

“AMATIVENESS” AND “ADHESIVENESS”: WHITMAN’S FORCES OF UNITY

Chang-fang Chen

陳長房*

摘 要

本論文探討惠特曼詩中綜合統攝之力。在「草葉集」中惠特曼試圖超越傳統，肯定未經雕飾的自然，重建人類神性的稟賦。依此推衍，傅萊耶論述天啟式的想像即變得十分有意義。傅氏以為天啟式的世相是探究現實的最高形式，也是人類追求欲望想像的極致。天啟式的視界，或代表基督教「聖經」末卷的「啟示錄」肇端的「天堂樂境」；或代表希臘羅馬古典傳統的「黃金時代」。唯有身處此時此地，自然即賦有人性的特質，人類心靈可獲得解放。而這些在在皆胥賴特殊的喻意修辭技巧的運用不為功。此外萬物齊一的觀點也是惠特曼文學架構的中心原則。傅氏相信自我認同的最高形式唯有在天啟式的視域中可以覓得。臻至此境界，人類可以將遠古純真世界與現代墮落世界，自我與異己，主體與客體，神性與人性，靈與肉，物質與精神合構為一。在詩行中，喻意修辭的運用同時也確認了詩人的齊物觀蘊涵詩人與主題的神契冥合。

Abstract

This study will reflect the forces of unity in selected poems of Walt Whitman. It will be noted that in many of Whitman's poems in *Leaves of Grass* the poet accomplishes the epochal by reaching behind tradition to find and assert nature untroubled by art, and by re-establishing the divinity of man. In this connection, Frye's discussion of apocalyptic reality is important. Apocalyptic reality is, for Frye, reality in its highest form. It is what the human imagination can conceive at the extreme limits of desire. Apocalypes, as Frye uses it, has been represented variously as the Revelation at the end of the Bible or the Paradise at the beginning to use the Christian metaphors; or the Golden Age, to use the image of classical antiquity. It is only in the apocalyptic world, according to Frye, that nature can be humanized and man liberated — and both are achieved at the same time by the principle of radical metaphor. "This is metaphor," Frye notes. "the complete transformation of both nature and human nature into the same form."

*作者為本校英語系專任教授

Identity is also a central principle of literary structure for Frye and serves to undergird the discussion of this study. In a number of places he has described the various forms which the drive toward identity takes. Frye makes clear that the highest form of self-identity comes from one's vision of the apocalyptic world, the original world from which man has fallen, a world of revelation and of knowledge which exists mysteriously between "is" and "is not" and in which divine and human creativity are merged into one. In such a state the distinction between subject and object disappears in favor of a unified consciousness. In poetry, identity-with as opposed to identity-as — means that the poet and his theme become one.

I

The language of poetry, as Elizabeth Sewall has said, leans two ways: either toward "nothingness" — a Platonic realm where physical objects collapse into their ideal essences — or toward "everythingness" — an inclusive tongue capable of rendering the vast plurality of creation. (Chapter 5) Walt Whitman steered in the direction of the latter. For example, the one trait he held in common with other romantic writers, such as Blake or Rimbaud, was the overwhelming desire to enter the unknown areas behind appearances to reveal the remote laws of existence, the underlying connections between man and the forces of the universe. Whitman had the ability to achieve access to the hidden corners of the creation of the human psyche, and to organic energies inherent in nature. (Matthiessen 518).

Whitman's language in his poetry dazzles the reader with a rhetorical power that animates each object, every scene or image. And the rush of images, the poet's seeming incapacity to contain himself, gives the impression that one is witnessing the furious disorder beneath the surface of the mind. Obviously, this is Whitman's plan. However, we know, in another sense, that nothing could be further from the truth, for the poet's worksheets and his correspondence prove beyond any doubt his painstaking and meticulous craftsmanship. He was an exacting revisionist. (Furness 30).

What early seized Whitman was the operation of time — time as the instigator of flux, destruction, and rebirth. Death, age, sexual drive, the continually changing face of man and the world — these collaborate with time or manifest its effects on a physical level. Together they compose the scheme of process. Yet process must be conceived through a fundamental division in being itself: a split between self and not self which creates an elaborate network of tensions in man's relation to his material body and the concrete world about him. This opposition serves Whitman as a dramatic groundwork for his poetry and helps him to arrange the

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flickering, nervous energy of his poems. The idea of an independent, self-contained nature, endowed with its own laws and energies, to which man is subject through his flesh, places the spirit at odds with it. Whitman finds in the not self an equivalent response to his own expanding selfhood, and only an empathetic exercise of the imagination is required for him to perceive the basic unity of self and other. In this connection, Whitman goes beyond the Transcendentalists, for although he retains their dualistic conception of reality, he alters it in two significant ways: first by placing the body firmly on the “self” side of Emerson’s dichotomy, and second, by preceiving the entirety of both self and not self to be suffused with the power of divinity. Thus, Whitman’s encounters with the essentiality of life involve neither a retreat from society nor a subordination of the senses, but rather a movement through society and a sensual embrace with the whole of the not self. (Buell 326-27) Roger Asselineau discusses Whitman’s “poetry of the body.” and makes a point of the greatest significance in understanding his ecstatic poetry, that though it begins in sensual delight, it leads to spiritual insight. Asselineau notes the following:

Whitman’s sensuality, instead of remaining exclusively carnal, opens out and is sublimated. The spirit, in order to be manifest, cannot do without matter and, of course, all mysticism depends on and is accompanied by emotions of the flesh. But what is original with Whitman, at least in 1855-56, is that, contrary to Wordsworth, Shelley, or Emerson, for instance, he always has the sharp consciousness of the purely sensual source of his mystical intuitions. Instead of proceeding at once to a spiritualization, like the English romantics or the American transcendentalist, he never forgets that his body is the theatre and the point of origin for his mystical states . . . (4)

For Whitman poetry must mirror the flow of interior experience; it takes form at the meeting place of the spirit and the rapidly shifting elements of physical reality — that is, in the caverns of the psyche. In this manner, it reflects the process by which man is ruled and, simultaneously, overcomes that process for the moment through the imposition of the imagination’s stability and order.

Nature is represented in the generation, conflict, abolition and regeneration of images and meanings. The poet’s imagination, then, raises these images from the successive motion of events to the stillness of art. Moreover, the imagination that dominates the American literary tradition, which is a romantic tradition, exists or

yearns to exist, outside whatever kingdom or necessity the real world imposes. For Whitman and other transcendentalists this impulse was almost a habit. Whitman's objective, it can be said, is conceptualized as a vision of apocalyptic stasis, a final destruction of a dualistic reality and its replacement with a new order in which the self has total freedom and power. All his energies have been directed into an intense concentration of self, centered about a single goal. The human mind or intelligence, has become so large and powerful that it completely dominates all other forces of being.

It is obvious, therefore, that Whitman's vision is liberal and inclusive, encompassing the total reality of his poetic process. Whitman's vision of unity always focuses on the tensions implicit in the dualistic world-view. The tensions between self and not self, between body and soul, between materiality and spirituality are at the center of his thought, and the attempt to resolve them is the informing principle of his verse.

II

According to Perry Miller, at the heart of the revolutionary tradition there is romance. In that association, the American classic writers confirm their debt to the literary influence of European romanticism. There were educated and literate people in the Colonies and the new States for more than a hundred years before the creative outburst which is called the American Renaissance. But English and continental literature could not have a great effect in America until their substance and temperament matched the American capacity for response. Dryden, Pope and Johnson were widely read in America, but Wordsworth and Coleridge could teach what the Americans were ready to learn. America was dependent on literary and intellectual innovation in Europe, most dependent, in fact, at the time when Emerson found the zest for declaring a cultural independence. (589-617) It was when Europe had experienced the French Revolution and a cataclysmic sense of historic endings and beginnings that its own experience began to resemble that of the western republic. The interchange of ideas began which made it possible for American literature to assume confidence and follow its own sources of inspiration.

Recent contributors to the study of romanticism and to the old argument over whether the term has coherent meaning, have joined in locating the root of the romantic movement in modern political history and the seminal event of the French Revolution. Northrop Frye, who edited a volume of English Institute essays in which

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this discovery is a major connecting thread, observed that “Romanticism . . . is not only a revolution but inherently revolutionary, and enables poets to articulate a revolutionary age.” (Frye, *Romanticism* vi-vii) Frye notes that he bases his understanding on the documentation and conclusions offered by M. H. Abrams in his contribution to the same volume. He makes the following observation:

The Romantic movement found itself in a revolutionary age, of which the French Revolution was the central symbol . . . The fact of revolution was linked in many poetic minds with the imminence of apocalypse — association of ideas that Mr. Abrams quotes from Coleridge as: “The French Revolution. Millennium. Universal Redemption. Conclusion.” But the apocalyptic world did not remain revolutionary flesh for long: anticlimax and disillusionment quickly followed. Mr. Abrams connects the frequent later Romantic theme of the plunging of hope into despair with this disillusionment, and shows that as the only place in which hope springs eternal can be the human mind, the theme of revolution fulfilling itself in apocalypse had to be transferred from the social to the mental world. . . . Such a feat was not a neurotic subjective substitute for revolution, but the articulating of a new kind of imaginative power — and also, of course, the bringing into literature of the new movement which we know as Romanticism. (Frye, *Romanticism* viii)

Harold Kaplan interprets the idea of revolution as the dramatic extreme of liberation. It is moved by the passion of hope, of revelation, and its intellectual instrument is what we call the imagination. But the imagination is subject to the anticlimaxes of disillusionment, just as the political romance faces counter-revolution, or the simple inertia of history, or something worse coming from within itself, expressed by the historic irony of the revolution “devouring its own children.” (25)

A revolutionary consciousness is formed by the assumption that civilization is subject to creative choice, or if the stress is deterministic, to an historic fatality which works for the good, as in Marxism. In either case, according to Kaplan, “reality” gives up its resistance to the imagination. The romantic rhythm describes that enchanted hope in flight and falling; the arc communicates the pathos of imaginative freedom in collision with the real world. Frye illustrates with a different image from Schopenhauer. “In Schopenhauer the world as idea rides precariously on top of a ‘world as will’ which engulfs practically the whole of existence in its moral indifference.” (Frye, *Romanticism*, 22)

For good historical reasons, it is this aspect of romantic thinking to which the classic American writers are said to be most sensitive. For example, romanticism is a way of looking at reality that places the self at the center of all existence, and serious romantic writing tends to be preeminently a record of the dramatic experience of the individual personality encountering society and nature and exploring the depths of its own being. Walt Whitman, as well as other romantics, centers his experience in the creative activity of imagination, the blending and unifying powers of the mind that enable man to shape and order his experience and realize the nature of its inner relationships.

Abrams strengthens this concept of the imagination with these remarks about Wordsworth:

Having given up the hope of revolutionizing the social and political structure, Wordsworth has discovered that his new calling . . . is to effect through his poetry an egalitarian revolution of the spirit (what he elsewhere calls an entire regeneration of his upperclass readers) so that they may share his revelation of the equivalence of souls, the heroic dimensions of common life, and the grandeur of the ordinary and the trivial in Nature. (Frye, *Romanticism*, 23)

Abrams states further:

Wordsworth's purpose in poetry was to achieve a revolutionary mode of sublimity, namely the mode of "sublimated humanity." To find the best pupils of Wordsworth one must go to the American writers, and these, Whitman and Emerson as well as Melville and Hawthorne, developed the creed of a "sublimated humanity." (Frye, *Romanticism*, 68)

Bernice Slote, writing in this same vein, makes the following observation:

The appeal of Whitman is that he gives full expression to the cosmic, physically generative, sense of life. In this, he contrasts with earlier writers who were only partly involved. Blake, for example, was physical, but he thought the world a shadow. Wordsworth was a nature mystic, but he preferred the literal to the rhapsodic tone, and his physicality was limited to nature. Shelley was rhapsodic and prophetic, but he sometimes wrote in air. In prose, although Emerson had the oversoul and Thoreau

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was at least a reprobate transcendentalist, both may have found more good than evil in their cosmos. It was Whitman who wrote the poetry that made the catalogue complete. (Miller, *Start* 6)

Life was a challenge or a test and, as Thoreau put it:

I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion. (*Walden* 90)

That urge to conquer experience and judge life is indeed in the best writing of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, and it leads in recurrent cycles to the apocalyptic and prophetic strain in American writing.

III

Kaplan observes, “in politics we have our scriptural texts, and history has produced its generative myths, but the very nature of a liberal society suggests that the complex moral imagination required to express it can best be found in its imaginative writers.” (ix) That perhaps accounts for the challenge felt not only by Whitman but also by other writers of the literary renaissance, and the way in which their works still evoke deep response in us. It is Whitman who represents the imaginative writer who encourages independence and self-reliance, and who asserts that love is a strengthening force in the universe. His poetry places high value on a consciousness that is expansive, resists constraint, and seeks restlessly for the freedom inherent in creativity. In other words, he is the spokesman for the liberal literary imagination.

There is this romantic attempt to unify through imaginative perception the world which Whitman constructs wherein the self discovers a vision of transcendent unity and projects it onto nature. This type of philosophical apocalypse can be applied to many poems in *Leaves of Grass*. The apocalyptic motif, then, becomes evident in not only Whitman but also in a good deal of mainstream American literature.

In its broadest sense, the apocalyptic imagination is an important aspect of the American renaissance writers' craft. Obviously, as a creating artist, Whitman performed an apocalyptic function. The work of art, Kermode explains, is apocalyptic because a kind of transcendence of temporal reality figures in the artistic process. (17)

The critic Geoffrey Hartman writes concerning the apocalyptic imagination, "it describes a mind which actively desires the inauguration of a totally new epoch . . . and since what stands between us and the end of the old world is the world . . . it may also characterize any strong desire to achieve an unmediated contact with the principle of things. (x) The focus on "the principle of things" allows the imagination to assert its own sovereignty and freedom from external reality. When this happens, the imagination becomes apocalyptic, destroying the old reality and replacing it with a new and more felicitous vision. Whitman represents that form of the apocalyptic romantic imagination, the sensibility that makes its own laws and values and relentlessly insists on imposing them on the common world.

Northrop Frye's discussion of "what the human imagination can conceive at the extreme limits of desire" (Frye, *Anatomy* 119) is applicable to Whitman's high degree of involvement and concern with the social and intellectual issues of his age and the manner in which this concern finds its way in his art. Whitman cannot have the world on his own terms and therefore, as an artist, he creates another world, a world in which the self is absolute and sufficient and external reality is destroyed. The main theme of this article is what James Miller refers to as "Whitman the poet of sexual force, the poet of procreation." (Miller, 37) This treatment will reveal that the strongest source of vitality in Whitman is erotic; his theme is communication and his metaphors are sexual. This enables him to express life as action and at the same time point to its unassailable, biological source of unity. Even at the end of his career Whitman still reaffirmed the importance of sex as a powerful force in life. He says in "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads":

From another point of view *Leaves of Grass* is avowedly the song of Sex and Amativeness, and even Animality — though meanings that do not usually go along with those words are behind all, and will duly emerge; and all are sought to be lifted into a different light and atmosphere. Of this feature, intentionally palpable in a few lines, I shall only say the spousing principle of those lines so gives breath of life to my whole scheme that the bulk of the pieces might as well have been left unwritten were those lines omitted. Difficult as it will be, it has

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become, in my opinion, imperative to achieve a shifted attitude from superior men and women towards the thought and fact of sexuality, as an element in character, personality, the emotions, and a theme in literature. I am not going to argue the question by itself; it does not stand by itself. The vitality of it is altogether in its relations, bearings, significance — like the clef of a symphony. At last analogy the lines I allude to, and the spirit in which they are spoken, permeate all *Leaves of Grass*, and the work must stand or fall with them, as the human body and soul must remain as an entirety. (LG 572)

That Whitman wanted the sexual passages of his poems to be understood as pious and joyous hymns to the universe and the organic process itself is made clear in the above quote. Whitman makes it clear that his love poems are so vital to his intention that “the bulk of the pieces might well have been left unwritten were those lines omitted.” One of the ironies of Whitman’s career is the fact that the poet who wished above all to speak to common humanity was so consistently misunderstood and misread.

IV

It is obvious that Whitman’s intention is to affirm “life” just because that affirmation seems difficult. He does so by turning from custom and received belief to the individual and to nature as the repositories of true values. To elicit the unseen or hidden values, he relies on the imagination, which is able to see fact as symbol. The poet’s imagination is creative, and its creation is also revelatory. The poet’s way of seeing allows him a glimpse of the “Real.” Whitman seems to insist that the poet can save us. He never ceases to assert in theory that nature is symbolic revelation. Emerson had first asked to see the “Ideal” not somewhere beyond, in another realm, but in the actual; to take things seriously just because they are not mere things but vehicles, symbols, epiphanies (Atkinson, *Emerson* 32)

In the previous part of this study, I have defined as apocalyptic those instances in Whitman’s poetry which present a radically different world or version of reality that exists in a credible relationship with the world or reality verified by empiricism and common experience — the world or reality the writer may assume his reader to bring to a reading of his work. My use of the adjective “credible” — rather than the narrower qualifier “rational” is based on the assumption that an act of

faith and an act of reason may be equally and inextricably involved in the acceptance of any unseen world that is, in some sense, concordant with the known world. I have used apocalyptic in the previous section as descriptive of visionary reality. This study continues in the same vein. Whitman's visionary world encompasses his ideas about the sensual and should be understood as performing essentially the same apocalyptic function. The focus is the revelation of a genuine, hitherto hidden, reality. According to C. S. Lewis, if the unknown reality, when known, is to be radically and convincingly different from our given reality and therefore worth knowing, it will share the visionary quality that characterizes the unknown realms mined by the various forms mysticism takes. Lewis goes on to say, in his posthumous collection of essays entitled *Of Other Worlds*, "to construct plausible and moving 'other worlds' you must draw on the only real 'other world' we know, that of the spirit." (12)

Whitman's aim, as this study will relate, is to destroy old assumptions and to suggest a new, and often visionary, reality. Samuel R. Delany writes the following explanation which is applicable to Whitman:

The vision . . . that Science Fiction tries for seems to be very close to the vision of poetry, particularly poetry as it concerned nineteenth century poets. No matter how disciplined its creation, to move into an unreal world demands a brush with mysticism, virtually all the classics of speculative poetry are mystical. (63)

Thus, Whitman's treatment of sex as a sacred and spiritual act which embraces life itself is perceived as a radical transformation or transfiguration. In other words, this old world of mind (the social taboos and frustrations attached to sex) discovers a believable new world of mind which determines to nullify and destroy the old system entirely or, less likely, makes it a part of a larger design. Whitman could not surrender the doctrine of sex, because it was his underlying principle of continuity on the naturalistic level. Sex is the bridge between men and women and between men and men. It is the natural continuum of human relationships.

The Danish critic Schyberg acknowledges that Whitman was a religious prophet in the same sense and degree that Nietzsche and Carlyle were, but no more. In his lyric forms and treatment of sex, Walt Whitman created a new epoch and became a major figure in world literature, and these were superlative achievements. (8) In addition, James Miller explains that "as Henry Adams speculated on the relevance of the sexual force to history, Sigmund Freud explored the central significance of the force in the psyche, and, later, Alfred Kinsey discovered the intricate

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omnipresence of the force in society. It is time that criticism caught up with history and evaluated Whitman not with nineteenth-century reticence but with twentieth-century reality — a reality he prophetically anticipated.” (Miller, *Start* 24) Henry Adams makes the following observations:

On one side, at the Louvre and at Chartres art and architecture inspired by the Madonna, as he knew by the record of work actually done and still before his eyes, was the highest energy ever known to man, the creator of four-fifths of his noblest art, exercising vastly more attraction over the human mind than all the steam-engines and dynamos ever dreamed of; and yet this energy was unknown to the American mind. An American Virgin would never dare command; an American Venus would never dare exist . . . Adams began to ponder, asking himself whether he knew of any American artist who had ever insisted on the power of sex as every classic had always done but he could think only of Walt Whitman . . . All the rest had used sex for sentiment, never for force. (Bradley, II, 625-26)

Miller observes:

There seems to be, in this one casual reference to Whitman, more revealed insight than in many a full treatise on the poet. Whitman emerges as neither the Good Gray Poet nor an obscene old man, but as the poet of sexual force, the poet of procreation. It was this fresh wind blowing through his *Leaves* that Emerson and Lanier and Swinburne felt but could not or would not identify. It is this enduring, magnetic energy in his work that constitutes the secret shared by Crane, Lorca, Thomas, and Ginsberg. (Miller, *Start* 24)

It can be said, therefore, that the crucial problem in interpreting Whitman’s poetic vision is the nature of his love. What strikes the reader of *Leaves of Grass* at once, especially in the early editions is that his love of people is intimately physical. His lines abound in sensual and sexual images. As he admitted in his own anonymous review of the 1855 edition, “If health were not his distinguishing attribute, this poet would be the very harlot of persons. Right and left he flings his arms, drawing men and women with undeniable love to this close embrace, loving the clasp of their hands, the touch of their necks and breasts, and the sound

of their voices.” (Traubel, 19-20) Actually, this first edition of *Leaves of Grass* creates a more vivid impression of the “harlot of persons” than of “health.”

Whitman could love men and women alike, along with children, domestic animals, birds, insects, and all natural beings. Such “adhesiveness” and the value Whitman put upon it, however, suggested not so much an ethical imperative as a psychic want. “Adhesiveness” stuck things together by sticking them all to the seeking and needful self. Whitman’s invocation of such phrenological faculties as “adhesiveness” and “amativeness” suggests that a good poem for “Song of Myself” might be found in his short works of 1856, “Spontaneous Me.” Like “Song of Myself,” “Spontaneous Me” followed the pattern prevailing through the whole *Leaves of Grass*, that of finding both a “me” and its “spontaneity” not within a self but in the self’s need to cling to and draw its being from outside. In this case, however, the physical principle of attachment to others was specifically located in sex and so in the most urgent physical need for union that experience knew. (LG 88) What seemed most central, however, was not a vision of freedom, but rather of sexuality as a harassed bondage, a brute need for coupling, a servitude to the only principle in Whitman that clearly and literally could be seen to animate the human universe.

One of the themes of “Song of Myself” is the unity of all being. Whitman resolves the dichotomy between self and not self that is implicit in the dualistic world view of other transcendentalists. Whitman means by the “I” in his poems that aspect of selfhood which is both individual and cosmic, part of all souls and all things. In this connection, it is necessary to focus on section 50 of “Song of Myself”:

There is that in me — I do not know what it is — but I know it
is in me.

Wrench’d and sweaty — calm and cool then my body becomes, I sleep
— I sleep long.

I do not know it — it is without name — it is a word
unsaid,

It is not in any dictionary, utterance, symbol.

Something it swings on more than the earth I swing on.

To it the creation is the friend whose embracing awakes me

Perhaps I might tell more. Outlines! I plead for my brothers and sisters.

Do you see O my brothers and sisters?

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It is not chaos or death — it is form, union, plan -- it is eternal life
— it is Happiness. (LG 88)

Whitman had no word to express that which, obviously sexual, is form, union, plan, and eternal life, that which, in other worlds, is God. His poems express his meaning. But in the twentieth century Sigmund Freud was to provide a word which sums up what Whitman is singing about: *libido*. Libido is the force of sexual instinct, “the total available energy of Eros.” (Freud XXIII, 149) According to Freud, the purpose of Eros, the instinct toward life, is “to combine single human individuals, and after that families, then races, peoples and nations into one great unity, the unity of mankind.” (Freud XXII, 122) Thus *Leaves of Grass* generally and “Song of Myself” specifically can be read as Whitman’s attempt to unify the forces of all being by focusing on sexual love.

The self is sexual, and so divine; thus Whitman’s poems are the embodiment of the divine Eros. In section 5 of “Song of Myself” the speaker recalls an experience of the union of his soul with his body:

I mind how once we lay such a transparent summer morning,
How you settled your head athwart my hips and gently turn’d over
upon me,
And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your tongue to
my bare-stript heart,
And reach’d till you felt my beard, and reach’d till you held my feet.
(LG 33)

The union which these lines represent is sexual. When the speaker is infused with sexuality, he becomes possessed of the knowledge that is immediate intuitive revelation:

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 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. (LG 33)

The implication is that God manifests himself through sexual love. Of course, the idea that God is Love is hardly original with Whitman, but Christianity has generally

associated divine love with Agape rather than with Eros. Whitman reconciles Agape and Eros. (Allen, *Handbook* 35)

Whitman's precoccupation with love as a unifying force is evidenced when one observes passages which celebrate the body of the poet:

Clear and sweet is my soul, and clear and sweet is all that is not my
soul.

Lack one lacks both, and the unseen is proved by the seen,
Till that becomes unseen and receives proof in its turn.

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Welcome is every organ and attribute of me, and of any man hearty
and clean,

Not an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile, and none shall be less
familiar than the rest. (LG 31)

The poet realizes that the dwelling place of Eros is the body, not only the sexual organs but the entire physical being. As Freud writes: "the libido has somatic sources. . . . The most prominent of the parts of the body from which the libido arises are known by the name of erotogenic zones, though in fact the whole body is an erotogenic zone of this kind," (*Freud*, XXIII, 151) It is appropriate that a poet concerned with "amativeness" and "cohesiveness" writes poetry that contains passages honoring the dwelling-place of Eros. Of course, Whitman's faith in this worldview derives neither from empirical demonstration nor from its logical inevitability, but from an intense awareness of the unity within himself of that spirit which presently manifests itself in material form as the electric, individual "I" and that spirit which presently exists as part of the cosmic "soul."

Randall Jarrell has said "One Whitman is miracle enough." He goes on to say:

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. (131)

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One has to ask how that astonishing sense of reality makes itself felt. The essence of this quality is, “I think, the effect of a living and moving world; it comes from the dominance of life metaphors in Whitman’s verse, the dialectic of nature, appearing within the frame of affirmation. The strongest source of vitality in Whitman is erotic; his theme is communication and his metaphors are sexual as I have already mentioned. This enables him to express life as action and at the same time point to its unassailable, source of unity — “amativeness” and “cohesiveness.”

The following passages are additional examples of the sexual metaphor. Whitman defines two identities, two “I am’s.” one of which is the particular person, surrounded by “trippers and askers,” “the people I meet,” involved in contingencies, “dinner, dress, associates, looks, compliments, dues.” But there is another which stands apart.

Apart from the pulling and hauling stands what I am,
Stands amused, complacent, compassionating, idle, unitary,
Looks down, is erect, or bends an arm on an impalpable certain rest,
Looking with side-curved head curious what will come next,
Both in and out of the game and watching and wondering at it. (LG 32)

“I am,” but principle is both involvement and universality, “existing both in and out of the game.” There is immunity in the words “amused, complacent, idle” and the stress on “looking down.” Here is the appearance of the Oversoul, revealed in its invulnerable self-sufficiency. This wider self is meant to be inclusive, complete; when Whitman calls it the soul, as in a line from “Starting from Paumanok,” he calls it “the contingent personal self the body.” But this gives him his clue and in “Song of Myself” he launches into a vividly erotic passage which does everything possible to break through the immunities of the self:

I believe in you my soul, the other I am must not abase itself to you,
And you must not be abased to the other.
Loafe with me on the grass, loose the stop from your throat
Not words, not music or rhyme I want, not custom or lecture, not even
the best,
Only the lull I like, the hum of your valved voice. (LG 33)

The act of love in Whitman is immediately universal; it hardly passes through the medium of the private experience. The sexual partners remain anonymous, they come

and go in a series, or they are, as in this case, the elements of an erotic organism which has its mate everywhere and in everybody. The act of love is understood as the "procreant urge" of all the world, the life force itself.

According to Matthiessen, Whitman was under the compulsion to teach that love was the structural element of his natural philosophy. For Whitman it was the life-energy of human relationships. Accordingly, his erotic theme has concreteness but is generalized; it accompanies the moral implications of love. Passion if not subdued is quite definitely sublimated. Sex as a metaphor verifies the interflow and interpenetrations of values to which communication addresses itself. (23-24) Matthiessen states further:

Whitman's language is more earthy because he was aware, in a way that distinguished him not merely from Emerson but from every other writer of the day, of the power of sex. In affirming natural passion to be 'the enclosing basis of everything,' he spoke of his sanity, of the sacredness of the human body, using specifically religious terms: 'we were all lost without redemption, except we retain the sexual fibre of things.' In defending his insistence on this element in his poems (1856), he made clear his understanding of its immediate bearing upon a living speech: 'To lack of an avowed, empowered, unabashed development of sex (the only salvation for the same), and to the fact of speakers and writers fraudulently assuming as always dead what every one knows to be always alive, is attributable to the remarkable nonpersonality and indistinctness of modern productions in books.' (523-24)

In "Song of Myself" sex as a powerful force is so much praised, and the poet identifies himself so much with the mystic who has penetrated all the mysteries of man and the universe, that much can be said about his revelations in these areas. For example, in section 20 he says: "I know I am august." In sections 10 and 47 Whitman is an athlete, because he extolls himself thus: "Alone far in the wilds and mountains I hunt,/Wandering amazed at my own lightness and glee"; "First-rate to ride, to fight, to hit the bull's eye, to sail a skiff, to sing a song or play on the banjo,/Preferring scars and the beard and the faces pitted with small-pox over all latherers." It is passages such as these which have gripped critics such as Gay Wilson Allen, who says what the "I" of "Song of Myself" seems himself a "superman"; (Allen, *Review* 76) and James T. F. Tanner says that "his belief in the superman is a personal humanism." (96)

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Whitman praises sexual virility in several passages in “Song of Myself,” corroborating the critics’ estimate that he poses as a virile man. The famous passage in section 11, which deals with twenty-eight young bathers and a lady, reveals the poet’s love for all sensuous pleasures, of which the most important is sexual. The poet has so much sexual stimulation that he feels that even the sea is his mistress. Hence, he says: “You sea! I resign myself to you also — I guess what you mean,/ I behold from the beach your crooked inviting fingers,” and pleads with her to “Cushion me soft, rock me in billowy drowse,/ Dash me with amorous wet,/ I can repay you” (section 22). Almost defiantly the poet challenges people with such statements as these: “Copulation is no more rank to me than death is.” “I believe in the flesh and the appetites,/ Seeing, hearing, feeling, are miracles,” and “The scent of these armpits aroma finer than prayer” (section 24). Unashamedly, he says, “On women fit for conception I start bigger and nimbler babes” (section 40). Such unreserved passages tend to make Whitman misunderstood by readers and critics for whom sex thus revealed and glorified is repellent.

Along with his empathically identifying himself with God, Whitman plays the part of a poet or philosopher who reconciles heaven and earth, which idea came to be propagated in the New World by Romantics such as Hawthorne, Melville, Emerson, and Thoreau. About this D. H. Lawrence significantly remarks that Whitman’s “was a morality of the soul living her life, not saving herself,” (Pearce, 19) and Tanner’s opinion is that “no one can read far into *Leaves of Grass* without observing Whitman’s identification of man and God as one.” (95) Ray Benoit suggests that the poet “was first torn between this pair, matter and spirit and then perceived in the self their reconciliation.” (25) That this is evident may be seen if we examine the various sections of the poem. For example, Whitman says: “The earth good and stars good, and their adjuncts all good” (section 7): “Maternal as well as paternal, a child as well as a man” (section 16); “I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul” (section 21): “I am not the poet of goodness only, I do not decline to be the poet of wickedness also.” Section 48 is about this reconciliation, of which the poet says, “I have said that the soul is not more than the body,/ And nothing, not God, is greater than one’s self is . . . I hear and behold God in every object. . . .” These quotes from critics and the poet himself bring home to us the fact that Whitman is concerned with the reconciliation of opposites such as body and soul and matter and spirit in “Song of Myself.”

Whitman’s autoeroticism, sexuality, love of sensations, his acceptance of life and death, and all other polarities, and his enigmatic assertion that he is God himself,

all may be understood and appreciated only if we understand that these are the utterances of a mystic for whom there is no unacceptable opposition between body and soul, man and God, heaven and earth, and good and evil. About this all-embracing and all unifying mysticism of Whitman, Fausset pertinently says that bringing the universal from "abstract heights" and proclaiming "its presence in the faultiest person or thing and in the humblest functions of nature was an act of true vision, quickened, it may be, by his reading of Oriental poetry and particularly of the *Bhagavad-Gita* in which Krishna embodies the universal "I." (118) It is immaterial to know whether Whitman was inspired by the *Bhagavad-Gita* or not. But for a clear understanding of the bewildering inconsistencies in his self assuming and shedding various identities in "Song of Myself" and other poems, it is useful to assume that Whitman, prior to his composition of *Leaves of Grass* had, if not the mystical experience of the Hindu saint, at least something very similar to that. Moreover, a knowledge of Whitman's cosmology, which is like that of Hinduism, is necessary for an appreciation of Whitman's poetry. (119)

It must be noted, however, that Whitman's pantheism is set off from that of the *Bhagavad-Gita* in that he does not depict the soul as retrogressing into a lower state of existence. For the Hindu believer born to the lower castes is doomed to an endless cycle of rebirths in lower animal and inanimate forms; his goal is to try to escape rebirth. By practicing yoga and mind control he can avoid the ceaseless cycle and reach a state of oneness of Brahma. This state once achieved, the soul is free from transmigration and rests serene and inviolate. But not so for Whitman. Since he views each particle of the universe as equally divine, there are no levels of lower or higher existence. The creation is no less than a complete and uncompromising cosmic democracy! (Allen, *Handbook* 268) In addition the soul (the "I" in Whitman's poems) "tramps a perpetual journey." Thus in "Song of Myself," he writes:

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars,
And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and the egg
of the wren,
And the tree-toad is a chef-d'oeuvre for the highest,
And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors of heaven. . . .
I find I incorporate gneiss, coal, long-threaded moss, esculent roots,
And am stucco'd with quadrupeds and birds all over,
And have distanced what is behind me and for good reasons,
And call anything back again when I desire it. (LG 59)

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When he says that he can call “anything back again when he desires it,” this is not to be taken literally. Whitman is poetically identifying himself with the World Soul which operates this way. He is the journeying soul forever through time and incorporating within himself all creatures:

I wonder where they get those tokens,
Did I pass that way huge times ago and negligently drop them?
Myself moving forward then and now and forever,
Gathering and showing more always and with velocity,
Infinite and omnigenous, . . .
His well-built limbs tremble with pleasure as we race around and
return.
I but use you a minute, then resign you, stallion,
Why do I need your paces when I myself outgallop them?
Even as I stand or sit passing faster than you. (LG 60-61)

It is within the scope of this vision that the poet feels himself to be “an acme of things accomplished” and “an encloser of things to be.” (section 44). And it is also in this sense that he glorifies his own body and his forbears:

Immense have been the preparation for me,
Faithful and friendly the arms that have help’d me.
Cycles ferried my cradle, rowing and rowing like cheerful boatmen,
For room to me stars kept aside in their own rings,
They sent influences to look after what was to hold me.
Before I was born out of my mother generations guided me,
My embryo has never been torpid, nothing could overlay it. (LG 81)

His heredity goes back to the origin of the creation. His soul was present at and saw the “huge first Nothing,”

I know I was even there,
I waited unseen and always, and slept through the lethargic mist,
And took my time, and took no hurt from the fetid carbon. . . .
For it the nebula cohered to an orb,
The long slow strata piled to rest it on,
Vast vegetables gave it sustenance,

Monstrous sauroids transported it in their mouths and deposited it with
care.

All forces have been steadily employ'd to complete and delight me,
Now on this spot I stand with my robust soul. (LG 81)

Now it can be seen that when Whitman says "nothing, not even God is greater to one than oneself is," he is not deifying his ego, but the Self within, the cosmic Soul.

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Whitman's doctrine of the evolution of the soul accounts for his worship of sex, "for it is by means of sex that the soul receives its identity and perpetually fulfills the cosmic plan." (268) Almost the whole of the "Children of Adam" group which was included in the 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass* exemplifies this idea, and its basis is philosophical rather than personal. Discussing "Children of Adam," Canby says, "This man's greatness is in some respects a function of his excessive sexuality. Whole sections of the *Leaves* are either sheer rhetorical fantasy or the articulation and sublimation of experience." But, he adds, "Of that experience we know actually very little . . . Unfortunately, much has to be omitted because we simply have no facts and in all probability never will have." (186-187)

Entitled "Enfant d'Adam," later changed to "Children of Adam," this group contains poems celebrating the love between men and women, a love which Whitman designated by the term "amativeness" which he took from phrenology. In his celebration of heterosexual love, Whitman presents himself as a "chanter of Adamic songs." With "To the Garden the World," the group begins in an outburst of Whitman's belief in the cyclic pattern of human reproduction:

To the garden the world anew ascending,
Potent mates, daughters, sons, preluding,
The love, the life of their bodies, meaning and being,
Curious here behold my resurrection after slumber,
The revolving cycles in their wide sweep having brought me again,
Amorous, mature, all beautiful to me, all wondrous,

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My limbs and the quivering fire that ever plays through them, for reasons,
most wondrous. (LG 90)

Whitman has come to his present existence like a new Adam to the Old Testament Garden of Eden. He is product and part of all males and females of the past and result of the physical union of their love. One notes another aspect of Whitman’s idea of an infinite line of life and nature along which man appears and reappears in life cycles. (Lewis 42-45) In this instance, the focus is upon human procreation, human renewal through the act of sexual union. Linked to Adam by endless generations, the poet stands in the present with his own Eve, the symbol of the necessary mate. Unlike the first Eve, Whitman’s Eve enjoys total equality with the male, a notion proper to Whitman’s plan for celebrating the “female equal with the male.” The cycle is renewed and will be renewed as with the first man and woman; it moves ahead in a pattern of sexual love and reproduction.

Lewis makes the following observation:

It is, in fact, in the poems gathered under the title “Children of Adam” (1860) that we have the most explicit evidence of his ambition to reach behind tradition to find and assert nature untroubled by art, to re-establish the natural unfallen man in living hour. Unfallen man is, properly enough, unclothed as well; the convention of cover came in with the Fall; and Whitman adds his own unnostalgic sincerity to the Romantic affection for nakedness. (Lewis, *Adam*, 45)

Whitman seems to want to reappraise the initial position undermined by the impact of contradictory empirical evidence.

Another poem in this group, “From Pent-Up Aching Rivers,” asserts the poet’s desire and need to write of sexual love. James Miller posits that Whitman “reveals” himself in this poem as the Adamic poet setting forth to celebrate the divinity of sex: “From time the programme hastening, I have loiter’d too long as it is.” He notes the remaining poems are “an attempt to fulfill this program, to explore the warp and woof of sex in all its mystical complexity.” Miller says “From Pent-Up Aching Rivers” interweaves the abundant and varied imagery by means of which the poet will celebrate the “act divine,” the “children prepared for,” and the “stalwart loins” in the poems to follow. Miller concludes that “From Pent-Up Aching Rivers” appears to be frenzied chaos unless read as the

introductory forerunner and the emotional outline of the remaining poems. Whitman says:

From pent-up aching rivers,
From that of myself without which I were nothing,
From what I am determin'd to make illustrious, even if I stand sole
 among men,
From my own voice resonant, singing the phallus,
Singing the song of procreation,
Singing the need of superb children and therein superb grown people,
Singing the muscular urge and the blending,
Singing the bedfellow's song, (O resistless yearning!)
O for any and each the body correlative attracting!
O for you whoever you are your correlative body!
 O it, more than all else, you delighting! (Miller 42)

These lines are like a personal declaration when we read them. They seem to be a firm and direct reply to Emerson's objections in 1860. These ideas share in the broad philosophic core of *Leaves of Grass*. In the following lines, Whitman abandons himself to the mysterious force of sexual passions and their gratification:

From the hungry gnaw that eats me night and day,
From native moments, from bashful pains, singing them,
Seeking something yet unfound though I have diligently sought it many
 a long year,
Singing the true song of the soul fitful at random,

Of the mad pushes of waves upon the land, I them chanting,
The overture lightly sounding, the strain anticipating,
The welcome nearness, the sight of the perfect body,
The swimmer swimming naked in the bath, or motionless on his back
 lying and floating,
The female form approaching, I pensive, love-flesh tremulous aching,
The divine list for myself or you or for any one making,

The mystic deliria, the madness amorous, the utter abandonment
(Hark close and still what I now whisper to you,

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I love you, O you entirely possess me,
O that you and I escape from the rest and go utterly off, free and
lawless. . . . (LG 91)

The poet’s eyes always seem to be on the endless family of man, stretching ahead through eternity and enduring through the sexual reproductive act — an act that is sacred, for it reproduces man, who is sublime to Whitman.

The next poem in the group, “I Sing the Body Electric,” is representative of the philosophic voice of the poet rather than an intense personal outburst of sexual expression. The poem, whose central theme is the coalescence, or single identity of body and soul, is typical of the buoyantly assertive Whitman of the 1855-1856 editions of *Leaves of Grass*, the poet who celebrates, by going “directly to the creation,” the divine essence immanent in every material form and process. Perhaps the clearest indication of the tenor of these early Adamic visions is found in the quote above from “A Backward Glance O’er Travel’d Roads,” where he writes that his purpose was “to formulate a poem whose every thought or fact should directly or indirectly be or connive at an implicit belief in the wisdom, health, mystery, beauty of every process, every concrete object, every human or other existence, not only consider’d from the point of view of all but each.” The body he celebrates is “electric” not because it is “charged” with symbolic meanings pointing beyond itself, but because it is the soul or spirit operating in a functional material form. (Miller, *Guide* 43) This perfect adaptation of form to indistinguishable physical and spiritual functions is of course based on the seminal assumption that man is “unfallen” and that through the “American experiment” he can most fully realize his limitless powers. The peripatetic and mythic “I” of these early poems is thus not only the voice of American realization, it is the voice of Adam enjoying his original relation to the universe and calling upon his “children” to do the same. Whitman says in the first section of this poem:

I sing the body electric,
The armies of those I love engirth me and I engirth them,
They will not let me off till I go with them, respond to them,
And discorrupt them, and charge them full with the charge of the soul.
Was it doubted that those who corrupt their own bodies conceal
themselves?
And if those who defile the living are as bad as they who defile the
dead?

And if the body does not do fully as much as the soul?
And if the body were not the soul, what is the soul? (LG 93-94)

It is clear from the above lines that Whitman is concerned with the idea that undergirds *Leaves of Grass* as a whole — the celebration of the body and the identity of body and soul. The main concern of the early Whitman is to “discorrupt” the “armies” (of bodies) and “charge them full with the charge of the soul”; that is, as “seer,” to make them conscious of their immanent divinity and power, and thus to share fully the views of man and his world.

Whitman reaches the thematic center of his poem in section 5 with his description of the female form in its procreative aspect. For Whitman the sex act is a key symbolic expression in which he is able to coalesce the themes of the unity of opposites, organic process, and the artist as creator. In “I Sing the Body Electric,” copulation is the mysterious origin of all “bodies” — the spirit that inheres in material forms. As he says in section 5:

This is the female form,
A divine nimbus exhales from it from head to foot,
It attracts with fierce undeniable attraction,
I am drawn by its breath as if I were no more than a helpless vapor,
 all falls aside but myself and it,

This the nucleus — after the child is born of woman, man is born
 of woman,
This the bath of birth, this the merge of small and large and the outlet
 again.
Be not ashamed women, your privilege encloses the rest, and is the exit
 of the rest,
You are the gates of the body, and you are the gates of the soul.
 (LG 96-97)

It is obvious that the poet honors the function of women, which is conceiving and giving birth to generations of humanity. The woman is the “exit of the rest,” the one from whom the infinite chain of humanity proceeds. Whitman honors the male’s body, equally with the female’s, and the place of each in the great cosmic order that he visualizes:

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The male is not less the soul nor more, he too is in his place,
He too is all qualities, he is action and power,
The flush of the known universe is in him,
Scorn becomes him well, and appetite and defiance become him well

.

The man’s body is sacred and the woman’s body is sacred,
No matter who is is, it is sacred — is it the meanest one in the
laborers’ gang?

.

Each belongs here or anywhere just as much as the well-off just as much
as you,
Each has his or her place in the procession.
The universe is a procession with measured and perfect motion. (LG
97-98)

In Whitman’s universe of “measured and perfect motion,” all people, regardless of who they are — “the meanest one in the laborers’ gang” or “the dull-faced immigrants” — possess bodies that have beauty and significance in the evolutionary order and development of the universe.

In “A Woman Waits for Me,” the “I” is no longer the Adamic poet setting forth a program but rather the Adam in mankind, a representative Adamic man according to James Miller. (Miller, *Guide* 45) As I have mentioned earlier, for Whitman, the sexual activity of the body and its parts represents a sacred and spiritual act embracing the fullness of life itself. In “A Woman Waits for Me,” Whitman says this precisely:

A woman waits for me, she contains all, nothing is lacking,
Yet all were lacking if sex were lacking, or if the moisture of the right
man were lacking.

Sex contains all, bodies, souls,
Meanings, proofs, purities, delicacies, results, promulgations,
Songs, commands, health pride, the maternal mystery, the seminal milk,
All hopes, benefactions, bestowals, all the passion, loves, beauties, delights
of the earth,

All the governments, judges, gods, follow’d persons of the earth,
These are contain’d in sex as parts of itself and justifications of itself.

(LG 101-2)

Because sexual activity is a human function that generates the future of nations and races, Whitman allows for no shame whatsoever; the essential purity of sex cannot be questioned by him. The poet says:

Without shame the man I like knows and avows the deliciousness of
his sex,
Without shame the woman I like knows and avows hers.
.
I draw you close to me, you women
I cannot let you go, I would do you good,
I am for you, and you are for me, not only for our own sake, but
for others' sakes,
Envelop'd in you sleep greater heroes and bards,
They refuse to awake at the touch of any man but me. (LG 102-3)

In the poems of 1855, 1856, Whitman assertively sets out to reveal the "equality in the mind" — of himself and thus of all minds — through the sheer exuberance of his message and the weight of objects and experiences lovingly described in the poems of the "Children of Adam" group.

Another group of poems included in the 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass* immediately after the "Children of Adam" poems is the "Calamus" collection. Here the poet celebrates that love which he calls "adhesiveness," another term he borrowed from phrenology and converted to his own use to mean "the manly love of comrades." These poems are manifestly homosexual. However, the point of greatest interest for the student of Whitman's poetry is the importance which Whitman attaches to this group in his total poetic program. (Allen, *Handbook* 98) "Calamus" contains Whitman's love poems. As Schyberg puts it: "Whitman first celebrated the emotion of love in all its nuances in 'Calamus.'" In "Children of Adam" he is self-confident and supercilious, in "Calamus," shy, hesitant, wistfully stuttering. (158)

Allen explains:

The kind of love which these poems reveal will perhaps always be debated among critics, who cannot enjoy the lyrics of Sappho without first assessing her morality. It is like the controversy over the Book of Canticles, whether it is erotic or a veiled allegory of church history. Let those who wish, interpret "Calamus" as an allegory of democratic brotherhood. The fact

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remains that the expression is the poetry of love, and sometimes almost as tender and beautiful as the expression of affection and friendship in Shakespeare’s sonnets which these poems parallel in a number of ways, except for being in free verse. (Allen, *Handbook* 99-100)

These poems would be the means by which Whitman’s ideal of universal brotherhood was to be realized: “divine magnetic lands with the love of comrades, with the life-long love of comrades.” (Allen, *Handbook* 100) Speaking psychologically, one could say the doctrine is the “Calamus” emotion, man uplifted, universalized, and informed with spirit. At any rate, Whitman exalted the institution of the dear love of comrades as his program for bringing into being a spiritual democracy and a world community of nations. Male love was, therefore, as legitimate and as pure for Whitman as male-female love.

In reviewing his life-work in 1876, Whitman wrote:

I also sent out *Leaves of Grass* to arouse and set flowing in men’s and women’s hearts, young and old, (my present and future readers,) endless streams of living, pulsating love and friendship, directly from them to myself, now and ever. To this terrible, irrepressible yearning, (surely more or less down underneath in most human souls,) — this never-satisfied appetite for sympathy, and this boundless offering of sympathy — this universal democratic comradeship — this old, eternal, yet evernew interchange of adhesiveness, so fitly emblematic of America — I have given in that book, undisguisedly, declaredly, the openest expression. . . . Poetic literature has long been the formal and conventional tender of art and beauty merely, and of a narrow, constipated, special amativeness. I say, the subtlest, sweetest, surest tie between me and Him or Her who, in the pages of *Calamus* and other pieces realizes me — though we never see each other, or though ages and ages hence — must, in this way, be personal affection. And those — be they few, or be they many — are at any rate *my readers*, in a sense that belongs not, and can never belong, to better, prouder poems. . . . Besides, important as they are in my purpose as emotional expressions for humanity, the special meaning of the ‘Calamus’ cluster of *Leaves of Grass* . . . In my opinion it is by a fervent, accepted development of Comradeship, the beautiful and sane affection of man for man, latent in all the young fellows, North and South, East and West — it is by this, I say, and by what goes directly

and indirectly along with it, that the United States of the future, (I cannot too often repeat,) are to be most effectually welded together, intercalated, anneal'd into a Living Union. (LG 753)

According to Jan Christian Smuts it is Whitman's conception of comradeship and the attractive forms in which that conception is expressed in the "Calamus" section of *Leaves of Grass* that have won for Whitman such a warm place in the hearts of most of his admirers. He goes on to comment that since the time of Christ no teacher of humanity has come forward with such a pure and lofty idea of human relations, and with the exception of Christ none has attached equal importance to love as the great renovative power in human destiny. It is therefore of the greatest interest to see what that conception of Whitman's was at this stage of his development. Smuts posits that Christ's conception of love seems always to have had a religious reference. His was that love which endured in the higher love. The disciples had to love one another, because they were all children of the heavenly Father. (93)

With Whitman, on the other hand, love was, at this stage of his development, a purely and frankly human relation. Smuts notes:

It had no religious considerations. It was a human plant which under certain conditions sprang up spontaneously in the real heart. He calls it very significantly "comradeship," and the section, "Calamus," in which this comradeship is celebrated follows the section "Children of Adam," in which the sexual passion is sung. This seems to suggest — and the suggestion is explicitly borne out by what Whitman says elsewhere — that in his mind, comradeship was a higher emotion than that of sex. To adopt his peculiar nomenclature, "adhesiveness" is a purer and more spiritual form of love than "amativeness." While comradeship has not the same strong physical basis in human nature as "amativeness," it certainly has a greater ideal basis and in that sense is a higher emotion. (93)

For Whitman love is the life-energy of human relationships. Accordingly his erotic theme has concreteness but is generalized; it accompanies the moral implications of love and democracy. Whitman effectively uses sex as a metaphor which verifies the interflow and interpenetration of values to which communication in an organic democracy addresses itself.

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The loud, self-confident voice of the “Children of Adam” poems gives way in the “Calamus” group to a nearly whispered hesitancy. “Calamus” stands as the outpouring of rare and traditionally abnormal emotions. Therefore, the feeling of secret sharing and seclusion that the group betrays is altogether understandable. It might be argued that the expression of these emotions committed him to a course which led to an ever more intimate, and ever more clearly defined, revelation of the self. At any rate, the decision to accept the self in all its erotic complexity is confessed in the “Calamus” group. Both the fact of Whitman’s revolutionary decision to define the nature of self and to accept this revelation as truth are revealed in the first poem of the group:

In paths untrodden,
In the growth by the margin of pond-waters,
Escaped from the life that exhibits itself,
From all the standards hitherto publish’d, from the pleasures, profits,
conformities,
Which too long I was offering to feed my soul,
Clear to me now standards not yet publish’d, clear to me that my soul,
That the soul of the man I speak for rejoices in comrades,
Here by myself away from the clank of the world,
Tallying and talk’d to here by tongues aromatic,
No longer abash’d (for in this secluded spot I can respond as I would
not dare elsewhere.)
Strong upon me the life that does not exhibit itself, yet contains all
the rest,
Resolv’d to sing no songs to-day but those of manly attachment,
.
I proceed for all who are or have been young men,
I tell the secret of my nights and days,
To celebrate the need of comrades. (LG 112-3)

There is in the above lines the undeniable force of the homosexual love of male and male. Whitman wants those unaltering male friendships whose bonds of comradeship are merely powerfully fraternal.

Certain attitudes in *Leaves of Grass* can be understood in a new way if it is supposed that they grew out of a struggle making the self explicit in all of its variations. For example, the self-deification in certain passages need not be taken

literally as the blasphemy which it appears to be. It is more probably over-compensation for the sense of inhibition from which the poet believes he has freed himself, and it is reinforced by the exhilaration of his release.

Whitman accepts even the social and moral outcast. The banquet he sets is "for the wicked just the same as the righteous"; he "will not have a single person slighted or left away"; he invites the "kept woman and sponger and thief. . . . the heavy-lipped, slave . . . the venerealee." Whitman not only receives outcasts; he becomes their champion. The poem entitled "Native Moments," which appears in the "Children of Adam" group reads as if it were a "Calamus" poem. It shows the poet, in imagination, giving himself up to "the drench of his passions," sharing "the midnight orgies of young men":

I am for those who believe in loose delights, I share the midnight orgies
of young men,
I dance with the dancers and drink with the drinkers,
The echoes ring with our indecent calls, I pick out some low person for
my dearest friend,
He shall be lawless, rude, illiterate, he shall be one condemn'd by others
for deeds done,
I will play a part no longer, why should I exile myself from my
companions?
O you shunn'd persons, I at least do not shun you,
I come forthwith in your midst, I will be your poet,
I will be more to you than to any of the rest. (LG 109)

It is apparent that Whitman must reject the conventional distinctions between good and evil. This rejection, in fact, seems to have been part and parcel of the poems in *Leaves of Grass*. Implicit in Whitman's repudiation of orthodox morality is the romantic distinction between "nature" and society, or "nature and civilization." Under the code of civilized society he had stood condemned; he had suffered an unnatural suppression of an essential part of himself. In order to accept the self which he advocated, he had to reject the artificial, trivial standards of society and adopt the larger, more genuine and more healthy standards provided by nature. In his decision to assert self in its universal significance, nature was the authority which he invoked.

Whitman apparently believed that the manly love of comrades was natural and universal. The poet has drawn this "Calamus" love from the private seclusion of

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his own heart and of the hearts of those “few” who understand and share similar emotions. At this point, he visualized a utopian society of radiant and matchless comrades:

Come, I will make the continent indissoluble,
I will make the most splendid race the sun ever shone upon,
I will make divine magnetic lands,
 With the love of comrades,
 With the life-long love of comrades. (LG 117)

This patriotic cry is typical of Whitman’s ever-widening optimism. He has converted the shy, hesitant manly attachment of “In Paths Untrodden” to an enthusiastic vision of socially creative and democratic masculine friendship. He proceeds “to celebrate the need of comrades” for the benefit of “all who are or have been young men.” This kind of love is a matter of national importance:

To the East and to the West,
To the man of the Seaside State and of Pennsylvania,
To the Kanadian of the north, to the Southerner I love,
These with perfect trust to depict you as myself, the germs are in all
 men,
I believe the main purport of these States is to found a superb friendship,
 exalted, previously unknown,
Because I perceive it waits, and has been always waiting, latent in all
 men. (LG 133-4)

But the need for comrades is not confined to America. In a moment when he is yearning and thoughtful, Whitman imagines that he sees “other men in other lands yearning and thoughtful,” men in Germany, Italy, France, Spain, China, Russia, or Japan:

This moment yearning and thoughtful sitting alone,
It seems to me there are other men in other lands yearning and
 thoughtful,
It seems to me I can look over and behold them in Germany, Italy,
 France, Spain,
Or far, far away, in China or in Russia or Japan, talking dialects,

And it seems to be if I could know those men I should become attached
to them as I do to men in my own lands,
O I know we should be brethren and lovers,
I know I should be happy with them. (LG 128)

Nor is the principle of manly attachment restricted in time; it permeates history.
Whitman sees it as base and finale . . . for all metaphysics:

Having studied the new and antique, the Greek and Germanic systems,
Kant having studied and stated, Fichte and Schelling and Hegel,
Stated the lore of Plato, and Socrates greater than Plato,
And greater than Socrates sought and stated, Christ divine having studied
long,
I see reminiscent to-day those Greek and Germanic systems,
See the philosophies all, Christian churches and tenets see,
Yet underneath Socrates clearly see, and underneath Christ the divine
I see,
The dear love of man for this comrade, the attraction of friend to friend,
Of the well-married husband and wife, of children and parents,
Of city for city and land for land. (LG 121)

This belief in the universality of the erotic emotion is not a temporary phase
in Whitman's development; it undergirds his creativity. In a long footnote in
Democratic Vistas, he vigorously reiterated his faith in adhesive love, at least rivaling
amative love:

It is to the development, identification, and general prevalence of
that fervid comradeship, (the adhesive love at least rivaling the amative
love hitherto possessing imaginative literature, if not going beyond it,)
that I look for the counterbalance and offset of our materialistic and vulgar
American democracy, and for the spiritualization thereof. Many will say
it is a dream, and will not follow my inferences: but I confidently expect
a time when there will be seen, running like a halfhid warp through all
the myriad audible and visible worldly interests of America, threads of
manly friendship, fond and loving, pure and sweet, strong and life-long,
carried to degrees hitherto unknown — not only giving tone to individual
character, and making it unprecedentedly emotional, muscular, heroic and

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refined, but having the deepest relations to general politics. I say democracy infers such loving comradeship, as its most inevitable twin or counterpart, without which it will be incomplete, in vain, and incapable of perpetuating itself. (Whitman *Vistas* Footnote to line 1647)

In another sense, Whitman extends his experience of the erotic to nature and to the cosmos. For instance, among some of his early notes for a proposed series of lectures on religion is found this interesting analogy:

There are in things two elements fused though antagonistic. One is the bodily element, which has in itself the quality of corruption and decease; the other is the element, the soul, which goes on, I think, in unknown ways, enduring forever and ever.

The analogy holds in this way — that the Soul of the Universe is the Male and genital master and the impregnating and animating spirit — Physical matter is Female and Mother and waits barren and bloomless, the jets of life from the masculine vigor, the undermost, first cause of all that is not what Death is. (Traubel 110)

It is apparent that “body and soul,” “woman and man,” “matter and spirit” are for Whitman equivalent terms to designate the same duality. He speaks of this duality erotically in his conception of self. Out of this union of the male soul and female matter is born the world of phenomena, the world of differentiation or of what Whitman calls “identity”:

Sacred shape of the bearer of daughters and sons,
Out of thy teeming womb thy giant babes in ceaseless procession issuing,
Acceding from such gestation, taking and giving continual strength and life,
World of the real — world of the twain in one,
World of the soul, born by the world of the real alone, led to identity,
body, by it alone. (LG 458)

“Identity” is a favorite word with Whitman and he gives it a special emphasis if not a special meaning. It represents the mystery of uniqueness in a person or thing — a mystery because the uniqueness springs from the fusion of two universals, matter and spirit. Although the distinction is never very clearly stated, Whitman

seems to attribute the unity of the universe to the soul, and to attribute to matter the differentiation of "identities." (Allen, *Hanbook* 179-180) Whitman is interested in using the erotic to transform the basic transcendental concept of the union of matter and spirit from an abstraction of thought into a concrete, sensuous reality.

Shapiro views the "Calamus" relationship as the necessary complement to the man-woman relationship of "Children of Adam." He notes "the male relationship not only bestows a personal fulfillment, but becomes the special component of a genuine, indissoluble, magnetic democracy." (Miller, *Start* 109) Whitman did not pretend to be a philosopher, but he did profess to be a religious prophet. His own vision of selfhood, of America, and of the universe he regarded as religious rather than literary in inspiration. Further, he regarded all genuine poetry as scripture and the genuine poet as the "true son of God." In brief, he followed the trend of nineteenth-century romanticism in fusing literature and religion.

VI

Thus Whitman's "song of procreation" links male and female sexual love to his vision of a great American nation of the future. He also considers male and female sexual love a functional part of the cyclic pattern in the universe. On the other hand, the poet views male love as legitimate and as pure as male-female love. In addition, this male "cohesiveness" is a creative relationship for the poet, because he saw in it a bond of masculine comradeship reaching across the nation. James Miller notes that Whitman's sexual vision pervades the whole of *Leaves of Grass* so as to become impossible of disentanglement from the book's total meaning. (Miller, *Start* 25)

Whitman's doctrine of the centrality of sex tapped in truth the chief reservoirs of the spirit. The social life is by the body, and the higher communions are of it. The importance of this doctrine, therefore, with the allied beliefs in the power of the body, is at once evident. It is a means of answering the questions arising from the problem of the one and the many. Whitman celebrated nature because from it (as was the case with others caught in the romantic current of the early nineteenth century) he derived inspiration and stimulation. But if nature generally was to be celebrated, then it seemed to him to follow logically that all products of nature were similarly to be celebrated. Nor was the natural world more an embodiment of nature than the natural body. The body had its beauty as an outgrowth of the great natural world, but it had its own distinctive kind of beauty as well.

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If this distinctive beauty could be expressed in work, it could also be expressed in a vigorous and robust healthiness. (Smuts, 88-92)

There was, however, even more than this involved: for a natural function of the healthy body is a sex relationship, and only a misconception of what the body is or of what nature is could lead one to deny this. Since a healthy sex relationship was a manifestation of the benevolent power of nature, it followed that a healthy sex relationship was justified in itself. But its greater justification was, that in the spiritual culminations which flowed from this physical base, the principal of continuity, the connection between the one and the many were exemplified in action. People so related could never be troubled by the question of how people were to be related, and a society permeated by such relationships would genuinely be a society. (Smuts, 92)

In the same vein, Miller is able to explain:

Whitman envisioned man’s sexual energy as primal, creative energy, a simple extension of a creatively evolving natural world. When Whitman loafed at his ease and observed a spear of summer grass, he saw more than an isolated green blade. He saw himself and the grass impelled to growth and reproduction by an identical creative force. Whitman repeatedly dramatized the natural world in sexual terms, constantly exploring the intimate kinship of nature and man. (Miller, *Start* 25)

Miller describes Whitman as a “sexual pantheist,” envisioning the world and man as infused by an identical, creative sexual vitality. He goes on to say that “Song of Myself,” “Children of Adam,” and “Calamus” give *Leaves of Grass* its substantial sexual foundation. The message in these poems reflects Whitman’s preoccupation with the total destruction of the world as he finds it and the construction of another world as he envisions it must be. As the poet whose great themes are love, democracy and religion, Whitman seems compelled to teach that love and democracy are the structural elements of his doctrine. For Whitman, they are the life-energy of human relationships. Thus, sex as a metaphor speaks to the point in proposing that love is reassurance for the “doubt of appearances.”

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