



An Ecuadorian Whitman Poem

Alexis Levitin

ISSN 0737-0679 (Print)
ISSN 2153-3695 (Online)

Copyright © 2009 Alexis Levitin

Recommended Citation

Levitin, Alexis. "An Ecuadorian Whitman Poem." *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 26 (Winter 2009), 156-157. <https://doi.org/10.13008/2153-3695.1895>

This Note is brought to you for free and open access by Iowa Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* by an authorized administrator of Iowa Research Online. For more information, please contact lib-ir@uiowa.edu.

11 Julian Hawthorne, "Hawthorne-Lemmon on *American Literature*," *Conservator* 7 (December 1896), 151-152.

12 *The Literature of All Nations and All Ages: History, Character, and Incident* (Philadelphia: Finley, 1897-1898), X, 334-336; *Essays of American Essayists* (New York: Colonial Press, 1900), 401-415.

13 "Books and Their Makers," *Philadelphia North American* (January 28, 1901), 13. These comments were also posthumously reprinted in Hawthorne's column "A Note on Anthologies," *Pasadena Star-News* (October 3, 1934), 11. See also "The Desire for Truth," *Booklover's Weekly* (November 25, 1901), 115: "Walt Whitman founded a sect, and established a fashion in what he was pleased to call poetry, because the rugged and often repulsive nakedness of his speech was thought to mean that he was a sincerer truth-teller than others."

14 *Century* 93 (December 1927), 157-169.

15 "Walt Whitman," *Pasadena Star-News* (October 28, 1925), 8. See also "When Gilder Was Pooh-bah," *Pasadena Star-News*, (August 17, 1929), 36: "the American bard, Walt Whitman, with scraps of paper covered with pencil scribbings in his pocket, to be interpreted into 'Leaves of Grass' at editorial conferences; a vague, wandering, childlike prophet, open of collar, threadbare of coat, dingy of shirt, shaggy of hair and beard; vain, timid, orphic and ordinary."

16 "Whitman and the Moderns / Some Notes on Critics, Poets, Novelists, Norman Foerster and American Criticism," *Pasadena Star-News*, (April 29, 1933), 15.

AN ECUADORIAN WHITMAN POEM

The poetry of Ecuadorian Roy Sigüenza (b. 1958) is homoerotic in theme and terse in expression. He generally focuses on scenes of daily life in ordinary places, transforming a movie house or a park bench into a setting for an erotic encounter. Despite his preference for brevity and simplicity of language, at times he makes use of greater stylization, while including references to other homosexual writers from both Europe and the United States. Within the Ecuadorian poetic scene, Sigüenza, speaking with a new lyric voice (that of a marginalized and persecuted homosexual), has developed a style that, very quickly, other poets have adopted as a reference point for their own work. One of the few authors in Ecuador willing to write of marginalized sexual experiences in an openly confessional manner, he has gained a certain status as a literary rebel in his own country. It is not surprising, then, that he would be attracted to Walt Whitman, whom he invokes in this modest little poem from his book *Ocupate de la noche* (Cuenca, 2000). I recently translated this poem with Fernando Iturburu; this is the first appearance of Sigüenza in an English translation.

Pista de baile

Aunque prefiera la danza Cheyenne,
el vals le va a Mr. Whitman

Baila confiado en los brazos de Jack
su último camarada.

Sus pasos son naturales
sobre la brillante sala de baile.

Dance Floor

Though he would prefer a Cheyenne dance
the waltz goes well for Mr. Whitman

He dances peacefully in Jack's arms,
his final comrade.

His steps are natural
gliding the gleaming barroom floor.

This brief poem imagines Whitman, the robust lover of life, as he dances with his last male partner. The poet suggests that Walt would have preferred something closer to the earth, something more autochthonic, more indigenous (“a Cheyenne dance”), but that even the highly civilized waltz is good enough for him as “he dances peacefully in Jack’s arms.” The key to the poem is in the quiet final twist of the simple concluding couplet: “His steps are natural / gliding the gleaming barroom floor.” Protected and at peace within Jack’s arms, he moves naturally across the floor, for this, in fact, is in accord with his nature. The barroom feels like a safe haven in this serene poem, with its simple words of elegance and security: “peacefully,” “natural,” “gliding,” and “gleaming.”

State University of New York, Plattsburgh

ALEXIS LEVITIN