

## “WHITMAN AND THE WORLD”

It has often been remarked that Walt Whitman and his works have been absorbed more affectionately by the rest of the world than he has been by his own country. In France, China, the Soviet Union, and many South American countries, he is regarded as the spokesman for that romantic impulse through which the individual self declares its liberty, or (somewhat paradoxically) affirms its solidarity with its comrades, regardless of time, race, or national identity. How do we explain Whitman's international appeal, and what can we learn from it about the way the rest of the world regards us?

These questions lay behind the first international conference, “Whitman and the World,” organized by the Whitman Studies Program at Rutgers University on November 21, 1986. Sponsored by the Walt Whitman Association and the New Jersey Department of Higher Education, the conference brought together over 300 teachers, students, and friends of Whitman to celebrate the establishment of Camden as a center for the study of Whitman and his tradition. The conference was organized by Professors David S. Reynolds and Geoffrey Sill of Rutgers University in Camden, and coordinated by Ms. Denise Buzz. Six of the conference papers—by Professors Reynolds, Kenneth Price, Walter Grünzweig, Yassen Zassoursky, Xilao Li, and Alexander Coleman—are included in this volume. To this collection were added talks given by Gay Wilson Allen and Roger Asselineau at a special session, also called “Whitman and the World,” at the Modern Language Association Convention in New York in December 1986, organized by Professor Reynolds.

In keeping with the purpose of *The Mickle Street Review*—that is, to initiate a dialogue between students and contemporary writers in the Whitman tradition—this issue also includes works by four poets who reflect on the ways America is viewed by other cultures, or who attempt to understand those cultures on their own terms. While making no explicit reference to Whitman, the poems testify that the Whitmanic pose is still a vital instrument for communication between Americans and the world.

G.M.S.