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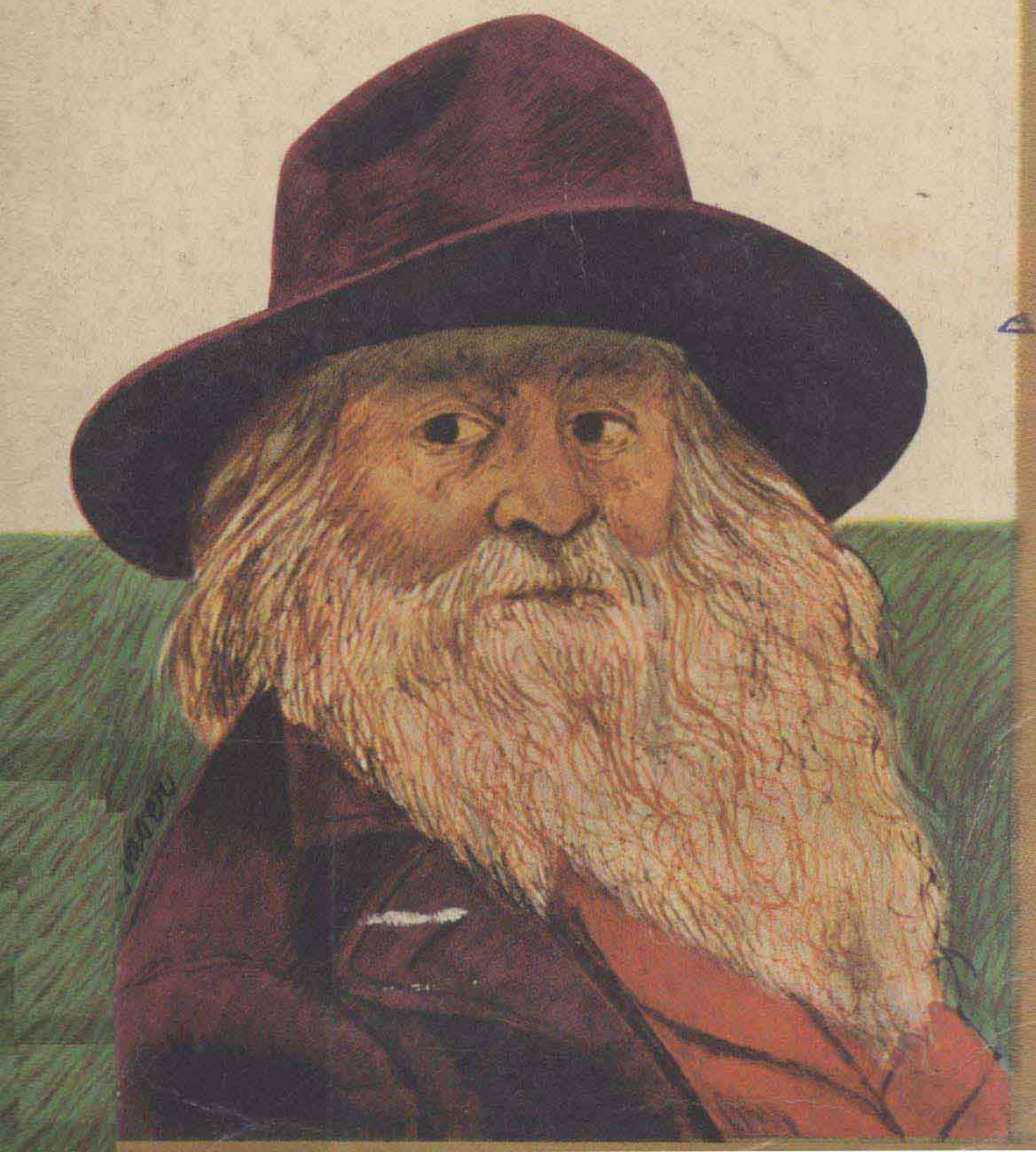
Walt Whitman

Leaves of Grass



Walt Whitman

Poet, journalist, lover of freedom, Walt Whitman was born near Huntington, Long Island, New York, on May 31, 1819. His father—a farmer and later a carpenter—moved his wife and nine children to Brooklyn in 1823. Walt attended public school until the age of twelve. Then for two decades he worked alternately as printer and journalist, except for two years of teaching on Long Island. In 1848, his "free soil" political beliefs lost him the editorship of the conservative Brooklyn *Eagle,* and he left the East, traveling South to New Orleans where he had contracted to write for the *Crescent.* Fascinated by the city, Whitman spent three months there; he then returned home to Brooklyn by way of St. Louis, Chicago, the Great Lakes, Niagara Falls, Albany, and the Hudson. In 1855, Whitman published his great tribute to America, the volume of poems which was to become his life's work, *Leaves of Grass.* Although praised by Emerson, it met with a disappointing reception, and Whitman continued, thereafter, to revise and expand it. In all, between 1855 and 1892, he published nine editions. During the Civil War and for some years after, Whitman worked as a war correspondent and government clerk, devoting much of his time to caring for the sick and wounded in the hospitals around Washington. His reactions to and interpretations of the struggle for freedom are to be found in *The Wound Dresser, Drum-Taps,* and in the Civil War section of *Specimen Days.* First published in 1882, this book contains Whitman's great themes; and it presents "specimen" events in the author's life and in the life of nineteenth-century America. Stricken with paralysis in 1873, the poet retired to Camden, New Jersey, where he lived until his death on March 26, 1892.

Walt Whitman

Leaves of Grass

With an Introduction by Gay Wilson Allen

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Book and Its Author

Today Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* is almost universally recognized as one of the masterpieces of world literature, but it did not have an impressive beginning.

Early in July, 1855, a thin quarto volume of ninety-five pages, bound in green cloth ornately stamped with roots, leaves, buds, and small flowers, was placed on sale in several bookstores in New York and Brooklyn. Although it was distributed and advertised by Fowler & Wells, publishers of books and magazines on phrenology, *Leaves of Grass* had been printed at the author's own expense by his friends the Rome Brothers in Brooklyn. Fewer than eight hundred copies were printed, and of these only two hundred were immediately bound.

Whitman withheld his name from the title page, but displayed himself in shirt sleeves and a nonchalant pose in a frontispiece photograph. Doubtless he intended thus to emphasize the personal nature of his poems and their informal style, a guess corroborated by a passage in his longest poem, then untitled but later called "Song of Myself," in which he stated his name and his supposed attributes:

> Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son,
> Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding,
> No sentimentalist, no stander above men and women or
> apart from them,
> No more modest than immodest.

But this eccentric manner of signing his book made Ralph Waldo Emerson, to whom Whitman sent a complimentary copy, doubtful of the real name of the poet. On July 21, 1855, he wrote: "I did not know until I, last night, saw the book advertised in a newspaper, that I could trust the name as real and available for a post office."

Emerson was one of the few literary men to see merit in this strange book—indeed, one of the few persons to read it at all, though there were more than the poet knew about at the time. In his first unrestrained enthusiasm the older poet wrote the younger: "I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere, for such a start. I rubbed my eyes a little to see if this

sunbeam were no illusion; but the *solid* sense of the book is a sober certainty. . . . " Whitman was naturally delighted, as well he might have been, with such warm praise from the famous New England poet. It fortified him against the abuse of less perceptive critics, and he was soon to receive enough abuse to overwhelm a sensitive young poet. But Walt Whitman was abundantly endowed with courage and determination, and he immediately began the preparation of a second edition to be published the following year.

There were a few other readers who recognized the importance of the first *Leaves of Grass,* but Emerson alone sensed its "long foreground." Indeed, it has taken critics and scholars nearly a century to discover the truth of Emerson's sure insight. Not even Whitman's intimate friends and associates—in fact, they least of all—were aware of the vast intellectual preparation and effort that went into the 1855 *Leaves of Grass.* His formal education had been scanty, being limited to five or six years of attending public school in the village of Brooklyn, N. Y. He was born May 31, 1819, at West Hills, a little farming community on Long Island, three miles south of Huntington. His father had learned the carpenter's trade, and is said to have been a competent and meticulous workman, but for some reason he never prospered. He was, in fact, already a failure when he moved his family to Brooklyn in 1823. He was interested in books and ideas, especially those of deistic Tom Paine, whom he knew personally, and the socialistic theories of Frances Wright. But he had received almost no formal education, and his wife, Louisa Van Velsor, daughter of a Dutch farmer on Long Island, was nearly illiterate.

Walter Whitman, Jr., was the second of nine children, and because his father was always hard pressed to feed and clothe his large family, he began at the age of eleven to work as an office boy. By his twelfth year he had quit school altogether and was apprenticed to the printing trade. For two decades he worked alternately as printer and journalist, except for two years of teaching in various country schools on Long Island. During the 1840's he wrote for popular magazines, edited several newspapers in New York City, and held the editorship of the Brooklyn *Eagle* for two years. The stories and poems he contributed to the magazines were conventional, sentimental, and undistinguished, but in journalism he was fairly competent. However, he did not prosper as an editor because practically all newspapers at that time were violently partisan and his "free soil" convictions did not agree with the political policies of the Democratic owners of the papers on which he was employed.

After he lost his editorship of the Brooklyn *Eagle,* Whitman traveled by train, stagecoach, and steamboat to New Orleans—then an arduous journey—where he worked for

three months on the newly-founded *Crescent*. Returning to Brooklyn, he edited a "free soil" newspaper and took an active part in the campaign of Martin Van Buren and Charles Francis Adams on the Free Soil ticket in 1848. Whitman continued to edit his paper, the *Freeman,* for nearly a year after the defeat of the Free Soil party, but he was finally forced to give it up.

Though nominally a Democrat, Whitman now found the Democratic press virtually closed to him. His political convictions had forced him out of journalism, though he continued to contribute occasionally to the New York *Post,* edited by his friend William Cullen Bryant, the *Tribune,* edited by Horace Greeley, and the Brooklyn *Advertiser*. But he could not support himself with these fugitive pieces. It was not by accident or caprice, therefore, that he joined his father in the building trade. In a short time he became a contractor, speculating modestly in real estate and house building like his father, though with more success. In fact, in the early 1850's Brooklyn was experiencing a lively building boom, and Whitman had excellent opportunities for accumulating wealth. He might have done so, too, if he had not acquired a greater ambition.

This ambition was the writing and publishing of a volume of poems which at an early stage in his planning he had decided to call *Leaves of Grass*. For years orators, authors, and editorial writers had been calling for a native literature commensurate with American natural resources, ample geography, and political idealism. This demand for an indigenous literature had of course been profoundly influenced by European Romanticism, and yet at the same time national pride had brought about the intellectual rejection of Europe, politically and culturally. In 1837 Emerson had declared in his "American Scholar" address: "Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close. . . . We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe."

The call for an original, native poet stirred Walt Whitman's imagination. He himself was descended from several generations of typical rural Americans, half-Dutch, half-British in origin. For his daily associates he habitually chose the mechanics, ferry-boat pilots, stage drivers, and rough, uneducated workingmen whom he had known all his life as relatives, neighbors, and companions in the saloons and on the streets of Brooklyn and New York. He shared their patriotic pride in the territorial expansion of the young nation, and looked upon the material growth of the United States as a blessing to all mankind, providing a refuge for the oppressed of every nation. He was acutely aware of his country's shortcomings, and hoped through his poems and speeches (for many years he cherished the futile ambition of becoming a great public

speaker) to spread and propagate democracy. But if Walt Whitman's qualifications for becoming his nation's poetic spokesman had been no more than devout patriotism and a journalist's gift for propaganda, he would never have become a great poet.

To an educated observer Whitman would have seemed to have almost no chance at all of becoming a real poet. But appearances were deceiving. In his own way he had been acquiring exactly the training he needed. Despite his slow movements and leisurely habits, his careless dress and association with ferrymen and stage drivers, he had assiduously cultivated his mind and esthetic sensibilities. From early boyhood he had been fond of the theater, and as a young man he became a devotee of the Italian opera. In Brooklyn he had also become intimate with painters and sculptors, notably William Sidney Mount, Walter Libby, Henry Kirke Brown, and John Quincy Ward. He spent many hours in the libraries of New York City. And in the 1850's he frequented the Egyptian Museum on lower Broadway, where he acquired an interest in the history of the human race and the myths and religions of ancient peoples that broadened his intellectual horizon. In both cities he attended lectures on astronomy, which also gave him new concepts of time and man's place in the vast structure of the universe. Although largely self-taught, Walt Whitman actually read more widely, both in quantity and in variety of subjects, than many of the authors of the period who had attended famous colleges. Whenever possible, however, he obtained knowledge through talks with explorers, scientists, and learned persons, such as Dr. Henry Abbott, owner of the Egyptian Museum. Walt Whitman was indeed a paradox. He recited Shakespeare from the top of a Broadway omnibus, where he sat beside the driver; he carried translations of Homer in his pocket when he went on fishing trips or spent the day alone on Coney Island (then a lonely spot); by choice he consorted with the most ignorant men, but loved opera and was welcomed in the studios of leading painters and sculptors.

But neither experience with the world nor the reading of many books makes a poet. He must, first of all, be endowed with a poet's temperament and sensibility, and ultimately with the gift of language. This endowment defies objective analysis, but Whitman's poems testify to the acute sensitivity of his touch, hearing, sight, and smell. Most important of all in the making of a great poet is an inner compulsion demanding outlet through the symbols of poetry. Whitman experienced this compulsion to an extraordinary degree in the years immediately preceding the completion of the first *Leaves of Grass*. To one of his most intimate friends he confessed later that he had written the first *Leaves* "under great pressure,—pressure from within." He felt that he "*must* do it." This con-

fession indicates a strong probability that the real motivating force was subconscious, as the abundance of sexual imagery in the early poems implies. Whitman rationalized his motive by contending (in an open letter to Emerson printed in the second edition of *Leaves of Grass*) that sex must be brought out of concealment into the open in order to foster a sane, healthy attitude toward this important phase of life. In the twentieth century this argument is readily acceptable; and one of Whitman's most lasting achievements was his contribution toward the breaking down of prudery and taboos against sex in literature.

But probably Whitman himself was only dimly aware of the generating power of "the pressure from within." In his early poems he exhibited a strong desire to make personal confessions. In "Song of Myself" (section 28) he feels betrayed by his senses, and complains of the "prurient provokers stiffening my limbs." This motivation has been explained by several critics as auto-eroticism, but the term is hardly adequate for the poet's complex psychology. There can no longer be any doubt that, despite their intensity, Whitman's sexual impulses were somewhat ambiguous. Every human organism, biologists tell us, has some cells of the opposite sex. In the absence of scientific data, we can only guess at the balance of the sexes in the body of Walt Whitman, but his compulsion to confess and to justify his emotions indicates at least a strong psychic disturbance. Later Whitman used the word "perturbation" for this disturbance, a term which he had encountered in the lectures on astronomy which he had heard and read. The term means, "disturbance of the regular . . . motion of a heavenly body, produced by some force additional to that which causes its regular motion." Whitman himself thought his *Drum-Taps* poems superior esthetically to *Leaves of Grass* because they had "none of the perturbations of Leaves of Grass" (the first three editions).

The process by which a poem is created in the mind of the poet is still little understood either by psychologists or literary critics, but it seems to begin with a profound emotional turbulence, probably on the subconscious level. From this turbulence not only emotional impulses but even verbal images float up into the poet's consciousness. If he writes the poem while the turbulence is still going on, he is not likely to have control over his esthetic form.

This theory illuminates the problem of esthetics in Whitman's poems. His most vivid and original imagery is found in "Song of Myself," but the emotional tone of this poem is very uneven and its structure has defied the best efforts of many critics, though some recent ones profess to find a thematic structure in it. Furthermore, there is frequently a conflict between Whitman's desire to be personal, to make intimate revelations to his reader, and his intuitions of truths about

life and the meaning of existence. In writing "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" Whitman had sufficient control over his inner turbulence to compose a poem with beautiful symmetry of imagery, rhythm, and pattern of symbols. A few years later in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" he exhibited similar control, and the same can be said of "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," which was completed several months after the death of Lincoln—an exemplification of Wordsworth's theory of "emotion recollected in tranquility."

It is significant, too, that in these poems in which the poet has control, his poetic message is the transcending of time and achieving a philosophy of death. In the "Ferry" poem life is always fluid and souls are forever crossing from the material to the immaterial world, and back again. In the "Cradle" poem the boy becomes a poet when he vicariously gains knowledge of death. In "Lilacs" the poet joins hands with "the thought of death" (grief for a personal loss) and "the knowledge of death" (philosophical acceptance)—"Comrades mine and I in the midst"—and arrives with them, completely resigned, at the end of the coffin's journey, "in the fragrant pines and cedars dusk and dim." Here the poet submerges his own personality and thereby transcends the bounds of his finite life. He achieves the fullness of selfhood, always his poetic and philosophical goal, in his esthetic intuition of the necessity for physical dissolution in the perpetuity of life.

Of course the personal experiences that created the turbulence in Whitman's psyche profoundly affected his poetic intuitions, but the relationship between biography and artistic creation is so complex and subtle that it can not be satisfactorily explained—if ever—in a few sentences, though some hints can be given. Whitman's reading of Lucretius may account for his intellectual acceptance, in his first two editions, of death as a part of the cycle of nature. At first he was anxious about his personal "identity," but he was consoled, as "Song of the Open Road" shows, by belief in "the progress of the souls of men and women along the grand roads of the universe." In this period his poetic faculties were exhilaratingly stimulated by his psychic turmoils; they did not affect him in an unhealthy manner.

But the failure of Whitman's first two editions, lack of success in his editorship of the Brooklyn *Times* in 1857–59, and his inability to find rewarding love and friendship, brought him to almost tragic despair around 1859. Early in 1860 he was elated by the offer of a young Boston publishing house, Thayer and Eldridge, to bring out a new, expanded edition of *Leaves of Grass*. A few months later, however, the firm went into bankruptcy as a result of the Civil War. Though discouraged by the bankruptcy, the poet was beneficially stimulated by the war. "Beat! Beat! Drums!" witnesses his surging patriotism. He did not enlist because he was forty-two and the

main support of his mother and feeble-minded brother, Edward, but a year and a half later he went down to the battlefield in Virginia to find his wounded brother George, whose wound proved not to be serious, and stayed on in Washington to help alleviate suffering in the army hospitals. "The Wound Dresser" shows the compassion that the hospital scenes aroused in him. Now he had seen death itself, not merely thought and dreamed of it.

After the war Whitman remained in Washington as a government clerk until a paralytic stroke in 1873 forced him to depart; he then went to live with George in Camden, N. J. His mother also died in that year, and during the winter of 1873–74 Whitman was so lonely and depressed that he longed for death, but "Prayer of Columbus" reveals the religious faith that saved him. Although he never recovered his health, his last two decades in Camden were relieved by increasing recognition abroad, especially in England, and he was able to draw spiritual strength and emotional solace from the philosophy which he had spent a lifetime cultivating. He died March 26, 1892, wracked by half a dozen diseases, but calm and cheerful to the last. He had become the "great poet" he had envisioned in 1855.

2. Literary Theory and Practice

In his 1855 Preface Whitman declared, "The poetic quality is not marshalled in rhyme or uniformity or abstract addresses to things nor in melancholy complaints or good precepts, but is the life of these and much else and is in the soul." For this reason "the greatest poet brings the spirit of any or all events and passions and scenes and persons . . . to bear on your individual character as you hear or read." Thus Whitman wanted his "expression" to be "transcendent and new. It is to be indirect and not direct or descriptive or epic."

But Whitman's esthetics was no " art for art's sake" theory. In fact, he professed scorn for beauty alone, and searched always for some profound truth residing in or emanating from external form, surface appearance, or "show," to use his favorite term (usually in the plural). Whitman believed poetry to be a variety of knowledge, and he exercised his poetic faculties not to create beauty but to recover and propagate wisdom—"recover" because he held the Platonic notion that truth is eternal and existed before the world was created. "The poets of the kosmos advance through all interpositions and coverings and turmoils and stratagems to first principles," he says in his 1855 Preface, and elaborates in "Song of Myself" as "truth" (sections 20 and 30):

> To me the converging objects of the universe perpetually flow,

All are written to me, and I must get what the writing means.

. . . . . .

All truths wait in all things, . . .

In "Song of the Rolling Earth" this becomes "the unspoken meanings of the earth," and in the same year (1856) the poet calls it "wisdom" in "Song of the Open Road" (section 6).

Whitman accepted unreservedly the Romantic philosophy that the natural world is a vast analogue of the spiritual. With the pantheists he believed that God incarnated Himself in His creation, and that to understand God man has only to commune with visible Nature. Thus in "A Song for Occupations" Whitman declares that "Objects gross and the unseen soul are one"; asserts in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" (1856 version) that "We realize the soul only by you, you faithful solids and fluids"; and asks and answers in "Starting from Paumanok" (section 13) the question of the soul's appearance:

Was somebody asking to see the soul?
See, your own shape and countenance, persons, substances, beasts, the trees, the running rivers, the rocks and sands.

. . . . . .

Behold, the body includes and is the meaning, the main concern, and includes and is the soul;
Whoever you are, how superb and how divine is your body, or any part of it!

Here the poet uses "soul" and not "God," but he declares in section 48 of "Song of Myself" that he hears and beholds "God in every object," sees Him "In the faces of men and women," and finds "letters from God dropt in the street, and every one is sign'd by God's name." Yet he is "not curious about God," because God is everywhere, and because he worships not God but the Divinity innate in each individual self. In section 24 he even declares himself to be "Divine . . . inside and out." This pride and arrogance of selfhood shocked many of Whitman's contemporaries, but it was not so much man as his potentialities that the poet worshipped. Belief in the spirituality of the innate self became the core of Whitman's religion, and the source of his faith that death is no more to be feared than birth, because both are merely stages in the never-ending transmutations of body and soul.

Consequently, Whitman's poems are filled with symbols of resurrection, from fish-eggs to sprouting grass and Adam

propagating the human race—for example, section 31 of "Song of Myself":

> 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'œuvre for the highest,
> And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors of heaven . . .

Whitman worships the human body not only because every man or woman is the son or daughter of God (a basic tenet of his "new religion") but also because it ferries the seeds of life, so that each person bridges (potentially at least) past and future generations. The act of procreation he describes ("Song of Myself," section 29) as:

> Parting track'd by arriving, perpetual payment of perpetual loan,
> Rich showering rain, and recompense richer afterward.
>
> Sprouts take and accumulate, stand by the curb prolific and vital,
> Landscapes projected masculine, full-sized and golden.

The poet, too, is a propagator, and Whitman often uses sexual imagery to describe his function, begetting a new race on mothers fit for conception. And this is not inconsistent with his role as cultural time-binder, conserving the knowledge and experience of past generations and by his imaginative intuition drawing upon his vision of the future, thereby making both past and future become present and available to his readers. As he says in the 1855 Preface,

> Without effort and without exposing in the least how it is done the greatest poet brings the spirit of any or all events and passions and scenes and persons some more and some less to bear on your individual character as you hear or read. To do this well is to compete with the laws that pursue and follow time. What is the purpose must surely be there and the clue of it must be there . . . and the faintest indication is the indication of the best and then becomes the clearest indication. Past and present and future are not disjoined but joined. The greatest poet forms the consistence of what is to be from what has been and is. He drags the dead out of their coffins and stands them again on their feet . . . he says to the past, Rise and walk before me that I may realize

you. He learns the lesson . . . he places himself where the future becomes present.

For a poet to be capable of performing these miracles he would have to be "great" indeed, and Whitman calls him not only a poet of the cosmos but himself a "kosmos" (his preferred spelling), that is, a symbolic microcosm of the macrocosm. By the magic of sympathetic identification, the symbolic "I" in his poems can range back and forth in time and space. Whitman's poems are suffused with cosmic emotion when he images the evolutionary processes which have culminated in his own birth and personal identity in the physical world (section 44 of "Song of Myself"):

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

Here Whitman draws simultaneously upon both mysticism and contemporary science. As a mystic he finds "the kelson of the universe" to be love, and he trusts the "Faithful and friendly . . . arms" of nature that have carried and guided him to the present moment of human existence. But scientific theory (in astronomy, as mentioned earlier, and biology and geology, all of which he studied in books, lectures, and journalistic popularizations) enables him to visualize his evolutionary origin ("Song of Myself," section 44):

> My feet strike an apex of the apices of the stairs,
> On every step bunches of ages, and larger bunches between the steps,
> All below duly travel'd, and still I mount and mount.

Thus through the lyric "I" of "Song of Myself," speaking for the human race from its first faint inception to its future culmination, Whitman can prophesy (section 51):

> The past and present wilt—I have fill'd them, emptied them,
> And proceed to fill my next fold of the future.

The cosmic poet and the national poet would seem logically to be at opposite ends of the literary spectrum, but Whitman was more successful in fusing the two than might be expected. And he was aided, of course, by the sanguine nationalism of the American people in the mid-nineteenth century. From the Puritans the young nation had inherited the belief that God had ordained a special, fortunate destiny for it. The Puritans had intended the Theocratic State of Massachusetts to be God's Own Government on earth. And the successes of the American people in their two wars with England had increased their confidence in a Providential destiny. After the

acquisition of the vast territories in the regions of Oregon and California just nine years before Whitman published his first *Leaves of Grass*, the possibilities for future growth and development seemed fairly to stagger the imagination of most Americans. They shared William Cullen Bryant's vision of the "Mother of a Mighty Race," whom her "elder dames" across the sea hated in their pride and jealousy:

> There's freedom at thy gates and rest
> For Earth's down-trodden and opprest,
> A shelter for the hunted head,
> For the starved laborer toil and bread,
> Power, at thy bounds,
> Stops and calls back his baffled hounds.

Despite the fact that slavery still existed in the United States, Whitman continued to harbor this national dream, this idealistic hope. The man who had sacrificed his journalistic career in the cause of "free soil" was, of course, fully aware of the evil of slavery. In 1856 in a political tract called "The Eighteenth Presidency!" he admitted that, "At present, the personnel of the government of these thirty millions, in executives and elsewhere, is drawn from limber-tongued lawyers, very fluent but empty feeble old men, professional politicians," and rarely from "the solid body of the people." In this tract Whitman even predicted a civil war if the slaveowners continued to dominate the national legislature and the judiciary. Yet he still had faith in the innate goodness of human nature and the common people.

When he wrote his 1855 Preface Whitman was not narrowly provincial or chauvinistic. Although he believed that all previous nations had failed to provide a society worthy of humanity, he did not reject or undervalue their contributions: "America does not repel the past or what it has produced under its forms or amid other politics or the idea of castes or the old religions." . . . Each age and nation, he thought, had made its contribution. America must now build upon these past achievements and surpass them. But he was never complacent about present conditions; his ideal nation was always something to be attained in the future. He did say in the 1855 Preface, "Here at last is something in the doings of man that corresponds with the broadcast doings of the day and night." But in the same paragraph he showed that what he meant was that nature had made unprecedented development possible: "One sees it must indeed own the riches of the summer and winter, and need never be bankrupt while corn grows from the ground or the orchards drop apples or the bays contain fish or men beget children upon women." Two paragraphs later Whitman stated his main theme: "The largeness of nature or the nation were monstrous without a corresponding largeness and generosity of the spirit of the citizen."

As late as 1874, in "Song of the Redwood-Tree," (section 3), Whitman reasserted his belief that on the North American continent, with its abundant and inexhaustible natural resources, a new society could arise "proportionate to Nature." But it was not material prosperity, mere wealth or power, or world-domination, that he expected:

> But more in you than these, lands of the Western shore,
> (These but the means, the implements, the standing-ground,)
> I see in you, certain to come, the promise of thousands of years, till now deferr'd.
> Promis'd to be fulfill'd, our common kind, the race.

Such prophecy as this Whitman always conceived to be the highest function of the poet, and he did not confine his "prophecy" to his own nation. In "Passage to India" (1868–71), he set forth the role of the poet as that of humanizing the discoveries and inventions of science and technology:

> Then not your deeds only O voyagers, O scientists and inventors, shall be justified,
> All these hearts as of fretted children shall be sooth'd,
> All affection shall be fully responded to, the secret shall be told,
> All these separations and gaps shall be taken up and hook'd and link'd together,
> The whole earth, this cold, impassive, voiceless earth, shall be completely justified,
> Trinitas divine shall be gloriously accomplish'd and compacted by the true son of God, the poet,
> (He shall indeed pass the straits and conquer the mountains,
> He shall double the Cape of Good Hope to some purpose,)
> Nature and Man shall be disjoin'd and diffused no more,
> The true son of God shall absolutely fuse them.

Walt Whitman must be given credit for being truly prophetic, in every sense of the word, in foreseeing the importance of humanizing science. In the twentieth century this is the great problem facing the human race, and the poet who could restore perfect harmony between man and nature would be "the true son of God" indeed. But can the poet—or any artist—accomplish such a miracle? During the European Renaissance poets not only believed that they could influence the conduct of men and politics but felt keenly their moral responsibility to do so. Milton, too, wrote his *Paradise Lost* to "justify" (significantly one of Whitman's key words in "Passage to India") the ways of God to men, though his poem has lived for other reasons. Shelley, closer to Whitman