one shared widely in post-World-War II Europe. Whitman was not "a primitive, irrational, wild poet" (204). He was a modern artist engaged in the "poetry of poetry making," in a "total rethinking of *how* 'America' should be written," in other words, someone for whom, as Pavese put it in his translator's note to "Nineteenth-century Naturism" in 1948, "'even American democracy became an expressive problem. Which is beautiful and consoling, still today'" (204).

Indiana University Russell Scott Valentino