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The Columbia History of American Poetry

哥伦比亚美国诗歌史

Jay Parini
Brett C. Millier

外语教学与研究出版社
FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND RESEARCH PRESS
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本书是美国哥伦比亚大学出版社出版的哥伦比亚文学史系列丛书中的一本，反映了美国当代诗歌史研究的新成果。

全书汇集了美国当代著名诗歌研究专家、学者关于美国建国以来的诗人、诗歌流派和诗歌发展的评论文章或论文共31篇，按历史先后顺序编排，脉络清晰，内容涵盖美国各个时期的诗歌创作和主要诗人，适合广大美国诗歌研究者和诗歌爱好者阅读参考。

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最近获悉外语教学与研究出版社慧眼认定并引进出版杰伊·帕里尼(Jay Parini)主编的《哥伦比亚美国诗歌史》(*The Columbia History of American Poetry*,1993),这是国内研究美国文学,特别是诗歌的学者的大喜事。它为国内各高校英文系或英文专业的教学增添了一本重要的参考书,也为美国诗歌博士生、硕士生写作论文提供了一个难得的指南。《哥伦比亚美国诗歌史》是埃默里·埃利奥特(Emory Elliott)主编的《哥伦比亚美洲小说史》(*The Columbia History of the American Novel*,1991)的姐妹篇,也是埃默里·埃利奥特主编的《哥伦比亚美国文学史》(*Columbia Literary History of the United States*,1988)的伴侣。这三部史书所论述的对象各有侧重,在美国学术界影响很大。

从北美殖民时期到当代,美国诗歌发展跨越时间400年。主编帕里尼在安妮·布雷兹特里特、爱德华·泰勒、朗费罗、艾米莉·迪金森、惠特曼、弗罗斯特、T. S. 艾略特、庞德、华莱士·斯蒂文斯、威廉·卡洛斯·威廉斯等被一般的美国诗歌史列为正宗白人诗人的队伍里又增添了19世纪和20世纪美国女诗人、美国印第安诗人和美国黑人诗人的章节。这反映了时代的进步,美国社会的进步。从这些章节中我们还可以看到,20世纪60年代反越战引发的以黑人为主的民权运动和激进妇女掀起的女权主义运动,都自然地反映在美国诗歌里。我们知道,罗伯特·斯皮勒(Robert E. Spiller)等人主编的《美利坚合众国文学史》(*Literary History of The United States*,1946年初版,1963年第3版)在其1511页的篇幅中只有一小节——"印第安传统"(9页)——简略地提到印第安文化与文学。该小节在一开头就介绍说:"直到19世纪美国人才开始把印第安文化视为文化财产。在大西洋海轮上的英国殖民者通常觉得最好的印第安文化是已经消逝了的印第安文化。整个印第安民族消亡了,没有记录下他们的内心生活。如果印第安传统闻名于世的话,那是用白人文化文学的模式打扮和浪漫化的

结果。”由此可见北美大陆原主人的文化与文学在强势话语中的低下地位。该文学史对处于弱势话语的美国黑人文学(包括诗歌)同样蔑视。它介绍美国黑人文学不但简单，而且称黑人为 Negroes，如今如果还有人称黑人为 Negroes 的话，那是对他们的侮辱和蔑视，有可能引起法律纠纷。现在美国人都称他们为 American blacks(美国黑人)或者 Afro-Americans (非裔美国人)。直到 20 世纪 80 年代末出版的《哥伦比亚美国文学史》和 90 年代早期沙卡文·伯科维奇(Sacvan Bercovitch)主编、至今还未出齐的八卷本《剑桥美国文学史》(*Cambridge History of American Literature*)才有专门章节介绍印第安文学和非裔美国文学。但把印第安诗歌和黑人诗歌同时放进大型美国诗歌史里论述的只有《哥伦比亚美国诗歌史》。

如果和同类的诗歌史，例如戴维·珀金斯(David Perkins)著的两卷本《现代诗歌史》(*A History of Modern Poetry*, 1976, 1987)和唐纳德·巴洛·斯托弗(Donald Barlow Stauffer)著的《美国诗歌简史》(*A Short History of American Poetry*, 1974)进行比较的话，《哥伦比亚美国诗歌史》的材料不但新，而且范围广。《现代诗歌史》和《美国诗歌简史》都没有把印第安诗歌列入美国诗歌论述的范围。《哥伦比亚美国诗歌史》具有自己的鲜明个性，突现了五大明显的特色：

1. 全书一共 31 个章节，由 31 位有相关研究和专长的学者撰写，保证了论述的权威性，而且每个章节后面都附列了参考书目，为学者进一步研究提供了方便。
2. 凡大诗人或重要的诗人都是单独成章，从而保证了论述的深度，便于博士生、硕士生或其他学者在研究某个重要诗人时获得尽可能多的信息和研究成果。
3. 美国诗歌史的综述放在序言里，阶段性的诗歌现象的综述则放在章节里，这样可以使读者对美国诗歌史留下整体印象或概念。
4. 同其他美国诗歌史相比，该书把美国有代表性的长篇诗歌单独列出来论述是一大特色，抓住了 20 世纪美国重量级诗人大多创作长篇诗歌的倾向。
5. 该书最突出的一点是在美国多元文化视野下的诗歌研究。任何国家的文学史家在勾勒文学发展时总是要把握贯穿该文学的传统，但这个传统往往局限在对掌握强势话语的民族文学的探讨上。以英国为主的欧洲白人移民建立起来的美国，以英语为国语，其历史只不过

200多年，而其文学史也不过是400年。在谈到它的诗歌传统时，美国诗歌史总是把其源头回溯到从英国移居美国的安妮·布雷兹特里特(1612—1672)和爱德华·泰勒(1642—1729)这两位诗人。美国诗歌的传统究竟是什么？杰伊·帕里尼用"早期美国黑人诗歌"(Early African Ameican Poetry)、"哈莱姆诗歌"(The Poetry of the Harlem Renaissance,美国黑人诗歌的黄金时代)、"黑人艺术诗人"(The Black Arts Poets)和"土著美国人诗歌"(Native American Poetry)四个章节作了回答：非裔美国诗歌和美国印第安人诗歌也是美国诗歌的一部分。一般的美国文学史和诗歌史有意无意地以男性白人诗人的价值取向、美学趣味作为衡量美国正宗诗歌的规范和标准。杰伊·帕里尼为了纠正这个偏见，他用了一个章节——"女诗人和现代派的兴起"(Women Poets and the Emergence of Modernism)作为回答：美国女诗人在美国诗歌的发展中同样做出了贡献。

章节设计的恰当与否取决于主编见识的高下。作为美国诗歌史的主编，杰伊·帕里尼在突破传统观念和扩大文学视野上取得了可喜而又令人信服的成绩。他在序言一开始就说："诗歌与民族文化的关系虽然有些混乱，总体上还是非常密切的，而且美国诗人取得的成就在很大程度上可以用来衡量整个美国文化本身所取得的成就。"在当今美国提倡多元文化的前提下，杰伊·帕里尼在他主编的诗歌史里充分肯定了非裔美国诗人和美国印第安诗人所取得的成就是整个美国文化的一部分，这正是他见识卓越之处，也是这部诗歌史的优点，尽管它还存在不足之处，例如，没有把方兴未艾的亚裔/华裔美国诗歌包括进去。[1]

《哥伦比亚美国文学史》虽然已经由四川大学朱通伯教授等人翻译，在1994年出版，但仍无法代替其原著在中国各高校英文系的使用。译本只被不通英语的中国学者和一般读者所使用，英文系里教授美国文学的教师、用英文写博士或硕士论文的学子和研究美国文学的学者则依然使用原著。八卷本《剑桥美国文学史》还没有出齐，即使全部出版了，由于卷帙浩繁，很难代替一卷本1263页的《哥伦比亚美国文学史》。因此，它如果有中译本的话(据说已经组织翻译)，它将来的读者恐怕比《哥伦比亚美国文学史》译本的读者还要少。学术论文、博

1 只是《哥伦比亚美国文学史》里有两个章节初步介绍了"墨西哥裔美国文学"和包括华裔在内的"亚裔美国文学"。

士或硕士论文如果引用了有错误的译著或者译著中错译的段落，那将是一个很大的遗憾。荷马尚且有打瞌睡的时候，谁也不能保证译著不出现这样那样的失误。最保险的办法是读原著。外语教学与研究出版社有鉴于此，引进出版而不是组织翻译出版《哥伦比亚美国诗歌史》是明智的。它虽然不会是畅销书，但可以预料它必定是国内老中青学者喜爱的长销书。

杰伊·帕里尼现为米德尔伯里学院英文教授，曾获古根海姆奖，在牛津大学作过访问学者，出版有四卷本诗歌、五部小说、论西奥多·罗什克的专著、约翰·斯坦贝克和罗伯特·弗罗斯特的传记。他的《罗伯特·弗罗斯特传》(*Robert Frost: A Life*, 1999)曾获芝加哥论坛腹地奖(*Chicago Tribune* Heartland Prize)。他除了主编《哥伦比亚美国诗歌史》外，还主编了《诺顿美国自传文选》(*The Norton Book of American Autobiography*, 1999)，并为《哥伦比亚美国文学史》撰写了一个章节——"罗伯特·弗罗斯特"(Robert Frost)。

张子清

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Introduction

THE relationship between poetry and national culture is always an intimate if troubled one, and to a large extent what American poets have accomplished as a whole is a measure of what American culture itself has accomplished. One can track the evolution of a national consciousness in the poems, as American poets, who begin as English Metaphysical poets abroad, gradually test their own voices and learn ways to absorb and embody the vision—the outer and inner landscapes—that spread out before them.

As one might expect, the story of American poetry involves our struggle as a people to achieve a national identity. "Nationalism," says an African character in a novel by Raymond Williams, "is in this sense like class. To have it, and to feel it, is the only way to end it. If you fail to claim it, or give it up too soon, you will merely be cheated, by other classes and other nations." In an essay called "Nationalism: Irony and Commitment" (1990) Terry Eagleton notes that nationalism, like class, inevitably involves an impossible irony. "It is sometimes forgotten," he writes, "that social class, for Karl Marx at least, is itself a form of alienation, canceling the particularity of an individual life into collective anonymity." Marx separates himself from the usual liberal view here in his notion that to undo this alienation one has to go, not around class, but through it. The same might be said for nationalism: one must go through it, not around it, grasping all forms of national feeling (including alienation from the nation state or the national mood or ethos of a particular time or region, as in the war protest poetry of the 1960s).

The poet's job in such a context of national self-realization has always been to lay claim to a voice that reflects the genuineness and separateness of a particular culture. The poets seize the given day, giving a "local habitation and a name" to what otherwise remains ineluctable—ever more alien. While the ultimate goal, as Eagleton would argue, is to go "through" to some point beyond nationalism, to create a poetry reflecting not an "American" consciousness but something like a "human" consciousness, we must still go through every stage of nationalism as a culture, feel each stage fully, in order to transcend them.

Adrienne Rich, one of our most essential contemporary poets, has written about what she calls "the dream of a common language." In her terms this dream is deeply feminist, involving "women's struggle to name the world." She says, movingly, that "a whole new poetry is beginning here" in a poem called "Transcendental Etude." Although Rich might well object, I would generalize from these observations to suggest that in fact the struggle of American poetry from the beginning has been this dream of a common language, and that there has always been in our best poets a sense that a "whole new poetry is beginning here."

The Columbia History of American Poetry offers a fresh testament to this "whole new poetry." While poets in this country have been far removed from the most visible centers of political and even cultural power, their poems have consistently taken the measure of the culture as a whole. They have done so in remarkably different ways (although one might argue that superficial differences of style are as not as important as underlying drives and motives reflected in striking thematic consistencies).

As a quick perusal of this text will suggest, the stylistic range of American poetry is unusually broad. If anything, one hestitates even to refer to "an American style in poetry." A poet like Edward Taylor, for instance, looks very like an English Metaphysical poet of the seventeenth century "gone native," while many of our early African American poets seem to belong to the traditions of oral poetry that have roots in a variety of West African tribal cultures. More recently one can hardly imagine poets with styles as different as James Merrill and John Ashbery. Nevertheless, as so many of the chapters in this book suggest, the wish to speak for the American people at large—for them and to them—is always present in the American poet: a brave and bold

assumption that underlies each visionary project as it unfolds from Anne Bradstreet and Phyllis Wheatley to Adrienne Rich, Charles Wright, and Mary Oliver.

The reader will find in this collection a rich variety of responses to many different "traditions" of American poetry by some of our strongest critics. These chapters are arranged chronologically, and represent what the editors consider important aspects of American poetry. Nevertheless, each chapter should be taken as one critic's point of view: necessarily subjective, rooted in the critic's position in the evolution of the culture as a whole. The reader will discover a considerable variety of critical methods in this "history." The only thing we, as editors, have consistently discouraged is obscurity of language and the excessive use of critical jargon.

The achievement of two of our most well-known Puritan poets, Anne Bradstreet and Edward Taylor, is examined by Frank Murphy. Bradstreet, he says, "wrote the best American poems on human love before the middle of the nineteenth century." He finds "an openness in her writing that is directly related to her role as an understanding mother." Edward Taylor, her younger contemporary, was an Englishman who came to America as a young man in the seventeenth century and remained an English Metaphysical poet in temperament and style; his work recalls the poetry of Donne, Herbert, Quarles, and others. Like many of the Metaphysical poets, he was also a clergyman, serving a parish in the frontier town of Westfield, Massachusetts, until his retirement in 1725, when he wrote the last of his brilliant "Preparatory Meditations."

What is interesting is how important these early American poets, especially Bradstreet and Taylor, have been for twentieth-century poets. John Berryman, in *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet*, acknowledges his debt directly. Poets such as Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Adrienne Rich, and Anne Stevenson—each of whom in different ways has confronted the issue of motherhood in her work—can also be seen to have learned a great deal from their distant precursor. Poets as diverse as T. S. Eliot, Allen Tate, Hart Crane, John Crowe Ransom, and Robert Lowell are in debt to Edward Taylor—as Murphy suggests—for the style of meditative poetry that he brought to this continent from England and naturalized in his own powerful way.

One of the chief tasks of criticism in the past decades has been the recovery of lost traditions. Women and African Americans, in partic-

ular, have been occluded, pushed to the margins, forgotten. The reasons why this happened are complex and go beyond any simple formulations involving patriarchy and racism, although these are certainly the places to begin. North America was, first, a land of indigenous people turned imperial colony. A whole native population was "erased" in a collective act of genocide in which millions of native people suffered and died. A further "colonization" took place when African slaves were forceably brought to this country, and many more millions suffered and died. Meanwhile, poets worked—at the center of the culture and in the margins.

In her chapter on "Early African American Poetry" Carolivia Herron performs an act of cultural archaeology, reaching into the margins for the origins of what has become one of our strongest "traditions." More specifically, she locates the origins of contemporary African American "polyphonic poetry" in the lyrics attached to "field hollers, ring shouts, rudimentary work songs, and songs of familial entertainment in the early colonies of the Americas—in the North, in the South, and in the Caribbean." She points to early African American lyric poets such as Lucy Terry, Phyllis Wheatley, and Jupiter Hammon, and she discusses several epics by African American poets, such as "The Sentinel of Freedom" by John Sella Martin, an apocalyptic poem that prophesies a "second coming after the United States is swept clean from the corruption of slavery," and *Moses* by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, a popular abolitionist poet who turns Moses into a mulatto who "freely chooses to return to the aid of his enslaved people." Moving from Lucy Terry through Wheatley, Hammon, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Frances Harper, and others, Herron notes: "The end of the immediate political requirements of the Civil War gave African American poets the freedom to write on all human themes: racism and flowers, wars and love, lynching and childhood."

At the center of American poetry has been the obsession with the long poem: the poem equal in size, power, and scope to the growing power of the nation state as a whole. John McWilliams and Lynn Keller each took upon themselves the formidable task of confronting this American obsession. McWilliams examines the work of epic poets such as Joel Barlow, Timothy Dwight, Alfred Mitchell, and a dozen others, moving right up through Stephen Vincent Benét's once popular but now rarely acknowledged narrative poem, *John Brown's Body*, a poem

that addresses one of the critical moments in the history of the abolitionist movement. McWilliams wonders in the end if the "disappearance of *John Brown's Body* from public view . . . suggests that a narrative verse epic will lose its impact whenever a poet fabricates characters said to embody cultural legend."

Lynn Keller, in her answering chapter on the long poem in the twentieth century, argues that the "long poem is a central—even obsessive—form for twentieth-century American literature." She demonstrates the peculiarly "contestatory form" of the long poem in this century, looking at the major Modernist attempts to create the long poem, such as Pound's *Cantos* and *The Waste Land*, as well as some lesser known but no less powerful works, which include Melvin Tolson's *Harlem Gallery* and H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*. Keller's encyclopedic chapter takes the long poem right up to the present, looking at contemporary long poems by James Merrill, A. R. Ammons, and others; she locates "several characteristics that typify the varied and experimental history of the twentieth-century long poem: a liberating mixture of genres, an enlargement beyond the postromantic lyric's focus on a moment of subjective experience, and an accompanying exploration of social and historical materials, often in service to a fresh understanding of the self and its construction."

In the postcolonial era American poetry began to move in fresh directions, as the urge to overthrow the English political yoke moved from the literal cancellation of British imperial power to an attempt to embody this freedom imaginatively in something like a separate national voice. William Cullen Bryant was probably our first national poet in this sense; he published *Thanatopsis and Other Poems* in 1921, and it was greatly prized by readers of poetry through the nineteenth and early twentieth century as the first flowering of a distinctly American expression. One can still return to Bryant with pleasure, hearing in him the first cadence of a truly national literature, one that would embody the American voice in all its grainy particularity.

The same may be said for John Greenleaf Whittier. As Jeffrey Meyers notes in his chapter on Edgar Allan Poe, "When Poe came to maturity William Cullent Bryant and John Greenleaf Whittier were the leading American poets." It is interesting to note that Poe himself turned away from them, preferring instead the English Romantic poets. His *Poems* (1831) was an impressive volume for a young man (Poe was

twenty-two at the time, and this was already his third collection). This book signaled to the reading public an original genius, one who would receive world acclaim, though Poe's early verse does not have the mesmerizing power of the poems included in *The Raven and Other Poems* (1845). Ezra Pound, a founding father of Modernism, would eventually say that "no one who has tried to write like Poe . . . has done anything good." Nevertheless, the impact of Poe has lingered, as Meyers observes: "His extensive influence on later writers has been quite out of proportion to the extremely uneven quality of his hundred poems." He locates the source of Poe's strength in his appeal to "basic feelings" and his natural gravitation toward "universal themes common to everyone in every language: dreams, love, loss; grief, mourning, alienation; terror and insanity, disease and death."

Poe was immensely popular in his own time, and he remains so. This cannot be said for Henry Wadsworth Longellow, who became the most widely admired poet of nineteenth-century America but whose work is now infrequently read and rarely studied. Dana Gioia, however, makes a compelling case here for Longfellow as the most talented of the Fireside poets, a group that includes Bryant, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and James Russell Lowell. Gioia looks in particular at Longfellow's narrative poems: *Evangeline* (1847), *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855), *The Courtship of Miles Standish* (1858), and *Tales of a Wayside Inn* (1863–1873). "These were the poems that earned him a preeminent position among his contemporaries," Gioia writes. "They were also the works most utterly rejected by Modernism." Much of Gioia's chapter is concerned with the issue of Longfellow in the postmodern age, concluding that the task for American poetry is "not to reject Modernism, which was our poetry's greatest period, but to correct its blindspots and biases." Furthermore, he argues, a "reevaluation of Longfellow will be an important part of this enterprise."

For modern and postmodern poets Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman might be considered the most profoundly generative voices. As poet, this is more true of Whitman than Emerson, yet Emerson has probably had more influence on American thinking in general than anyone else. In an essay called "Emerson: The American Religion" (published in a collection called *Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism* in 1982), Harold Bloom makes the case for Emerson's priority:

The lengthened shadow of our American culture is Emerson's, and Emerson indeed saw everything in everything, and spoke with the tongue of a daemon. His truest achievement was to invent the American religion. . . . Starting from Emerson we came to where we are, and from that impasse, which he prophesied, we will go by a path that most likely he marked out also. The mind of Emerson is the mind of America.

This "American religion" is self-reliance, not in any common sense but as reliance on the alien God within us. Bloom writes: "*Self*-reliance . . . is the religion that celebrates and reveres what in the self is before the Creation, a whatness which from the perspective of religious orthodoxy can only be the primal Abyss." In his chapter on Emerson and other poets of the Transcendental movement Lawrence Buell examines Emerson's major poems carefully in relation to the gnostic urge toward self-definition in the face of the abyss that Bloom cites. "More often than not," says Buell, "the development of the subjective mood in Transcendentalist poetry expresses loss or lack of self-integration."

That vulnerability, for instance, is expressed in "Days," one of Emerson's finest poems:

> Daughters of Time, the hypocritic Days,
> Muffled and dumb like barefoot dervishes,
> And marching single in an endless file,
> Bring diadems and fagots in their hands.
> To each they offer gifts after his will,
> Bread, kingdoms, stars, and sky that holds them all.
> I, in my pleached garden, watched the pomp,
> Forget my morning wishes, hastily
> Took a few herbs and apples, and the Day
> Turned and departed silent. I, too late,
> Under her solemn fillet saw the scorn.

This memorable poem reenacts the Blakean myth of the fall into individuality, and thus frames what begins to emerge in Emerson as a central conflict in American poetry: the self versus the abyss, a dialectic later characterized explicitly by Edward Arlington Robinson in his poem "Man Against the Sky" and by Wallace Stevens in his "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," where he writes: "Soldier, there is a war between the mind / And sky, between thought and day and night."

Late in life, in the winter of 1866 Emerson noted in his journal that "for every seeing soul there are two absorbing facts,—*I and the Abyss.*" But his poetry from the first was a formal meditation on this crucial dialectic, and the work of fellow Transcendentalist poets such as William Ellery Channing, Christopher Pearse Cranch, and Jones Very continues the Emersonian project of working through this dialectic. For the most part, as Buell notes, the Transcendentalists preferred tight poetic forms, a sense of what he calls "liberty-within-restraint," and he cites their influence on such later poets as Robinson, Frost, Bishop, and Wilbur. In a startling conclusion Buell suggests a major revision of our notion of American poesis. He would review the whole of American poetry in the light of what he calls "a transatlantic Anglophone community almost as interlinked in the nineteenth century as in the High Modernist era." In his narrative of American poetic development he eschews "the autochthonous myth of American poetic history that winds up dancing around a selective version of Whitman, fathered perhaps by an even more selective version of Emerson." Transcendentalist poetry must not, Buell suggest, merely be seen as a "proto-Whitmanian artifact." In effect, Transcendentalism becomes part and parcel of the larger movement from Puritan meditative poetry to Frost, Moore, Bishop, and many of our best contemporary poets.

Even a cursory reading of the chapters gathered in this *Columbia History* will reveal the centrality of Whitman, who has been and remains our most influential poet. We must all, as poets and readers of poetry, "make a pact," as Pound says, with Whitman, and many books have been written about the attempts by some of our best poets to come to terms with Whitman's expansive visionary challenge to posterity. Listen, for a moment, to Whitman's unmistakable voice:

> As Adam early in the morning
> Walking forth from the bower refresh'd with sleep,
> Behold me where I pass, hear my voice, approach,
> Touch me, touch the palm of your hand to my body as I pass,
> Be not afraid of my body.

This poem leads directly to the solitary singer by the sea in Wallace Stevens' majestic "Idea of Order at Key West" via Hart Crane's invocation of Whitman in the "Cape Hatteras" section of *The Bridge*, where he writes:

> O Walt!—Ascensions of thee hover in me now
> As thou at junctions elegiac, there, of speed,
> With vast eternity, dost wield the rebound seed!

Likewise, Theodore Roethke, in a moment of crisis in a late poem, calls out with piercing directness: "Be with me, Whitman, maker of catalogues!" More recently, one hears the Whitmanian note vividly reborn in Mary Oliver's astonishing "When Death Comes," where she considers what it will be like when one has stepped through the door of life into the eternal night of death:

> I want to step through the door full of curiosity, wondering:
> what is it going to be like, that cottage of darkness?
>
> And therefore I look upon everything
> as a brotherhood and a sisterhood,
> and I look upon time as no more than an idea,
> and I consider eternity as another possibility,
>
> and I think of each life as a flower, as common
> as a field daisy, as singular,
> and each name a comfortable music in the mouth,
> tending, as all music does, toward silence,
>
> and each body a lion of courage, and something
> precious to the earth.

One can hardly imagine our debt, as a culture, to Walt Whitman, who was able to summon a vision as defiantly idiosyncratic yet as thoroughly central and representative as any in the history of our poetry. He did it in *Leaves of Grass,* his lifetime project, which is discussed and alluded to by a dozen different critics in this book. And Whitman is the primary focus of Donald E. Pease's chapter, which surveys the whole of this poet's career, moving chronologically through the major poems of *Leaves of Grass*. Pease begins with Ezra Pound's famous homage to Whitman called "A Pact." In this poem Pound recognizes Whitman as the true father of American poetry, the poet who broke new ground and found a voice equal to the vast new continent that it celebrated. Pease sees Whitman as a radical democrat whose inclusive vision of an American future repositions the Emersonian dialectic as not just self versus the abyss but *included* versus *excluded* figures. He identifies the Whitmanian project as one that cleverly absorbs, even appropriates, the reader in an ongoing and