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THE INTERNATIONAL WHITMAN: A REVIEW ESSAY

WALTER GRÜNZWEIG



DELPHINE RUMEAU. *Fortunes de Walt Whitman: Enjeux d'une réception transatlantique*. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2019. 769pp.

This is one of the longest books ever published on Whitman. Of its 769 pages, a full 714 are actual critical text, supplemented by 1585 substantive footnotes, none of which are mere textual references. It is an extensive work looking at Whitman's reception in a large number of languages and cultures, definitely transatlantic in scope, possibly the first attempt to capture a truly international and intercultural Whitman. It is a major work. And—it is written in French.

One admires the self-confidence of the author, Delphine Rumeau, to write what she has to say in her own language and to trust that it will nevertheless find its way to those who need to know its findings—and, if not, so much the worse for readers unable to read quite complex French. There is much to be said in favor of sticking to one's own language in research, even if the topic is an author in a foreign language. When I published my own study of Whitman in the German-speaking countries *in German* in 1991, it was a very different book from that which appeared four years later in English. The years it took me to rework my book into English were largely invested in making it more accessible to international, mostly American, readers—a process that required radical condensation and a certain reduction in complexity.

Perhaps someday Rumeau will rewrite her book for an English-speaking audience, but initially she was obviously not willing to make the concessions required for an English-language version, which likely (for reasons of differences between French and American academic publishing traditions) would not have permitted such an extensive volume. She instead has insisted on the space and the complexity that the French version allowed her and in that sense has remained true to what she set out to do.

However, do we as scholars not have an obligation to the international world of research? Does the fact that the one language nearly all Whitman critics know is English not oblige us to make such a study available at least to that largest group of potential readers? As it stands, one of the longest books on Whitman is accessible only to a relatively small minority within the Whitman academic community.

I have therefore undertaken here to write an extensive review going far beyond the traditional evaluations of the scholarship, methodology, depth of knowledge of the subject, and everything else usually implied by the genre of a scholarly book review. While I will include my personal perspective, I believe that the Whitman community, especially readers of the *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review*, will best be served by a more extensive and detailed critical overview of the contents of this extraordinary book.¹

That this review is so long and so detailed will ensure that those with widely varied interests and expectations in Whitman scholarship can more easily turn to specific sections in the book that might be important for them. My intent is to help Rumeau's extensive research on Whitman gain greater international visibility among literary critics. In the past (though not necessarily in Whitman scholarship), we have discovered the hard way that criticism in a non-English language can lead to scholarly isolation, and, even though the political category of linguistic imperialism is a consideration (in which, incidentally, other "larger" languages such as French or German participate in their own way), there are practical reasons for disseminating the contents of this book into the wider Whitman world—which ultimately, and logically, is English-speaking.

To be fair, Rumeau's book is not really addressed to the Whitman community, at least technically. Her PhD thesis, *Chants du Nouveau Monde. Épopée et Modernité (Whitman, Neruda, Glissant)* [*Chants of the New World: Epoch and Modernity*], published in 2009, was in Comparative Literature, and she teaches in that field at the University of Toulouse-Jean Jaurès. *Fortunes de Walt Whitman* appears in the same series as her thesis did, volume 86 of *Perspectives Comparatistes* published by one of the most respected scholarly publishing houses in France. It is a series that permits a scholarly depth and breadth which most other international academic publishers would not allow. It is, in that sense, very French, and, again, deserves to be written in that language.

The international Comparative Literature movement has placed an emphasis on linguistic equity between English and French (although not for other languages—not "major" languages, and certainly not "minor" ones), and in a way French has long been secretly the preferred comparatist tongue. One

may deplore the fact that languages other than English increasingly have become secret codes in international scholarship, but the very fact of the diminishing importance of Comparative Literature as a field and its shift from comparing literatures to investigating theory confirms the problem even on the disciplinary level. Outstanding as it may be, scholarship that is untranslated into English does little for the field in which it is conducted.

A Global Whitman

Rumeau's book is, of course, a "Whitman book," taking a hitherto unknown perspective in Whitman studies, but it also has a special comparatist added value which I will attempt to point out. Nevertheless, my own approach here will be from the perspective of Whitman scholarship. Previous research on Whitman's international reception—critical, creative, and through translation—has largely been a part of non-comparatist research, although, like my own, it has profited from comparatist methodologies and approaches. Such investigations started long before the age of "reader response."

Whitman saw himself not only as the founder and innovator of American poetry, the theme which dominated the preface and the poetry of his 1855 edition, but soon thereafter also as an international poet. His poem "Salut au Monde!," first published in 1856 under the title "Poem of Salutation," has provoked a series of global responses to Whitman extending into the present. Whitman and his contemporary propagandists—from William Douglas O'Connor (whose *Good Gray Poet* was disseminated nationally and internationally) to Horace Traubel—took great interest in the poet's followers around the world and supported their endeavors to translate his works and publicize information about the author and his projects.

Whitman and the early Whitmanites virtually developed their own model of world literature of which the American "bard" was a natural part, and his international reception was early on part of the argument for his significance. This is naturally true of his reception in English-speaking Europe (see Harold Blodgett's 1934 *Walt Whitman in England*), but also in non-English-speaking continental countries. Gay Wilson Allen's early account of Whitman's international reception in his *Walt Whitman Handbook* (first issued in 1946) eventually turned into an anthology of Whitmanesque texts around the world entitled *Walt Whitman Abroad* (1955) and then, massively expanded and co-edited with Ed Folsom, *Walt Whitman and the World* (1995). Separate monographs dealing with individual countries or linguistic regions began with Fernando Alegria's *Walt Whitman en Hispanoamerica* (1954, and never issued in an English version) and

then accelerated in the reader-response age, including France (Betsy Erkkila, 1980), Germany (Walter Grünzweig, 1991), and Britain (M. Wynn Thomas, 2005). A new, long-awaited study on Whitman Italy by Caterina Bernardini is going to appear as part of the Whitman Series at the University of Iowa Press, as is Marta Skwara's study of Whitman in Poland (originally published in Polish in 2010).

Although a major part of *Fortunes de Walt Whitman* plays in France, its innovation and uniqueness is that it extends this analysis to other languages and linguistic areas, most significantly English, then Spanish and Portuguese, Italian, and, most noticeably, Russian—the languages, as Rumeau freely admits, she herself commands. Indeed, the author is said to have learned Russian specifically for this study. One could hardly expect more from a scholar and yet *Fortunes de Walt Whitman* as a whole—as broad as its spectrum and as extensive as its perspective are—nevertheless focuses mostly on “major” languages. It does, at times, include “lesser” languages of some literary reputation such as German or Swedish. It completely, however, ignores “marginal” languages from East-Central Europe (most notably Czech and Slovak), the Balkans, or Greece, let alone small minority languages.

A second novelty of the book, and one of very immediate interest to Whitman scholarship, is the study's perspective. According to Rumeau, the admiration of Whitman on the part of his followers often takes the form of fetishism (see p. 18), an observation she occasionally extends to Whitman scholars themselves. She reports, for example, her experience in a recent international Whitman symposium with a mixture of surprise, appreciation, and detachment: “The author of these lines was astonished when, on the occasion of the first symposium of Whitmanites in which she participated, she was invited to take the hands of her colleagues for a moment of meditative sharing” (19). Clearly, Rumeau has a point here. The sense of community and the devotion to Whitman among Whitman scholars is fairly unusual, even compared to other author-centered events which are also characterized by a certain fetishism. Rumeau clearly presents herself as an outside observer assuming an objectivity sometimes lacking in in-group scholarship.

Scholarly objectivity is a highly desirable quality, but there is a bit of contradiction here between presenting a 750-plus-page book promising to investigate the author's “immense postérité” (9) internationally since the nineteenth century since attempting to retain a scholarly distance from what after all is also “her” author. We are reminded of the global Covid-19 lockdown in Spring of 2020, when distancing was introduced as an ambiguous routine with narratives

acknowledging its necessity yet hoping for a speedy return to previous closeness and intimacy. (Whitman, the urban saunterer yearning to embrace everybody he encountered, displays the worst behavioral model for pandemic times.) Like many of Whitman's readers, Rumeau attempts to keep her distance but seems to find it very difficult to do so: her book is often torn between mandated scholarly objectiveness and an overwhelming fascination for "her" author.

The full title of her book, *Fortunes de Walt Whitman: Enjeux d'une réception transatlantique*, reveals this ambiguity. "Fortune" is an old comparatist term referring to the history of a particular author, theme, or phenomenon but plays, of course, also with its meaning of good luck. Whitman does have an international reception that needs to be studied, as expected and hoped for by himself, but he is also *fortunate* in the sense of being lucky and successful. "Enjeux" are on the one hand *issues and problems* that appear in the history of Whitman's reception; on the other hand they are *stakes*—etymologically the word is related to the *risks and interests* (political, aesthetic, etc.) involved in a game ("jeu"). Reception history is thus a game involving fortunes and maybe also misfortunes.

In her introduction, Rumeau explains her scholarly concerns, although major important considerations are only made explicit later. She first attempts to locate her position in reception theory and reception studies. Although the introduction downplays the notion of authorial intention or the meaning of a text, those do have a place in the overall set-up of the study, especially in the interest of its productivity: "One thing will have to be stated with great clarity: the most dynamic receptions are those where an encounter emerges between what is offered by a text and what a reader seeks there" (12). Later on, Rumeau explains more explicitly that she will focus on "the interaction of authorial intention, the ambiguities of the work, and the lenses used by an era and a culture" (40). In spite of the many problems of the concept of intentionality, this approach seems helpful because of the dialogical model between what used to be called the "sending" and the "receiving" culture.

A second methodological claim for her work is, as emphasized in the title, that of a transatlantic exchange: "Finally, this transatlantic space has seemed to us as the one to be focused on because the movement in the Whitmanian reception is not one-way but emphasizes very much a circulation, a shuttling back and forth" (31). Although, as will subsequently be shown, this approach is applied very productively to a variety of reception phenomena, it is by no means new to Whitman scholarship. While it is obvious that a broadly based study such as hers cannot refer to, or even find all relevant scholarship, it would have been helpful to look at existing examples, if only to serve the purpose of this book.

Finally, the introduction gives three reasons for “Pourquoi Whitman?” Economically speaking, one answer might be that Rumeau had already completed a long book dealing with Whitman, bringing him together with Pablo Neruda and Édouard Glissant in a study of modernity and the epic tradition. The substantive reasons given here have to do with (1) the tendency to “confound” author and work (which provides interesting methodological challenges, but also insights); (2) the mere volume of (lyrical) answers to and rewritings of Whitman; (3) the varieties of his critical and especially creative reception; and (4) the large scale of (and relatively easy access to) international reception of his work.

Especially regarding the last aspect, my summary-analysis will show that I have very mixed reactions to this topic. On the one hand, I have already emphasized the focus on “large,” mostly Western literatures. From a postcolonial perspective, the book is problematic, because “transatlantic” would include Africa and Rumeau’s claim that Whitman’s African reception (the North African Arab world excepted) is not quite as significant is not substantiated. Furthermore, the book has a certain French bias although the author would probably deny this. But even statements *ex negativo*, namely the reminder (to herself?) to “be careful not to overly generalize based on the French case [...]: the French twentieth century does not represent all Western modernity[;] Mallarmé’s [aesthetic] politics do not override the Whitmanian ones in all countries” (479), shows a tendency that needs at least to be questioned. On the other hand, the overall conception of the book—and the sophisticated way of relating different Whitman phenomena in a space transcending the transatlantic one—leads me to recommend this as the first scholarly monograph on the global Whitman.

But Rumeau’s comparative approaches also entail other methodological concerns which are explained, sometimes explicitly, later in the book. The history of Whitman’s reception is not a homogeneous one that runs smoothly along the lines of traditional history:

The smoother character of the contemporary reception should not lead one to forget the surprises and the unevenness that the examination of the polemics that crystalized around Whitman in the course of the twentieth century has revealed. Even if they can be explained by contextualization, many were by no means inevitable or even foreseeable. That Whitman has since the beginning of the century been found suitable as a homosexual figure in Europe can be explained, both in the light of the text and that of the context of the reception, but the debate ends up detaching itself from its source which becomes a virtual pretext. (549)

Another reason for dealing with Whitman, given quite late in the book, is Whitman’s specific politics:

The tension between social cohesion and affirmation of individual liberty, the tension at the heart of democracy, is formulated by Whitman with a singular force and acuity; that is thus the only solid issue in Whitman's work that political forces tried put on their agendas. (549)

In the end, "the capacity to bind together either the polemic or simply the debate in poems that form a long conversation constitutes without a doubt one of Whitman's grand legacies to the poetry of the twentieth century" (550).

Whitman and European Modernism

The first of the four large chapters, entitled "Walt Whitman and European Modernism in Poetry" ("Walt Whitman et la modernité poétique Européenne"), concentrates its findings very cleverly on one motif, that of Whitman as a modern barbarian, a *primitif*. Establishing two poles represented by Charles Baudelaire (later Mallarmé is foregrounded) on the one hand and Whitman on the other, the latter is said—in contrast to the former—to establish modernity not only as an "exaltation of the present, but also a positive view of time" (35), as a source of new beginnings. The task of the chapter is to "examine the debates on modernity in poetry which the reception of Whitman crystallizes in Europe" (36), and revolving around *modernité* and *barbarie*. Although the latter is ultimately not an analytical term, it does work to structure the whole chapter and to provide an understanding of the Whitman phenomenon around the 1900s through the first part of the twentieth century in many parts of Europe.

It is a "souffle barbare," a barbarian's breath, that goes through Europe with Whitman, and it is deeply desired and appreciated. According to what French critic and writer Gabriel Sarrazin wrote more than a hundred years ago from a contemporary perspective, a regeneration of humanity and literature was going to result in an "active world, peopled by a formerly old race, but now rejuvenated through the contact with a new sun," and that sun was Whitman (43). The key Whitmanite in France, Léon Bazalgette, saw Whitman as the author of a democratic gospel, which was going to renew the moribund traditional "Latin" culture of Europe and bring it back into tune with nature (44). Whitman, the new American literary giant, thus became involved in an extended debate on classicism and the grand European tradition.

This scenario unfolds in other European countries as well, according to Rumeau, especially in Romance language countries that all had to deal with this tradition of *latinité*. In Portugal, Fernando Pessoa, one of the key protagonists of the book, announces that the "essential thing about the barbarian is that he is essentially modern" (35). Through his heteronym Álvaro de Campos, the grand

Portuguese modernist connects Whitman with his desire for a new Renaissance, vitalism, modern technology, and a fundamental barbarian spirit, as does his Catalonian counterpart Cebrià Montoliu.

In Britain, this movement goes in the direction of the veneration for a pagan poet. British Whitmanites such as Edward Carpenter and Ernest Rhys present a denationalized global prophet (in contrast to other European countries where the Americanness of the poet is emphasized) who becomes the hope for a Socialist humanity. In German, Austrian dramatist and critic Hermann Bahr placed Whitman into the center of a movement calling “us” all barbarians, there is—in spite of the non-Latin origin of German—equally a turn against *latinité*. The various “Germanic” (worse: Teutonic) interpretations of Whitman, sometimes tinged with anti-semitism eerily foreshadowing later developments in Germany and Austria, can more easily be placed into a European context due to Rumeau’s comparatist framework. In Tsarist Russia (the Russian reception is detailed at greater length in the third chapter) there are European symbolist tendencies as in Constantin Balmont’s translations bringing a barbaric Whitman into a traditional form, while Korney Ivanovich Chukovsky is introducing him in free verse.

After World War I, there is—naturally—a decline in interest in this barbarian Whitman. D. H. Lawrence remains fascinated with the *primitif*, but there is an increasingly critical tendency toward this motif in which he is joined by French novelist Jean Giono. The characteristic reaction on the part of European poets, according to Rumeau, is an initial mesmerism—they are “at first fascinated, inebriated with joy—then become skeptical of an excess of optimism vis-à-vis a modernity which is proving murderous; they are put off by excessively high and irresponsible expectations, verging on naiveté” (117). For Italian author Cesare Pavese (who wrote his thesis on Whitman), it was a *dream* of the *primitif* rather than the Barbarian himself (118f.).

Barbarian meant for the most part elasticity in versification. The second part of the chapter thus deals with *vers libre*. As someone who has studied Whitman’s reception in a number of European countries, but also supervised projects on his receptions in non-Western literatures such as Arabic and Persian literatures, I have long since become convinced that Whitman’s major effect on the international literary system was the introduction of free verse. With few exceptions, there is a “before and after Whitman” in world poetry. Delphine Rumeau’s book takes a somewhat different point of view. While she does agree that Whitman’s major input was indeed the *vers libre*, the question mark in the title of her chapter—“The *vers libre* Américain: Une importation impossible?”—

indicates a certain hesitation at the very start:

But the *vers libre* is also the object of very different approaches and conceptions. If the one invented by Whitman is a fairly flexible instrument to be received into fairly different poetics which refashion it in their own way, it is not certain that it really established itself in European poetry, whether in English or in other languages. Ultimately, the Whitmanian verse, characterized by length, amplitude, absence of run-on lines, the organization in long, often anaphorical sequences, only met with limited success each time. (120f)

In the end, the *vers libre* “has not led to a lasting inscription in the European history of [poetic] forms.”

It seems to me that this is a question of a glass being half full or half empty. The fact that there is plenty of European (and American) poetry that is still more traditionally “form”-oriented does not mean that the Whitmanian impulse did not amount to a revolution in poetry. Here, as in many other parts of the book, Rumeau adjusts her findings to a more measured European mode (reminding one of the notion of the more cultured capitalism Europe has supposedly produced compared to its American version). It turns out that for Rumeau, the “fortune” of Whitman is often not quite as fortunate as originally supposed.

It is, of course, true that one can find many examples in European poetry that support that notion. The example of Algernon Swinburne, which is expounded at length, shows that Whitman was not so much a founder, but a great reformer, and that his main contribution was not so much his poetic form, but atmospherics. Gerard Manley Hopkins (discussed at greater length, but missing in the index of names) is closer to the European modernist “model” represented by Mallarmé and part of a “European resistance to an exaggerated [!] amplitude and absolute metrical disorder” (142). Rumeau even uses Gilles Deleuze’s remarks on Whitman, claiming somewhat stereotypically that the Europeans have

an inborn sense of organic totality or of composition, but need to acquire a sense for the fragmentary . . . whereas the Americans, to the contrary, have a natural sense for the fragmentary and what they must master is the sense for totality, for the beautiful composition. (139)

Nevertheless, there are those Europeans for whom Whitman’s free verse does establish the desired revolution not only in poetry but in life at large. For Edward Carpenter, a “Whitmanian entirely and faithfully,” free verse guarantees the porosity between life and work. To early French Whitman translator Jules Laforgue (born in Montevideo and thus, like many European Whitman activists, with a transatlantic background), Whitman “boosted the European neurasthenic by

the energy of the New World” (149). Rumeau places Whitman, Rimbaud, and Laforgue next to each other as artists working with the effect of surprise.

There is an interesting group of later French symbolists, including American-born francophone poets and Whitman translators Stuart Merrill and Francis Viélé-Griffin, who attempt to bring together symbolism and Whitman, in that way achieving a mid-Atlantic synthesis tempering the latter and invigorating the former, symbolists “separating increasingly clearly from Mallarmé to promote the rapport between art and life” (155). Against French literary history which often makes of Mallarmé the “alpha and omega” of poetic modernism, these Whitmanian symbolists bring in the great Whitmanian themes of the road, the path, the body, nature, and the future (see 158).

The final subchapter, entitled “Recivilizing the Barbarian,” starts out with French Whimante Valery Larbaud, whose engagement with Whitman is studied at greater length as he welcomes Whitman as a barbarian (“the Barbarians entered literature. More exactly: the Barbarian. But what a Barbarian!”; 170) but eventually turning him into a European (!): “His doctrine is German, his masters are English; throughout his intellectual life he was a European inhabiting America. . . . It is then only in Europe where he could be recognized and he was” (180).

The subchapter then moves on to the other side of the Atlantic with major figures equally expressing an ambiguous attitude towards Whitman (although in general, Rumeau accords Whitman a more lasting and profound place in the New World than the Old). This includes George Santayana and especially Ezra Pound, whose poem “Redondillas, or Something of that Sort” is critical of Whitman though written in a very Whitmanian format, and who eventually creates his famous “pact” with Walt as they are obviously “one sap and one root” which should lead to “communication” between them.

In the conclusion of the chapter, there is a kind of summary that deserves to be quoted at greater length:

The European reception of Whitman engages multiple intercultural relations, phenomena of rejection or compensatory appropriations out of a fascination for the foreign, the barbarian, but also more dialectical phenomena, polemical and dynamic challenges. It is of course often difficult to distinguish between what belongs outside (Whitman) and what belongs inside (the European context, the preoccupation with the idea of a renaissance, the taste for the primitive, the desire to break with idealism and symbolism)—that is a difficulty inherent in any reception study (216).

In the end, the ambiguous quality of the “European” chapter is upheld even

in the conclusion. Maybe the use of an essentially metaphorical category like that of the Barbarian “had” to result in such indecision at the same time that it successfully addresses major concerns concerning Whitman in many parts of Europe and enabled an essentially successful presentation of the Whitman phenomenon on a European scale.

Nouveaumondism

The investigation of the development of an American “conscience” in Whitman’s reception in the book’s second chapter (“Whitman et la conscience continentale Américaine”) is truly pan-American. Rumeau is not just *adding* authors writing in Spanish, Portuguese, and French, but she has a naturally transcontinental view, which in the form of *nouveaumondism* is characteristic of Whitman’s reception. Beyond this perspective, this chapter presents what amounts to the first attempt since Alegría in 1954 at a comprehensive reception history of Whitman in Latin America, and her discussion shows that it is indeed only possible to understand this reception if we look at it from a pan-American perspective.

One major difference to the Anglo-American reception of Whitman is that in the Latin American hemisphere, Rumeau does not discern as much of a “rupture” (236) between the Old and the New World. The reception is determined by European, Spanish, Portuguese, and French “filters” or lenses. *Modernismo*, including the innovation of the poetic form, makes the European discussion relevant. Out of this transatlantic modernism, however, an ultimately stronger transcontinental tendency develops which can be described as the “irruption of geography in American poetry” (230). Ultimately “Whitman is the grand emancipator who has liberated American poetry from European tutelage, has dismissed the paper nightingales to make the cry of the hawk audible in a more real way” (230).

José Martí, the Cuban pioneer representing the “prologue” of Rumeau’s chapter, couples the notions of “modernité” (the first one to practice free verse) and “Americanité.” Her second example is Rubén Darío. While his poetry is “Latin” rather than “Iberian,” he deals with the “old topics” such as Native American traditions. In both cases, the question is asked—implicitly a challenge to Whitman—about which America we are talking about: Darío, in his “Salutación del optimista”, emulates Whitman’s *translatio mundi*, but the shift is now from Tiber, Seine, Danube, and even Ganges to the Río Plata. What I am saying is that they are now talking back to Whitman from different rivers, not from the Old World but from Latin America.

This project, expressing a “continental ambition,” includes Whitman’s first translator in South America, Álvaro Armando Vasseur, whose Spanish translation is famously based on Luigi Gamberale’s Italian one, and Vasseur’s early *Poemas* (1912). It is more explicitly developed later on by Pablo Neruda, an author who appears on several occasions in Rumeau’s study and who credits Whitman with having taught him to be American and to believe in the originality of American expression. This is another version often encountered in this American reception of an “Adamic America.”

The notion of “*décalage*” (time lag) often appears in this book, although the shifts are not often as clearly delimited as one would expect. However, in the section on French Canada, so far not very well known, this phenomenon is obviously helpful as Whitman’s reception there does not start until roughly 1930. Rumeau first explains the context characterized by the defensive narrative of survival. She contrasts the triumphalism of the national sentiment in the U.S. with French-Canadian “defeatism” (267). It is therefore not surprising that Franco-Americans (i.e. French speakers in the U.S.) such as Robert Choquette, whose Whitmanesque poetry confronts urban modernity, and the poet Rosaire Dion-Lévesque (the first French-American Whitman translator), play something of a mediating role here.

This North American French Whitman might be described, in Rumeau’s words, as a “moderately American” Whitman. He is a *primitif*, but not necessarily tied to the New World, in an “astral” rather than a concrete America, and this reception focuses on the mystical rather than the democratic poems. The fact that these *Feuilles* (Leaves) are heavily edited in French translation shows the difficulty of the project, although the publication of a Whitman book itself marks “an important moment in the history of québécoise literature” (284) as the publishing house shifts from that moment to a more American orientation. In the end—and this is also shown in Edouard Glissant’s West Indian Whitman emphasizing a “poetics of relationship”—the *nouveaumondist* French Whitman “constitutes a declaration of literary independence vis-à-vis France and of belonging to the American continent” (287).

The next subchapter, entitled *Tesserae*, a mosaic metaphor, deals with a particularly challenging Whitman reception by multiethnic and “racially” defined writers. While there are certain Hispanic writers taking up the “Amerindian” component (to which is added the Catholic religion and the Spanish), it is really Brazilian literature that gains center stage here. The most interesting section is on the first Brazilian writer in free verse, Mario De Andrade, and translator Tasso de Silveira, who also becomes a poet answering Whitman (“Palavras a

Whitman”), but especially Ronaldo de Carvalho, whose strongly Panamerican attitude echoes Whitman: “I hear the enormous chant of Brazil” (299). Characteristically, the latter is taking Whitman to task and emphasizing his deficits: “You who invented the New World / have not seen the other America piercing / the obscurity limiting the borders of race” (301).

This tendency to extend, complement or correct (and of course also challenge) Whitman is characteristic of the central author of the U.S./race section dominated by Langston Hughes. Hughes is a heavily studied poet, and his appreciation of Whitman’s work is well known (“I, Too, Sing America”), but in Rumeau’s context, new aspects become visible. This is especially true with regard to his strong transatlantic affinities (with García Lorca and through his travels, though, interestingly, his trip to the USSR is not mentioned) and the non-essentialized racial identity which is connected with Whitman. The international outlook of the Harlem Renaissance seems to have also been mediated by Whitman, as, for example, in an essay by Alain Locke dedicated to the important Belgian Whitmanite Émile Verhaeren, in which he emphasizes the importance of Whitman, a “remarkable European filter” in Rumeau’s words.

While the focus on Hughes is understandable, there would have been many more examples from the Harlem Renaissance and also (predominantly leftist) U.S. Black writers of the 1930s. Instead, the subchapter jumps to contemporary Black literature, mentioning, but not really explaining, June Jordan’s self-declared descendance from her quasi-father Walt Whitman. Jordan, who places Whitman in a global context of non-elitist, non-European “people’s poetry” from Hughes to Neruda, thereby defines her own Black and at the same time cosmopolitan identity as a poet.

In the area of U.S. “multiculturalism,” Rumeau then differentiates between the “enthusiasm” of the Hispanic-Americans such as Martín Espada or Rudolfo Anaya for Whitman and the much stronger scepticism on the part of Native Americans. In spite of Whitman’s by now well-documented imperialist attitude, there is much good will on the part of the Hispanics, probably also due to the “goodwill” Whitman created for himself by his use of Spanish words (*Libertad!*). Whitman’s attitude towards Native Americans is, according to Rumeau, “frankly hostile” and the reaction of indigeneous poets is at the very least reserved, uncertain, interrogative, characterized by a “peut-d’être.” At best, a voice like Sherman Alexie can bring itself to “defend” Whitman, but Whitman’s Hegelian world view provides little space for survival for the Natives.

There is an interesting, comparatist observation that Langston Hughes’s thinking, which is “much more international than community-oriented,” is

much more “compatible with this Whitmanian spirit.” Generally, “Whitmanism is much more on the side of Panamericanism than multiculturalism” (325).

The next subchapter, “Prairie Perdue” (“Lost Prairie”), asks the question “Ubi est Whitman?” (Where is Whitman or where would he stand?). Essentially it deals with the question of the survival of Jefferson’s pastoralism in the twentieth century. Confronting T. S. Eliot’s pessimistic attitude (which Rumeau connects to a Baudelairian view of modernity), Rumeau discusses the attempts of three different modernist authors, Hart Crane, Federico García Lorca, and Stephen Vincent Benét, to update Whitman’s vision in the twentieth century and to formulate a poetic conception beyond Eliot’s radical critique.

Whitman’s postulate of a compatibility of the “machine” and a “jouissance de la nature” (325) disintegrates in the twentieth century. For Crane, Whitman foresaw the anemic modern society, warned us about it, but also pointed out possibilities of regeneration. In one of a number of longer textual interpretations in her study, Rumeau follows Crane’s address to Whitman, especially in his long poem *The Bridge*. Whitman’s vision may have been “effaced,” but it is not yet completely lost and can be restored. By alluding to Whitman’s “Year of the Modern,” Crane seems to indicate the way Whitman envisions such a regeneration in the modern age; in his *Bridge*, which connects Whitman’s time and his own, he provides an “update of the Whitmanian heritage” (338).

Lorca’s stay in New York City in 1929 further radicalized his skeptical vision that grew out of his experience of a threatening urban modernity and of an unrestrained capitalism. Materialism, resulting in spiritual emptiness, spells the failure of American modernity. However, in Rumeau’s analysis, Lorca’s reading of Whitman offers a movement of “correction,” helping him to integrate the latter’s optimism in his vision of modernity, and providing consolation.

Unlike Crane’s and Lorca’s readings of Whitman in the light of Eliot, Stephen Vincent Benét reinforces the latter’s critique. The point here is not to resurrect or exhume Whitman but to amend him. In a long reading of Benét’s “Ode to Whitman” (1935), Rumeau illuminates his radical critique of the depression-ravaged country. Whether the Whitmanian solution she is pointing out (no longer the Open Road, but the Rivers flowing from North to South “abolishing history” – thus offering a return to the primary forces of nature rather than human agency) is the point of Benét’s poem seems somewhat uncertain to me. Nevertheless, this section—combining two U.S. modernists and a Spanish one—impressively proves the added value of the study’s comparatist approach.

The final section of this American chapter, essentially dealing with U.S.

reception after World War II, is entitled “Ruines de la Modernité Américaine.” As in other parts of this book, Rumeau seems to be overly pessimistic about the more recent period, prematurely abandoning her trust in Whitman’s continuing receptive productivity. After World War II, she says, “the American left gave up the Whitmanian hope,” “convinced that the American Dream was no longer attainable” (352ff.). Even before that, the “dream of Whitmanian modernity had definitely been abandoned in Europe shortly after the First World War” (353). The latter is certainly not true for Germany and other parts of Europe where, in the 1920s, America and Whitman came to stand for the comprehensive modernization of society in the name of “Americanism.” And Rumeau’s own examples in this final section of Chapter 2 suggest to me that Whitman and his poetry retain critical potential vis-à-vis the emerging mass consumer society and turbocapitalism.

Some of the “*élégies de l’Amérique whitmannienne*” by Allen Ginsberg, Louis Simpson, and others are sharply critical of what is quickly becoming U.S. postmodern culture. The loci of melancholy (“*lieux de la mélancolie*”) which she interestingly discusses in several Whitman-inspired poems, such as the supermarket or garages, offer more opportunities for change than some Europeans, enamoured of an anticapitalism coupled with strong scepticism toward American culture, might think (as expressed, for example, in a poem written by French Whitman translator and poet Jacques Darras written during a visit to the U.S. during the Trump campaign in 2016; see 374ff.). I personally think that the encounter with Whitman in Ginsberg’s “A Supermarket in California” is neither amicable, amorous, nor poetic (see 356). It seems to me that Ginsberg is in fact searching for ways to integrate Whitman even into this American (post-) modernity. That this reading at times returns to a more Romantic reading of Whitman—in Rumeau’s word a “misreading, a partial reading that makes the prosopopoeia of Whitman effective for a critical vision of modernity” (380)—is okay.

Whitman, the Prophet

The first section of the “Prophet” chapter (“Le prophète Whitman”) dealing with activist readings of Whitman is devoted to the debate on Whitman’s homosexuality. It is said to be a “Western European debate” (383). While the U.S. was increasingly installing Whitman as a national poet, Europe, and especially France, was emphasizing Whitman’s sexuality and the homoeroticism of his poetry. The extensive German debate on Whitman’s (homo-) sexuality is largely omitted because it is extensively and in detail dealt with in a study already

published. In fact, large parts of Rumeau's study summarize results of other investigations, and it is not altogether clear when they are included and when they are omitted. Unfortunately, a large corpus of an international discussion on Whitman as a gay poet in *The Gissing Journal* (between Eduard Bertz and various correspondents, including Whitman) is not referred to at all.

Basically, Rumeau's account of this discussion contrasts two types: voices that emphasize and defend Whitman's gay status (Bertz in Germany, André Gide and Guillaume Apollinaire in France) and those who are less willing to "classify" or even "stamp" the poet accordingly (like the two primary Whitman propagandists in France and Germany respectively, Léon Bazalgette and Johannes Schlaf). Rumeau also includes many Americans in the latter group, such as Horace Traubel, who was not comfortable or interested in publicly discussing Whitman's sexuality.

This opposition seems a bit too strong. Whereas it is quite obvious that Apollinaire and Gide have a political, activist agenda (and Bertz's texts are even published in the central organ of sexuality and gender research directed by Magnus Hirschfeld, the *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen*), one should not discount the strategic attitude of the other group. Traubel, Bazalgette, and Schlaf had larger than just sexual political agendas and took into consideration the limited ability of a larger reading public to process Whitman as a gay prophet around the turn of the century. If Whitman was to become a major literary, cultural, and even political force, it did not seem wise to them to treat him as a voice of single-issue politics. More importantly, even they were unwilling to follow the sometimes clinical discourses of defining Whitman's sexuality, discourses that undermined a more open and liberal reading of this topic.

In a very interesting way, the end of this chapter connects Whitman's widespread presence on and above the battlefields of World War I with the issue of gayness. Drawing a parallel between the Whitman of the Civil War, working as a nurse, and the many European accounts of Whitman as "wound dresser" in the context of the Great War, Rumeau finds in a "Whitman of the body" a way to integrate these two topics, thus countering Darras's notion of a Whitman cut in two (into a sexual and a political part).

The second "Prophet" subchapter, "New Messiah," is rather short and not at all activist. Rather, it centers on the religious dimension and the various labelings of Whitman in that context, from magus to prophet, pagan God, or even Christ. The point here is, and the tone of the section reveals a certain European skepticism, that Whitman seems to attract all kinds of esoteric minds willing to give a religious twist to issues otherwise explained rationally. Still

today, Rumeau argues, “Whitman’s reception in the United States outside academic milieus remains . . . strong in spiritualist and esoteric circles” (411). The possibility that this is a way of bringing traditional metaphysical religiosity down to earth—and into the body—which would make this reading progressive rather than traditionalist, is not considered here. Whitman, the “Yankee Heiland” (Yankee Messiah), as Eduard Bertz has it, is in many cases, both in Europe and in the U.S., a quasi-religious force actually subverting traditional religion.

A fascinating separate little study which concludes this subchapter actually seems to me confirm this idea. Rosaire Dion-Lévesque, a Franco-American born in Nashua, New Hampshire (who, according to Rumeau, has been little noted in Whitman research), reads Whitman as an “inspired bard.” Coming out of a strong Catholic tradition, Dion-Lévesque finds that Whitman opens up the possibility of a mystical view of the world—one which often goes through the body. It is a new religion which “inverts the hierarchy of body and soul in Catholicism to celebrate the divinity of the body” (421). As in many other cases, Rumeau here provides a short but very pointed study of a Whitman character scholars need to further investigate in order to understand and better appreciate Whitman in the contexts of both Canadian culture and that of the Catholic tradition.

The third and very long subchapter on the political Whitman is one of the book’s finest. “Le camarade Whitman” here does not explicitly point to the use of the term “comrade” in Marxist or other leftist parties in English and French; neither does it discuss the etymology of the term (those who sleep in a *camera*, one room, together, which would seem to have a particularly Whitmanian application). But it does point to political partisanship. Whereas the sections on The Gay Whitman and Whitman the Messiah mostly take place in France (with some side-excursions to the U.S., Great Britain, and Germany), the political Whitman crosses the Atlantic repeatedly. It starts out in Britain, moves to the U.S., briefly returns to France, only to end up in pre-revolutionary Russia or the USSR (the Soviet revolution being much less of a hiatus in the Russian Whitman reception than one would expect, probably because the American—censured by the Czarist government—was a part of the revolutionary upheaval).

The presentation of the British political Whitman, making use of (and generously acknowledging) Kirsten Harris’s detailed 2016 study (*Walt Whitman and British Socialism*), is very impressive, especially because of the emphasis on its quasi-religious quality (such as, for example, John Trevor’s “Labour Church”). There is a latent tendency here, as in the chapter on Whitman’s sexuality, to

contrast a socialist, anarchist, later Communist Whitman with the much tamer “nationally” constructed poet in the U.S., but here Rumeau quickly reconsiders: “One cannot be quite certain whether one should reduce the socialist reception of Whitman into the United States to the status of a British import” (431). The rest of the chapter tells a very different story, from the political contributions of a visionary Traubel all the way to those of a politician like Eugene V. Debs and Communist Ella Reeve “Mother” Bloor. If anything, the religious rhetoric of the British Socialists of various schools was probably shaped by Whitman’s, Traubel’s, and even Debs’s religious rhetoric.

To be sure, these transatlantic and intra-European travels, in this section and throughout the book, are not documented in detail. Only in a few cases do we get, often in footnotes, information about personal contacts and relationships between the different actors. Sometimes there is a reference to whether a particular text might have been available to a reader in a different country or whether knowledge of that text may have been likely. Rather, Rumeau uses the metaphor of an (uncertain but impressive) *echo*, suggesting a connection without proving it. This points to a dialogue between authors and texts, and even though they are not always documented, they are convincing simply through their juxtaposition, creating new insights and augmented spaces of understanding.

Anything Rumeau writes on Whitman’s Russian reception is noteworthy simply because most of it has not been accessible so far. But the Russian section is also very well done. More than anything, *Fortunes de Whitman* shows the great need for a well-informed study of Whitman in the USSR, including political and historical dimensions. Whitman, Rumeau emphasizes, “traverses all Soviet eras without really suffering an eclipse (even if the grand Whitman moment is located in the period immediately after the revolution and at the beginning of the 1920s)” (448). Sometimes, there are small hints about enormous developments about which readers will want more information. For example, when we are told that Whitman was translated into a dozen (!) Soviet languages (474), it would have been interesting to get further details so as to better understand of the development in Soviet ethnic/minority politics. After all, the Russian reception and the larger Soviet reception belong together.

The relationship(s) between Kornei Chukovsky (Whitman’s key twentieth century Russian translator), Vladimir Mayakovsky (his most important creative follower in poetry), and People’s Commissar Anatoly Luncharsky (his political-bureaucratic manager), are effectively presented here. The enthusiasm for Whitman, also expressed in comparatively large editions of his work, cannot be overestimated. Different ideological views about Whitman—that of the progres-

sive bourgeois or the socialist (Chukovsky later on borrows the latter claim from Lunarcharsky)—show an amazingly dynamic discussion, quite characteristic of the early Soviet Union, especially in the literary-artistic sphere. Rumeau even discusses a movie by avantgarde Russian filmmaker Dziga Vertov entitled *A Sixth Part of the World*, released in 1926, which relates Section 33 of “Song of Myself” to the techniques of the film.

The travel metaphor for the transatlantic dimension of Whitman reception is no longer always adequate. Obviously, the origins of the “Whitman rouge” in U.S. proletarian literature from Meridel le Sueur to Carl Sandburg, Stephen Vincent Benét, and Michael Gold cannot always be easily identified and probably do not need to be. Soviet interest and active support of Whitman in the first Socialist nation of course helped Whitman’s cause in literary communist (party) politics in the U.S. and in the American Left at large. But the native U.S. Left has contributed as much to this development, and in its own way, so that it would probably be better to speak of parallel developments in constant flux and dialogue.

The model, however, as has been pointed out previously in Whitman research, is similar for most of the leftist reception, whether it concerns the Russians, Michael Gold, or, later, Neruda. In his works and throughout his life, Whitman made a promise for a brighter future of humanity (and the emergence of an appropriate poetry), but the U.S. and (American) capitalism have regularly and profoundly *betrayed* (“trahi”) Whitman. (Whitman himself established this model through *Democratic Vistas*.) It is therefore up to the Third International to help Whitman’s vision come (back) to life. In a very nice simplifying line, Rumeau summarizes this succinctly: “Lenin is the midwife [“accoucheur”] of Whitmanian America, the one who facilitated the arrival of a pastoral communism” (473).

A very interesting separate short study deals with the poem “Pioneers, o Pioneers!,” a poem which, by highly uncertain apocryphal information, Marx knew and enjoyed (though this does not appear in this study). Rumeau locates the Whitmanian origin of the poem in a Western American frontier context. In a British framework, it became a part of the “March the Workers,” only to be later associated with the “pioneers” of the Soviet Communist Youth Organization “Komsomol.” (In Wilhelm Schölermann’s 1904 German translation, incidentally, not discussed in the book, the pioneers are marching on the Right rather than the Left towards a stronger German nation.) The effect of this study by Rumeau is that it opens up connections without making strong claims for them—and that is good. I believe it is entirely possible that the young “pioneers”

we find in the Soviet Union and later in other countries of the Communist world may actually come from Whitman just as I have long suspected that the term “Comrade” as used in international Marxist parties may derive from Whitman. The emergence of a Marxist/Socialist rhetoric in the second and especially the third quarter of the nineteenth century took place at a time when Whitman was very much a part of this conversation.

Rumeau’s claim that outside of Communist Europe “nothing remains of the Socialist Whitman” after the 1930s may be a bit overstated and also premature. The fact that the Western European Left took issue with Whitman does not deny his relevance in that context. In the 1980s, Allen Ginsberg told me, when we discussed my project on Whitman’s German reception, that I would have a difficult time doing that research after he, Ginsberg, also appeared prominently on the German scene. After all, the significance of his and Whitman’s poetry would be hard to differentiate. There is some truth to this self-confident statement, but Ginsberg’s own *fortune* in Europe also proves the continuing relevance of a Leftist Whitman in Western Europe.

From here, Rumeau moves to the region where the political Whitman would from now on be safely at home, namely Latin America, where “Whitman’s flame is truly reignited after World War II.” The personality she uses to demonstrate this new shift is Spanish poet León Felipe, who takes Whitman out of the Spanish Civil War, which was so disastrous for the global left, into exile in Mexico where he anticipates and prepares the postwar political readings of Whitman.

This leads us right to a longer and rather text-centered section on “The Whitman soviétique de Neruda.” In the poems of Pablo Neruda, Rumeau announces (in a rather Whitmanesque way herself, as she at times is taken in by Whitman’s lyrical mode) that the “cries of Whitman and Mayakowsky will travel through the times, the steppes and the oceans to celebrate Communist man” (487). She reads Pablo Neruda’s Whitman reception, which sometimes amounts to an undeclared translation of Whitman in his poetry, especially in his *Canto General* (translated into German by the same GDR poet translator, Erich Arendt, who produced Whitman’s translation in that country), as a part of the Cold War Period. This is certainly true, and her analysis of another *translatio imperii*, this time from the U.S. to the USSR, is impressive, echoing incidentally Whitman’s own notion of a westward (through America) “Passage to India.”

Whether Neruda’s political reading of Whitman in the wake of the fascist putsch against Salvador Allende in 1973 is really part of the Cold War or a continuation of the Global Anti-Fascist struggle since the 1920s is not quite

certain, but Rumeau's analogy of Whitman's reference to Lincoln during and after the Civil War with Neruda's to Allende is fresh and interesting. This political sub-chapter ends with a short discussion of Cuban-Dominican poet Pedro Mir and his "Countersong" to Walt Whitman.

Under the heading "Corpoèmes," the final sub-chapter of the "Whitman as prophet" section brings together body and activism after World War II. Again, the claim that Whitmanites like Traubel and Carpenter as well as those in Latin America felt "uneasy" about Whitman's homosexuality and that dealing openly with the issue required help from abroad, especially Europe, seems very questionable to me. What obviously does happen, however, on both sides of the Atlantic, is a convergence of the physical and the political. In the section on Federico García Lorca, which also deals with Neruda's friendship with the Spanish writer killed in the Spanish Civil War, Rumeau emphasizes how homosexuality can be addressed without reducing it to a single issue.

The most interesting critical focus is on Jean Sénac, a French-Algerian writer who definitely deserves to be better known in the Whitman world. With him, as with many other authors who need to be concerned with their coming out, Whitman's name and Whitmanesque poetry serve as a code-word. Sénac's "Paroles avec Whitman" (*with* Whitman rather than *following, succeeding, or replacing* Whitman) present a new model of interaction with the American poet.

It is uncertain to what degree the final larger section, devoted to Allen Ginsberg, is a new contribution to our understanding of Ginsberg's relationship to Whitman or to the gay reading of Whitman, but the intensive discussion of the "Plutonian Ode" (1978) definitely breaks new ground. And, since this section follows closely onto the discussion of Lorca, Whitman and Lorca in Ginsberg's "Supermarket" poem are seen in a new light.

The long prophet chapter ends with Vietnam references, including figures like Walter Lowenfels and Thomas McGrath. Modifying her earlier suggestion of the end of "politics," Rumeau now suggests that while "the political Whitman has not completely vanished, it has in the Western world largely changed function and form" (548). Whitman today is "less radical but has not left the political terrain." I believe the reverberations of the Trump presidency and the growth of the Far Right internationally will soon reveal some of these new functions and forms.

The Poetic Body

The final chapter (“Le corps poétique et son devenir”) intersects and overlaps at times with the sections on the homoerotic Whitman and the “corpoème,” focusing, as it does, on various versions of Whitman’s bodies which, in the end, are all textual though not necessarily all literary or poetic. Initially, Rumeau places Whitman’s notion of self between Romantic individualism and Romantic dissolution, summarizing it with Baudelaire’s formula of the (contradictory) notion of the “vaporization and centralization of the self [moi]” (552). Whitman’s specificity here then is the use of his body: “Whitman in effect bequeathes his body as much as his work, so that the two are mixed up with each other and the question of the legacy of the work becomes inseparable from that of immortality, of the dissolution and the transformation of the body” (554).

Subsequently, a series of creative reworkings of Whitman’s selves are discussed. The variety of self in which the subject claims to be others, or even *all* others, Rumeau calls the “le sujet impérial.” This includes parodies which appear early; some are uncannily reminiscent of Donald Trump’s helpless rhetoric: “I am Walt Whitman! I have been to Oxford. I too am wise, I am learned” (557). Most significantly in this category, and of course going beyond it, is D.H. Lawrence’s famous study, which for Rumeau leads to the more contemporary question of whether Whitman “the white male can incarnate the minorities, can he really claim to be this supreme instance who includes and represents them all?” (562). This, of course, extends to female responses by Muriel Rukeyser, Erica Jong and Judith Moffett (as well as a brief reference to the very interesting Michael Strange, i.e. Blanche Marie Louise Oelrich).

Two sections referring to the self as fiction include Jorge Luis Borges, who is interested in the way Whitman consciously creates a personality and defines a character. Rumeau’s discussion of a second, related case, Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa, is the longest one in the book—and also the most enthusiastic. The idea of a split self that ultimately allows the author to discover the alterity within the self, fascinates Pessoa. His well-known development of heteronyms is directly connected to Whitman; one thesis actually claims that it was a way for the Portuguese author to process the shock that the experience of reading Whitman’s poetry presented to him.

At least two of Pessoa’s heteronyms are directly or indirectly connected to Whitman. According to the critic Erduardo Lourenço, heteronym Alberto Caeiro is the figure resulting from the repression of Whitman; Alvaro Campos in turn a Whitmanist poet bubbling over with what is the result of the return of the repressed. In the end, Rumeau celebrates the aesthetic productivity of this

“dynamic” of heteronyms:

The heteronomy, in a way of saying, is the theatrical manifestation of the irreducible diversity of the modern poetic subject which Whitman himself put on the stage, instead of merely attempting to dissolve it in a grand extensive movement. Pessoa’s poetic *oeuvre* is thus one of the most perceptive and at the same time most creative receptions of Whitman ever given to us. (596)

From Whitman’s selves, the chapter moves to the body. The study first refers to the celebration of the perfect body (“*corps en gloire*”) that emerges from passages like the famous section 24 of “*Song of Myself*” (“If I worship one thing more than another it shall be the spread of my own body”) and goes on to discuss the Costa Rican poet Cardona Peña and U.S. poet Phil Tabakow (“Walt Whitman at Pfaff’s”) as examples. In addition to discussing Whitman’s blazon of himself, it is a way of “confusing the borders between author and text, between body and words, between death and presence” (602).

The motif of “Old Walt” starts from the contrast between the image in the 1855 and the more dominant, iconic older images suggesting a progressive detachment from the body but, at the same time, a growing serenity and assurance. The beard, “*metonymie ultime*” (612), massively contributes to Whitman’s image as a prophet (initiated of course, by W. D. O’Connor). Connected to that are photographic images of Whitman, especially the familiar one with the butterfly, which Rumeau subsumes under the category of ekphrasis, where photographs become the basis for poems on Whitman.

Another category, which has been very productive in the U.S. and international reception, are the various invitations to a personal, physical encounter with Whitman of the kind he suggests at the end of “*So Long!*”: “. . . this is no book, / Who touches this touches a man.” Although the parallel to Christian models is remarkable, Rumeau tends to overrate the actual religious dimension of this “*poésie de la présence*”:

The fixation on Whitman’s body and the fetishism which it expresses at times are very visible forms of what this poetry signifies for modernity [...]: the dream of a poetry which sticks to the real, which takes the form of what is alive. (637)

While I would take issue with her notion of the “real,” Rumeau’s conclusion does address a central rhetoric of modernism and in that sense explains Whitman’s usefulness in the modernist reception.

The third and final section of this chapter, entitled “Dissolution, Resurrection, Partage/Sharing,” deals with various ways of addressing Whitman

beyond his actual death in 1892, based, of course, on Whitman's own various testaments and prophecies for his readers that promise various forms of future presence. For Rumeau, this amounts to an amalgamation of metaphysical and poetic dimensions. While it (and the whole Whitman phenomenon) very much counteracts Barthes' notion of the death of the author, it does, on the other hand, anticipate and/or materialize the intertextual turn in literature (and literary theory): "But the multiplications of the levels of intertextuality serve the affirmation of [Whitman's] presence—this is the Whitman paradox par excellence" (664).

Although I will not be able to discuss the many manifestations of this phenomenon in detail, this section is of great methodological interest for Whitman Studies because it brings a variety of Whitman phenomena, which have been previously marginalized, into a system. This includes Whitman memorial sites such as the Camden tomb and his house on Mickle Street, grass as a ubiquitous sign of the poet's presence, books commemorating him (e.g., *In Re Walt Whitman*), Whitman's autopsy, and Whitman "apparitions," many of which are treated in poetry and thus become part of his literary reception.

Of particular interest here are the many authors quoting Whitman—which, christologically speaking, can amount to a resurrection—and Whitman translations, which generally (and, in Whitman's case, in particular) confuse and question borders between author, text, and readers. The various phenomena Rumeau assembles here, oftentimes characterizing translation metaphorically, are not only interesting in conceptualizing Whitman translation but will also provide an interesting contribution to the ever increasing discussion in translation theory. A commentary on Rosaire Dion-Lévesque's French-Canadian translation of Whitman (who characterizes his translation as a "transfusion"!) also applies to other examples given here: "His translation is not literal; it takes liberty with idioms and images; but it renders an authentic tone of those extracts which it transcribes for us; it delivers to us a very lively and fluid Whitman in French" (667).

A rather long but very interesting and appreciative section returns to Spanish-Mexican Whitmanian author and Whitman translator León Felipe, whose 'translation' is the best-known rendition of Whitman in the Hispanic World. He self-consciously breaks with the traditional translation "contract" requiring "faithfulness" to the original. Felipe explains that he has "translated [Whitman], added to him, falsified him, contradicted him" (677). Whitman, of course, is an ideal case for such a project as he asks his followers to innovatively build on his work rather than stay within its limits. Felipe's political argument is

that he has done this on a public terrain, the leaves of grass, and that in this way, the translator's poetic voice becomes a collective voice of and for the people. Beyond that, the "poet himself becomes immortal because his legacy will be incarnated and continued by those who come after him" (683).

Similarly to the case of Felipe, Rumeau refers yet again to Pablo Neruda as a second example, another translation where a poetic language is used collectively and shared. His translation, or rather recreation, is like a paraphrase. Like Felipe's, his conception of a poem is one that blends the words of others (Whitman in translation, incorporated in his poetry) and his own (686). Another prominent Whitman translator, Jacques Darras, is said to "appropriate" Whitman and make him "darrassien," a tendency subsequently corrected by the translation of the 1855 edition of *Leaves* by Éric Athenot.

Outcomes

In her conclusion, Rumeau at first returns to Whitman. The fact that he was read as "poète de la modernité" (701) was made possible by the fact that he covered so many aspects of it. An immense following assembled behind his free-verse poetic revolution, his announcement of a new world, his acceptance of technology and progress, and, in the end, what came to be known as his "primitivism." He was the beacon of—and for—the beginning of the twentieth century.

At the same time, he became an antidote to the equally modernist, mostly European awareness of language in crisis. In what seems to me a bit of an oversimplification (though it's a nice analogy), Rumeau claims that, for Whitman, the word is equivalent to the object in the same way that the poem refers to the body. Along with his message of an adhesion to the present, Whitman's model—an original one according to Rumeau—paradoxically combines a break with tradition and a continuation of it. His gesture of rupture does not result in discontinuity (706), and his ultimate belief in language was a very attractive alternative for those who wanted to confront the challenges of modernity without despairing over it. His equally paradoxical teaching to distrust the teacher at the same time allowed for the necessary anti-traditionalist, anti-authoritarian impulses so important for the period. Rather than starting a new tradition, Whitman here starts a "tradition of commencement" (see Sascha Pöhlmann's 2015 *Future-Founding Poetry* on that very theme).

Finally, Rumeau repeats her oft-stated notion that, in spite of the internationality of the academic Whitman movement (she mentions the annual meetings of the *Transatlantic Walt Whitman Association* as an example), the lasting

Whitman tradition is anchored in the United States: only there can Whitman act as as father (“père”) of a culture. She repeats Pound’s notion that “Whitman is to my fatherland . . . what Dante is to Italy” (201) and actually extends Italy to “Latin Europe.” However, she adds, this status, too, came about only as a result of the manifold transatlantic interactions with Europe: “it has not constituted itself exclusively from the interior” (710), i.e., domestic U.S.

In the end, I disagree with Rumeau on the degree of the *fortunes* of Whitman on the European side of the Atlantic. I believe that the two European traditions she works with throughout her study, those of Mallarmé (or Baudelaire) and Whitman, stand next to each other, debate with each other, and balance each other out, and continue to do so far into the rest of the twentieth century. In Germany, the Expressionist movement actually brings both groups under one label, the philosophical and language conscious group including Gottfried Benn, Georg Heym, Georg Trakl and that of Whitman-related “Messianic Expressionism,” including Franz Werfel, Ernst Toller, and others. Even though Whitman might not be invoked as frequently in Europe today as he once was, there is an unbroken tradition in form and theme that is still productive for new and innovative poetry.

In order to appreciate this better, we should have a closer look at the “smaller” European languages and literatures where Whitman also continues to be translated and published, and, following the postcolonial route, we should also take the non-Western Whitman tradition more seriously. Rumeau’s own mixing of typology and chronology in her presentation should remind us not to view the development of literary history as rigidly linear.

Beyond putting Whitman into a larger, comprehensive international perspective, Rumeau’s book is, from a Whitman Studies perspective, most interesting for the various new grounds it breaks. It should remind Russian scholars that we urgently need a history of Whitman’s Russian (and Soviet) reception, for which Rumeau’s sections on Russia have laid a fertile ground. We need a new Latin American Study, which observes the interaction with Iberian Europe the way Rumeau has done. What should be considered in looking at the transatlantic interactions is not just the dialogues between texts but the networks of translators, poets, and political and other activists who invoke Whitman. Rumeau stresses the importance of a reception that goes beyond Whitman’s written work, but the book falls somewhat short in dealing with this aspect (although, as I emphasized in the beginning, there is only so much one scholar can do).

What I find most valuable in this study is the variety of authors and

other personalities treated in (sometimes very short) multiple sections, at times amounting only to vignettes. Whitman research will profit enormously from investigating many of these fascinating figures from around the world who will help us to better understand his global network. Rumeau's final word on the "grand compagnonnage" (714)—which Whitman announced and which actually formed around him and continues to form—is an extremely optimistic call to continue working on some of the many ideas that this remarkable study has provided for us.

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Notes

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