

Rafael Bernabe, *Walt Whitman and His Caribbean Interlocutors: José Martí, C.L.R. James, and Pedro Mir: Song and Countersong*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2022. 293 pp. (Paper US\$ 28.00)

*Walt Whitman and His Caribbean Interlocutors* is an important book that explores the writings of Whitman (1819–92) and three Caribbean authors who engaged with them: Cuban poet, essayist, and revolutionary José Martí (1853–95), Trinidadian activist, historian, and cultural critic C.L.R. James (1901–89), and Dominican poet Pedro Mir (1913–2000). Whitman and these “interlocutors” are skillfully discussed from a Marxist point of view in terms of the contradictions of capitalist modernity exemplified by the United States. The author, Rafael Bernabe, is a long-time Puerto Rican socialist, activist, and politician, as well as a highly regarded historian, sociologist, and professor. He ran twice for governor of Puerto Rico as candidate of the Working People’s Party, and in 2020 he was elected as an at-large member of the Puerto Rican Senate. He has published numerous works on Puerto Rican history, culture, and politics, including, with César Ayala, *Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History since 1898* (2007).

Bernabe uses Marxism to frame his discussion of each individual author, with close attention to Martí’s, James’s, and Mir’s responses to Whitman. This robust, well-researched work is completely in line with the leftist mission of its publisher, which is to issue “books that contribute to struggles for social and economic justice ... [serving as] a vibrant and organic part of social movements and the education and development of a critical, engaged, international left.” Bernabe states that he is a Marxist on the book’s first page. He reads Whitman against Marx and thus calls him “the poet of an expanding capitalist economy, of the rise of modern industry and of the formation of a capitalist world market.” At the same time, he views them both as “two prophets of modernity, of modernity as such, and, thus, of ourselves” (p. 1). He recognizes the affinities between Marx and Whitman, who was sympathetic to the socialist movements of 1848, critical of the rich and powerful, and always a champion of the proletariat.

Following Bernabe’s introduction, the book contains 11 chapters. The first five explore celebrations of the modern in the works of Marx and Whitman, “singers of the world created by capital” (p. 51). They examine these authors’ critique of modernity and the alternatives they envisioned. The rest of the book focuses on the interlocutors. Chapter 6 examines Martí’s reading of Whitman in terms of the Cuban’s celebration and critique of an emergent modernity in late nineteenth-century America, which he observed firsthand as an exile living for over a decade in New York City. Chapters 7 through 9 examine how Whit-

man and Martí contended with the contradictions they detected in the modern world. Chapter 10 analyzes James's reading of Whitman, and it addresses the Trinidadian's conception of American history presented in his *American Civilization* (published posthumously) and in his work on *Moby Dick*.

The book's final chapter examines Mir's poetic tribute and response to Whitman, "Countersong to Walt Whitman (Song of Ourselves)," which belongs to the longstanding tradition of Latin American poets addressing Whitman—initiated by Martí with the publication of his essay "El poeta Walt Whitman" (1887), which was based on his attendance at Whitman's last public appearance. One quibble here, not of great consequence: Bernabe's discussion of the poem's English translation is limited by his use of the text that appeared in the early edition of *Countersong to Walt Whitman and Other Poems* that was published by Azul Editions in 1993. The more recent edition, published by Peepal Tree Press in early 2018 as Bernabe was evidently preparing his book for publication, includes a revised translation. For instance, Bernabe rightfully criticizes the early rendering of a refrain using the Spanish pronoun *nosotros* (we, us, ourselves) as "we the people" (p. 91). He rejects the phrase's "specific historical and political association with the U.S. Constitution that the text does not warrant" (p. 253). The revised translation uses the more literal "ourselves" (p. 109). Of course, translations are never finished, only abandoned.

While there are countless books and articles about Whitman, Bernabe's brilliant book offers new insights through its Marxist lens on the bard's work and ideas. It productively uses the writings of Martí, James, and Mir to imagine the conversation between Marx and Whitman, providing deep explorations of how they read Whitman. Indeed, it sheds new critical light not only on their writings and Whitman's magnum opus *Leaves of Grass*, but also on relations between the United States and the cultures of its Caribbean neighbors.

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