

Whitman's Catalog Imagery in "Song of Myself"

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ABSTRACT

Walt Whitman is recognized by most authorities as one of the greatest of American poets. His most important poem is "Song of Myself." The sheer length of the poem sets it apart from most other works; it is over 1300 lines long. Critics have been impressed by the richness of Whitman's language and imagery. The poem is divided into fifty-two sections and a number of these contain his catalogs; these vary in length from a modest fifteen lines (Section 8), to a grand catalog of over one hundred and sixty lines (Section 33). Catalogs as a poetic device are not new; however, Whitman's use of them to demonstrate the essential unity of the universe amid its seeming endless diversity was unique. Three catalog sections form the subject of this paper: 8, 15 and 33. Together they display a progression of imagery which moves from a depiction of everyday American scenes, in Section 8, to Section 33, where the poet's images become markedly heterogeneous and his imagination takes flight, "speeding through space" and even altering time itself as he says, "I am the clock myself." In reading the catalogs, one is swept along as the cornucopia of images accumulate; some critics have compared the experience to watching a film. Whitman has been seen as a uniquely American poet. However, while many of his images depict the American landscape and people, in the final analysis he transcends his time and nation. People all over the world respond to his verse because it speaks directly to their hearts. It is his wider humanity that raises him to the level of a world poet. The goal of this paper is to serve as an introduction to an important part of Whitman's verse and to the poet himself.

"I am large, I contain multitudes."

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1. "Song of Myself" and "Leaves of Grass"

Leaves of Grass, published by Whitman himself in July of 1855 in an edition of less than 800 copies, was a slim volume containing twelve untitled poems. The first and longest poem was not given the title *Song of Myself* until the 1881 edition; in the edition of 1856 it was *Poem of Walt Whitman, An American*; and in the 1860 edition, simply *Walt Whitman*.

Song of Myself is widely considered to be "Whitman's best poem and (it) contains in essence nearly all, yet not quite all, there is to 'Leaves of Grass' " (Chase 1955 in Clarke 2:223). It is the epitome of his verse and his thought in that it is "the quintessence of "Leaves of Grass": one can find in it all the themes, the profound with the simple, contained in Whitman's poetry" (Pavese 1951 in Clarke 3:202).

The remaining eleven poems in **Leaves of Grass** were, in later editions, given the following titles: *A Song for Occupations, To Think of Time, The Sleepers, I Sing the Body Electric, Faces, Song of the Answerer, Europe, The 72d and 73d Years of These States, A Boston Ballad, There Was a Child Went Forth, Who Learns My Lesson Complete* and *Great Are the Myths*.

In the later editions (there were eventually eight), of **Leaves of Grass**, more poems would be successively added and amended until the book contained over 380 poems. In each subsequent edition Whitman's addition of new poems and alterations of existing ones became an evolutionary process of growth that he saw as a reflection of the processes of nature. Allen observes that Whitman's major ambition in **Leaves of Grass** was to "symbolize in his poems the nature of the universe itself and the relation of the 'self' to it, embodying this relationship in a style analogous to the processes of natural development, and permitting the work to grow with his own cumulative experience like a plant or a tree—a miniature image of pantheistic and cosmic evolution (in Clarke 4:249).

Though *Song of Myself* is considered central to **Leaves of Grass** and "the best example of Whitman's literary technique and world view" (Bauerlein 1991 in Clarke 2:345), the relationship of *Song of Myself* to the other poems is not hierarchical:

.... Whitman never thought of "Song of Myself" or any other of his poems as presiding over or holding the key to the rest of the Leaves. Not wishing to view 'Leaves of Grass' as a compilation of discrete units of verse, each with its own beginning, middle and end, Whitman always speaks of his volume as an organic whole....

(ibid. 2:344)

The poems in the 1855 edition were on a variety of themes, but "what consolidates disparities and contradictions between and within individual poems, he says, is his fundamental intention in creating 'Leaves of Grass,' what he loosely calls 'the one deep purpose...the religious purpose' " (ibid.). In the poem *Starting From Paumanok*, Whitman says:

My Comrade!

*For you to share with me two greatnesses, and a third one rising inclusive and more resplendent
The greatness of Love and Democracy, and the greatness of Religion.*

Verses like these echo passages from the Book of Common Prayer and the King James version of the Bible, both of which Whitman was familiar with. Compare the above with this verse from Corinthians ch.13, v.1:

And now abideth faith, hope and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

"Charity" can be understood to mean love. While the structure of biblical verse and the thought in the Bible influenced Whitman, various other influences helped form his ethos:

This was an extraordinarily fertile period in American religion, as the antimonian spirit unleashed by the Second Great Awakening led to the formation of several new denominations and sects, including Mormonism and various brands of millennialism. Whitman, who called 'Leaves of Grass' "the new Bible" and said he wished to "inaugurate a new religion" shared in this new creative spirit. His 'religion' owed much to...science, religious and philosophical authors he was reading, and particularly to the interrelated movements of spiritualism, Swedenborgianism, and Harmonialism.

(Reynolds 1995:236)

Accordingly, "religion" for him meant not necessarily organized religion but the divinity he perceived in all created things and, specifically, the universal religious impulse in man. Even his conception of democracy is perhaps more religious or spiritual than it is political; he speaks of, for example, "the cosmic equality of all souls." At the same time, he also stressed "the divinity of the self," and the oneness of all souls in "a complete unity in a common immortality" (Allen 1946 in Clarke 2: 254). Early in this century, one critic saw Whitman's verse as a celebration of "above all other things Religion, but it is a religion without God (though it often uses his name), and without any creed or with all creeds indifferently...His Religion, in fact, means simply the cultivation of truth and nobleness and human fellowship, and has nothing to do with dogmas. He is deeply convinced of the immortality of the human Soul...." (Thompson 1910 in Clarke 3:80).

In his youth, Whitman also had experience with other religions like Quakerism, so that "the religion of his poetry would be ecumenical, naming and embracing many religions without lending absolute credence to any single one" (Reynolds 1995:36). While Whitman had great faith in God, he had little faith in religious creeds; as Karl Shapiro says, "I feel that the fundamental religiosity of Whitman plus the contempt for religion is American" (1960 in Clarke 3:231).

Deism also influenced his world view. Deism's toleration of other religious systems was characteristically American and also stressed man's divinity; his experience with Quakerism (already noted, also early on) probably reinforced his open-minded and free-thinking tendencies and his mystical outlook. The combination of these two created a powerful early influence: "The pan-religious quality of Deism

and the democratic emphasis of Quakerism made an explosive, liberating combination for the young Walt" (Reynolds 1995:39). Both "claimed to be religious but had nothing to do with church or creed" (ibid.). Later another "-ism" would become part of Whitman's belief system; in Transcendentalism he would find further justification for his pervasive belief in man's divinity.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, one of the leading lights of New England Transcendentalism, taught that we are one with Nature and that we can intuit spiritual and metaphysical truths because this is so. Further, through introspection, self-knowledge and the use of reason, it is possible for all men to realize these truths, therefore rendering reliance on religious texts and institutions unnecessary. While Whitman denied twice that Emerson had any influence on his poetry, his remark that "I was simmering, simmering, simmering; Emerson brought me to a boil" (ibid.) arguably shows that Transcendentalism was of some influence in his thinking. Further, Whitman was a great reader and it is highly likely that he read most of what Emerson wrote. Also, he visited him a number of times and they had long walks and talks together.

In his social and moral views, as well as his spiritual orientation, Whitman embodied many essential American traits, and he was conscious and proud of being an American bard; however, ultimately he is a world figure. Henry Miller was of the opinion that "America has never really understood Whitman, or accepted him, America has exalted Lincoln, a lesser figure...I maintain most stoutly that Whitman's outlook is not American, and more than it is Chinese, Hindu or European. It is the unique view of the emancipated individual, expressed in the broadest American idiom, understandable to men of all languages" (1962 in Clarke 3:237). What men of all languages understand in Whitman is his ability to give voice to the shared feelings, desires and hopes of people everywhere.

His concern with the human spirit naturally led him to ponder the dialectical relationship of the individual soul to God or a universal oversoul. This was one of the great themes of his poetry. On a more mundane but parallel level, he was concerned with the relationship of the individual person to society. These twin concerns inform much of his work so that awareness of their importance in his writing is important to a balanced understanding of his thought. In addition, his personalism (his own term), led him to see the individual as essential in any successful democratic society and the individual soul as integral to any religious or spiritual system of beliefs.

Beyond this, Whitman's poetics in *Song of Myself* were tri-dimensional. He sought through his poem: "to improve and transform life (the poet as maker and reformer); to discern and set forth its miraculousness (the poet as celebrator); and to sing the transcendence of human love, envisioned as divine (the poet as lover)" (Bradley and Blodgett 1973:xxxiii).

1.1 The Quest for Structure

Song of Myself is 1336 long lines divided into fifty-two sections. These sections have also been called by various Whitman scholars, *paragraphs*, *chants*, *poems*, or *clusters*. Some have suggested that such a partitioning may allude to the yearly cycle of weeks. These sections are problematic for some readers in that "there is no fixed rational or affective scheme whereby we may decide that a given

section should or should not have begun where it begins and ended where it ends, or contain what it contains. It is this formal difficulty which has most often disturbed readers of Whitman" (Pearce 1961 in Clarke 2:250). However, if the reader approaches the poem without preconceptions, this need not hinder appreciation; Whitman intended that the poem be unstructured; he felt that movement and flow were the key elements: "Such a poetry aimed at release and reintegration. Totally process, it could, as Whitman himself has said, have no proper beginning or ending. It could have no form bound by necessities of any sort. Its greatness would lie in its resistance to that formalization which, as it was fatal to man, would also be fatal to poetry" (ibid.:251). Reynolds (1995) observes that "The poem as a whole follows no discernible pattern" and any attempt to impose one on the poem is a largely futile effort to make it manageable to the understanding or to make the poem fit individual preconceptions of what it should be:

There have been nearly twenty different descriptions of a 'structure' of "Song of Myself," most of them centered on the development of the private self, but these varying, sometimes contradictory explanations are Procrustean efforts to impose order on a poem whose free form is one of its main rhetorical points.

(Reynolds 1995:325)

Because it is a process poem or a poem of becoming, it is perhaps more fruitful to approach it transactionally. Railton emphasizes that:

"Song of Myself" is not a poem about "what happened"; instead, the poem itself, like any performance, is what is happening as it is being read. That is the when of the poem: the "this day and night" the reader spends with the poet, reading the poem (1855,26). The dramatically charged space between Whitman and the reader is the where of the poem. The poem doesn't have a plot; it is a plot—it is organized around the reader, whose assumptions Whitman seeks to make over in his own image. Looking at "Song of Myself" for its structural design....will continue to frustrate readers because its design is essentially outward-looking, rhetorical, strategic.

(in Greenspan 1995:9)

The musical nature of the poem has been frequently commented upon, with some finding a symphonic structure exhibiting a "musical logic, a pattern of symbolic structure and a progression of emotional intensification that culminates in a genuine climax and denouement" (Allen and Wilson 1955 in Clarke 4:326). Whitman was a great music lover, especially of Italian opera, and he himself has said that were it not for opera, he would not have known how to write **Leaves of Grass**. His method of writing has also been described musically, he "strung his poems together on a free melodic line and by means of motifs, voices, recapitulations, rests, crescendi and diminuendi" (Chase 1955 in Clarke 2:227). John Berryman, the poet, felt the poem has four symphonic movements. In the structure proposed by Berryman, the Roman numbers designate the movements and the Arabic numbers the 52 sections:

I 1-5: "Double invitation from 'I,' or the human body to the human soul and from 'I,' or the poet, to the reader";

II 6-9: "concerned after this prelude of the grass and death, with 'I's' identification *outward*";

III 20-38: the theme is "Being, 'What is man anyhow?' [20:390], "to which there are two series of answers...of the Self and "not of the Self":

IV 39-52: "addressed to his 'Eleves'—disciples—"lovers of me" Whitman gradually withdraws.

(in Miller 1989:xxi)

One more example of the organizational schemes proposed for the poem is that of Malcolm Crowley, who sees "an irreversible order, like the beginning, middle and end of any good narrative." He divides the poem into nine "sequences":

I 1-4: "the poet or hero introduced to his audience...He is also in love with his deeper self or soul, but explains that it is not to be confused with mere personality";

II 5: "the ecstasy...the rapt union of the poet and his soul,... described—figuratively, on the present occasion—in terms of sexual union";

III 6-19: the grass, "symbolizing the miracle of common things and the divinity...of ordinary persons";

IV 20-25: "the poet in person...he venerates himself as august and immortal, but so...is everyone else";

V 26-29: "ecstasy through the senses...With the sense of touch, [the poet] finds himself rising to the ecstasy of sexual union";

VI 30-38: "the power of identification...with every object and with every person living of dead, heroic or criminal";

VII 39-41: "the superman";

VIII 51-52: "the poet's farewell."

(ibid.)

Most other structural schemes posit from five to a maximum of nine larger divisions or segments that vary according to the ideological or philosophical inclination of the critic, among these are approaches emphasizing Freudian psychological analysis, mysticism and the Self, the Self in the world, nineteenth-century American social forces, and even a "five-act comic drama" (ibid.:xxvii). Miller concludes:

Doubtless partitive structures will continue to appear, but there can be few substantial rearrangements so long as critics continue to emphasize the significance and resonances of the following sections: 1, 5, 6, 24-25, 28-29, 33-38, 39, 50-52. Yet it is only Whitmanesque to believe that in the future a reader will uncover, no doubt by happy accident, patterns embedded in the rich details of the mosaic that at last produce the harmonious consensus that has eluded generations of reader-lovers.

(ibid.: xxviii)

While many readers have been perplexed by the lack of conventional structure, Pearce points out

the importance of the poem **not** having a structure: "Most students of 'Song of Myself' have wished to find in it some strong structural principle. It is as though they would measure it by such dialectically unifying standards and forms as those which Whitman strove to transcend...it was necessary for the success of the poem that it in no way be externally or generically structured" (1961 *ibid.*:248-249). As noted earlier, most central to any understanding of the poem is the idea that it is "more a process than a form" (*ibid.*). This is also reflected in the way he composed the poem. Whitman wrote the poem over a relatively long period of time, in discrete segments, which were later arranged and pieced together, like a mosaic.

Along with the attempts to see a structure in the poem, there is also the large variety of interpretations of the theme of *Song of Myself*. It appears that the poem is rather like a mirror: each reader finds his or her Self reflected in the poem. In 1900, an Englishman, Edmund Gosse, insightfully commented that Whitman's poem "is literature in the condition of protoplasm" in which the reader is "immediately confronted with his own image stamped upon that viscid and tenuous surface. He finds, not what Whitman has to give, but what he himself has brought" (*ibid.* 97-98).

Interpretations of theme and concepts of structure may differ among critics, but one feature that almost all readers agree on is the richness and heterogeneity, the sheer variety of features in the poem. Whitman created:

a fantastic world...an extraordinary collection of small imagist poems, versified short stories, realistic urban and rural genre paintings, inventories, homilies, philosophizings, farcical episodes, confessions, and lyric musings....

(Chase 1955 in Clarke 2:225)

Perhaps, in the end, it is unnecessary to analyze or see a structure in Whitman's work. Efforts to do so are rendered largely meaningless because of the unique nature of his poetics. Randall Jarrell's estimation of Whitman's gifts is of importance because it imparts a perspective that perhaps comes closer than many others to the truth that Whitman transcends conventional poetic standards:

They might have put on his tombstone WALT WHITMAN: HE HAD HIS NERVE. He is the rashest, the most inexplicable and unlikely—the most impossible, one wants to say—of poets. He somehow is in a class by himself, so that one compares him with other poets about as readily as one compares **Alice** with other books. (Even his free verse has a completely different effect from anybody else's.) Who would think of comparing him with Tennyson or Browning or Arnold or Baudelaire?—it is Homer, or the sagas, or something far away and long ago, that comes to one's mind only to be dismissed; for sometimes Whitman is epic, just as **Moby Dick** is, and it surprises us to be able to use truthfully this word that we have misused so many times. Whitman is grand, and elevated, and comprehensive and real with an astonishing reality, and many other things—the critic points at his qualities in despair and wonder, all method failing, and simply calls them by their names. And the range of these qualities is the most extraordinary thing of all. We can surely say about him, "He was a man, take him for all in all. I shall not look upon his like

again"—and wish that people had seen this and not tried to be his like: one Whitman is miracle enough, and when he comes again it will be the end of the world.

(1953 in Clarke 3:194)

2. Introduction: "I CELEBRATE myself"

The first five lines of the poem are here treated at some length by way of introduction to the work and to the poet himself. These first two stanzas also contain much of what is central to Whitman's purpose in *Song of Myself*. Greenspan proposes that the opening words of any poem are of special importance because they immediately commit a writer "to many of the important choices that he or she has to make with regard to tone, diction, and content..." (1995:94). The following lines can therefore be seen as a paradigm of the poem as a whole:

*I CELEBRATE myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.*

*I loafe and invite my soul,
I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.*

This is perhaps one of the most famous opening sequences in any poem, and surely the most famous in a poem by an American. "I CELEBRATE myself, and sing myself," echoes the beginning of Virgil's *Aeneid*: "I sing of warfare and a man of war." Whitman apparently had in mind an American epic when he began this way. The first verb used in this opening poem in *Leaves of Grass* is of special significance because it is "one of the fundamental concept terms in Whitman's poetry generally: his poetry articulated and performed a celebration of life" (Greenspan 1995:2).

However, Whitman was immediately criticized for his use of the two personal pronouns before and after "CELEBRATE": "contemporary and later critics of hostile persuasion were to censure the egotism," notes E.H. Miller (1989:45). But G.K. Chesterton, a Whitman admirer, suggested in 1904 that "the egotism of which men accuse him is that sense of human divinity which no one has felt since Christ" (in Clarke 3:56). There is really no reason to have to forgive Whitman his egotism because his concerns were for others. In fact, the second-person pronoun "you" is of greater importance in his aesthetic than the poetic "I". It is an interesting and significant fact that both this stanza and *Song of Myself* begin with the first-person pronoun "I" and end with the second-person pronoun "you". Moreover, "The 'I' of his lyrics was...from the beginning symbolical. Of course he had to draw upon his own experience... [but] 'expressing' himself was secondary in importance to his creating a form for the expression of a more universal experience in which his finite life was only an interlude" (Allen and Davis in Clarke 4:357). His apparent egotism, in John Updike's view, is more a matter of historical circumstance. It was:

the exultant egotism which only an American could have voiced. By mid-nineteenth century the creed of American individualism was ascendant:...our political institutions and our

still-vast unexplored territories permitted the enterprising individual an illusion of unlimited importance and sublime potential...

(1983:109)

The promise of potential power that Americans felt in the 1850's may have been of some consequence in inspiring Whitman's egotism but the majority of contemporary and later critics agree that "The author is but a type...what he says of himself he says of all mankind" (Carpenter 1909 in Clarke 1:107). Another 19th Century English reviewer felt that the poem "seems to resolve itself into an all-attracting egotism—... yet in such wise that this one soul shall be presented as a type of all human souls whatsoever" (ibid.:111). Further, an important qualification to this seeming egotism is that it is "suffused and tempered with a strenuous empathy" (ibid.). This quality in Whitman, the ability to identify with, and therefore comprehend, the 'other,' to empathize with other human souls, in fact, to project his consciousness into all forms in the natural world and somehow thereby 'understand' them, is one his most central traits as a poet and a person. He is therefore celebrating his individual being and through empathic projection, all beings and all creation:

His works show Whitman's ability to lose his personality in that of the object or objects under contemplation. In addition, he was able to put himself in the 'other man's place' as few men have been able to do.

(Cook in Clarke 2:261)

The lines that follow and temper the first line, "And what I assume you shall assume/For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you" have been interpreted as Whitman "actually offering to share every atom of himself with us" (Thomas 1987:41). While this is difficult to imagine, these three lines can also be understood as Whitman stating a paradox:

Both politically and by nature man has 'identity,' in two senses of the word: on the one hand, he is integral to himself, unique, and separate; on the other hand, he is equal to, or even the same as, everyone else. Like the Concord Transcendentalists, Whitman was easily led, in prophetic moods to generalize the second term of the paradox of identity beyond the merely human world and with his ruthless equalitarianism to conceive the All, a vast cosmic democracy....

(Chase 1955 in Clarke 2:225)

Whitman's interest in science was also an influence on the ideas he presents in the poem. He noted in the Preface to **Leaves of Grass** that "Exact science and its practical movements are no checks on the greatest poet but always his encouragement and support....In the beauty of poems are the tuft and final applause of science." Allen emphasizes that Whitman "drew simultaneously upon both mysticism and science...." (1955 in Bradley and Blodgett:895). This was not such an unusual mix as it might at first appear; what he sought to do through this synthesis was "to give the physical facts and theories spiritual and poetic connotations" (Allen 1946 in Clarke 2:256).

Justus Liebig, a pioneer in agricultural chemistry, published in 1847 *Chemistry and Its Applications*

to *Physiology and Agriculture* which Whitman reviewed as editor of *The Brooklyn Eagle*. Whitman in his review of the book wrote, "Chemistry! The elevating, beautiful, study....which involves the essences of creation, and the changes, and the growths, and the formations and decays of so large a constituent part of the earth...." (Reynolds 1989:240). There seemed to Whitman to be a "democratic exchange of substances in nature. Just as Liebig wrote that 'the active state of the atoms of one body has an influence upon the atoms of a body in contact with it,' so Whitman announced in the second line of his opening poem that 'every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you' " (ibid.).

The relationship of the personal pronouns 'I' and 'you' in the opening lines immediately draws the reader into the poem as a participant in creating meaning; by crossing the gap between the poet and the reader, Whitman offers to share the process of the poem. R.W.B. Lewis has said in this context that what is required is "the creative participation of each reader—" and Whitman has said, "I round and finish little, the reader will always have his or her part to do, just as much as I have had mine" (1965 in Bloom: 106).

While Whitman counted on the reader to participate in creating meaning in his poems, his relationship to his prospective audience was not assured because, while he intended his poems for the mass of Americans, he could only hope (largely in vain as it turned out) that his work would reach a large audience. It is ironic that his poems were most appreciated by the intelligensia, while poets like Wordsworth found a place on the humble bookshelves of many a workingman. His poetry was ignored and this hurt him deeply; the writing itself required of him "an act of faith, faith that a real 'you' existed somewhere" that he could reach. The last line of the poem is:

I stop somewhere waiting for you.

Whitman's feeling for the idealized reader was carried beyond the traditional 19th Century "Dear Reader" formula. And while he addressed his readers in this manner in some parts of his work, he went further: he was able, as no poet before or since has been, to create an intimate feeling or transfer of energy between poet and reader via the text. Lines like, "Who touches this book, touches a man" and "It is I you hold, and who holds you," and "I spring from the pages into your arms," indicate that Whitman sought love and perhaps erotic satisfaction through his art. The poet Robert Creeley suggests that Whitman

invites, as it were, the person reading to 'come unto' the activity and experience of the poems, to share with Whitman in a paradoxically unsentimental manner the actual texture and force of the emotions involved. When he speaks directly to the reader, there is an uncanny feeling of his literal presence, physically.

(1973 in Miller:46)

The sense that Whitman is actually physically present with the reader is further conveyed by these lines from the 1856 poem *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry*:

Consider, you who peruse me, whether I may not in unknown ways be looking upon you;

and from section seven of the same poem:

*Closer yet I approach you,
What thought you have of me now, I had as much of you—I laid in my stores in advance, I consider'd
long and seriously of you before you were born.*

Who was to know what should come home to me?

Who knows but I am enjoying this?

Who knows, for all the distance, but I am as good as looking at you now, for all you cannot see me?

By addressing future generations of readers, Whitman attempts to transcend his time and place. He knew that, though he was underappreciated in his own time, readers as yet unborn would someday pick up his book and respond to his poetry as he hoped they would; he thus assured himself of a measure of immortality. In the preface to **Leaves of Grass** he wrote:

Still the final test of poems or any character or work remains. The prescient poet projects himself centuries ahead and judges performer or performance after the changes of time.... Is he (the poet) beloved long and long after he is buried? Does the young man think often of him? and the young woman think often of him? and do the middleaged and old think of him? A great poet is for ages and ages....

(1855:24)

The significance of his work has not diminished over the almost 150 years it has been read and appreciated; if anything, it has taken on new meaning and resonance with each year that passes. Cavitch (1978) proposes a psychological interpretation of Whitman's effort to reach "future generations" of readers:

His startling insinuation of his living self into the reader's immediate thoughts imposes onto the audience Whitman's desire for reunion with his disembodied soul. The situation which is so often repeated in his work that it could serve as an emblem for his sensibility is always one that objectifies his fundamental sense of vast separation between the poles of his consciousness, acknowledging distances that only his special insight can countervail against all logic and circumstantial evidence.he draws his audience into a relation that reproduces while it minimizes his sense of distance from himself. The internal drama of his creative person, his ideal soul, and his complete self is continued externally in the intimacy he establishes among the poet, his audience, and the poems;....

(in Clarke 4:709-710)

This artistic need to unify the experience of the self and also, by extension, to integrate his experience of the world, can be partially understood as a product of the times in which Whitman matured as a poet. He is often seen as the most American of poets because he celebrated his nation repeatedly in his work; but, in another sense, (if this view is accepted), he was as divided and torn by

ambiguity about his place and direction as was his nation in the years prior to the Civil War:

He wanted the entire nation to support the idea of the balance of contraries that he had clarified in his own personality, and he expected his society to respect the ambiguities of national identity with the same delicacy of mind and feeling that he had attained only in writing poetry. Of course, nothing in the actual life of the country, particularly at that time, could answer Whitman's need for a stabilizing external reflector of himself. On the brink of war, threatened everywhere by political corruption and social violence, the nation of the mid-1850's offered him the image of citizens driven by deadly antagonism against other citizens. As an imperfect but nevertheless insidious counterpart to the dynamics of his consciousness, national life could only exacerbate the stresses of his divided nature.

(ibid.)

Whitman's psychological state prior to and during the writing of **Leaves of Grass** has been of interest to many scholars and it will probably continue to be a topic of Whitman studies for years to come. His desire for closeness with his readers, however, may have more to do with his aesthetic goals than with any psychological or spiritual rift he sought to heal through his verse. It is interesting that when Whitman published **Leaves of Grass** in 1855 he did not put his name on the title page; this deliberate omission would be in line with his belief in a shared poetic experience; his poems belonged to no one and, therefore, they belonged to everyone. As he later told his friend and biographer Traubel, "It would be sacrilege to put a name there—it would seem just like putting a name on the universe. It would be ridiculous to think of "Leaves of Grass" belonging to any one person: at the most I am only the mouthpiece...I like the feeling of a general partnership—as if the Leaves were anybody's who chooses just as truly as mine" (Reynolds 1995:324). Whitman seems to have held the belief that his "utterances proceeded from some source of consciousness or wisdom beyond himself" (Furness 1928 in Clarke 4:96). His faith in the truth of his vision led him to hope that he could cause his readers to see, understand and share his insights.

The next line: "I loafe and invite my soul" was for Whitman, who was the "most famous exponent of contemplative loafing," a form of meditation whereby "the activity of poetry would be for him largely a matter of relaxation, opening up his sensibilities to the natural and spiritual worlds" (Reynolds 1995: 64). This seems to have been a consistent aspect of his personality; he has been called "the most disgraceful idler, loafer and loiterer...Whitman early announced his love for genuine loafing (as distinct from mongrel laziness, in which there is an unfortunate admixture of work) and his rebellious intention of establishing an entire loafer kingdom" (Thomas 1987:49). Whitman lost more than one job after being accused of laziness, and many who knew him attested to his slowness in movement and fondness for relaxation. "I lean and loafe at my ease" is his real self on record.

The first definite image of the many images in this poem, the 'I' leaning on the earth "observing a spear of summer grass," was in reality a favorite bodily posture with Whitman. Bronson Alcott, visiting the poet in October of 1856, said that, "When talking (he) will recline upon the couch at length, pillowing his head upon his bended arm, and informing you naively how lazy he is, and slow" (1938 in Clarke 1:73).

The tension created between the physical 'I' and the spiritual 'my soul' is a recurrent feature throughout Whitman's poetry. This relationship was not one of opposition, where the body is seen as alienated from the soul, but rather one of harmony, where the body and the soul are distinct but in symbiosis. Whitman expressed this mutuality in the Preface to **Leaves of Grass** by saying that "The spirit receives from the body just as much as it gives to the body" (1855:21). He felt that "The body is not cursed; it is the miraculous materialization of the soul. The origin of the body-soul Whitman does not explain; he merely states that it is holy and the holy of holies" (Shapiro 1960 in Clarke 3:232). He was, in essence, "trying to obliterate the fatal dualism of the body and soul" by "acknowledging the physicality of the soul, or the spirituality of the body" (ibid.).

Dualism has traditionally seen the body and the spirit (or soul) as separate and distinct. Its most famous champion was Descartes, who was trying to prove, through this distinction, that the soul was immortal; he did not necessarily imply it was superior because of its immortality. He said that "the separate existence of the mind and body is conceivable; therefore it is possible; but if it is possible for two things to exist separately, they cannot be identical" (Honderich 1995:206-207). Though the body and soul are distinct, they can form a union. This union materializes in a human being. For Aristotle, however, the soul "was simply the form of the body, ie. the way the body behaved, and thus not capable of existing separately from it" (ibid.:841) but "for Plato, most Christian theologians of the first millennium A.D., Descartes, and many others, the soul was the essential immaterial part of a human, temporarily united with its body" (ibid.:841). Whitman celebrated the divinity of his own body and soul and the divinity in all men. Unlike many people of his time and society, he did not see the body as something to be distrusted; something to be controlled because of its "animal-nature." For him the body was an emanation of the soul.

The problem of evil in Whitman's ethos is rather difficult to clarify. Perhaps it is best to review some theories that attempt to account for its existence. One is that "evil does not really exist: it is an illusion. A second is that evil is a necessary part of a good whole, just as the dark patches in a painting may contribute to the perfection of the whole. A third view, developed by Aquinas, is that evil is a privation of the goodness proper to something, as blindness is the privation of the goodness of the eye. None of the views seems to do justice to the reality of pain and suffering" (Downie in Honderich 1995: 254). Whitman's pantheism would be in accord with the first view of evil; at the same time, his acceptance and praise of all reality would seem to agree with the second view of evil. It is possible that he held both views simultaneously: that evil is ultimately an illusion and that what we see as evil in this life is necessary. One authority on Whitman insists that "he denies only the ignoring of evil, and the categorizing of evil...he does not approve evil as Nietzsche did. What Whitman does is assert that all reality is good" (Allen 1946 in Clarke 4:234). Whitman's love for, and acceptance of, all existence leads to a state where, "In the last analysis, he justifies evil, like Hegel, like Pope and Archbishop King, by reference to the universal harmony of things. But these philosophers accept evil only in the abstract; whereas Whitman has a Godlike tolerance and affection for evildoers in the flesh" (1936 in Clarke 4: 174). Whitman's pantheism has already been mentioned. Allen defines this belief system as one which asserts that "the Universe is a Divine Unity, in which separation of parts and the existence of Time and Space, good and evil, birth and death have no ultimate reality but exist only artificially in temporarily

finite minds (temporarily because finite minds will soon return to the infinite unity of all mind)" (in Clarke 4:225). Whitman used the word *omnes* (all) to declare himself the poet of all existence. The following lines from *Starting From Paumanok* probably state his view as well as anything else he said or wrote about evil:

*Omnes! Omnes! Let others ignore what they may,
I make the poem of evil also, I commemorate that part also,
I am myself just as much evil as good, and my nation is—and I say there is in fact no evil,
(Or if there is I say it is just as important to you, to the land or to me, as any thing else.)*

Why did Whitman choose a spear of summer grass as a symbol? He once said to his friend and biographer R.M. Bucke, while talking about some fine scenery and the desire to go and see it: "After all, the great lesson is that no special natural sights—not Alps, Niagara, Yosemite or anything else—is more grand or more beautiful than the ordinary sunrise and sunset, earth and sky, the common trees and grass." Bucke concluded from this that "the central teaching of his writings and life" was "namely, that the commonplace is the grandest of all things; that the exceptional in any line is no finer, better or more beautiful than the usual, and that our eyes should be opened to see and our hearts to feel what we all have" (Bucke 1923 in Clarke 1:62). The interconnectedness and miraculous nature of all creation Whitman expressed in the Preface to **Leaves of Grass** by saying:

any miracle of affairs or persons inadmissible in the vast clear scheme where every motion
and every spear of grass and the frames and spirits of men and women and all that concerns
them are unspeakably perfect miracles all referring to all and each distinct and in its place.
(1855:16)

The miracle of the commonplace held for individuals and societies. The perfection of the individual and the perfection of a single spear of grass, on one level, became a perfect field of grass and society on another level. All creation for Whitman was divine and he saw the unity behind the diversity of appearances and nature was his model and ideal in this.

In an early notebook, Whitman expressed his belief in this divinity he saw everywhere: "Bring all the art and science of the world, and baffle and humble it with one spear of grass" (in Miller 1989:50). Grass is such a pervasive symbol for him that it is used in at least ten of the fifty-two sections of *Song of Myself*. For example, Section 6 begins with:

*A child said "What is the grass?" fetching it to me with full hands;
How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is any more than he.*

In the lines that follow, he proceeds to speculate on what it is. He guesses that it is "the flag of my disposition" or "the handkerchief of the Lord" purposely dropped. Perhaps it is "itself the child, the produced babe of the vegetation." He then calls it a "uniform hieroglyphic" sprouting everywhere among all people no matter their place or station in life and so uniting them. And as death unites all men finally, he sees the grass as the "beautiful uncut hair of graves."

Though grass was one of Whitman's most powerful and central poetic symbols, he filled his poems with a multitude of other meaningful images. His catalogs allowed him to enumerate a cornucopia of imagery through the act of naming. And through his catalogs he brought into being a whole diverse yet unified world. R.W.B. Lewis has said of Whitman:

Traditional mysticism proceeds by denial and negation and culminates in the imagery of deserts and silence, where the voice and being of God are the whole reality. Whitman's mysticism proceeds by expansive affirmation and culminates in plentitude and huge volumes of noise. Traditional mysticism is the surrender of the ego to its creator, in an eventual escape from the limits of names; Whitman's is an expansion of the ego in the act of creation itself, naming every conceivable object as it comes from the womb.

(1955 in Clarke 4:328)

2.1 Whitman's Use of Imagery

Pictures

*In a little house pictures I keep, many pictures hanging suspended—it is not a fixed house,
It is round—it is but a few inches from one side of it to the other side,
But behold! It has room enough—in it, hundreds and thousands, all the varieties;
Here! Do you know this? This is cicerone* himself;
And here, see you, my own States—and here the world itself, bowling through the air;
(rolling)*

** a museum guide*

These first few lines of *Pictures*, an uncollected and unpublished poem written well before 1855 were found in an early notebook. Many years later, in 1881, he would publish *My Picture Gallery* which is a redaction of these early notebook jottings:

My Picture Gallery

*It is round, it is only a few inches from one side to the other;
Yet behold, it has room for all the shows of the world, all memories!
Here the tableaux of life, and here the groupings of death;
Here, do you know this? this is cicerone himself,
With finger raised he points to the prodigal pictures.*

In these verses comparing his head to a picture gallery, the round shape refers to his head, of course, and in another sense it applies to the "poetic structure with which he is experimenting....the images that floated" in his mind "were arranged only by their mysterious associations" (Allen and Davis 1955 in Clarke 4:361). These images often include scenes from American life in the mid-nineteenth century, but they range beyond this; his visual associations seem limitless—he also pictured foreign scenes, vast mountain ranges and even the planets and beyond. His imagination contained "an exhibition of 'hun-

dreds and thousands' of images which, presumably, could unroll ad infinitum. Such a store house...allows Whitman to 'span vast realms of space and time' and bring us 'mirages' of 'people and scenes, animals, trees, colors, and lines plain as could be' " (Wilson and Allen 1955 in Clarke 4:360). Poetry for Whitman was a process where image after image emerged through an associative process. The process itself "begins on a conscious level and moves to the fringe of the subconscious" all the while "the images come as if propelled by some hidden force, out of the sacred depths of memory into the light of consciousness" (ibid.). The three catalogs cited in this paper are examples of this poetic process. It will be seen that the "stream-of-consciousness" technique used in much of Whitman's poetry is especially evident in the catalogs and, further, that this was more than a process of composition. The flow of the catalogs, where line after line of imagery appears before the reader's eyes, serves to draw the reader into the poem and carry him or her along like a boat in a rushing river.

Whitman was a poet to whom the sense of sight and visual imagery were integral to his poetic method; he learned, as he experimented, that "images were the bricks for his poetic building" (ibid.:361). He came to realize that images were "basic to his sense of process—of poetic portrayal" (ibid.:34). In the Preface to **Leaves of Grass** he declared: "Who knows the curious mystery of the eyesight? The other senses corroborate themselves, but this is removed from any proof but its own and foreruns the identities of the spiritual world" (1855:10). Such an important element in his poetry should be clearly understood and defined.

Definitions of poetic imagery differ but "most users of the term would agree that it is a figurative use of words by which the poet suggests to the reader's senses a physical object—or the momentary interaction of objects—that has an analogical and subjective meaning. More simply, Ezra Pound has defined a poetic image as 'that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in a moment of time,' (Allen and Davis 1955 in Clarke 4:359). The image may involve any of the senses, but usually the image offers a picture of a physical object, "a snapshot of experience—real or fictitious" (ibid.). Whitman's images are often photographic in this sense, and as we shall see, they anticipated the cinema.

Photography had become popular in America by 1840 and Whitman was, like most Americans of the time, greatly impressed with its ability to capture and present reality as no other representative medium could. Reynolds observes that "The world, it seemed, could actually be reproduced. Loved ones might die, but their images could be preserved. Distant places never visited could be enjoyed in daguerreotype. Art, death, space, time: all seemed changed by this apparently miraculous medium" (1995:280). The ability to manipulate reality was not lost on Whitman, who understood the potential that the new visual technology held. In touring one photograph gallery, Whitman was in a setting where "portrait after portrait created an epic effect of the kind he seeks in 'Song of Myself'...." (Clarke 1991: 131). Many of the lines in his catalogs are a running series of photo-like images that present what he saw around him and what he imagined.

Three million daguerreotypes were produced yearly in America by 1853 (ibid.). The pervasiveness of the medium made the photograph symbolic of the times. Whitman presented his poems as being outside the tradition of conventional poetry, with its use of "devices" which for him were artificial. His poetry would be a picture of his time: "In these Leaves (of Grass) every thing is literally photographed.

Nothing is poeticized" (ibid.). The fact that photography could capture reality so faithfully led Whitman to feel "his poetic 'I' was a kind of roving camera eye aimed at the world around him" (ibid.).

Still, Whitman went frequently to the art museums of New York and the paintings he saw there influenced his catalog imagery. There he saw "paintings of all kinds...hung in layered rows on crowded walls. Whitman's eclectic catalogs, with their juxtapositions of widely assorted vignettes, may be said to have reflected the exhibition format" (ibid.:287). Many of the painters of the time strove for realism as they sought to present, for example, landscapes that allowed the viewer to "experience God's creation afresh" (ibid.). In the popular genre paintings the aim was to provide the public with "slightly idealized versions of themselves in action, at work or at play" (ibid.).

However much realism daguerreotypes and landscape and genre painting may have brought to American visual experience, for Whitman there were still elements missing: "he wanted picturesqueness but also explosiveness, rebelliousness, suggestiveness" (ibid.:298). He sought a poetry, therefore, characterized by movement, rather than an art form that was static, like photography or painting. The poetry he finally made was closer in essence to film. His catalogs, while a series of discrete pictures, depend upon motion for their effect. Once they have been begun, the reader is "swept along, reluctant to stop and ponder any particular line; the lines can be understood as 'frames' and the pace of the verse seeks an equilibrium of image and effect...the experience is similar to that of an audience before a film" (ibid.:145-146). Mason (1973) after calling attention to the "cinematography of the catalogues" adds:

Within a Whitman catalogue, dozens, perhaps hundreds, of images are accumulated. With the addition of each image the picture is changed entirely; condensation (of images) by the reader is necessarily postponed until the end of the catalogue, and the reader is invited to skim, rushing to the end and the final image. One may feel induced to skim, but one never feels entirely satisfied in leaving a catalogue unfinished. To stop half-way is to perceive half of a moving picture.

(in Clarke 2:289)

In his catalogs, there is a clearly realized movement as the images follow one another, presenting a series of representations in discrete lines. The rhythm that carries the images is so often like the pacing of film; this perhaps partially accounts for the popularity of Whitman's verse into the twentieth century. Foster considers Whitman's catalog rhetoric and his stringing together of images an effect that provides "a psuedo-movement similar to the moving picture" where "Whitman stands in the midst of the world feverishly winding frame after frame through the mechanisms of perception. The material world passes in all its variety before the poet and Walt Whitman correspondingly selects those segments which suit Walt Whitman's purpose" in order to "explain his own unique role" (1964 in Clarke 2:275). A contemporary poet sees the catalogs in a similar light:

these successions are not to be called catalogues. That name has thrown readers off; it is misleading. What we are confronted with here, each time, is not a list, but a sequence with its own direction. It is visual; it is close to another form...Whitman, writing years before the invention of the moving picture camera, has in his poems given to us sequence after

sequence that might be the detailed instructions, not to the director and cameraman only, but to the film editor as well. The rhythm of these sequences is film rhythm, the form is montage; and movies could easily be made of these poems, in which the lines of the longer, more sustained speech rhythms would serve as sound track, while these seemingly broken and choppy descriptive lines would serve well as image track.

(Rukeyser 1949 in Clarke 4:278-279)

3. Whitman's Catalogs in "Song of Myself"

The term catalog is used here because it is generally, though perhaps incorrectly, applied to a type of verse that is found in many of Whitman's longer poems. Whitman did not originate this form; it is

of ancient origin and found in almost all the literatures of the world. In antiquity the catalog often had a didactic or mnemonic function...But frequently catalog verse has a more clearly aesthetic function, such as indicating the vastness of a war or battle or the power of a prince or king...In medieval and Renaissance poetry, the catalog device is often used for itemizing topics such as the beauty of women.... In 19th and 20th century European and American poetry, other functions of the catalog have emerged. Whitman, for example, employs long lists to demonstrate the essential unity of the universe amid its seemingly endless multitude.

(Preminger and Brogan 1993:174)

Though the catalog device has had different functions throughout the history of verse, Whitman's use of it was new and his discovery is central to his work. Scholars have noted that "the so-called catalogue device became a basic feature of his structural technique" (Wilson and Allen 1955 in Clarke 4:361). So, while *Song of Myself* may not be characterized as having a formal structure on an external level, his catalogs provide some internal structure.

Buell, who has probably written more about Whitman's catalogs than any other authority, notes that "Whitman's catalogs are a most salient feature of his poetry and certainly the most neglected" (1968 in Clarke 4:571). This past neglect is now being rectified as the importance of the catalogs and their place in his poetry is now better understood and appreciated:

One of the most important of his innovations—reviled in his day as a barbarism—is the rhetorical catalogue, the enumeration in line after long line of visual phenomena, either taken from the natural world or the man-made. It required courage to list at enormous length rather than take the conventional path of generalization, but the courage has been posthumously rewarded. The catalogues in "Song of Myself" are magnificent...perhaps only an American poet could see the rhetorical possibilities of this enumerative technique; the immense plurality of the United States is made for this type of celebration, and even a plain roll-call ("Mississippi with bends and chutes,/And my Illinois fields, and my fields of Missouri...") can lift the heart without much help from a poet. America herself dictated the technique to a man passionately in love with America. It is, of course, a technique that

looked forward to the epic cinema of Griffiths, poetry derived from the juxtaposition of visual images.

(A. Burgess 1968 in Clarke 3:249)

The catalogs, according to Foster, have a three-dimensional purpose: "they function as representations of reality; they link the poet's senses to his world; they provide a continuous succession of images which give the illusion of the real life processes intuited by the poet at the same time" (in Clarke 2:275). They are also notable for their sheer inclusiveness. Their "main purpose...seems to be to express the boundless fecundity of nature and human life" (Buell 1968 in Clarke 4:573). The imagery in the catalogs may appear to be random, however, certain "devices lie behind" his method and provide a certain amount of continuity, linking and structure, just as the catalogs themselves give some structure to the larger poem. Among these devices are "the appeal to all the five senses," and his use of a "parallelism" which "shapes and gives emphasis" to his verse; there are also some lines which "point to a moral" while others "draw the conclusion"; there are also lines that merely list, and these alternate with others that "connect the images to a subject" (ibid.:574).

The poet's world view, articulated in the catalogs, was an expression of his transcendental beliefs. Whitman, like Emerson, was interested in nature's underlying divine unity in its apparent temporal diversity, but he was more particularly concerned with the human order of things in this divine plan and man's place in nature. Whitman's beliefs led him to a "basic assumption of divine immanence" present in all men:

the persona—the 'I'—in Whitman's poetry is...not merely individual but cosmic, and as such can participate in the experience of all men...For rendering this collective conception of the self poetically, the catalog is the most appropriate technique. Through it, the self can be sung in such a way as to incorporate, or seem to incorporate, all particular selves. "Of these one and all I weave the song of myself," Whitman says at the end of one long catalogue. "These" are the disparate images of human life which the poet has just listed, to the end of showing how, "one and all," they are united in "myself." The method of the song mirrors the complex unity of the singer.

(ibid.:577)

3.1 "The little one...The youngster...The suicide"

The first example of a Whitman catalog cited in this paper, and the "first grand catalogue" (Mason 1973 in Clarke 2:284) in *Song of Myself* is Section 8. Three catalog sections are treated in this paper (8, 15, and 33), and it is perhaps best to present them in their numerical order because this is how they appear in the poem. In addition, this order is appropriate because they increase in length and decrease in overt unity: this first catalog is fairly unified and not inordinately long. Also, it is a good example of the way Whitman uses language to create "tapestries of imagery and rhetoric" (Buell 1968 in Clarke 4:573). The other two catalogs presented in this paper are less unified and progressively longer. It should be remembered that, while they are less unified, they need not be considered less successful. The reader will recall that structural analysis, while fruitful in other types of poetry, is less than appropriate here

because in employing this approach:

we are liable to rest in a too simple evaluation of Whitman's poetry: to divide his catalogs into a small group which have design and are therefore "good," and a large group which are relatively amorphous and therefore "flawed." Such a polarization ignores the fact that the element of structure in a Whitman catalogue—indeed in any Whitman poem—even where refined, is relatively unstressed...the order of importance is the order in which we have proceeded: the individual sensuous and emotional responses are paramount, then the sense of plenitude, and lastly, when it exist(s), the design.

(ibid.:575)

This catalog is eighteen lines in length.

8

*The little one sleeps in its cradle,
I lift the gauze and look a long time, and silently brush away flies with my hand.
The youngster and the red-faced girl turn aside up the bushy hill,
I peeringly view them from the top.*

*The suicide sprawls on the bloody floor of the bedroom,
I witness the corpse with its dabbled hair, I note where the pistol has fallen.*

*The blab of the pave, the tires of carts, sluff of boot-soles, talk of the promenaders,
The heavy omnibus, the driver with his interrogating thumb, the clank of the shod horses on the granite floor,*

*The snow-sleighs, clinking, shouted jokes, pelts of snow-balls,
The hurrahs for popular favorites, the fury of the rous'd mobs,
The flap of the curtain'd litter, a sick man inside borne to the hospital,*

*The meeting of enemies, the sudden oath, the blows and fall,
the excited crowd, the policeman with his star quickly working his passage to the centre of the crowd,
The impassive stones that receive and return so many echoes,
What groans of over-fed or half-starv'd who fall sunstruck or in fits,
What exclamations of women taken suddenly who hurry home and give birth to babes,
What living and buried speech is always vibrating here, what howls restrain'd by decorum,
Arrests of criminals, slights, adulterous offers made, acceptances, rejections with convex lips,
I mind them or the show or resonance of them—I come and I depart.*

In the first three sequences, Whitman "catalogues the extremes of humanity from the innocent babe to the criminal....He begins by looking down at the babe, a young couple and a suicide" (Mason 1975 in Clarke 2:284). These images straightforwardly present scenes of birth, love and death; the tenderness of

the first image and the voyeuristic sense of the second, "I peeringly view them," contrast with the objectivity of "I witness" and "'I note" in the third, (it is remembered that Whitman was a journalist before he became a poet). Randall Jarrell calls these three images "a little 'view of life' " (1953 in Clarke 3:188).

The scenes that follow seem to be based upon sounds heard and sights seen in a cityscape. Of this passage, Mason observes:

Most of the images are of sound. The sounds are individual at first and at the ground level. These sounds, however, surge to create "the blab of the pave." Individual sounds become soon lost in the sounds of the crowd. One sound does not replace another. The impassive stones that "receive and return so many echoes" bounce the sounds back and forth. The final image is one of joyous clatter. To Whitman, of course, the clatter is resonance. The poem also considers the scene a "show." And it is a show of images, but the reader does not see the show until the catalogue has come to a close.

(1973 in Clarke 2:290)

These images are lively and well-drawn, with rhythm that moves along in language of surprising beauty. The words "gauze," "silently," "red-faced," "bushy," "dabbled" are vital and alive; the "blab of the pave" (pavement), the "sluff of boot-soles," and the "talk of the promenaders" all bring the sounds to our ears. The use of "interrogating" to describe the driver's thumb; the sound imagery of "the clank of the shod horses on the granite floor" echoes in the reader's mind while "the flap of the curtain'd litter" softly reminds one of the movement involved. All these closely observed sounds create a striking impression of the city scenes Whitman was so familiar with.

The "heavy omnibus" with its team of horses referred to in line seven was something Whitman had close first-hand experience of. He took every opportunity to ride the omnibuses, usually up front, on top, seated next to the driver. In a short piece from *Specimen Days*, (a collection of essays), titled *Omnibus Jaunts and Drivers*, Whitman recalls:

the drivers—a strange, natural, quick-eyed and wondrous race—... How many hours, forenoons and afternoons—how many exhilarating night-times I have had—riding the whole length of Broadway, listening to some yarn, (and the most vivid yarns ever spun, and the rarest mimicry)—or perhaps I declaiming some stormy passage from Julius Caesar or Richard, (you could roar as loudly as you chose in that heavy, dense, uninterrupted street-bass.)

(Prose Works 1982:703)

Whitman continues by listing the colorful names of some of the drivers who were his friends: "Broadway Jack, Dressmaker, Balky Bill, George Storms, Old Elephant, his brother Young Elephant (who came afterward,) Tippy, Pop Rice, Big Frank, Yellow Joe, Pete Callahan, Patsy Dee...." And their character he collectively describes as being, "largely animal—eating, drinking, women—great personal pride, in their way...." and while there were "a few slouches here and there" Whitman claims,

"I should have trusted the general run of them, in their simple good-will and honor, under all circumstances" (ibid.). But the poet owed more to these drivers than a chance to view the urban scene, hear yarns, and declaim Shakespeare; he appreciated their energy and admired the skill and strength of command required to control a team of horses and a ponderous vehicle in the chaos and crush of nineteenth-century Broadway. He further delighted in their "companionship, and sometimes, I suppose the critics will laugh heartily, but the influence of those Broadway omnibus drivers and declamations and escapades undoubtedly enter'd into the gestation of "Leaves of Grass" (ibid.).

The contrast in the eighth line of "snow-sleighs" with the omnibus is an apt juxtaposition, a technique, as already noted, that was a favorite of Whitman's in his catalogs. The "clinking" (of bells) again brings sound to the reader's attention. The "shouted jokes" and "pelts of snow-balls" give a sense of movement and animation to this section. Amid all this movement, the grouping of such sense impressions into clusters gives a general feeling that the poet is a spectator in the hustle and bustle of Broadway. These details are "brought together into a single 'full sweep,' in which none is given special prominence" (Brand 1991 in Clarke 4:868). This accumulation of specifics has been likened to the effect of viewing a panoramic painting of a cityscape:

As in an Impressionist painting of a city scene, individual objects are dissolved into broad general impressions that combine to produce an overall sense of distanced motion and diversity. When Whitman does isolate a figure in one of his crowd "sweeps," it is generally in order to provide a focal point for a general urban motion, mood, or texture. All we see of the driver of the omnibus moving up Broadwayis his interrogating thumb.

(ibid.:868-869)

In line thirteen, an " 'excited crowd' is given a specific texture by 'the policeman with his star quickly working' his way to the centre" (ibid.:869). The "impassive stones" of the pavement and the surrounding buildings are not unlike the poet himself in that they both "receive and return so many echoes." He saw himself as absorbing the life around him and translating it and echoing back in the form of his verse.

Another juxtaposition follows in lines 15-16 between the "over-fed" and the "half-starved," as they groan and "fall sunstruck or in fits," and the exclamations of women "taken suddenly who hurry home and give birth to babes."

The concluding lines again feature speech at their center: "living and buried speech," and "howls, slights, offers, acceptances, rejections." What the poet sees and hears in the urban crowd is duly reported, "I mind them or the show of them—I come and I depart."

3.2 "And of these one and all I weave the song of myself"

Section 15 is the "longest catalogue so far in the poem" (Mason 1974 in Clarke 2:284) at sixty-nine lines and "most of those lines comprise one sentence, each line beginning with itemization of a person or thing and ending with a comma or semi-colon" (Tanner 1965 in Clarke 4:545). The sentences are

placed together one after another without the use of any connecting words to show the relationship between them (parataxis). This makes for fast-moving verse and creates an effect of snow-balling movement; the reader feels that "as he introduces type after type, person after person, there is a cumulative effect of combination in variety....The juxtapositions are not unconsidered or irresponsible, though we are obviously intended to feel, rather than ponder or comprehend, the relevance of the continuities, the similarities in the difference" (ibid.:545-546). In this catalog, Whitman "moves *through* humanity in its diverse forms. The catalog is a visual feast" (Mason 1974 in Clarke 2:284). The catalog is a presentation of the America Whitman knew in all its characteristic diversity, but he provides an underlying unity:

The overall unity cannot be stated, perhaps just as the unity of America, as it was then, with its centrifugal movements and its incoming variety, could hardly be grasped or demonstrated but only felt. Whitman wants to convey his sense that somehow the teeming differing crowd is basically a sort of family, and if we can respond to his vision then many of his so-called catalogues come alive and knit themselves together.

(ibid.:546)

One unifying feature of this section is the way he describes people, for he "always catches them in the very act of living" (Thomas 1987:56). Along with the images of living people that animate this section, there is the dynamic "provided by the subtle discrimination between related sounds, which form a latticework of delicate yet sinewy energy" (ibid.:124).

15

*The pure contralto sings in the organ loft,
The carpenter dresses his plank, the tongue of his foreplane whistles its wild ascending lisp,
The married and unmarried children ride home to their Thanksgiving dinner,
The pilot seizes the king-pin, he heaves down with a strong arm,
The mate stands braced in the whale-boat, lance and harpoon are ready,
The duck-shooter walks by silent and cautious stretches,
The deacons are ordain'd with cross'd hands at the altar,
The spinning girl retreats and advances to the hum of the big wheel,
The farmer stops by the bars as he walks on his first-day loafe and looks at the oats and rye,
The lunatic is at last carried to the asylum a confirm'd case,
(he will never sleep any more as he did in the cot in his mother's bed-room;)
The jour printer with gray head and gaunt jaws works at his case,
He turns his quid of tobacco while his eyes burn with the manuscript;
The malforn'd limbs are tied to the surgeon's table,
What is removed drops horribly in a pail;
The quadroon girl is sold at the auction-stand, the drunkard nods by the bar-room stove,
The machinist rolls up his sleeves, the policeman travels his beat, the gate-keeper marks who pass,
The young fellow drives the express-wagon, (I love him, though I do not know him;)
The half-breed straps on his light boots to compete in the race,*

*The western turkey-shooting draws old and young, some lean of their rifles, some sit on logs,
 Out from the crowd steps the marksman, takes his position, levels his piece;
 The groups of newly-come immigrants cover the wharf or levee,
 As the wooly-pates hoe in the sugar field, the overseer views them from his saddle,
 The bugle calls in the ball-room, the gentlemen run for their partners, the dancers bow to each other,
 The youth lies awake in the cedar-roof'd garret and harks to the musical rain,
 The Wolverine sets traps on the creek that helps fill the Huron,
 The squaw wrapt in her yellow-hemm'd cloth is offering moccasins and bead-bags for sale,
 The connoisseur peers along the exhibition-gallery with half shut eyes bent sideways,
 As the deck-hands make fast the steamboat the plank is thrown for the shore-going passengers,
 The young sister holds out the skein while the elder sister winds it off in a ball, and stops now and then
 for the knots,
 The one-year wife is recovering and happy having a week ago borne her first child,
 The clean-hair'd Yankee girl works with her sewing-machine or in the factory or mill,
 The paving-man leans on his two-handed rammer, the reporter's lead flies swiftly over the note-book, the
 signpainter is lettering with blue and gold,
 The canal-boy trots on the tow-path, the book-keeper counts at his desk, the shoemaker waxes his thread,
 The conductor beats time for the band and all the performers follow him,
 The child is baptized, the convert is making his first professions,
 The regatta is spread on the bay, the race is begun, (how the white sails sparkle!)
 The drover watching his drove sings out to them that would stray,
 The peddler sweats with his pack on his back, (the purchaser higgling about the odd-cent;)
 The bride unrumples her white dress, the minute-hand of the clock moves slowly,
 The opium-eater reclines with rigid head and just-open'd lips,
 The prostitute draggles her shawl, her bonnet bobs on her tipsy and pimpled neck,
 The crowd laughs at her blackguard oaths, the men jeer and wink to each other,
 (Miserable! I do not laugh at your oaths nor jeer you;)
 The President holding a cabinet council is surrounded by the great Secretaries,
 On the piazza walk three matrons stately and friendly with twined arms,
 The crew of the fish-smack pack repeated layers of halibut in the hold,
 The Missourian crosses the plains toting his wares and his cattle,
 As the fare-collector goes through the train he gives notice by the jingling of loose change,
 The floor-men are laying the floor, the tinnerns are tinning the roof, the masons are calling for mortar,
 In single file each shouldering his hod pass onward the laborers;
 Seasons pursuing each other the indescribable crowd is gather'd, it is the fourth of Seventh-month, (what
 salutes of cannon and small arms!)
 Seasons pursuing each other the plougher ploughs, the mower mows, and the winter-grain falls to the
 ground;
 Off on the lakes the pike-fisher watches and waits by the hole in the frozen surface,
 The stumps stand thick round the clearing, the squatter strikes deep with his axe,
 Flatboatmaen make fast near dusk near the cotton-wood or pecan trees,
 Coon-seekers go through the regions of the Red river or through those drain'd by the Tennessee, or
 through those of the Arkansas,*

*Torches shine in the dark that hangs on the Chattahoochee or Altamahaw,
Patriarchs sit at supper with sons and grandsons and great-grandsons around them
In walls of adobe, in canvas tents, rest hunters and trappers after their day's sport,
The city sleeps and the country sleeps,
The living sleep for their time, the dead sleep for their time,
The old husband sleeps by his wife and the young husband sleeps by his wife,
And these tend inward to me, and I tend outward to them,
And such as it is to be of these more or less I am,
And of these one and all I weave the song of myself.*

The first line, "The pure contralto sings in the organ loft" was probably inspired by Marietta Alboni, who "among all the opera stars, (was) the one that shone brightest for him" (Reynolds 1995: 190). Whitman has said of her, "She used to sweep me away as with whirlwinds" (ibid.). The carpenter in the next line adds to the music with the "tongue of his foreplane" which "whistles its wild ascending lisp." The lines that follow, represent "the heterogeneous sights and sounds of democracy" where the poet,

Bubbling over with a rollicking exuberance, mocks genteel restraints and conventional artistic order and embraces everything with the uncritical eagerness of a child intent upon enjoying, not evaluating, the world he is discovering, as though for the first time.

(Miller 1989:79)

Throughout his poetry, Whitman used the Quaker designation of "first-day" for Sunday, "Second-day" for Monday and so on. For the months, he likewise used "First-month" for January to "Twelfth-month" for December. Thus we find the farmer on a "First-day loafe" inspecting his oats and rye.

The next two lines, where the lunatic is carried to the asylum, never to sleep in his mother's bedroom ever after, are especially poignant. Whitman's older brother, Jesse, went mad and died in an insane asylum and his younger brother, Edward, or "Eddy," was "retarded from birth, partly crippled, and possibly epileptic" (Reynolds 1995:28). Whitman was devoted to Eddy and would eventually leave most of his estate to him. When Thoreau visited Whitman's home in 1856, he noticed in the corner of Whitman's bedroom "an unmade bed where Walt slept with his retarded brother Eddy..." (ibid.:364). In the context of the mid-nineteenth century "when large families lived in small houses...Whitman's sleeping arrangement with Eddy was not unusual" (ibid.:393). This may have inspired the line: "(He will never sleep any more as he did in the cot in his mother's bed-room;)." By 1888, as the poet's health grew worse after a series of strokes, Eddy's condition also deteriorated. "Eddy was having epileptic seizures that, with his retardation and other handicaps, made him more helpless than before. On August 1st, Walt's sister and a friend placed Eddy in an insane asylum in Blackwoodtown, New Jersey. His expenses of fourteen dollars a month were still paid by Walt" (ibid.:566). In his will of 1892, he left most of his estate, "including the Mickle Street house and the bulk of his savings, to Eddy. He explained, "First of all I want to protect Eddy. Eddy must be protected at all costs" (ibid.:571).

Whitman's devotion to his family was notable and extended beyond life. The tomb he had built

"housed not only Whitman but his parents, Hannah, George, Louisa and Ed" (ibid.:572). It is fitting that in life Whitman worked for some time as a builder, constructing houses which he and his family would then move into; in death he saw to it that they would all be together again under the same roof.

Whitman's older brother Jesse was another matter. Jesse had threatened their mother with violence a number of times and had become gradually more dangerous. He had grown to be such a threat that "Walt had him committed" (Callow 1992:312) in 1864 "to the Kings County Lunatic Asylum, where he died six years later of a ruptured aneurysm..." (ibid.:409). When his mother learned of Jesse's death and burial in a potter's field, she wrote Walt: " 'O walt aint it sad to think the poor soul hadent a friend in the world near him in his last moments and to think he had a paupers grave' " (Reynolds 1995:486). The tragedies of his two brothers might have made him bitter and cynical; but the suffering the family experienced only made his bond to them stronger; it also deepened and strengthened his compassion for all those who despaired; the prostitutes, slaves, the poor, the diseased and the insane he placed in his poems were treated with great tenderness.

The next lines about the journeyman printer with the "gray head and gaunt jaws" who "works at his case" come from Whitman's own experience as a printer, compositor and editor with various newspapers in the New York area.

The series that begins with the "quadroon girl is sold at the auction stand" and that ends with the "young fellow drives the express wagon" has a rhythmic quality and a flow of imagery that is characterised by the verbs used: "sold, nods, rolls, travels, marks who pass, drives." This leads to the "half-breed straps on his light boots to compete in the race" which naturally connects with another form of frontier competition, "the western turkey-shooting" which "draws old and young." The pictorial quality of this, Henry B. Rule feels, was influenced by the painting *Shooting for the Beef* by George Caleb Bingham, which Whitman probably saw on exhibit in New York in 1850-52. However, Edwin Fussell believes it is "conceivably based on a scene in *The Pioneers* (by James Fenimore Cooper) in which Natty Bumppo demonstrates his phenomenal skill with the rifle" (Miller 1989:80).

The American scenes which follow are images portraying the diversity of the society of the time. The "newly-come immigrants" contrasts with unfortunates who were brought to America against their will: the "wooly-pates" watched by the overseer who "views them from the saddle" emphasizing the slave-master relationship by placing the master on a horse where he looks down on the slaves working in the field. The ballroom where the gentlemen and their partners bow to each other is juxtaposed to the solitary youth in his garret room who "harks to the musical rain." The linking of music in both lines contrasts with the solitary youth and the sociable dancers. The frontier picture of the Michigan trapper, the "Wolverine" who sets his traps is succeeded by the squaw selling trinkets. The Indian who once lived off the land is now reduced to selling handicrafts because others have replaced her kind.

Then there is a transition to an eastern scene in an art gallery where a "connoisseur peers" at the art on the walls. This is followed by the docking of the steamboat, where the "deck-hands make fast" the lines to the shore. These lines of rope are linked to the image of the skeins of yarn in the next line where the young sister "holds out the skein while the elder sister winds it off in a ball."

The next series contains images of daily work in nineteenth-century America. We see the "clean-hair'd Yankee girl" at her sewing machine; the "paving-man" in repose as he "leans on his two-handed rammer." This image contrasts with the activity of the reporter, whose "led flies swiftly over the note-book." This forms a further contrast with the deliberate and careful actions of the sign-painter as he is seen "lettering with blue and gold."

The next cluster shows us a canal boy who "trots on the towpath" and a shoemaker who "waxes his thread" and a conductor who "beats time for the band." The motion of these images is basically linear and serves to link them.

The juxtaposition that is most striking in the ensuing lines is the paring of the bride unrumpling her dress as "the minute-hand of the clock moves slowly" with the opium-eater who "reclines with rigid head and just-open'd lips." Tanner notes that "time has slowed down for both of them: the bride in anticipation of life, the addict in exhaustion with it" (1965 in Clarke 4:546). Then comes the prostitute who "draggles her shawl" whose "bonnet bobs on her tipsy and pimpled neck." So, taken together we have a memorable series:

*The bride unrumple her white dress, the minute-hand of the clock moves slowly,
The opium-eater reclines with rigid head and just-open'd lips,
The prostitute draggles her shawl, her bonnet bobs on her tipsy and pimpled neck,*

These lines at first seem to lack any basic unity, but this is due to the subtlety of the internal dynamic of these images and the language used to frame them. Randall Jarrell (1953), was able to perceive certain relationships here that perhaps only another poet might see:

The first line is joined to the third by *unrumple* and *draggles*, *white dress* and *shawl*; the second to the third by *rigid head*, *bobs*, *tipsy*, *neck*; the first to the second by *slowly*, *just-open'd*, and the slowing-down of time in both states.

(in Clarke 3:189)

We next see the President in council with his cabinet and a scene in a piazza where "three matrons stately and friendly" walk "with twined arms." The placing of the "very different yet almost elementally important groups" is not accidental, for they are "the fathers of a new nation" and "the mothers of its necessary men" (Tanner 1965 in Clarke 4:456). The assonance of the next line where "smack" and "pack" are followed by "repeated," "halibut" and "hold" serves as another transition; we then are presented with a "Missourian" slowly crossing the plains with his stock and a nicely observed scene on a much faster form of transportation across the vastness of the plains: a fare-collector going through a train who "gives notice" of his arrival "by the jingling of loose change."

The next two lines come directly from Whitman's experience. It has already been noted that he was a builder for a time. In 1852, he "bought lots, built frame houses on them, and sold them..." In the summer of 1852 he "built two three-story frame houses on Cumberland Street" in Brooklyn and "moved

into one of the houses on September 1, renting out the other" (Reynolds 1995:134). While the lines about floormen, tinnerns, masons and laborers may appear to be random, there is a deeper meaning: "a subtle and important cohesion: from laying a floor, tinning a roof, and calling for mortar, a house will result. The mason, as he binds together the farthest parts of the house and turns them into one unified structure, has much in common with the poet who asks, 'Shall I make my list of things in the house and skip the house that supports them?' " (Fishkin 1985 in Miller:81).

The crowd pictured on the fourth of July is "indescribable" on a summer day celebrating America's birthday. This image is of great importance to Whitman because he was so passionately patriotic. From this yearly event there is movement to the yearly cycle of the seasons "pursuing each other" spring where the "plougher plows," fall when the "mower mows," and finally the "winter-grain falls to the ground." In the deepness of winter we see the pike-fisher who "watches and waits by the hole in the frozen surface" of the lake.

Another frontier picture of a "squatter" chopping tree stumps in a clearing is then presented, followed by "flatboatmen" tying up for the night and "Coon-seekers" hunting their prey through the regions of the Red River, the Tennessee River and the Arkansas River. Then two more rivers are mentioned, both with sonorous Indian names, the Chattahoochee (CHAT-a-hoo-chee) and the Altamaha (al-ta-ma-HA), where torches shine in the dark and on the water. We are coming to the end of Section 15 now, and Whitman shows us scenes of "Patriarchs" who sit at supper with generations of their families. He pictures hunters and trappers who rest in "walls of adobie, in canvas tents...after their day's sport." The expanse of time and space in Whitman's catalogs becomes more apparent now in "The city sleeps and the country sleeps" and "The living sleep for their time, the dead sleep for their time." The old husband sleeps by his wife, as does the young husband, and finally:

*And these tend inward to me, and I tend outward to them,
And such as it is to be of these more or less I am,
And of these one and all I weave the song of myself.*

Miller says of Section 15, "The lengthy catalogue ends in a quiet, delicate coda, as city and country, living and dead, aged and young, husbands and wives, and the I merge, diversity momentarily giving way to harmonious union" (1989:81).

3.3 "I am afoot with my vision"

Section 33, the last catalog to be dealt with in this paper, is over 160 lines long. As the three catalogs have increased in length (from 18 to 69 to 160 lines) and complexity, the poet's vision has changed. The action in Section 8 is confined to a city; Section 15 covers the nation and pictures more diverse scenes; in Section 33 Whitman's vision ranges over the whole earth and out into the cosmos; he sees immense distances and is bound by neither space nor time.

It has been suggested that the catalogs "control the reader's involvement in the poet's movement from the singular to the cosmic" and that the evolution of Whitman's vision in *Song of Myself* is, in

essence, a progress "of expansion" (Mason 1973 in Clarke 2:279). So too, does Whitman's vision in Section 33 move from the particular to the general, the minute to the grand, from intimate detail to grand sweeps of vision. His vision moves in such a way that "his sense of himself expands to include ever more examples of his universality" (Cavitch 1978 in Clarke 4:695). Whitman at this point in the poem finally and "triumphantly sums up the intellectual point and method of his poem's repetitive form..." (ibid.:704).

Miller, like many other readers of Whitman, writes that Section 33 is: "the longest and most dazzling of the catalogue recitatives, the I soars, sails, floats, 'afoot with my vision,' " (1989:109). In the beginning of the section, as the poet departs on his journey, his imagination gains a new facility, and there is a change in "the relation between his inner being and external reality...in his celebration of imaginative freedom in stanza 33" (Cavitch 1978 in Clarke 4:706).

Section 33 has been called "the longest and loosest catalogue in a long, loose poem" (Buell 1968 in Clarke 4:580) and as such the reader's best approach is to "drift with the speaker through the images" and to simply "experience it...since the visionary element is inextricable from the best 'poetic' qualities" (ibid.:580). In all of Whitman's catalogs, but especially in this one, "what the reader most needs to bring to the catalogue:

is a sense of abandonment. This does not mean the complete denial of the critical faculty, but only its suspension, for as long as it takes to get caught up, or at least to give the piece a fair trial. One feels that whatever intricate design a catalogue may later be seen to have, it is essentially and outpouring, intended to stir up, not to settle.

(ibid.:581)

33

*Space and time! now I see it is true, what I guess'd at,
What I guess'd when I loafed on the grass,
What I guess'd while I lay alone in my bed,
And again as I walked the beach under the paling stars of the morning.*

*My ties and ballasts leave me, my elbows rest in sea-gaps,
I skirt sierras, my palms cover continents,
I am afoot with my vision.*

*By the city's quadrangular houses—in log huts, camping with lumbermen,
Along the ruts of the turnpike, along the dry gulch and rivulet bed,
Weeding my onion patch or hoeing rows of carrots and parsnips, crossing savannas, trailing in forests,
Prospecting, gold-digging, girdling the trees of a new purchase,
Scorch'd ankle-deep by the hot sand, hauling my boat down the shallow river,
Where the panther walks to and fro on a limb overhead, where the buck turns furiously at the hunter,
Where the rattlesnake suns his flabby length on a rock, where the otter is feeding on fish,*

Where the alligator in his tough pimples sleeps by the bayou,
 Where the black bear is searching for roots or honey, where the beaver pats the mud with his paddle-
 shaped tail;
 Over the growing sugar, over the yellow-flower'd cotton plant, over the rice in its low moist field,
 Over the sharp-peak'd farm house, with its scallop'd scum and the slender shoots from the gutters,
 Over the western persimmon, over the long-leav'd corn, over the delicate blue-flower flax,
 Over the white and brown buckwheat, a hummer and buzzer there with the rest,
 Over the dusky green of the rye as it ripples and shades in the breeze;
 Scaling mountains, pulling myself cautiously up, holding on by low scragged limbs,
 Walking the path worn in the grass and beat through the leaves of the brush,
 Where the quail is whistling betwixt the woods and the wheat-lot,
 Where the bat flies in the Seventh-month eve, where the great goldbug drops through the dark,
 Where the brook puts out of the roots of the old tree and flows to the meadow,
 Where cattle stand and shake away flies with the tremulous shuddering of their hides,
 Where the cheesecloth hangs in the kitchen, where the andirons straddle the hearth-slab, where cobwebs
 fall in festoons from the rafters;
 Where trip-hammers crash, where the press is whirling its cylinders,
 Wherever the human heart beats with terrible throes under its ribs,
 Where the pear-shaped balloon is floating aloft, (floating in it myself and looking composedly down,)
 Where the life-car is drawn on the slip-noose, where the heat hatches pale-green eggs in the dented sand,
 Where the she-whale swims with her calf and never forsakes it,
 Where the steam-ship trails hind-ways its long pennant of smoke,
 Where the fin of the shark cuts like a black chip out of the water,
 Where the half-burned brig is riding on unknown currents,
 Where shells grow on her slimy deck, where the dead are corrupting below;
 Where the dense-starr'd flag is borne at the head of the regiments,
 Approaching Manhattan up by the long-stretching island,
 Under Niagara, the cataract falling like a veil over my countenance,
 Upon a door-step, upon a horse-block of hard wood outside,
 Upon the race-course, or enjoying picnics or a good game of base-ball,
 At he-festivals, with blackguard gibes, ironical license, bull-dances, drinking, laughter,
 At the cider-mill tasting the sweets of the brown mash, sucking the juice through a straw,
 At apple-peelings wanting kisses for all the red fruit I find,
 At musters, beach-parties, friendly bees, huskings, house-raisings;
 Where the mocking-bird sounds his delicious gurgles, cackles, screams, weeps,
 Where the hay-rick stands in the barn-yard, where the dry-stalks are scatter'd, where the brood-cow waits
 in the hovel,
 Where the bull advances to do his masculine work, where the stud to the mare, where the cock is treading
 the hen,
 Where heifers browse, where the geese nip their food with short jerks,
 Where the sun-down shadows lengthen over the limitless and lonesome prairie,
 Where herds of buffalo make a crawling spread of the square miles far and near,
 Where the humming-bird shimmers, where the neck of the long-lived swan is curling and winding,

Where the laughing-gull scoots by the shore, where she laughs her near-human laugh,
 Where bee-hives range on a gray bench in the garden half hid by the high weeds,
 Where the band-neck'd partridges roost in a ring on the ground with their heads out,
 Where the burial coaches enter the arch'd gates of a cemetery,
 Where winter wolves bark amid wastes of snow and icicled trees,
 Where the yellow-crown'd heron comes to the edge of the marsh at night and feeds upon small crabs,
 Where the splash of swimmers and divers cools the warm noon,
 Where the katy-did works her chromatic reed on the walnut tree over the well,
 Through patches of citrons and cucumbers with silver-wired leaves,
 Through the salt-lick or orange glade, or under conical firs,
 Through the gymnasium, through the curtain'd saloon, through the office or public hall;
 Pleas'd with the native and pleas'd with the foreign, with the new and the old,
 Pleas'd with the homely woman as well as the handsome,
 Pleas'd with the quakeress as she puts off her bonnet and talks melodiously,
 Pleas'd with the tune of the choir of the whitewash'd church,
 Pleas'd with the earnest words of the sweating Methodist preacher, impress'd seriously at the camp-
 meeting;
 Looking in at the shop windows of Broadway the whole forenoon, flattening the flesh of my nose on the
 thick plate-glass,
 Wandering the same afternoon with my face turned up to the clouds, or down a lane or along a beach,
 My right and left arms round the sides of two friends, and I in the middle;
 Coming home with the silent and dark-cheek'd bush-boy, (behind me he rides at the drape of the day,)
 Far from the settlements studying the print of animals' feet, or the moccasin print,
 By the cot in the hospital reaching lemonade to a feverish patient,
 Nigh the coffin'd corpse when all is still, examining with a candle;
 Voyaging to every port to dicker and adventure,
 Hurrying with the modern crowd as eager and fickle as any,
 Hot towards one I hate, ready in my madness to knife him,
 Solitary at midnight in my back yard, my thoughts gone from me a long while,
 Walking the old hills of Judea with the beautiful gentle God by my side,
 Speeding through space, speeding through heaven and the stars,
 Speeding amid the seven satellites and the broad ring, and the diameter of eighty thousand miles,
 Speeding with tail'd meteors, throwing fire-balls like the rest,
 Carrying the crescent child that carries its own full mother in its belly,
 Storming, enjoying, planning, loving, cautioning,
 Backing and filling, appearing and disappearing,
 I tread day and night such roads.

 I visit the orchards of spheres and look at the product,
 And look at quintillions ripen'd and look at quintillions green.

 I fly those flights of a fluid and swallowing soul,
 My course runs below the soundings of plummets.

*I help myself to material and immaterial,
No guard can shut me off, no law prevent me.*

*I anchor my ship for a little while only,
My messengers continually cruise away or bring their returns to me.*

*I go hunting polar furs and the seal, leaping chasms with a pike-pointed staff, clinging to topples of brittle
and blue.*

*I ascend to the foretruck,
I take my place late at night in the crow's-nest,
We sail the arctic sea, it is plenty light enough,
Through the clear atmosphere I stretch around on the wonderful beauty,
The enormous masses of ice pass me and I pass them, the scenery is plain in all directions,
The white-topt mountains show in the distance, I fling out my fancies toward them,
We are approaching some great battle-field in which we are soon to be engaged,
We pass the colossal outposts of the encampment, we pass with still feet and caution,
Or we are entering by the suburbs some vast and ruin'd city,
The blocks and fallen architecture more than all the living cities of the globe.
I am a free companion, I bivouac by invading watchfires,
I turn the bridegroom out of the bed and stay with the bride myself,
I tighten her all night to my thighs and lips.*

*My voice is the wife's voice, the screech by the rail of the stairs,
They fetch my man's body up dripping and drown'd.*

*I understand the large hearts of heroes,
The courage of present times and all times,
How the skipper saw the crowded and rudderless wreck of the steam-ship, and Death chasing it up and
down the storm,
How he knuckled tight and gave not back an inch, and was faithful of days and faithful of nights,
And chalk'd in large letters on a board, **Be of good cheer, we will not desert you;**
How he follow'd with them and tack'd with them three days and would not give it up,
How he saved the drifting company at last,
How the lank loose-gown'd women looked when boated from the side of their prepared graves,
How the silent old-faced infants and the lifted sick, and the sharp-lipp'd unshaven men;
All this I swallow, it tastes good, I like it well, it becomes mine,
I am the man, I suffer'd, I was there.*

*The disdain and calmness of martyrs,
The mother of old, condemn'd for a witch, burnt with dry wood, her children gazing on,
The hounded slave that flags in the race, leans by the fence, blowing, cover'd with sweat,*

*The twinges that sting like needles his legs and neck, the murderous buckshot and bullets,
All these I feel or am.*

*I am the hounded slave, I wince at the bite of the dogs,
Hell and despair are upon me, crack and again crack the marksmen,
I clutch the rails of the fence, my gore dribs, thinn'd with the ooze of my skin,
I fall on the weeds and stones,
The riders spur their unwilling horses, haul close,
Taunt my dizzy ears and beat me violently over the head with whip-stocks.*

*Agonies are one of my changes of garments,
I do not ask the wounded person how he feels, I myself become the wounded person,
My hurts turn livid upon me as I lean on a cane and observe.*

*I am the mash'd fireman with breast-bone broken,
Tumbling walls buried me in their debris,
Heat and smoke I inspired, I heard the yelling and shouts of my comrades,
I heard the distant click of their picks and shovels,
They have cleared the beams away, they tenderly lift me forth.*

*I lie in the night air in my red shirt, the pervading hush is for my sake,
Painless after all I lie exhausted but not so unhappy,
White and beautiful are the faces around me, the heads are bared of their fire-caps,
The kneeling crowd fades with the light of the torches.*

*Distant and dead resuscitate,
They show as the dial or move as the hands of me, I am the clock myself.*

*I am an old artillerist, I tell of my fort's bombardment,
I am there again.*

*Again the long roll of the drummers,
Again the attacking cannon, mortars,
Again to my listening ears the cannon responsive.*

*I take part, I see and hear the whole,
The cries, curses, roar, the plaudits for well-aim'd shots,
The ambulanza slowly passing trailing its red drip,
Workmen searching after damages, making indispensable repairs,
The fall of grenades through the rent roof, the fan-shaped explosion,
The whizz of limbs, heads, stone, wood, iron, high in the air.*

Again gurgles the mouth of my dying general, he furiously waves with his hand,

*He gasps through the clot **Mind not me**—mind—the entrenchments.*

In Foster's reading of the opening lines of Section 33, "the poet marshals the perceptions afforded by both grass and the ocean, slips his moorings and launches forth on an inward voyage where he steers by imaginative points of geography. He is a creature of becoming, a vehicle in motion" (1964 in Clarke 2:272). The opening of this grand catalog emphasizes that "What the poet had guessed at is that space and time are inseparable. And no longer is the poet bound by either" (Mason 1973 in Clarke 2:291). He is free and "afoot with his vision." Whitman is essentially in "movement away from the self and toward the universe or cosmos. The catalogues describe that journey" (ibid.:291). This catalog can be seen as a launching pad or point of departure in the progress of the poet to ever-wider spheres of vision on his journey with the reader. Whitman's images of ascension: "my ties and ballasts leave me," "I skirt sierras" and expansion: "my elbows rest in sea-gaps," "my palms cover continents" are powerful declarations of imaginative freedom culminating in the memorable proclamation, "I am afoot with my vision."

What follows has been called "a beautiful eighty-line list of places visited by the singer" a list whose power consists in the language, the rhythmic flow and the "tremendous sense of vitality conveyed by running...these...many epiphanies together" (Buell 1968 in Clarke 4:580). This catalog within a catalog (lines 715 to 795), has an initial series of observed human activities, followed by a succession of images of animals: the panther, the buck, the rattlesnake, the otter, the alligator, the black bear and the beaver, all of which are native to the North American continent. Then comes a sequence of plants: sugar cane, the cotton plant, rice, the western persimmon, the "long-leav'd" corn, the "blue-flower" flax, the buckwheat, and the rye "as it ripples and shades in the breeze."

After this series of American people, animals and plants the 'I' scales mountains and walks along a path through the brush leading to domestic and pastoral scenes featuring quail "whistling betwixt the woods and the wheat-lot" and a meadow where cattle "shake away flies with the tremulous shuddering of their hides."

There is then a shift to the sea, one of Whitman's central symbols and a favorite setting for his verse, where "the she-whale swims with her calf" and a "steamship trails hind-ways its long pennant of smoke" while the "fin of the shark cuts like a black chip out of the water." The sense of movement in these three images is especially fine: the wake of the whale, the smoke of the steamship and the cut of the shark's fin serve as unifying images.

The next image, of shells that "grow to the slimy deck" of the half burned brig contrasts with the condition below the deck, where "the dead are corrupting." The process of life, however primitive, above and death and corruption below on the derelict ship present a strange unified image here.

The ensuing images of picnics, baseball games, "he-festivals," musters, and beach-parties lead to the image of the mocking bird sounding his "delicious gurgles, cackles, screams and weeps." This is succeeded by another domestic farm scene of the hay-rick, the brood cow, the heifer and the bull.

The shift to a western image of herds of buffalo that "make a crawling spread" over the prairie is the beginning of a series of finely-wrought images: the humming bird that "shimmers" as it flies; the swan whose long neck "curves and winds"; the gull which "scoots by the shore"; and finally, the images of bee hives ranged on the gray bench "half hid by the weeds" and the partridges roosting in a ring "with their heads out."

The images of the burial coaches as they enter the cemetery and the "winter-wolves" barking "amid the wastes of snow and icicled tress" are much more somber. The heron eating small crabs, the swimmers and divers who "cool the warm noon" and the katydid who "works her chromatic reed on the walnut tree over the well" end this series where Whitman has placed us in "Audubon's world, as the I gathers sights and sounds" (Miller 1989:111).

There is then a three line transition using the word "through" that brings the reader to a five-line series where the poet "tells us he is 'pleased' " like God, "at what he has recreated" (ibid.:111). The 'I' is then on Broadway looking in shop windows, walking in a lane or on a beach with friends, in the wilderness, in a hospital caring for a patient, by a coffin, voyaging to foreign ports, and amid a crowd of modern people.

Another point of departure follows. He is in his back yard alone at midnight, where his thoughts leave him for a long time and he is in "the old hills of Judea with the beautiful gentle God by my side." This carries him beyond earthly concerns and his vision turns to other worlds beyond. He refers, in the next line, to the then still recent discoveries of the inner ring of Saturn and the planet Neptune. Then comes the lovely image of the 'crescent child':

"Carrying the crescent child that carries its own full mother in its belly": 'Carrying' is a metaphorical expression of the earth's gravitational force holding the moon in its orbit; 'crescent' refers to the phase of the moon (new), and also suggests the position of the foetus in the womb.

(Beaver in Miller 1989:111)

This catalog within a catalog ends after eighty lines with a series of verbs: "enjoying, planning, loving, cautioning," etc. where the poet treads "night and day such roads."

The next stanza is unusual because of Whitman's "metaphorical comparison of the life of celestial bodies to ripening fruit" (ibid.). The famous line, "I fly those flights of a fluid and swallowing soul" marks a series where he becomes the "other" and nothing can "prevent" him from becoming or entering other forms. He becomes: a seal hunter, a soldier, a lover where he "turns the bridegroom out of bed" and stays with the bride, he is the drowned man's wife and then the drowned man himself.

The following lines then recount an actual heroic incident. A stricken ship, the *San Francisco*, sailed from New York harbor on December 22, 1853 bound for South America. She was caught in a gale within a few hundred miles of the city. She was helpless at sea for some time, losing many passengers and crew (150 people were swept overboard by one huge wave) before the heroic captain of a passing

ship came to their rescue. Miller feels that the "tragedy at sea culminates in two of the most famous lines in the poem" (ibid.):

*All this I swallow, it tastes good, I like it well, it becomes mine,
I am the man, I suffer'd, I was there.*

Of these lines, the poet Jarrell senses that "Whitman has reached—as great writers always reach—a point at which criticism seems not only unnecessary but absurd: these lines are so good that even admiration feels like insolence..." (1953 in Clarke 3:192). According to Wright, the line beginning "I am the man" is "one of the noblest lines of poetry ever written...because it is not a boast but a modest bit of information...perhaps a whispered aside to the reader" (Miller 1989:113). John Berryman feels that the "superb" last line "probably includes an allusion to 'Ecce Homo' and so another Christ-identification, but this is incidental to its compendious report of what the artist is up to. The Self, of course, has disappeared, been put aside; the 'I' is now soul only, the imagination" (1976 in Clarke 3: 287). In a somewhat different reading of Whitman's need to become and suffer with others, ie. the series "All this I swallow..." Denis Donohue states that the poet:

was a little too ready to assimilate this pain to the genial law of his own equation....Even if we read this as a hymn to the sympathetic imagination, or, alternatively, in the Nietzschean sense that life is somehow justified by the courage its endurance requires, still we jib at its fluency. It is one thing to suffer, and it is quite another thing to sympathize with the suffering of others, and these experiences are not identical, no matter what Whitman's equations say.

(1965 in Clarke 4:460)

Whether one agrees with Donohue or not, it is quite a feat of sympathetic imagination for Whitman to be able, for example, to envision the witch burned at the stake, and the hounded slave in the powerful passage that follows the line "All these I feel or am." This is a fine example of Whitman's "imaginative power of transforming himself into another person" (Carpenter in Miller 1989:113). P.E. More explains this "otherness" in Whitman, his sympathy, by referring to a wartime photograph taken of him:

you will be struck by that brooding regard of the eyes which goes with the vision of the seer...he was conscious of (an) identity which made him one with every living creature, even with the inanimate elements. He was no stranger in the universe. The spirit that gazed out of his own eyes into the unresting multitude looked back at him with silent greeting from every passing face. And it was chiefly through this higher identity, or sympathy, that he cast away fear.

(1906 in Clarke 4:46-47)

The next, striking line, "Agonies are one of my changes of garments" may mark what one critic sees as "the familiar [Jungian] descent into darkness and hell" (Lewis in Miller 1989:113); however, looking simply at the language itself, we see how it manifests power through the "interweaving of abstract and familiar terms..." in "unexpected combinations" which "give a new vigor to his style" (Asselineau 1962

in Clarke 4:436). The poet becomes, through his powers of sympathy and identity, the "mashed fireman with breast-bone broken" whose last sight is "The kneeling crowd" which fades with the light of the torches. It is at this point in the poem that the 'I' is "now Soul only, the imagination...in its perpetual present" so transcendent that it "assumes the functions of Time" (Miller 1989:114) which becomes clear in the next lines:

*Distant and dead resuscitate,
They show as the dial or move as the hands of me, I am the clock myself.*

Carlisle believes that "Whitman measures himself and his existence by a mythic or human time rather than by chronometric time. He humanizes time and skirts space. Whitman is clearly not confined to a particular realm, for he experiences a world...through his awareness" (ibid.).

Section 33 closes with the account of the old artillerist who tells of the bombardment of his fort; of the ambulance passing "trailing its red drip"; of the carnage wrought by explosions and finally, as in so much of Whitman's poetry, a sound, as the dying general "gurgles" and speaks, gasping through the clot of blood, "Mind not me—mind—the entrenchments."

So ends Whitman's longest catalog in *Song of Myself*. The journey from his declaration of imaginative freedom with "I am afoot with my vision" to this battlefield scene is at times like a roller coaster ride and at other times a calm and peaceful progress. The rhythm and pace may vary but the abundance of imagery never does. Whitman was able in all his catalogs to create small worlds with his imagination, but in this one he has created worlds within worlds; he has seen and described the real and the imagined on more levels and in more ways than ever before. Some might argue that he would never manifest such artistic power again.

4. Conclusion: "Toward you all, in America's name"

The images of America that Whitman presented in *Song of Myself* can of course be understood simply as a report of his experience: an imaginative record of himself and his times. Whitman has said of *Leaves of Grass* that it was "an attempt, from first to last, to put a person, a human being (myself, in the latter part of the Nineteenth century in America,) freely, fully and truly on record" (Prose works).

However, on another level, much of the poem and, in particular, the catalogs within it, can be seen as an effort to give form to the "inexhaustible vitality of nature" (Thomas 1987:80); his catalogs were a result of his desire to "express the boundless fecundity of nature and human life" (Buell 1968 in Clarke 4:572). In the catalogs and through the sheer diversity of things his eye rests upon, Whitman attempts to unify the seemingly disparate realities he perceived. He "wants to evoke, imply, as it were, all the rest of the world, the infinity of space and the 'amplitude of time'" (Asselineau 1962 in Clarke 4:432). In attempting this seemingly impossible undertaking, which most artists would not even think of, he largely succeeds. The honesty of his voice and the accuracy of his perceptions lead the reader to trust in his vision.

Whitman perhaps sensed some danger in the task of trying to give expression to such a vast and diverse subject. The catalog becomes a form through which he is able to express the scope of his vision and it also serves as a means "of preventing the world from disintegrating, as for him it constantly threatened to do, into a spectacle of endless mutability and into a chaos of a meaningless succession of experiences. His catalog technique allows him 'to move so fast through the circuit of forms that no catastrophe can touch him. The spirit triumphs over chaos by sheer energy' " (Thomas 1987:80). In presenting his vision through the catalogs he brings order and a sense of unity and meaning to a world that would otherwise appear random and meaningless. This is the essence of religion. He saw this sense of meaning and unity as essential to human happiness, so his poems become a testament to man's yearning for meaning, unity and order. Through the juxtaposition of seemingly disparate elements in the 'space' of the catalogs, Whitman was able to bring about a poetic fusion of his world, a world that sometimes threatened, in his view, to come apart at any moment. His catalogs symbolically worked to "impute to American society the unity in diversity Whitman believed characterized the life of the natural order" (ibid.). This need to resolve and unify had its roots in more than a social setting: it is a consequence of Romanticism, which sees the human imagination in general and the poetic imagination in particular as necessary because the imagination "resolves all contradictions and unifies the soul and being of creator and receiver, writer and reader, subject and object, and human nature and Naturageist alike" (Preminger and Brogan 1993:572). Whitman's imagination was an expression of his need to unify his world on all levels: the psychopersonal, the social, the national, the global and the universal or metaphysical. If there is one consistent design or basis in his work, it is this, and it is wholly in keeping with the times in which he lived and which formed his views.

The world Whitman created in *Song of Myself*, through listing or naming so many of the things he valued, places him in the role of creator of a new "home" for himself and his readers. Just as he once (physically) built houses, in his poetry he created a place that had not before existed. This was achieved through the mystical power of the spoken word; it must be remembered that his poetry was meant to be read aloud, for that is when it has its greatest power. R.W.B. Lewis has said:

Every great poet composes a world for us...Whitman... engaged in the stupendous task of building a world that had not been there before the first words of his poem...He absorbed life for years; and when he contained enough, he let it go out from (him) again. 'I...accept all, then reproduce all in my own forms.' (This becomes) actual in...the process of naming. It is hard to recall any particular life and work, of men and women and animals and plants and things, of body and mind, that Whitman has not somewhere named in caressing detail. And the process of naming for Whitman is nothing less than the process of creation. This new Adam is both maker and namer; his innocent pleasure, untouched by humility, is colored by the pride of one who looks on his work and finds it good. The things that are named seem to spring into being at the sound of the word. It is through the poetic act that Whitman articulated the dominant metaphysical illusion of his day and became the creator of his own world.

(1955 in Clarke:4:327)

Because Whitman was a poet of imaginary brilliance so unlike anyone else, it was difficult for people in his day to recognize his genius and it is still difficult for many modern readers to appreciate him. However, his goals were fairly simple, even if his poetics were not. He first of all sought to celebrate his own individual being; his body, mind and soul he recognized and praised for the divine gift they were. Early in the poem he declares himself to be "Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos." The order here is revealing; he saw himself as an individual, an American, a common man among others in a society that idealized the common man, and finally he pictured himself, like all men and women, as a whole universe of promise and potential. The direction of his genius and creative power was expansive. William James observed that

The only sentiments he allowed himself to express were of the expansive order; and he expressed these in the first person, not as your mere monstrously conceited individual might so express them, but vicariously for all men, so that a passionate and mystical ontological emotion suffuses his words, and ends by persuading the reader that men and women, life and death, and all things are divinely good.

(1902 in Clarke 4:41)

Whitman was celebrating himself for all men in a belief that a divine spirit was what we all share as a common human bond. This spirit, or soul, was both individual and collective and so souls could recognize each other when they met in life. In D.H. Lawrence's phrase the soul is "a wayfarer down the open road...Meeting all other wayfarers along the road" (1923 in Bloom:18-19). This image of souls journeying on the road of life Whitman felt was an important one because the journey itself, not the destination necessarily, was what mattered. Whitman's understanding of the soul and his religious and spiritual conceptions changed over time, of course. In his early life he was open to many influences, some traditional, like the Bible and orthodoxy, others less so, like spiritualism. As he grew older, he adopted other views. In one scholar's view, in later life he no longer believed in

the zaniness of space-traveling lecturers, the erotic mysticism of Swedenborgians, the all-absorptive quality of mesmeric healers. Now he had a simplified vision that was in line with the homogenized optimism of late-nineteenth century movements like mind cure and liberal Protestantism. The weirdly magical, sometimes tortured seer of 1855 had become the positive thinker of 1891.

(Reynolds 1995:585)

This rather sociologically-based view of Whitman's complex beliefs may or may not be accurate; however, it appears that while the poet's spiritual beliefs may have become more conservative, the people around him began to see him increasingly as a kind of "new messiah" (ibid.:583). He was even dubbed, perhaps somewhat sarcastically, the "Pope of Mickle Street." One early devotee, however, had always seen him as a powerful spiritual presence. His biographer, R.M. Bucke, had for many years felt that Whitman had "cosmic consciousness" and many who met the poet came away deeply moved by his presence. One of these was the founder of a Whitman "church" in Bolton, England. Dr. John Johnson made what can properly be called a pilgrimage to see Whitman at his house on Mickle Street in Camden, New Jersey. The good doctor felt the aged poet has a magnetism "which positively astonished me,

producing an exhaltation of mind and soul which no man's presence ever did" (Reynolds 1995:528). And one of the church's other founders, J.W. Wallace, has said of Whitman:

the divine life which is at the root of every human soul, however deeply buried in his or her subconscious nature, had in Whitman risen into clear consciousness and dominating power, "dazzling and tremendous as the sun."In him the two complementary sides of the religion outlined in "Leaves of Grass"—the divine pride of man in himself and an outgoing sympathy which amounted to self-identification with all others—were extraordinarily developed and in perfect balance....he appeared the embodiment of a strong, well-poised soul, of rare purity and sweetness, serenely wise and loving.

(1970:219-225)

Although Wallace had never believed in spiritualism, while he was with Whitman in the poet's home, "he suddenly had a vision of his dead mother, who had died six years earlier. Wallace later wrote, 'I seemed to see her mentally with perfect clearness, her face radiant with the joy of our realized communion.' For him, it seemed 'indisputable that Walt was somehow the link between us, as if his presence had made the experience possible' "

(Reynolds 1995:582-583)

Whitman never claimed to be a prophet, seer or spiritual teacher, though he probably enjoyed the attention and adulation. In the Preface to **Leaves of Grass** he declared:

There will be no more priests. Their work is done. A superior breed shall take their place.... a new order shall arise and they shall be the priests of man, and every man shall be his own priest.

(1855:25)

A community of souls on the open road, however, would require some help from other souls, especially those among the new breed of poets. Whitman felt that certain things were required of the poet:

The land and sea, the animals fishes and birds, the sky of heaven and the orbs, the forests mountains and rivers, are not small themes...but folks expect of the poet to indicate more than the beauty and dignity which always attach to dumb real objects...they expect him to indicate the path between reality and their souls.

(1855:10)

His responsibility as an American poet was fulfilled. He left a bible for his fellow countrymen when he completed **Leaves of Grass**. It is full of poems that indicate the "path between reality" and the human soul. It is also a book that celebrates the American experience. In absorbing America and expressing the meaning and spirit of the nation and the people in his times, Whitman defined what America is for all time. New generations of readers, both in America and around the world, have come to his book and found truth, beauty and a path.

But Whitman is a larger presence. He transcends America. His stature as a visionary poet places him beyond national boundaries and cultural definitions. His thought and his sense of humanity belong to the world. Although understanding Whitman's real inner nature is a difficult undertaking, the following passage probably comes closer to defining him than any other prose passage he ever wrote. It can be interpreted on both a national level (addressed to an American audience), and on an international level (addressed to the people of all nations):

This is what you shall do: Love the earth and the sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to everyone that asks, stand up for the stupid and crazy, devote your income and labor to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God, have patience and indulgence toward the people, take off your hat to nothing known or unknown or to any man or number of men, go freely with powerful uneducated persons and with the young and the mothers of families, read these leaves in the open air every season of every year of your life, re-examine all you have been told at school or church or in any book, dismiss whatever insults your soul, and your very flesh shall be a great poem and have the richest fluency not only in words but in the silent lines of its lips and face and between the lashes of your eyes and in every motion and joint of your body.

(Preface to **Leaves of Grass** 1855:11)

These lines, of course, express some very American values; however, the humanism, the integrity and the urging to "dismiss whatever insults your soul" appeal to people the world over. Whitman himself said, "my dearest dream is for an internationality of poems and poets, binding the lands of the earth closer than all treaties and diplomacy" (Allen and Folsom 1995:2). And problems of translation aside, the response to his poetry in other countries has been overwhelmingly positive. One of the foremost Whitman scholars has noted that "No other poet since Shakespeare has appealed to so many people in so many places in so many ways" (ibid.). People around the world read Whitman because he "carefully and imaginatively defined the problematics of democracy" and because "everyone seems to find in his poetry what she or he wants and needs" (ibid.). This wide appeal continues to this day.

At a time when much of the world appears to resent the intrusion of American cultural exports (a term like "Coca-colonization" springs to mind) and the resulting homogenization of values caused by the popularity of products that change world eating habits (McDonald's), the way people dress (Levi's and American styles in general), and entertainment preferences (Hollywood movies and MTV), something as liberating and uplifting as the poetry of Walt Whitman is a positive offering from America to the rest of the globe. People around the world wishing to understand America and American culture could do no better than to turn to Whitman. But his verse offers much more than this. It is a gift to the world from a truly great soul. It is a pathway and beacon for those wishing to understand the human soul, the meaning of democracy, the importance of freedom, the necessity of brotherhood, the essence of religion, and, finally, the power of love.

In *Song of Myself* Whitman says:

*And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,
 And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,
 And I know that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the
 women my sisters and lovers,
 And that a kelson * of the creation is love....*

* A lengthwise timber or metal structure running internally along the bottom of a of a ship, parallel with and bolted to the keel, fastening the floor timbers or plating and the keel together (OED).

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