America's mythic bard good for summer reading

With the solstice coming and the summer days following in hot and probably somewhat wet pursuit, it's a good time to get reacquainted with, or begin exploring, the life and words of the mythic and real American bard, Walt Whitman.

Whitman's intense, erotic, comprehensive vision of America and democracy can be enjoyed through his Complete Poetry and Collected Prose (The Library of America, 1982) which, under Justin Kaplan's editorship, is the most complete single volume of his work published. Along with the final versions of "Leaves of Grass" and the "Complete Prose Works," this edition contains the raw and wonderful text of the first, selfpublished, 1855 version of "Leaves of Grass" and a section of "Supplementary

And it's a beautiful book materially. The semi-flexible binding is made of unfinished rayon imported from Holland. The 1,380 thin, opaque, acid-free pages, full of eye-pleasing typography, are sewn together. The book is guaranteed to last 500 years, so it can be handed down to relatives and friends. The Library of America, of which this volume is a part, is a large project publishing many important American writers in quality, definitive, reasonably priced editions.

Kaplan's biography, Walt Whitman: A Life (Simon and Schuster, 1980), is now available in paperback. Its lucid, flowing prose comfortably carries many fascinating details of the poet's unique life-journey. Whitman's enigmatic self was borne by the mysterious relationship between human conflict and creativity.

This self was a double and paradoxical one whose conflicts were essential for its artistic evolution, as Paul Zweig, poet and scholar, shows in his just published study of the poet's formative years, Walt Whitman: The Making of the Poet (Basic

Among the many influences on Whit-

man's discovery of a new poetry was his background as a newspaper man. "As a poet, he transposed the idiom of the contemporary newspaper - its broad miscellaneous esthetic, if I may so call it - into a new tone and a new form," writes Zweig.

All three books make good reading for

times coming. Alfred Gross

The Friday Edition has moved through its first season unscathed. All contributors, editorial and otherwise, are invited to celebrate. Check the Emerald office for details.



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