Buono, Carmen Joseph Dello, ed. Rare Early Essays on Walt Whitman [review]

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Except for the Dowden essay (reprinted in anthologies edited by Milton Hindus, Edwin H. Miller, and Francis Murphy), all the essays are indeed rare; whether they are worth reprinting is another matter. Mary E. Wager-Fisher’s piece is really for children and says very little for 1980s readers; we could well skip the Toke essay, and Wallace prophesies how Whitman’s Democracy, based on Religion, is supplanting Europe’s 1920 political forms—its value is marginal. The two longest and most probing studies, by Stedman and Dowden, are good to have; yet best of all I liked what De La Mare had to say about Whitman—all too brief. What we do see here so well, on the whole, is the contrast between the American essayist Stedman and all the others (except Wager-Fisher), who express early British views of Walt Whitman.

The book, stoutly clothbound for the library trade, is not necessarily expensive, as books go these days; its format is rather unattractive; and its usefulness is rather more historical than critical.

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