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Whitman's creative genius

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WHITMAN'S CREATIVE GENIUS

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

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It is the purpose of this thesis to examine Walt Whitman's work in an effort to determine his qualities of creativeness. The investigation will fall into two main divisions: first, the tracing of certain influences on Whitman's thought and technique; and, second, a discussion of the manner in which he added to these influences so as to indicate his creative genius.

It is beyond the scope of this study to analyze all the influences in Whitman's work. Only a representative few will be discussed, and even these will not be treated extensively. An effort will only be made to show that Whitman, being either influenced by these sources or receiving at least support from them, stamped his personality on what he borrowed or absorbed. In short, from old or well known premises, he drew new conclusions which reflect his creativeness. This will be done in the following manner:

In Chapter I is presented a discussion of the influence of Emerson, Wordsworth, Hegel, the Bible, Orientalism, and Greek literature on the thoughts, premises, and conclusions of Whitman.

The main sources of his technique are traced principally to Nature, the Bible, and to Blake in Chapter II.

The discussion in Chapter III will fall into three parts: first, a reviewing of the requisites for creativeness; second, a discussion of what Whitman did to his sources; and third, a measuring of Whitman by the standard thus established for creative ingenuity.

It is the hope of the investigator that this study will in some way help to dispel some of the misunderstandings and distorted opinions held concerning Whitman. The argument has often arisen concerning
his right to be called a true poet just as much unnecessary time has been spent in debating a similar question regarding Pope. Of course Whitman is a poet just as Pope is. Matthew Arnold says that literature in the main should be a serious criticism of life, and Stedman says that the main thing in poetry is imagination; without it poetry is a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. Whitman, indeed, possessed high seriousness and imagination.

We thus arrive at this conclusion: Whitman inherited his thoughts and technique from many people, books, and experiences; but he did not follow these slavishly; he assimilated and absorbed them; yet he added to them; he revised and modified them; and, in many instances, he, like Shakespeare, Milton, and Chaucer, succeeded in surpassing his models or in supplanting them—a true evidence of creative genius.

The reliable biography by Bliss Perry was an inestimable source of help as was J. W. Allen's discussion of American Prosody. The investigator is also grateful to Mr. G. Lewis Chandler, teacher of English at Morehouse College and Atlanta University, for his expert counsel and personal cooperation in his capacity as advisor.

3 Edmund Stedman, American Poets (New York, 1886), p. 381.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I SOME SOURCES OF WHITMAN'S THINKING</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emerson</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wordsworth</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hegel</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Orientalism, Greek Literature, the Bible</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II SOME SOURCES OF WHITMAN'S TECHNIQUE</td>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nature</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Bible</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blake</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III WHITMAN: A NEW VOICE</td>
<td></td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Requisites for Creativeness</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Whitman's Contributions</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Whitman and Creativeness</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION</td>
<td></td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td></td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

SOME SOURCES OF WHITMAN'S THINKING

It is the purpose of this chapter to trace some sources of Whitman's thinking in an effort to determine, to use Floyd Stovall's words, whence he came. A discussion of all the literary influences is obviously beyond the scope of a single chapter; therefore the following have been chosen as representative: Emerson, representing American literature; Wordsworth, representing English literature; and Hegel, representing German philosophy. In addition, his debt to ancient literature will be shown by tracing parallel thoughts in Bhagavadgita, Homer, Hafiz, and the Bible. It is not intended in this chapter to discuss these extensively. An attempt will only be made to show that Whitman, like all creative writers, borrowed from various sources. He developed by eager reading. How he absorbed the thoughts of his predecessors and stamped thereon his own personality will be discussed in a later chapter.

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1 Floyd Stovall, ed. Whitman (Atlanta, 1934), XII.
2 Sometimes, however, Whitman gives the impression that he is indebted to no one:

Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems?
Stop this day and night with me
and you shall possess the origin of all poems.

Although he only possessed what amounts to a common school education, Whitman was an omnivorous reader. The exact extent of Whitman's reading of books, however, has never been accurately measured; but, says Foerster, Whitman had a great deal of curiosity, and possessed the modern passion for exact knowledge. He was, indeed, like virtually all of the great poets, a good deal of the bookman; he tends to mislead us, however, by his own boast that he belonged to the future rather than the past. Yet Whitman himself says, "I sat studying at the feet of the great masters."

Emory Holloway describes the effect the reading of Emerson's essays had upon Whitman:

One fortunate day the book selected was the Essays of Emerson. It proved to be the needed precipitant, as it has been to many a young man and woman since. The mind and

---

2. Floyd Stovall, op. cit., XVII.
4. Ibid.
5. The following is proof of his belief that he belonged to the future:
   The past and present wilt -- I have filled them, emptied them,
   And proceed to fill my next fold of the future.
   See "Song of Myself", p. 75.
soul of Whitman, the American, lay fallow and ready for the seed sown by the germinative mind of Emerson... He was a concrete American interpretation of the German transcendentalists and Eastern mystics. He sold the idea of the inner life of man to certain classes of the American people.

Transcendentalism related to a life of humanitarian service. In this respect, it had much in common with the practice of the Quakers. It is not difficult to understand, then how well prepared was Whitman, in his early 30's for such an experience of the reading of Emerson's Essays. He had been brought up to believe in the "inner light". 1 He had that repose, that receptivity, that sluggishness of the motor and muscular organism that is conducive to "quietism" and to visions. 2

Emerson's "Spiritual Laws" was reviewed by Whitman in the Brooklyn Eagle in its issue of December 15, 1847. 3 It is also believed that he had heard Emerson speak in Brooklyn in 1850. 4 Hence, he knew Emerson and his works much earlier than he confessed. It was not, however, until he read the "Essays" that he brought Whitman to a "boil".

1 Much has been made of the influence of heredity on Whitman, who perhaps, owes his realism, his glorification of the common place, his tendency toward transcendentalism and mysticism to his Dutch blood. His Quaker traits appear in his silence, plainness, placidity, sincerity, self-respect, and his dislike of debate, strife, and war. His Quaker traits are also shown in his friendliness, his benevolence, his religious depth, and his trust in the Inner Light. See O. L. Triggs, Selections from the Poetry and Prose of Whitman (Boston, 1908), p. XVIII.

2 Whitman's love of an audience, his passion to sing himself, and his egotism are all Celtic traits. See Edgar L. Masters, Whitman (New York, 1937), p. 1.

3 Emory Holloway, Whitman an Interpretation in Narrative (London, 1926), pp. 102-103.

4 Edgar L. Masters, op.cit., p. 314.

5 Emory Holloway, op. cit., p. 104.
Compare the following:

Emerson:
Greatness always appeals to the future.1

Whitman:
And whether I come to my own today
or in ten thousand or ten million years,
I can cheerfully take it now, or with
equal cheerfulness I can wait.2

Emerson:
Whoso would be a man must be a
nonconformist.3

Whitman:
I wear my hat as I please indoors
or out.
Why should I pray? Why should I
venerate and be ceremonious?4

Emerson:
Insist on yourself; never imitate.5

Whitman:
You shall no longer take things
at second or third hand, nor
look through the eyes of the deed,
nor feed on spectres in books,
You shall not look through my
eyes either, nor take things from
me,
You shall listen to all sides and
filter them yourself.6

Emerson:
There is a time in every man's
education when he arrives at the
conviction that envy is ignorance; that
imitation is suicide; that he must take
himself for better, for worse, as his
portion.7

1 R. W. Emerson, "Self Reliance," Emerson, ed. F. I. Carpenter
2 "Song of Myself", p. 40.
4 "Song of Myself", p. 40.
6 "Song of Myself", p. 25.
Whitman:
Candidly and dispassionately reviewing all my intentions, I feel that they were creditable -- and I accept the result, whatever it may be.1
Emerson:
What your heart thinks, is great.2
Whitman:
Whatever satisfies the soul is truth.3

These statements are certainly parallel in thought; and they seem to show, as Poerster believes, that Whitman absorbed the Emersonian gospel of self-reliance. However, scholars are agreed that no one knows exactly what or who was responsible for the sudden change in thinking and technique of Whitman in 1855. Some also believe that much of the material in the 1855

4 Norman Foerster, op.cit., p. 198.
5 George Carpenter is one scholar who admits that no one knows exactly what caused Whitman's sudden change in thought and technique. The following is pertinent:

It is still to be hoped that documents of some sort will be found which will throw light upon Whitman's life between his return from New Orleans and the first appearance of Leaves of Grass in 1855. During these years /1848-1855/ he wrote much, and yet we have virtually nothing that will indicate the nature of the marvelous changes that were taking place in him ... And in his own reminiscences, full as they are, there is little that bears closely upon the matter. At thirty he was a somewhat indolent newspaper writer, with an undeveloped style--the sign of a mind that had not yet come to self knowledge. At thirty-six he had written a series of extraordinary poems, original both in form and substance. And yet the genesis of this novel form and substance remains practically unknown. See George Carpenter, Walt Whitman (New York, 1924), p. 33.
Floyd Stovall is another scholar who shares this belief:

Between 1847 and 1855, however, he passed through a critical period of revolt and self-discovery, a kind of belated adolescence, from which
edition of *Leaves of Grass* had been long in the making. Is it possible that Whitman realized the revolutionary character of his work and was somewhat timid about putting it into permanent form? There is a time to read Emerson, and Whitman's time came in 1853 or 1854. It is likely that Emerson's gospel gave him the needed confidence. Emerson's statement that "no man can do anything well who does not think that what he does is the centre of the visible universe" seems like a statement of Whitman. It is also likely that Whitman was originally inspired by Emerson, but, after he had come to see, also he emerged a different person. The man of morals and sentiment gave place, temporarily at least, to the "natural" man, contemptuous of restraint, sensual, and frankly egotistic. See Floyd Stovall, *op. cit.*, p. XXI.

And, finally, Edgar L. Masters supports their belief:

When Whitman was twenty, he wrote a love poem. . . . It may be said here that this poem has no merit, and gave no promise of what he became at last. Moreover, none of these poems has any distinction, whatever. . . . See Edgar L. Masters, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

Holloway believes that *Leaves of Grass* is not the result of sudden inspiration:

To comprehend the literary offspring of Whitman's rare experience, then, we must go back a little in order to examine, not only the efforts he had been making to produce the book, which from the age of twenty, had been the secret dream of his life, but to discover, also, if we can, the half conscious motives which supplied the energy behind his work. See Emory Holloway, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

And Bliss Perry concurs in this opinion:

In no sense, therefore, was *Leaves of Grass* an impromptu performance. It was the result of a purpose which had been slowly forming for years. See Bliss Perry, *Walt Whitman* (New York, 1906), p. 68.

Emory Holloway, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

Stedman seems to substantiate this statement:

Walt Whitman was stimulated by this *Emerson's* teaching that a poet should fearlessly compel the muse, and by the rugged example of Carlyle, to follow resolutely the method which suited his bent and project. See Edmund Stedman, *Poets of America* (New York, 1898), p. 166.

exactly how he differed from Emerson, he said that his work owed nothing to the influence of Emerson.

Yet, according to Masters, Whitman said the following to Traubel:

For myself I have never had any difficulty in deciding what I should say and not say. First of all comes sincerity—frankness, open-mindedness; that is the preliminary: to talk straight out. It was said of Pericles that each time before he went to speak he would pray (what was called praying then—what was it?) that he might say nothing to excite the wrath of the people. Whitman shook his head. I should not like to recommend it myself. Emerson, for one, was an impeachment of that principle; Emerson with his clear transparent soul; he hid nothing, kept nothing back, yet was not offensive: the world’s antagonism softened Emerson’s sweetness.

This statement shows how much Whitman admired the courage and intellectual audacity of Emerson; and from this admiration might have come the possible influence of the "Sage of Concord" on Whitman.

The one work of Emerson, moreover, which appears to have exerted the greatest influence on Whitman is the well known Phi Beta Kappa address, "The American Scholar", delivered at Harvard in 1837. Once again, Emerson, in this address, pleads for originality and individuality, but this time it is for a more generous and original culture in America.

The following literary seed of Emerson apparently took root in the mind of Whitman:

We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds. ... A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men.

---

2 Edgar L. Masters, op. cit., p. 297.
Further, Emerson believes that the American scholar should not be a "parlor poet" but "man thinking". He believes that each person should be a regular student at the University of Experience. The past, however, is not to be excluded completely. We are to use the culture of the past as material, in related units, for the type of life which we wish to build.

Compare what has been said by Emerson with the opening sections of Whitman's "Preface" to Leaves of Grass, published in 1855:

America does not repel the past or what the past has produced under its forms or amid other politics, or the idea of castes, or the old religions,--accepts the lesson with calmness--is not impatient because the slough still sticks to opinions, and manners, and literature, while the life which served its requirements has passed into the new life of the new forms--perceives that it waits a little while in the door--that it was fittest for its days--that its action has descended to the stalwart and well-shaped heir who approaches--and that he shall be fittest for his days.

The Americans, of all nations at any time upon the earth, have probably the fullest nature. The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem.

The American poets are to enclose old and new, for America is the race of races. The expression of the American poet is to be transcendent and new.

To be sure, the similarity between the main thought in Whitman's "Preface" and that in Emerson's "American Scholar" is stressed again and again by students of Whitman. Masters and Holloway, for example, make the following statements:

Masters:

There is a good deal of Emerson in this challenging preface /1855 L. of G/ and the tone and interplexus of Emerson's words

1

Ibid., p. 52.

2

and their arrangement seem in it. It may have been that Emerson was as much delighted with it as he was with the poems themselves, and was moved by these fresh inspiring blasts to send Whitman the letter of congratulation which has become a part of the famous notes of the first edition of Leaves of Grass.1

Holloway:

The preface announces as a personal fact what in the "American Scholar" address, Emerson had twenty years before voiced as an aspiration—that America should realize herself through her writers, no longer betraying her provincial inferiority either by rejecting or by imitating the past.2

Whitman himself seemed conscious of the fact that he was Emerson's "American Scholar" in the flesh. He proclaims his mission in "Starting from Paumanok": America is a new world, and Walt Whitman is its prophet.

The following taken from "Starting from Paumanok", seems to be a poetic confirmation of the "American Scholar":

Solitary, singing in the West, I strike up for a New World,

... .

With firm and regular step they wend,
They never stop,
Successions of men, Americanos, a hundred millions,
One generation playing its part and passing on,
Another generation playing its part and passing on in its turn,
With faces turned sideways, or backward towards me to listen,
With eyes retrospective towards me,
Americanos! Conquerors! Marches humanitarian!
Foremost! Century marches! Libertad!
Masses!
For you a programme of chants:
Chants of the prairies,
Chants of the long running Mississippi,

1 E. L. Masters, op. cit., pp. 79-80.
2 E. Holloway, op. cit., p. 121.
3 John Bailey, op. cit., p. 137.
and down to the Mexican sea,
chants going forth from the centre from
Kansas and thence equidistant,
Shooting in pulses of fire ceaseless to
vivify all,
In the names of these States shall I
scorn the antique?
Why these are the children of the
antique to justify it.

... ... ... ... ... ... ...
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.1

One could go on indefinitely citing sections from "Starting from Paumanok" to illustrate many or most of the principles held by Emerson, but perhaps enough has been said to show what it was intended this section should make clear; Emerson's influence on Whitman. Whitman himself called Emerson master,2

and in the following statement seems to admit his influence:

He joins on equal terms the few great sages and original seers. He represents the free man, America, the individual ... ... ... No poet or teacher of old times or modern times has made a better report of womanly and manly qualities, heroism, chastity, temperance. His words shed light to the best souls; they do not admit of argument.3

Thus it seems incontrovertible that Emerson did influence Whitman. There are, of course, more aspects than this study includes; but it is perhaps no exaggeration to say that Emerson's poet is Whitman, or Whitman is Emerson's

1 "Starting from Paumanok", pp. 12, 13, 14, 19.
2 Bliss Perry, op. cit., p. 117.
3 Emory Holloway, op. cit., p. 105.
American Scholar come to life. It was Emerson who formulated the ideal and in his discourse suggested that there should be a real American poet, and in so doing he can be called a precursor of Whitman. In his insistence on freedom, individuality, absolute independence, patriotism, heroism, manliness, chastity, and new-worldliness, Whitman, in short, was Emerson's literary child.

_**Wordsworth**_

Emerson, however, was not the only literary source of influence on Whitman. His intense patriotism did not make him narrow either in his reading or outlook; he readily admitted his respect, love, as well as his dislike for certain English writers, among them Wordsworth, about whom he had much to say. Indeed, Mrs. O'Connor regrets that no records were made of conversations between her and Whitman concerning Wordsworth and other writers.

Despite the fact that Whitman criticized the political views of the later Wordsworth, his literary views parallel those of Wordsworth, from whom he received at least support, if not ideas. This section of the chapter, therefore,

---

2. Tennyson, Scott, and Carlyle were among the English writers whom he admired: He was a great reader of Tennyson and still more, from the beginning, to the end of his life, of Walter Scott, of whom he once strangely said, "If you could reduce the Leaves to their elements, you would see Scott unmistakably active at the roots. See John Bailey, _op. cit._, p. 20.

   Already in 1846, moreover, he had felt the keen edge of Carlyle's mind, though he did not approve his style. See Floyd Stovall, _op. cit._, p. XXII.

3. Wordsworth he looked upon as a lost leader, a man who showed his lack of true sympathy for men and women by coming out for kingcraft, obedience, and the like. See Norman Foerster, _op. cit._, p. 165.
will be concerned primarily with tracing the similarity of thought in Whit-
man's "Preface" to _Leaves of Grass_ and Wordsworth's "Preface" to the _Lyrical
Ballads._

2 W. Whitman, "Preface" to _Leaves of Grass_, op. cit., ed. C. C. Stark-
weather, p. 403.
Whitman describes the poet:

The messages of great poets to each man and woman are, come to us on equal terms, only then can you understand us. We are no better than you. What we inclose you inclose, what we enjoy you may enjoy... The greatest poet hardly knows pettiness or triviality. If he breathes into anything thought small, it dilates with grandeur and life of the universe. He is a seer—he is individual—he is complete in himself—the others are as good as he, only he sees it, and they do not. He is not one of the chorus—he does not stop for any regulation—he is president of regulation.1

and finally the two think alike about the technique of poetry.

Whitman believes that:

The poetic quality is not marshalled in rhyme or uniformity, or abstract addresses in things, nor in melancholy complaints or good precepts, but is the life of these and much else, and is in the soul. The profit of rhyme is that it drops seeds of a sweeter and more luxuriant rhyme, and of uniformity that it conveys itself into its own roots in the ground out of sight... The pleasure of poems is not in them that take the handsomest measure and sound.2

Wordsworth voices the opinion that

The language, too, of these men /the common man/ is adopted (purified indeed from what appears to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust) because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived; and because, from their rank in society and sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse being less under the influence of social vanity.3

These quotations, taken from Wordsworth's "Preface", published in 1798, and Whitman's "Preface", published in 1855, reveal Whitman a critic in the same sense that Wordsworth is a critic; they were both tremendously interested in the theory of poetry; both were primarily concerned with the relation of poetry


2 Ibid., p. 404.

to contemporary life; and both illustrated their theory with a collection of poems, Whitman with his *Leaves of Grass* and Wordsworth with his *Lyrical Ballads*; finally, both collections were turning points in literary history.

Like Wordsworth, Whitman learned much from nature. In his youth there was no conscious purpose except to please that pure organic pleasure which the young Wordsworth tells us that he drank in even at the age of ten from "beauty old as creation". The two were also alike in that the "impulse toward some form of literary expression was slow in shaping".

Whitman describes how nature affected him:

There was a child went forth every day;
And the first object he looked upon,
that object he became;
And that object became part of him for
the day, or a certain part of the day,
or for many years, or stretching
cycle of years.

Wordsworth admits nature influenced him:

Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe!
Thou Soul, that art the Eternity of thought!
And givest to forms and images a breath
And everlasting motion: not in vain,
By day or star-light, thus from my first
dawn
Of childhood didst thou intertwine for
me
The passions that build up our
human soul.

---

1 Norman Foerster, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-158.
2 Bliss Perry, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
3 "There Was a Child Went Forth", p. 306.
As has already been stated, Whitman was reluctant about admitting his debt to any man or work, and he did not like Wordsworth any better than he liked Milton. Bailey, however, insists that his best theories and practices are built on Wordsworth's principle:

Yet he owed a great deal more than he knew to Wordsworth. Or at least was much more kind to Wordsworth than he knew. For it was Wordsworth more than anyone else who gave to poetry its freedom to call nothing common or unclean. When Whitman brought the average man into poetry, he was only advancing in a path first cleared and levelled by Wordsworth. One half of Wordsworth's genius lay precisely there: in the discovery that the plain man has his place in poetry as well as the hero, the daisy as well as the rose, common life and ordinary incidents as well as great and dazzling events. Like Whitman he wanted to enlarge the world of poetry; he insisted on bringing men and women as men and women, not as captains or heroines, into poetry, and laid all his stress, not on the professional or avocational characteristics of men which are essential. Whitman's triumphs were gained in the same field. It is true that he often took a curious pleasure in reciting lists of men's various occupations; but his finest things are built on Wordsworth's principle.2

Bliss Perry also makes a significant and pertinent statement:

Upon the whole the most original and suggestive poetic figure since Wordsworth, he gazed steadily, like Wordsworth, upon the great and permanent objects of nature and the primary emotions of mankind.3

1 John Bailey believes that Whitman's dislike for Milton was caused by the fact that Milton was the most learned of poets:

Naturally enough he did not like Milton, the most learned, splendid, and in the best sense aristocratic of poets, the most consummate artist the English race has produced... Yet it is interesting enough to note that it is Milton, who exhibits two curious parallels with him. Like Whitman, Milton had been a journalist... and like Whitman, he suffered from it... And the second poem of the Leaves of Grass illustrates another parallel... The poem sounds exactly like an echo of Milton's... contempt for war as the theme of epic and of his resolve to set the highest poetry to higher uses. See John Bailey, op. cit., pp. 58, 59.

2 John Bailey, op. cit., p. 65

3 Bliss Perry, op. cit., p. 307.
Whitman, in the light of these statements and citations, was perhaps influenced by Wordsworth's literary theory and practice. Certainly they are similar in having a poetic theory advanced in a preface; they both placed emphasis on the common man; and they are both "magnificent idlers".

**Hegel**

Whitman not only read American and English literature, but he also loved to brood upon the German philosophers Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel.

It would only be natural for a man of Whitman's intellectual curiosity and breadth to be influenced by the thought and speculation of his age. The source of this influence was the Renaissance in Western Europe: the value of the individual man and the marvels of the physical universe were being emphasized. The rationalism of the seventeenth century, the intellectual and social enlightenment of the eighteenth, the humanitarianism and transcendentalism of the nineteenth all tended toward the development of a democratic society. One aspect of this movement reflected in the thought of Whitman was the idealism of German philosophy, particularly the Hegelian doctrine of a cosmic consciousness that unfolds through conflict and contradiction to divine ends.

Perhaps the best statement of the Hegelian philosophy which most influenced Whitman can be found in Whitman's prose work "Carlyle From American Points of View";

1 Bliss Perry, op. cit., p. 264.
2 Floyd Stovall, op. cit., pl XV.
The most profound question which can occupy the mind of man: What is the fusing explanation and tie—what the relationship between the (radical, democratic) Me, the human identity of understanding, emotions, spirit, etc., upon the one side, of and with the (conservative) Not Me, the whole of the material objective universe and laws, with what is behind them in time and space, on the other side? Kant and Schelling have given explanations of the matter. But G. F. Hegel's fuller statement of the matter probably remains the last best word that has been said upon it, up to date.

According to Hegel the whole earth, (an old nucleus thought, as in the Vedas, and no doubt before, but never hitherto brought so absolutely to the front, fully surcharged with modern scientism and facts, and made the sole entrance to each and all) with its infinite variety, the past, the surroundings of today, or what may happen in the future, the contrarieties of material with spiritual and of natural with artificial, are all, to the eye of the ensembler, but necessary sides and unfoldings, different steps or links, in the endless process of creative thought, which, amid numberless apparent failures and contradictions, is held together by central and never-broken unity—not contradictions or failures at all, but radiations of one consistent and eternal purpose; the whole mass of everything steadily, unerringly tending toward the permanent utile and morale, as rivers to oceans. As life is the whole law and incessant effort of the visible universe, and death only the other or invisible side of the same, so the utile, so truth, so health are the continuous—immutable laws of the moral universe, and vice and disease, with all their perturbations, are but transient, even if ever so prevalent expressions.

Whitman sings of the cosmic unity:
I sing to the last the equalities modern or old.
I sing the endless final's of things
I praise with electric voice,
For I do not see one imperfection
in the universe
And I do not see one cause or result
lamentable at last in the universe.

---

2 "Song of Parting", p. 411.
The following contains Hegel's philosophy of the idea of growth through
the interaction of life and death:

Of your real body and any man's or
woman's real body,
Item for item it elude the hands
of the corpse-cleaners and pass to
fitting spheres,
carrying what has accrued to it from
the moment of birth to the moment
of death.  

The poem "Eidolons" continues this same thought. Each eidolon is the
spiritual result of a life-cycle of birth, growth, and decay, and becomes
the basis for a new cycle that shall produce more advanced eidolons. Since
these eidolons are eternal they must have existed in the cosmic conscious-
ness as divine purpose.

The following is an illustration of the preceding statements:

Of every human life,
(The units gather'd, posted, not a thought,
emotion, deed, left out,)
The whole or large or small summ'd,
added up,
In its eidolon.

All space, all time,
(The stars, the terrible perturbations of
the suns,
Swelling collapsing, ending, serving
their longer, shorter use,) 
Filled with eidolons only.

Not this world,
Nor these the universe, they the universes,
Purport and end, ever the permanent life
of life,
Eidolons, eidolons.

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1 "Starting from Paumanok", p. 19.
2 Floyd Stoval, op. cit., p. 414.
Unfix'd yet fix'd,
Ever shall be, ever have been and are,
Sweeping the present to the infinite future,
Eidolons, eidolons, eidolons.

The next phase of Hegel's philosophy which influenced Whitman was politics.

Whitman states:

To politics throughout, Hegel applies the like catholic standard and faith. Not any one party or any one form of government is absolutely and exclusively true. Truth consists in the just relations of objects to each other. A majority or democracy may rule as outrageously and do as great harm as an oligarchy or despotism—though for less likely to do so. But the great evil is either a violation of the relations just refer'd to, or of the moral law. The specious, the unjust, the cruel, and what is called the unnatural, though not only permitted but in a sense (like shade to light) inevitable in the divine scheme, are by the whole constitution of that scheme, partial, inconsistent, temporary, and though having ever so great an ostensible majority, are certainly destined to failure, after causing great suffering.

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1 "Eidolons", pp. 5, 6.

2 To be sure, Hegel was not the only source of Whitman's political philosophy:

Politically, as a democrat, he had gone to school to Thomas Paine and Jackson and, later, Abraham Lincoln. He never completely abandoned his early Jeffersonian conviction that that government is best which governs least. See Newton Arvin, "Whitman's Individualism", The New Republic, LXXI (July 6, 1932), p. 212.

What all of these influences finally made Whitman believe is given by Stovall:

Politically he imagines the world of the future as a democratic hegemony with America in the leading role, "a new race dominating previous ones". See Floyd Stovall, "Main Drifts in Whitman", American Literature, IV (March 1932), p. 12.

The following poems contain evidence of the Hegelian influence:

Roaming In Thought
(After Reading Hegel)

Roaming in thought over the Universe, I
saw the little that is
Good steadily hastening toward immorality
And the vast all that is called Evil I saw
hastening to merge itself and become
lost and dead.1

Over The Carnage Rose Prophetic a Voice

Over the carnage rose prophetic a voice,
Be not dishearten'd affection shall solve
the problems of freedom yet,
Those who love each other shall become
invincible,
They shall make Columbia victorious.2

And certainly the following contains thoughts which are parallel to
Hegel's political philosophy:

Are not political parties about played out. I say
they are, all around. America has outgrown parties; henceforth it is too large, and they too small. They habitually
make common cause just as soon in advocacy of the worst
deeds and men as the best, or probably a little sooner for
the worst... .

What right has one political party, no matter which,
to wield the American government. No right at all.

The last phase of Hegelian philosophy which Whitman discusses is
theology:

Theology Hegel translates into science. All apparent
contradictions in the statement of the Deific nature by dif-
f erent ages, nations, churches, points of view, are but frac-
tional and imperfect expressions of one essential unity, from
which they all proceed--crude endeavors or distorted parts to
be regarded both as distinct and united. In short (to put in
our own form or summing up,) that thinker or analyzer or onlooker
who by an inscrutable combination of trained wisdom and natural
intuition most fully accepts in perfect faith the moral unity and
sanity of the creative scheme, in history, science and all life

1 "Roaming in Thought", p. 233.
2 "Over the Carnage Rose Prophetic a Voice", p. 266.
and time, present and future, is both the truest cosmical devotee or religioso, and the profoundest philosopher. While he who, by the spell of himself and circumstances, sees darkness and despair in the sum of the workings of God's providence, and who, in that, denies or prevaricates is, no matter how much piety plays on his lips, the most radical sinner and infidel.¹

Whitman himself explains why he discusses Hegel's formulae so fully:

In my opinion the above formula of Hegel are an essential and crowning justification of New World democracy in the creative realms of time and space. There is that about them which only the vastness, the multiplicity and the vitality of America would seem able to comprehend, to give scope and illustration to, or to be fit for, or even originate. It is strange to me that they were born in Germany, or in the old world at all.²

Compare the following with Hegel's idea about theology:

Swiftly arose and spread around me
the peace and knowledge that pass
all argument of the earth,
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,
And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping
in the fields,
And brown ants in the little wells
beneath them.
And mossy scabs of the worm fence,
heap'd stones,
elder, mullein and poke-weed.³

Esther Shephard in her book, Walt Whitman's Pose, accuses the poet of never having read Hegel, but a discussion by Gostick. The book, however, may

² Ibid.
be considered a very unsympathetic study of Whitman.

From this lengthy discussion it seems that he had absorbed directly or indirectly the Hegelian philosophy. Furthermore, according to Masters, Hegel was one of the authors whom he re-examined during his stay at Timer Creek. Indeed, Whitman is full of the German idealism and one has only to read his works to realize that the word cosmos plays an important part in his philosophy.

Stating the influence of transcendentalism on Whitman, Masters asserts:

Carlyle had unquestionably exercised a great influence on Whitman, as Emerson had, and as Hegel had, of whom he wrote when recording his thoughts on Carlyle.

Binns, even more than Masters, declares the influence of Hegel upon Whitman:

It was because Hegel saw life, both the Me and the Not Me, as a single Whole, and found a place for evil in his world purpose, that Whitman hailed him as the one truly "American thinker of the age."

And finally Shephard clinches the matter when she states:

What becomes clear is that in 1872 and in 1883 Whitman was not unwilling to have it known that his thought had been influenced not only indirectly by the philosophy of the German Idealists as it had filtered into nineteenth century thought but also directly by his reading of Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel.

It thus seems true that Hegel influenced the social, political, religious, and cosmic views of Whitman.

Orientalism, Greek Literature, the Bible

Whitman's reading interests extended beyond America, England, and Germany to the East. He was well versed in the Bible, Homer, Hafiz, and others. In

1 E. L. Masters, op. cit., p. 200.
2 H. Binns, op. cit., p. 298.
3 E. Shephard, op. cit., p. 366.
short, "He stood", says Perry, "in well defined relations to the literature of the past".

Whitman probably owes his orientalism to the indirect influence of Emerson. Emerson read several of the translations of Sanskrit and Persian poetry which appeared before 1855 and advised others to do likewise, especially the Bhazavadigita, a worn copy of which has been found among Whitman's possessions.

In this particular book, the god Krishna, appears "as the light and life of all things; he is the beginning and the end, the cause and the effect, the mystery of birth and of death and much more to the same effect". Whitman's "I" appears as the same, the Alpha and the Omega, and all in between.

Indeed Whitman's "I" has height, depth, width:

I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as of the wise,
Regardless of others, ever regardful of others,
Maternal as well as paternal, a child as well as a man,
Stuff'd with the stuff that is coarse and stuff'd with the stuff that is fine,
One of the Nation of many nations, the smallest the same and the largest same

... I know I am deathless
... I know I am august
... I am integral with you, I too am of one phase and all phases.4

1 Bliss Perry, op. cit., p. 276.
3 Ibid.
4 "Song of Myself", pp. 37, 40, 42.
One favorite theme of oriental literature is the comparing of human life with a road. Hafiz, the Persian poet, says:

'Tis strange, at every stage along the road,
As soon as I have eased me of my load,
I hear the jangling camel bells' refrain,
Bidding me bind my burden on again.  

In "Song of the Open Road", Whitman says that the universe is but a road for traveling souls:

Allons! we must not stop here,
However sweet these laid-up stones,
however convenient this dwelling we cannot remain here,
However shelter'd this port and however calm these waters we must not anchor here,
However welcome the hospitality that surrounds us we are permitted to receive it but a little while.

Allons! after the great Companions, and to belong to them!
They too are on the road—they are the swift and majestic men—they are the greatest women.

Orientalism is also suggested in the Calamus poems by the kissing of the men. In the orient this is merely a form of greeting.

2 Ibid., Quoted by Elsa Barker in "What Whitman Learned from the East" (Canada Monthly, 1911).
3 Ibid.
4 "Song of the Open Road", pp. 128, 129.
Behold this swarthy face, these gray eyes,
This beard, the white wool unclipped upon my neck,
My brown hands and the silent manner of me without charm;
Yet comes one a Manhattanese and ever at parting kisses me lightly on the lips with robust love,
And I on the crossing of the street or on the ship's deck give a kiss in return.
We observe that salute of American comrades land and sea,
We are those two natural and nonchalant persons; 1

Sensuousness is another characteristic of the poetry of the East.
Whitman's sensuousness can easily be seen in the following:

Smile, O voluptuous cool-breath'd earth!

Smile, for your lover comes.

Carpenter has the following to say about mysticism, orientalism, and Whitman:

Mystic experience is more familiar in the Orient than in the Occident and is most often produced by long and solitary meditation, in which the attention is intently fixed on a single object until the sense of selfhood broadens enormously and the spirit seems suddenly to cross the threshold of nature, and the finite self to rejoin the universal. Whitman was definitely a mystic. Two things are characteristic of the man after he had precipitated himself into the mood of ecstasy: unity of universe and love! 2

And Floyd Stovall maintains that lines 87-88 in "Song of Myself" contain the most definite record left by Whitman of his mystical gift. In these lines Whitman says:

1 "Behold this Swarthy Face", p. 105.
3 "Song of Myself", p. 41.
4 George Carpenter, op. cit., pp. 54, 55.
5 Floyd Stovall, op. cit., p. 405.
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 reached till you felt my beard, and reached till you held my feet, Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge that pass all the argument of the earth, And I know that the hand of God is in 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, And limitless are leaves stilt or drooping in the fields, And brown ants in the little wells beneath them And mossy scabs of the worm fence, heap'd stones, elder, mullein and poke-weed.■*■

In addition to all this, Bliss Perry and Emory Holloway have noted Whitman's kinship and indebtedness to oriental literature. Perry indeed makes it clear that:

In his capacity for brooding imaginative ecstasy, he was Oriental rather than Western. Deep affinities allied him with the oldest literatures of our Indo-European race; his own poetical style was formed largely upon that of the Old Testament: he read Hindu and Persian poets in the best translations available, carried Alpers Oriental Poetry to the Washington hospitals to read to wounded soldiers, and made many notes, it is said, in his own copy of the Bhazavadgita. His fondness for naming himself in his verse, his dervish-like passion for the endless Open Road, and even his catalogue method, have been noted as having singularly close parallels in the poetry of the East.2

1 "Song of Myself", pp. 27-28.
2 Bliss Perry, op. cit., p. 31.
And Holloway makes this singular statement:

When, long after Whitman's death Tagore visited America, he declared that no American had caught the Oriental spirit of mysticism so well as he.¹

Hence Whitman's debt to Orientalism seems apparent.

Carrying to the extreme his idea of independence and individuality, Whitman at times owned no influence, but he named Homer and Felton's Greece among the books which he read to solace his depression in his old age. It is also a well known fact that he read the Bible, Shakespeare, and Homer early in his life; he even knew large portions of them by heart and recited them outdoors while training for oratory. He liked their rhythm; he liked their thought; he liked their subjects.

Love and death are great subjects for Homer; they are the greatest in Whitman. The following poems are illustrative:

Sometimes With One I love

Sometimes with one I love I fill myself with rage for fear I effuse unreturned love, But now I think there is no unrestrained love, the pay is certain one way or another,⁵ (I loved a certain person ardently and my love was not returned) Yet out of that I have written these songs.⁶

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¹ H. B. Binns, op. cit., p. 63.
² O. L. Tuggs, op. cit., p. XXXVIII.
³ N. Foerster, op. cit., p. 161.
⁴ John Bailey, op. cit., p. 4.
⁵ Emerson's essay, "Compensation", has a similar theme.
⁶ "Sometimes With One I love", p. 111.
and
'Tis not for nothing, Death,
I sound you out, and words of you,
with daring tone-embodying you,
In my new Democratic chants--keeping you
for a close,
For last impregnable retreat--a citadel and
tower,
For my last stand--my pealing, final cry!¹

Pertinent to this discussion of the influence of Greek literature upon
Whitman is the following statement of Triggs:

Once in a conversation with Sidney Morse, Whitman
quoted from Felton the following passage: "To the Greeks the
natural man was not the savage running naked in the woods,
but the man whose senses, imagination, and reason are un-
folded in their highest reach; whose bodily force and mental
powers are in equipoise, and in full and beautiful action;
who has the keenest eye, the surest hand, the truest ear,
the richest voice, the loftiest and most rhythmical step;
whose passions though strong are held in check, whose moral
nature runs into no morbid perversions, and whose intellectual
being is robustly developed; whose life moves on in rhythmical
accord with God, nature, and man, with no discord except to
break its monotony and to be resolved in the harmony of its
peaceful and painless close. This is the ideal being, whose
nature is unfolded without disease, imperfection, or sin, to
perpetual happiness and joy". No better description than this
could be written of Whitman's ideal American.²

Considering this passage, it seems safe to say that Whitman gave to
his ideal American the same qualities which the Greeks gave to their natural
man: health, liberty, haughty pride, self-reliance, prudence, tolerance,
equality, and divinity.

¹ "In Former Songs", p. 487.
² C. L. Triggs, op. cit., p. XXXIX
³ Emory Holloway, op. cit. p. XXXIX.

The Greeks placed emphasis upon the beauty and strength of the body.
It is believed that Whitman's glorification of the body can be traced to his
interest in Greek culture.
Moreover, it is significant to note that as Homer's greatest works center around the Greek and Trojan War, so do some of Whitman's greatest poems spring from the Civil War, which certainly mellowed and ripened him. Such poems of Whitman as, "Reconciliation", "Come Up From the Fields Father", "Turn O Libertad", "Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night", "O Captain! My Captain", "When Lilacs Lost In the Door Yard Bloomed", may be cited as examples.

Indeed it is a popular thing among students of Whitman to point out, as does Foerster, that

He knew Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Pindar, Demosthenes, Pythagoras, and Plutarch. He read Symond's "Greek Poets" and Grotes "History". If he did not have a wide learning in Greek culture, he had at least an eager interest. 2

And these students often say with Binns that "it was from the pages of the Bible, of Homer. . . that he derived most".

Thus we may add the Greek influence to Whitman's indebtedness to orientalism. We may also add the Bible.

If we are to judge by the number of allusions and quotations in his work the Bible was the chief source of Whitman's inspiration, and therein lies the key word, inspiration. He was inspired by the life and work of Isaiah, the great prophet, and in turn aspired to inspire. His book itself is the utter-

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1 John Bailey, op. cit., p. 4.
2 Norman Foerster, op. cit., p. 159.
3 Henry Binns, op. cit., p. 59.
4 E. Holloway, op. cit., p. XXIV.
In Vol. II of The Uncollected Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman, Holloway cites the allusions to and quotations from the Bible. See E. Holloway, op. cit., p. 326.
5 Ibid., LXXIII.
ance of mystical inspiration. He was to be the bard or prophet of his own time and country. If Whitman can be said to have had an ideal, that ideal was Christ. He was his model of greatness, and there was no extended period of his life when he did not read the Bible in an effort to learn more about his model. Symonds says that we can judge how deeply influenced Whitman was by the life of Christ by the manner in which he laid down his health to serve in the hospitals during the Civil War.

Enough of the testimony of others. What does Whitman himself say of the Bible? The following answers the question:

I suppose one cannot at this day say anything new, from a literary point of view about those autochthonic bequests of Asia—the Hebrew Bible. . . . and a hundred lesser but typical works. . . . But will there ever be a time or place—ever a student, however modern, of the grand art, to whom those compositions will not afford profounder lessons than all else of their kind in the garnerage of the past? Could there be any more opportune suggestion to the current popular writer and reader of verse, what the office of poet was in primeval times—and is yet capable of being, anew, adjusted entirely to the modern. . . .

To what myriads has it been the shore and rock of safety—the refuge from driving tempests and wreck! Translated in all languages, how it has united this diverse world!

No true bard will ever contravene the Bible. If the time ever comes when iconoclasm does its extremest in one direction against the Books of the Bible in its present form, the collection must still survive in another, and dominate just as much as hitherto, or more than hitherto, through its divine and primal poetic structure. To me, that is the living and definite element—principle of the work, evolving everything else. Then the continuity; the oldest and newest

1 Ibid., LXXXIII.
2 Norman Foerster, op. cit., p. 162.
Asiatic utterance and character, and all between, holding together, like the apparition of the sky, and coming to us the same. Even to our Nineteenth Century here are the fountain heads of song! 1

Thus the poet himself has eloquently given the strong influence of the Bible on his thinking.

And Binns affirms the Bible influence by saying:

He studied the Bible systematically and deliberately, weighing it well and measuring it by the standards of outdoor America in the nineteenth century. 2

There seems to be no need to multiply citations. Perhaps the examples and testimonies already cited are convincing enough to show that Whitman was influenced in his thinking by the Bible.

It was not intended in this chapter to give an extended treatment of Whitman's literary relationships. Even those that have been discussed have not been treated extensively. An attempt has been made to show only some of the important sources that helped shape Whitman's views, premises, and conclusions; for he developed in the usual manner by eager reading and by unconscious and conscious imitation. In the light of this absorption and imitation, the following statements are both interesting and pertinent to a cursory discussion of Whitman's literary and ideological indebtedness and kinships:

"My life is a miracle and my body which lives is a miracle", he declared, incorporating in one sentence the mysticism of Hicks and transcendental affirmation. 4

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2 H. B. Binns, op. cit., p. 57.
3 Norman Foerster, op. cit., p. 169.
4 Frances Winwor, American Giant (New York, 1941), p. III.
Whitman shared the same rules and views about the union as Lincoln.\(^1\)

In his theory of government he was a thorough Jeffersonian.\(^2\)

He was like Shakespeare in the prodigality both of observation and of interest.\(^3\)

Like Rousseau he cried "Back to Nature" and praised at once the ego and the average; and like him he spurned reason and exalted emotions.\(^4\)

Like Walter Scott he was fascinated with the beauty of the feudal order, which he hoped democracy might emulate while developing great personalities.\(^5\)

His rhapsodic celebration of perfection seems closer to the naive deism of Shaftesbury than to Platonic Transcendentalism.\(^6\)

Many of the thoughts and actions of his ideal poet are parallel to George Sand's Consuelo.\(^7\)

"Out from behind the Mask of Autumn Kivulets" is full of Carlyle, the mystical Carlyle of Sartor.\(^8\)

They /The Leaves/ may owe something, also, to Macpherson's Ossianic poems.\(^9\)

\(^1\) John Bailey, op. cit., p. 30.
\(^2\) Floyd Stovall, op. cit., p. XIX.
\(^3\) John Bailey, op. cit., p. 5.
\(^4\) Norman Foerster, op. cit., p. 216.
\(^5\) Ibid.
\(^7\) E. Shephard, op. cit., p. 236.
\(^8\) John Bailey, op. cit., p. 182.
\(^9\) Floyd Stovall, op. cit., p. XXII.
And he had found, perhaps, in the **Autobiography** of the many-sided Goethe the first suggestion for a book of his own that should incorporate a personality.¹

This list could be extended indefinitely, and each author's kinship could entail a long and separate study. In this chapter Whitman's debt to Emerson, Wordsworth, Hegel, Orientalism, Greek literature, and the Bible has been shown. In a later chapter, it will be shown that that which he read was taken for clarification and verification into his consciousness. The reading of books does not make a creative genius. If it did, says Triggs, "There would be no lack of these things in the World". An attempt has been made to show that Whitman, like many men of genius, inherited his thoughts from many lands and peoples: Americans, Englishmen, Germans, Greeks, Hebrews, and Persians. It will be shown later that he significantly added to what he received; that he frequently emerged with new conclusions to old premises; hence he can be said to possess some of the chief qualities and talents of a creative genius.

¹ **Ibid.**, p. XXIII.

² O. L. Triggs, *op. cit.*, p. XXXIX.
CHAPTER II

SOME SOURCES OF WHITMAN'S TECHNIQUE

In Chapter I an attempt was made to trace the main sources of Whitman's ideas. It was shown that he borrowed his insistence on freedom, individuality, absolute independence, patriotism, heroism, manliness, chastity, temperance, and new-worldliness from Emerson; from Wordsworth he gained some elements of his theory of poetry, his idea of the relation of poetry to contemporary life, his desire to bring into poetry the common man and the common things of life, and his love for nature; many of his social, political, religious, and cosmic views were received from Hegel; to orientalism he owed his mysticism and his idea that life is a journey toward the ultimate unity; Greek literature gave him his idea of an ideal American, whose main attribute should be a strong, healthy body; and finally, the Bible inspired him to be a prophet of his people.

It is the purpose in this chapter to trace some of the main sources of his technique. Whitman was possibly indebted to Wordsworth, Coleridge, Os- sian, DeQuincey, Emerson, Nature, the Bible, Tupper, Milton, Warren, and orientalism; but his chapter will only discuss Nature, the Bible, and William Blake in an effort to show that they were probably largely responsible for the form of the material found in the 1855 edition of Leaves of Grass. Moreover, these sources will not be discussed extensively; but, as in Chapter I, an at- tempt will only be made to show that Whitman, like all creative writers, not only borrowed his ideas from various sources, but he also borrowed his tech- nique from such sources.
Whitman, as it is well known, chose as his medium of expression an unrhymed species of verse, which does not seem to have any obvious metrical pattern, but which does contain, at certain intervals, phrases or passages which are regular iambic or dactylic.

However, there have been severe criticisms of Whitman's verse form. Some, like Santayana, have called it "barbaric"; others, like Sidney Lanier, thought Whitman "a butcher of poetry." These reactions tend to leave the impression that Whitman's verse form is iconoclastic, utterly unconventional, absolutely without precedent. But a careful examination of the theory and practice of quite a few poets reveal that, in principle, at least, Whitman did not break new ground. For, as Beaty points out:

Rime is not found in classical Latin, Greek or Hebrew poetry, and very rarely in English poetry until after the Norman conquest in 1066. Hebrew poetry has nothing in the original or in translation, which corresponds to English meter or rime.

Further evidence of the fact that Whitman was not the first writer to use this type of verse is seen in the statement of Beaty that William Blake wrote free verse before Whitman was born.

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5. Ibid., p. 370.

Milton in his foreword to Paradise Lost says that rime is not necessary: The measure is English heroic verse without rime, as that of Homer in Greek, and of Virgil in Latin--rime being no necessary adjunct or true ornament of poem or good verse, in longer works especially, but the invention of a barbarous age to set off wretched matter and lame meter. See Milton's "The Verse." Milton's Paradise Lost, ed. Albert S. Cook (New York, 1896), p. 51.
Moreover, it is significant that Whitman's first efforts in verse were conventional in technique and bore no evidence of the style which he used in the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*.

This edition, however, did not contain the first of Whitman's free verse to be published. The first to be published but not the first to be written, were "Blood Money" which appeared in the *New York Tribune*, March 22, 1850;


2 "New Years Day, 1848" was the first to be written, and was published in the *Home Journal*, March 30, 1892. "Isle of LaBelle Riviere" was next, and was published in the *Cincinnati Post*, April 30, 1892. See Emory Holloway, "Whitman's First Free Verse", *Nation*, 104-105 (Jan.-Dec., 1917), p. 717.

3 The following is an extract from "Blood-Money", the first of Whitman's free verse to be published:

Section I

"Guilty of the body and the blood of Christ"

Of olden time when it came to pass
That the beautiful god, Jesus, should finish his work on earth,

Then went Judas, and sold the divine youth, and took pay for his body.

Cursed was the deed, even before the sweat of the clutching hand grew dry;

And darkness frowned upon the seller of the like of God,

Where, as though earth lifted her breast to throw him from her and heaven refused him,

He hung in the air, self-slaughter'd.

The cycles, with their long shadows, have stalk'd silently forward,

Since those ancient days—many a pouch enwrapping meanwhile

Its fee, like that paid for the son of Mary.

And still goes one saying, "What will ye give me, and I will deliver this man unto you"?

And they make the covenant, and pay the pieces of silver.

See *Uncollected Poetry and Prose*, I, pp. 25-27.
"Wounded in the House of Friends" which appeared in the same paper, June 14, 1850; and "Resurgemus", published on June 21, 1850.

To what, then, may we attribute the style which has come to be called "Whitmanesque"? One answer is probably nature. What opportunities did Whitman have of knowing nature?

When Whitman was quite young, his parents moved to Brooklyn, but most of his summers were spent on Long Island with his grandparents. Binns says that it was thus that he not only came to know his grandparents, but he was also taught by nature during the most impressionable years of his life; for he spent his time roving the hills and playing on the seashore. West Hills is located, as has already been indicated, by the sea. Bazalgette describes the scenes and sounds which Whitman was exposed to during his stay on Long Island:

... is near enough to the sea for its confused noises to be heard; especially on peaceful nights, after a storm, the muffled and distant rumbling of the waves produce a marvelous effect. Walt always kept the echo of the "mystic surfbeat of the sea". Very near the farm /his grandparents' farm/ is the ...

The following is an extract from the third of his free verse poems. It contains themes present in his later works:

Liberty, let others despair of thee,
But I will never despair of thee:
Is the house shut? Is the master away?
Nevertheless, be ready, be not weary of watching,
He will surely return; his messengers return anon.


Floyd Stovall, op. cit., p. XVIII.


Ibid.
elevation, Jaynes Hill, the culminating point of the island. From this height, which is perhaps but a hundred yards from the seashore, a marvellous panorama of fields, wood, hills, bounded by the waters of the sound on one side, by the ocean on the other, surrounds and subdues you.

Whitman describes the effect of his childhood rovings on himself in "There Was a Child went Forth", which was cited in Chapter I. And surely in "Elemental Drifts", Whitman depicts the scenery and describes the effect which the sea had upon him:

As I wend to the shores I know not,
As I list to the dirge, the voices of men and women wreck'd,
As I inhale the impalpable breezes that set in upon me,
As the ocean so mysterious rolls toward me closer and closer,
I, too, but signify, at the utmost, a little wash'd-updrift,
A few sands and dead leaves to gather,
Gather, and merge myself as part of the sands and drift.
O baffled, balk'd, bent to the very earth,
Oppress'd with myself that I have dared to open my mouth,
Aware now, that, amid all that blab whose echoes recoil upon me, I have not once had the least idea who or what I am,
But that before all my insolvent poems the real Me stands yet untouch'd, untold, altogether unseen,
Withdrawn far, mocking me with mock-congratulatory signs and bows,
With peals of distant ironical laughter at every work I have written,
Pointing in silence to these songs, and then to the sand beneath.

Now I perceive I have not understood anything—not a single object... and that no man ever can.

I perceive Nature, here in sight of the sea, is

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1 Bazalgette, op. cit., p. 25.
taking advantage of me, to dart upon me,
and sting me,
Because I have dared to open my mouth, to
sing at all.¹

We are thus assured that Whitman had ample opportunity to learn nature,
and it seems no exaggeration to say that he reacted to it sensitively. The
phase of nature, however, which seemed to exert the greatest influence upon
him is the sea; for scholars believe that the sea definitely influenced the
rhythms which he used. Carpenter, for example, asserts this:

This new form hovered between prose and verse;
it was living, musical, rhythmical, impassioned speech.
If it had a prototype or an origin, it may be said to
have been born of the rhythm which he heard in Nature
and of his memories of the areas and recitatives of the
Italian opera.²

In this connection, Perry quotes Professor Scott, who, in an unpublished
paper entitled "A Note on Walt Whitman's Prosody", states:

Whitman had/ delicate susceptibility to certain modes
or motion and sequences of sound, particularly the free
swaying, urging motions of the ferry-boat, the railroad
train, the flight of the birds, and among sounds, those
of the wind, the locusts in the tree-tops, and the sea.³

And the following, from the same source, is definite evidence that Whitman
patterned his lines after the waves and is, therefore, testimony that the sea
is a source of influence:

The Whitman line consists, like the prose sentence,
of an advancing and retreating wave. He varied the speech
rhythm to coincide or conflict with the routine scansion,
introduced minor waves and impulses and used alliteration

¹ "Elemental Drifts", pp. 408-409. Other poems which contain evidence of
the influence of the sea are "On the Beach at Night", "The World Below the
Brine", and "On the Beach at Night Alone", pp. 412-414. See also Walt Whitman
² George Carpenter, op. cit., p. 41.
³ Bliss Perry, op. cit., p. 87.
and refrain. . . . He is fairly regular in observing his own prosodic rules.¹

Masters, as implied in the foregoing passage, compares Whitman's verse rhythm with that of sea waves and suggests again the possible influence of an element of Nature upon Whitman's verse form. He gives his opinion in one terse sentence:

His lines are long as sea waves which wash in upon the ear bringing the deep susurrus of the deeps.²

It is easy to understand why the rhythm of the sea would have such a strong influence on Whitman: he not only revelled in Nature as a child, but he also read poetry, when he became a man, in the presence of the sea. Everything connected with the sea seemed to cast a spell over him; accordingly his mind caught the rhythm of the waves.

Moreover, Whitman, in explaining his metrical system said that it was like a wave: "The metre is like the recurrence of lesser and larger waves on the seashore", rolling in continuously, and fitfully rising and falling. This statement conveys a great deal of truth; for in reading certain works of Whitman's aloud, one who has lived by the seashore, and who, therefore, knows something of their rhythm, can easily detect their similarity to the waves. First, there is the full forceful swell and then the receding surge. In the following poem lines one and two are the receding surges; line three is the full, forceful swell; line four is a receding surge, of a lesser degree than the first two; and line five is a full swell, not containing, however, the force of line three:

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¹ Ibid., p. 88.
² Edgar L. Masters, op. cit., p. 297.
⁴ Bliss Perry, op. cit., p. 94.
As I ebbed with the oceans of life,
As I wended the shores I know
As I walk'd where the ripples continually
Wash you Paumanok,
Where they rustle up hoarse and sibilant,
Where the fierce old mother endlessly
cries for her castaways,
I musing late in the autumn day, gazing
off southward,
Held by this electric self out of the pride
of which I utter poems,
Was seized by the spirit that trails
in the lines underfoot,
The rim, the sediment that stands for all
the water and all the land of the globe.1

A fourth scholar who believes that the sea is perhaps responsible for
many of Whitman's rhythms is DeSelincourt. He substantiates the statements
made in the foregoing paragraph, for he describes one line as beckoning un-
mistakably like a full wave, and he receives pleasure from another because
it soothes as it recedes. In "The Problem of the Form", he writes:

His native instinct for rhythmical expression is
abnormally powerful.
"I behold from the beach your crooked
inviting fingers",
he writes of the sea in his first great poem, and the
rhythm of the line beckons of itself unmistakably. A
little later we have
"Cushion me soft, rock me in billowy
drowse"
And the rhythm lulls now and assuages. Effects like
these are common in Leaves of Grass, and a great part
of the pleasure it gives us depends upon them.2

And finally, Stovall, in giving what may be considered a clinching state-
ment, not only about what Whitman tried to do in Leaves of Grass but about the
influence of Nature on his style, says:

In short, the one cardinal principle that he has
tried to illustrate in Leaves of Grass is that the only fit-
ting poetry for democratic America is that which shall
"tally and express "nature in its cosmic fullness, including
its spiritual as well as its material aspects; for after
all, nature is the only complete and actual poem.

1 "As I Ebbed With the Oceans of Life", p. 216.
2 Basil De Selincourt, op. cit., p. 59.
There is doubtless more to Whitman's prosody than he has chosen to acknowledge. Yet, whatever artistic devices he may have used, his final purpose was to reproduce in his poems the rhythms of Nature. It is impossible to say how well he succeeded unless the rhythms of nature could be definitely known.2

Stovall, it seems, has well stated the problem: the rhythms of nature, perhaps, can not be definitely known. Nevertheless, all things considered, it seems that nature, especially the sea, had a salutary influence upon the technique of Whitman.

The Bible

Nature, perhaps, gave Whitman the hint for the rhythms used in his poems; but his real authority for rejecting the long-accepted poetic forms was gained from the Hebrew Bible. Bliss Perry says without reservation that "the essential model was the rhythmical pattern of the English Bible".3

About the only book which was familiar to the type of family into which Whitman was born was the Bible; hence Whitman early became familiar with its

Amy Lowell, however, apparently feels that Whitman struck upon his verse form by blind accident and ignorance, not by conscious art and imitation. This contention is seen in the following paragraphs:

And here I wish to make a statement which I fear will be somewhat startling. I believe that Walt Whitman fell into his own peculiar form through ignorance, and not, as is commonly supposed, through a high sense of fitness; in this point he is at complete issue with the moderns who are supposed to derive from him since they are perfectly conscious artists writing in a medium not less carefully ordered because it is based upon cadence and not upon metme. Whitman never had the slightest idea of what cadence is, and I think it does not take much reading to force the conviction that he had very little rhythmical sense. See Amy Lowell, "Walt Whitman and the New Poetry", Yale Review, XVI (April, 1927), p. 503.

2 Harriett Monroe, Poets and their Art (New York, 1932), p. 79.
3 Bliss Perry, op. cit., p. 96.
4 Henry S. Canby, op. cit., p. 309.
sound. It is also possible that he learned its language and rhythm from the American masses whose poetic language was the Bible. His love for and interest in the Bible were pointed out in Chapter I. It was stated that if we are to judge by the number of quotations and allusions, the Bible was his chief source of inspiration. These quotations and allusions were cited by Emory Holloway. Moreover, it was also stated that there was no period of his life when he did not read the Bible in an effort to learn more about Christ, who was, perhaps, his one and only model. Binns asserted that he read the Bible systematically and measured it by the standards of Nineteenth Century America. And finally, it was shown that Whitman himself acknowledged the influence of the Bible in an essay entitled "The Literature of the Bible". He stated that the Bible could give profounder lessons than any other work. It transcended time, place, and men.

What of the stylistic qualities of the Bible? In the first place, the line is the unit of rhythm. Next, the Hebrew authors employed as a mechanical device, parallelism. This parallelism is of four kinds: synonymous, antithetical, cumulative, and ascendant. Synonymous parallelism is that type in which the second line emphasizes the first. For example.

1 Ibid.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., op. cit., p. XXIV.
6 Norman Foerster, op. cit., p. 162.
7 H. B. Binns, op. cit., p. 57.
9 Ibid.
Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands;  
Sing forth the honour of his name;  
make his praise glorious  
Psalm 66.

Antithetical parallelism is that type in which the second line is the direct antithesis of the first. The following is illustrative:

For their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant.

But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not; yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath.  
Psalm 78

Cumulative parallelism is that type in which the second line completes the first. For instance,

So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: Also my wisdom remained with me.

And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour; and this was my portion of all my labour.  
Ecclesiastes 2, 9 and 10.

Ascendant parallelism is that type in which each succeeding line adds to the other. For example,

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.  
My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.  
Psalm 121.

Gay Wilson Allen, who has made a study of American prosody, and who included Whitman among his representative authors, agrees with Ferry and other
scholars concerning the tremendous influence of the Bible on Whitman's technique, and, more than any other writer on the subject, closely analyzes Whitman's technique of parallel structure in the light of that found in the Bible. He writes:

The first rhythmical principle of Leaves of Grass is that of parallel structure; the line is the rhythmical unit, each line balancing its predecessor, and completing or supplementing its meaning. . . . 1

The second evidence is that the verses of Leaves of Grass, like those of old Testament poetry are composed of four types of parallelism: 2

(1) Synonymous—the second line enforces the first by repeating the thought. (There may or may not be repetition of words. . . .) 3

How solemn they look there, stretch'd and still,
How quiet they breathe, the little children in their cradles.
"The Sleepers", Sec.

I too am not a bit tamed. I too am untranslatable,
I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.
"Song of Myself", Section 52.

(2) Antithetical—the second line denies or contrasts the first. (Used very sparingly in Leaves of Grass) 4

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.
"Song of Myself", Section 1

2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
(4) Climatic or "ascending rhythm--each succeeding line adds to its predecessor, usually taking up words from it and completing it.\(^1\)

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd
And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the night,
I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring,
Ever-returning spring, trinity sure to me you bring,
Lilacs blooming perennial and drooping star in the west,
And thought of him I love.\(^2\)

When Lilacs last, etc. Sec. I.

Here the author has explained at length how Whitman utilized the parallelism of the Bible. He stated that the unit of rhythm in the Bible was the line. Indeed this is to be found in Whitman. Allen himself says that of 10,500 lines in Whitman only twenty were run-on lines. For example,

All this time and at all times wait the words of true poems,
The words of true poems do not merely please,
The true poets are not followers of beauty but the august masters of beauty.\(^3\)

The following is further evidence that Whitman utilized synonymous parallelism:

O but it is not the years--it is I, it is you,
We touch all laws and tally all antecedents\(^5\)

\(^1\) Ibid.
\(^2\) Ibid.
\(^3\) Gay Wilson Allen, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 239.
\(^4\) "Song of the Answerer", p. 190.
\(^5\) "With Antecedents", p. 188.
Additional testimony of his use of antithetical parallelism can be seen in the following:

It is not upon you alone the dark patches fall,
The dark threw its patches down upon me also, 1

Proof of the fact that he employed cumulative parallelism is here illustrated:

Whatever satisfies souls is true;
Prudence entirely satisfies the craving and glut of souls,
Itself only finally satisfies the soul,
The soul has that measureless pride which revolts from every lesson but its own. 2

And finally climatic or ascending rhythm is shown in the following:

The law of the past cannot be eluded,
The law of the present and future cannot be eluded,
The law of the living cannot be eluded; it is eternal,
The law of promotion and transformation cannot be eluded,
The law of heroes and good-doers cannot be eluded,
The law of drunkards, informers, mean persons, not one iota thereof can be eluded. 3

Certainly it seems that the Bible is another source of Whitman's technique.

Indeed, Bliss Perry believes that the Bible served as a charter for *Leaves of Grass* because its structural devices seemed to break down the barriers between poetry and prose. He declares:

1 "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry", p. 181.
2 "Song of Prudence", p. 231.
3 "To Think of Time", p. 385.
The parallelism which constituted the peculiar structural device of Hebrew poetry gave the English of the King James version a heightened rhythm without destroying the flexibility and freedom natural to prose. In this strong, rolling music, this intense feeling, these concrete words expressing primal emotions in daring terms of bodily sensation, Whitman found the charter for the book he wished to write.¹

In Chapter I, it was shown that Whitman's thinking was influenced by the Bible: its primary influence was that of inspiration; and from the citations given in this chapter, it seems that the Bible exerted greater influence in determining his style than any other single literary work.

Blake

However true this might be, other works and other authors have had significant influence on the pattern of Whitman's verse. Among these authors stands William Blake, who wrote free verse before Whitman was born; who, perhaps, served as the common interest between Whitman and Mrs. Anne Gilchrist, thereby precipitating a famous literary friendship; and whose well-known design Whitman used for his own tomb.

Before entering into a discussion of likenesses in the work of Blake and Whitman, however, there are two other authors whose works might have influenced Whitman's technique, and who, therefore, deserve mention in this connection:

¹ Bliss Perry, op. cit., p. 96.
² Stovall states that Whitman had felt the keen edge of Carlyle's mind in 1846, and it is significant that he did not like Carlyle's style; for Carlyle was definitely influenced by the Bible as Craig and Thomas assert:

He knew, as almost nobody now knows, the Bible, and the Bible he knew was in its authorized version English of the Sixteenth and early Seventeenth century with freer syntax and greater liberty in vocabulary movement. See Craig and Thomas, eds., Nineteenth Century Prose (New York, 1938), p. 283.

³ J. O. Beaty, op. cit., p. 370.
⁴ H. B. Binns, op. cit., p. 263.
⁵ Ibid., p. 341.
Samuel Warren and M. F. Tupper. Perry acknowledges that there is a fair parallel between the technique of Warren's "Lily and the Bee" and the technique of *Leaves of Grass*. He states, however, that it is difficult to trace Whitman's sources because of his tendency to evade quotations and references. He writes:

There is another book, Samuel Warren's "The Lily and the Bee", which might have influenced Whitman. It is hard to trace Whitman's sources since he made no quotations nor references to other writers; but this work, published around 1851, contains catalogue, ejaculation, apostrophe, and many other devices peculiar to Whitman's style.

Esther Shephard tells us that Whitman's close friends ridicule the charge that he borrowed from Tupper. However, it is definitely known that he had reviewed Tupper's work "in the time of the long foreground and that he had admired the author's new mode of expression". Bliss Perry goes even further. He believes that Tupper's *Proverbial Philosophy* exerted a strong influence, primarily because he utilized Whitman's "pet" device: enumeration. He asserts:

Macpherson's Poems of Osjsian and Tupper's *Proverbial Philosophy* might have exerted strong influences on Whitman's style. The latter work probably exerted more influence than the Ossian: Tupper's composition lacked rhyme, metre, and indeed rhythm. More significant, however, is the fact that he employed the enumerative or catalogue method so dear to the heart of Whitman.

Thus the style employed by Whitman had many precedents, among them, as stated before, Blake, who used a style similar to Whitman's in the "Prophetic Visions", which was included in Whitman's studies.

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1 Bliss Perry, op. cit., p. 93.
2 Esther Shephard, op. cit., p. 77.
3 Ibid.
5 Edmund Stedman, op. cit., p. 37.
Blake's form did not come to him through accident. He labored over his work and finally decided to abandon the conventional forms. He says that "Poetry fettered, fetters the human race"; and in casting away the fetters, he helped to free the spirit of poetry. Let him speak for himself:

When this verse was first dictated to me I considered a monotonous cadence like that used by Milton and Shakespeare, and all writers of English Blank Verse, derived from the modern bondage of Rhyming to be a necessary part of the verse. But I soon found that in the mouth of a true orator, such monotony was not only awkward, but as much a bondage as rhyme itself. I therefore have produced a variety in every line, both of cadences and number of syllables. Every word and every letter is studied and put into its fit place; the terrific numbers are reserved for the terrific parts, the mild and gentle for the mild and gentle parts, and the prosaic for inferior parts, all are necessary to each other. Poetry Fetter'd, Fetters the Human Race!

Does not Whitman say as much in his "Preface" to Leaves of Grass? He too is abandoning the conventional forms in order to gain more freedom. He declares:

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. The profit of rhyme is that it drops seeds of a sweeter and more luxuriant rhyme, and of uniformity that it conveys itself into its own roots in the ground of sight. The rhyme and uniformity of perfect poems show the free growth of metrical laws and bud from them as unerringly and loosely as lilacs or roses on a bush, and take shapes as compact as the shapes of chestnuts and oranges and melons and

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2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
pears, and shed the perfume impalpable to form.
The fluency and ornaments of the finest poems
or music or orations or recitations are not independent,
but dependent.¹

What form did Blake use in the Prophetic Books? His works contain poems
written in "rhythmical prose", in imitation of Æssian and the Bible. His
lines are long and the unit of rhythm is the line. He employs catalogues
and Symons believes that he loved contemporary names even more than Whitman.
Blake, it must be remembered, was both painter and poet. His poems were ac-
companied by pictorial illustration. Indeed, the poetry of Blake holds a
unique position in English literature: it was extraordinarily independent
of contemporary fashion in verse and had intuitive sympathy with the taste of
a later generation.

Certainly there is great similarity between the following extract from
Blake's "Proverbs of Hell" and Whitman's poem, "I Sit and Look Out". The
lines are long, yet they are almost epigrammatic in their statements; there
are no run-on lines; and the rhythm is strikingly similar. One has only to
read these two poems to realize these similarities in technique:

¹ Walt Whitman, "Preface" to Leaves of Grass, op. cit., ed. Floyd Stovall,
p. 320.
² Arthur Symons, op. cit., p. 92.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
⁶ Ibid., p. 596.
Proverbs of Hell

In seed-time learn, in harvest teach,
in winter enjoy,
Drive your cart and your plough over
the bones of the dead.
The road of excess leads to the palace
of wisdom.
Prudence is a rich ugly old maid
courted by Incapacity.¹

I Sit and Look Out

I sit and look out upon all the sorrows
of the world, and upon all oppression
and shame,
I hear secret convulsive sobs from young
men at anguish with themselves,
remorseful after deeds done,
I see in low life the mother misused by
her children, dying, neglected, gaunt
desperate,
I see the wife misused by her husband,
I see the treacherous seducer of
young women,
I mark the ranklings of jealousy and
Unrequited love attempted to be hid, I see these
sights on the earth,
I see the workings of battle, pestilence, tyranny,
I see martyrs and prisoners,
I observe a famine at sea, I observe the sailors
casting lots who shall be kill'd
to preserve the lives of
the rest,
I observe the slights and degradations
cast by arrogant persons upon laborers,
the poor, and upon negroes, and the
like;
All these—all the meanness and agony
without end I sitting look out
upon,
See, hear, and am silent.²

It is no wonder that Bullet is reminded of Blake when he reads certain
works of Whitman. He writes:

² "I Sit and Look Out", pp. 179-180.
When the tide of his inspiration flows
strongly / there are / sentences that sometimes
recall the condensed cosmic wisdom of Blake.¹

Not only does Bullet give testimony of the similarity between the two,
but Swinburne, who has made a critical study of Blake, says that the likenesses
between Blake and Whitman are so many and so grave, that those who believe in
transmigration might use the two as proof of their belief. Their poetry,
says Swinburne, is alike in melody, informality, in its likeness to oceanic
rhythms, and in its likeness to elemental and eternal things. He writes in
his famous essay:

The points of contact and sides of likeness
between William Blake and Walt Whitman are so many
and so grave, as to afford some ground of reason to
those who preach the transition of soul or trans-
fusion of spirits. . . . Their poetry has at once
the melody and the laxity of a fitful stormwind; that,
being oceanic, it is troubled with violent ground-
wells and sudden perils of ebb and reflux, of shoal and
reef, perplexing to the swimmer or the sailor; in a
word, that it partakes the powers and the faults of
elemental and eternal things; that it is at times
noisy and barren and loose, rootless and fruitless
and informal; and is in the main fruitful and de-
lightful and noble, a necessary part of the divine
mechanism of things.²

The following poem of Blake's bears a singular similarity to Whitman's
poem which follows it in its cataloguing of contemporary names.

Blake—

The corner of Broad Street weeps;
Poland Street languishes
To Great Queen Street and Lincoln's
Inn: all is distress and woe.³

¹ Gerald Bullet, op. cit., p. 41.
³ Arthur Symons, op. cit., p. 87.
Whitman--
A Kentuckian walking the vale of the
Elkhorn in my deer--skin leggings,
a Louisianian or Georgia,
A boatman over lakes or bays or
along coasts, a Hoosier, Badger,
Buckeyes; ¹

Whitman in the light of these citations and statements, was, perhaps, influenced by the theory and practice of Blake. Indeed they are alike in stating their purpose in a preface; in the lengthy and rhythmical devices of their lines in the condensed epigrammatic quality of some of their verses; in that both were probably influenced by Ossian and definitely influenced by the Bible; and in their cataloguing of contemporary places.

Thus the discussion in this chapter so far seems to lead to the following conclusion: Whitman did not start a new, iconoclastic type of poetry. His style, of course, bears the stamp of his own personality; but he received hints from such sources as Nature, the Bible, and Blake.

Binns believes, however, that Whitman probably took hints from more than Nature, the Bible, and Blake. Whitman, he feels, also followed paths cleared by Browning, Carlyle, Emerson, and Meridith. For he says,

He Whitman had to go back to the prophets of Israel and the rhythm into which their message was put anew by seventeenth century translators to find a model. It was from them and a study of the movements of prose, but especially of speech, that he came into his own singular and not inappropriate style. At the last definition the appeal of Leaves of Grass is intended to be that of an intimate kind of speech and... bears a resemblance to that of Browning, Carlyle, Emerson, and Meridith.²

¹ "Song of Myself", p. 46.
² C. H. Binns, op. cit., p. 29.
Moreover, Canby is of the opinion that Whitman's love of music, especially Italian opera, was one of the major sources of influence on his technique. He has written two pertinent paragraphs concerning Whitman's love of music and the opera.

Thus it may be safely said that Whitman in his use of free verse owes much to many different kinds of sources. Masters supports this conclusion by stating emphatically that he invented no forms, but fashioned his lines after the Bible and Ossian, and was, moreover, encouraged by Aristotle's theory about the difference between poetry and prose. He declares:

In point of fact Whitman invented no form. He put into his long lines the rise and fall of his own spiritual diaphragm, just as a poet writing iambic pentameter will be Shakespeare or be Milton or Wordsworth or Browning. So Whitman did with a long free line in his own way what Ossian had done, and the Bible as well, Job and Psalms. The dactylic hexameters of Homer differ from each other in music and in the place of stress, yet all are hexameters. Whitman's lines differ from each other in meter and rhythm, yet all are stamped with his spiritual tone. It may be that Whitman knew what Aristotle said about poetry, and how it did not differ from prose and how it did.

Another Whitman scholar, Canby, holds that Whitman never tried to claim credit for originating free verse. Perhaps other writers of his day were practicing it, but that does not say that Whitman borrowed from them. Whitman, he declares, picked up his style from the Bible, as a child would pick up slang. And he gives the singularly significant opinion that Whitman sought a rhythm for his purpose and by labor perfected it. He writes,

In this brief resume of the source of the Whitman style, I have omitted any reference to contemporary books,

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1 Henry S. Canby, op. cit. p. 312.
2 Ibid., pp. 312-313.
3 Edgar L. Masters, op. cit., p. 81.
and I think rightly. Whitman, so far as I know, never made the absurd claim of inventing free verse.\textsuperscript{1}
If there were others, like Martin F. Tupper, practicing it in his day, their methods have little resemblance to his. He picked up free verse as naturally from oratory based upon the Bible, and from the Bible itself, as a child picks up slang. What he sought was a rhythmic method suited to his purpose, and that he got, and, after hard labor, perfected.\textsuperscript{2}

And finally Allen gives the conclusion of the whole matter, when he declares that no one knows exactly what the sources of Whitman's technique are, but, whatever its origin, it is a rediscovery of a very old verse form—rather than an entirely new invention. He writes:

We must conclude finally, that sometime around 1851 Walt Whitman discovered a poetic technique which was peculiarly adopted to his own abilities. He preached a new literary theory (including a new prosody) as the medium to be used by the future poet of Democracy, but he was really defending his own most natural style of versification. Precisely where he learned this new manner so well suited to him we do not know, but it was, whatever, its source, a rediscovery\textsuperscript{3} of a verse technique some five thousand years old rather than the invention of an entirely new method.\textsuperscript{4}

\begin{itemize}
\item[1] Beaty holds a somewhat different position. He says that Whitman it was who fought and won the battle for free verse. See J. O. Beaty, op. cit. p. 371.
\item[3] It is to be noted here that Canby, in holding that Whitman labored hard to perfect his free verse, is in disagreement with Amy Lowell, who holds, as we have seen, that Whitman stumbled upon the form through ignorance and accident. Bliss Perry agrees with Canby, however, that Whitman labored over his work. In his notes it is said he had written, "Make this more rhythmical". See Bliss Perry, op. cit., p. 88.
\item[4] The word rediscovered is extraordinarily pertinent to this thesis. Originality does not mean newness. It implies discovery and labor, the result of the two being rediscovery and hence, creativeness. Harriet Monroe feels that Whitman labored over his work and finally attained his poetic technique or his style as a result of this labor. As proof of her contention she cites a section from "Specimen Days" in which Whitman says, "Commenced putting Leaves of Grass to press for good...after many manuscript doings and undoings. I had great trouble in leaving out the stock poetical touches, but succeeded at last". See Harriet Monroe, op. cit., p. 196.
\end{itemize}

It seems, then, that Whitman's technique, like his thinking, is not entirely iconoclastic and new. It probably came to him from several sources. According to the evidence given it may safely be asserted that he owes something chiefly to Nature, the Bible, and Blake. If the greatest source of influence had to be given, the Bible would assuredly be named. It will be remembered, however, that Whitman did not copy these sources; they gave him the idea and he added from his own creative ingenuity; thus we have a product which is entirely Whitmanesque.

The form of the material found in the 1855 edition of Leaves of Grass was even more revolutionary and strange than the thinking. Because of its unusual form, many men of letters doubted that it was poetry at all. Whitman, on the other hand, had, as it has been shown, sufficient precedent for his "scrapping" of rhyme and metre: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Emerson, Carlyle, DeQuinccey, Macpherson, Shakespeare, Milton and Bryant, just to name a few. He was attempting to give "a new tongue to the new vistas", and no one can doubt that he succeeded admirably. His success, however, does not alter what this chapter has attempted to show: that he was not the inventor, not even the first discoverer of verse without meter and rhyme. He certainly borrowed from the past! In short, his technique is a rediscovery of a form centuries old. What he did to this form to make it entirely his own is the work of the next chapter.
CHAPTER III
WALT WHITMAN: A NEW VOICE

In preceding chapters, it was shown that Whitman's thinking and technique were influenced by many persons, experiences, and books, but primarily by Emerson, Wordsworth, Hegel, Orientalism, Greek literature, Nature (especially the sea), Blake, and last, the Bible. It was also shown that Whitman, like many men of genius, borrowed from different and various sources. Emerson said in his Representative Men that the "greatest genius is the most indebted man." Indeed, Whitman seems to agree with this statement; for he says that he studied at the feet of the great masters; but now, if eligible, he wishes that the great masters might return and study him. Stovall, believing that Whitman assimilated what he thought usable from various sources, and believing that from these he consciously made something new, writes:

Having outgrown the past, Whitman seems to think he can dispense with it and forget it. He examines his inheritance, admires it, then dismisses it to stand in his own place in the present.

To be sure some of the greatest poets in English literature borrowed from various sources:

Chaucer owed much to his Italian and Provencal sources. . . . Shakespeare created his "Merchant of Venice" (as some say) on the model of Marlowe's mighty line. . . . Tennyson made over old stories into new and entirely different ones in Idylls of the King. . . . Homer's Iliad may not be the original work of one poet but a compilation and adaptation of the works of many other bards. See E. Shepherd, op. cit., p. 248.


"Song of Myself", p. 45.

Floyd Stovall, "Main Drifts in Whitman's Poetry", op. cit., p. 18.
This chapter will attempt to show just that. It will deal with the additions or contributions made by Whitman and a discussion of Whitman's qualifications in the field of creative literature in an attempt to show that Whitman, despite borrowing from certain sources, was a creative genius. This will be done in the following manner; first, a discussion of what constitutes creative ingenuity; second, Whitman's contributions; and third, a discussion of Whitman's right to be called a creative genius.

What is meant by creative literature? It is the result of a writer's choice of, and imaginative building upon, the facts of life. It can easily be seen that it is, in a true sense, a new creation, bearing the ineffaceable mark of the writer's personality. This stamp or mark has two main qualities: vision and style. By vision is meant the writer's view of life, the interpretation that he gives to it; in short, the theme and bent of the author's work; by style is meant the methods or devices which he uses to give expression to his interpretation of life. These main qualities may be divided into several parts or phrases.

It is a well known fact that there is nothing absolutely new under the sun. Thus, originality in literature does not mean the bringing into literature of something absolutely new. Excellence is the only originality that art considers". Assuredly there is nothing new about such themes as love,
war, death, sunset, friendship, religion, courage, hope, and despair; yet "something remains to be told of each eternal theme". Different writers, therefore, will of necessity write about the same things; but the writer "who calls our attention to most beauty in it, will be original or unique in the only way that art permits". John Erskine declares that no one is particularly interested in the sources of an artist. The themes belong to life, and hence belong to one person as much as to another; and if one author improves on another man’s work that is his prerogative; he has committed no crime:

There is such a thing as plagiarism; yet unless one is a fanatic for originality, the question of plagiarism is of no great importance; the world is not interested, and if the author is concerned from whom the play or plot is stolen, his concern is more for his property than for his art. If his work is stolen unchanged, it is still as good art as it was before; if the thief has mangled it, his plagiarized version will not be so good as the authentic text; but if by luck he has improved on what he took, it becomes his, bag and baggage, so far as fame is concerned. Who were the authors of those songs Burns made over into his masterpieces? Who were those dramatists and chroniclers from whom Shakespeare rewrote. The names in many cases can be looked up, but they are of no account. The world feels that the great writer conferred a benefit by improving on the earlier work. What is far more important, the world also feels that the great writer, in improving on another man’s work, actually invaded no private rights, for the material of literature is life, and life is no one’s private property.

To restore the sharp edges of impression, to bring back the first flavor of things is the ideal of life and of art; only strong personality can do it, but where such a personality comes, it is irresistible and undisguisable. It shows up best in those attitudes of life which in other hands have grown drab and sordid; the contrast brings out the genius.

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1 Ibid., p. 52.
2 Ibid., p. 53.
3 Ibid., pp. 80-82.
Originality, then, it can not be emphasized too often, consists in improving the old materials of life; in stamping one's personality on the old in such a way that it actually becomes new, at least new in significance and meaning.

What qualities must a writer possess in order to be called original, a creative genius? Various authors have given numerous qualifications. Many agree on certain qualities; on the other hand, there are some requisites which are given by some authors which are entirely omitted by others. Let us review some of these requisites and qualifications of an original genius.

According to Elizabeth Nitchie, the creative genius must have a sense of beauty, imagination, and a command of language. She writes:

The creator of literature is a man of greater sensitiveness and broader experience than the average man, with a sense of beauty and a power of imagination that enable him to order and balance his experiences, and with a command of language that empowers him to transmit the value of his experience and to make a thing of beauty out of the expression of it. The genius is the writer who possesses this equipment in the highest degree.¹

Spingarn holds the opinion that a real poet can make any subject new if he has sufficient imagination. He declares in a most pertinent statement:

Cynical critics have said, since the first outpouring of men's hearts, there is nothing new in art; there are no new subjects for the poets.² But the very reverse is true. There are no old subjects; every subject is new as soon as it has been transformed by the imagination of the poet.

One of the most famous discussions of the symptoms of poetic power is Coleridge's Biographia Literaria, Chapter V. Coleridge gives these symptoms

¹ Elizabeth Nitchie, The Criticism of Literature (New York, 1929), pp. 54-55.
² J. E. Spingarn, Creative Criticism and Other Essays (New York, 1931), p. 220.
in a critical analysis of Shakespeare's "Venus and Adonis" and "Rape of Lucrece". The first qualification is "perfect sweetness of versification". He believes that imagery, affecting incidents, thoughts, personal and domestic feelings may be acquired as a trade. "But the sense of musical delight, with the power of producing it, is a gift of imagination." In short, "The man that hath not music in his soul" can indeed never be a genuine poet. Continuing his discussion of the poetic symptoms, Coleridge discusses the second qualification in the following manner:

A second promise of genius is the choice of subjects very remote from the private interests and circumstances of the writer himself. At least I have found, that where the subject is taken immediately from the author's personal sensations and experiences, the excellence of a particular poem is but an equivocal mark, and often a fallacious pledge, of genuine poetic power.

Coleridge discusses images as his third symptom. Images, however, copied or represented in words, do not of themselves characterize a true poet. Such images must be "modified by a predominant passion"; they must have the effect of reducing multitude to unity; and "human and intellectual life must be transferred from the poet's own spirit". The last quality which he requires a poetic genius to have is depth and energy of thought. To be a great poet,

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1 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Biographia Literaria", Coleridge's Principles of Criticism, ed. Andrew J. George (Boston, 1895), pp. 57-58.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., p. 58.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid., p. 59.
6 Ibid., p. 60.
a man must be a profound philosopher. "For poetry is the blossom and the fragrancy of all human knowledge, human thoughts, human passions, emotions, language." In summarizing, Coleridge gives this classic description of Shakespeare:

He first studied patiently, meditated deeply, understood minutely, till knowledge became habitual and intuitive, wedded itself to his habitual feelings, and at length gave birth to that stupendous power, by which he stands alone, with no equal or second in his own class; to that power which seated him on one of the two glory smitten summits of the poetic mountain, with Milton as his compeer, not rival.

Thus, for Coleridge the creative genius must have perfect sweetness of versification, good choice of subjects, images which have been modified by passion, and deep philosophic thought.

Louise Dudley helps in the forming of our picture of the creative artist in her book, The Study of Literature. Of particular interest is the chapter, "Forms of Imagination", in which the author discusses creative imagination and fancy. Fancy and creative imagination are alike: they are formed under emotional stress and are not the product of the will; but fancy and creative imagination are also different; in fancy cleverness of the likeness is essential and in creative imagination truth of the likeness is essential. The creative imagination produces work which is the highest art.

1 Ibid., p. 63.
2 Ibid., p. 64.
4 Ibid., p. 95.
5 Ibid., p. 97.
6 Ibid.
It would seem that Dudley agrees with Stedman, who says that imagination is the essential thing; without it poetry is as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.

Fredrich Hebbel, feeling that the creative genius should be able to comprehend the visible and the invisible, and so interpret God, Nature, and man that each will ultimately fill its proper sphere in our lives, asserts:

Creative art is a spirit that can sink itself into every form and into every condition of being and grasp and render visible the laws of the former and the fundamental character of the latter. Its function is to redeem nature unto the highest expression of its characteristic life, Man to his utmost freedom, the Divine which in its infinity we cannot grasp unto its necessary existence.2

Stedman maintains that the greatest poet has versality both as to subject matter and style. He says:

The greatest poet is many-sided and will hold himself slavishly to no one thing for the sake of difference. He is a poet, too, in spite of measure and material, while as to manner, the style is the Man. Genius does not need a special language; it newly uses whatever tongue it finds.3

Since Matthew Arnold holds that literature is a criticism of life, he feels that the greatest poet is he who can make his ideas teach us how to live.

It is important, therefore, to hold fast to this: that poetry is at bottom a criticism of life; that the greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life, to the question: How to live.4

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1 Edmund Stedman, op. cit., p. 381.
And Masters follows Arnold's idea in the main when he makes the following epigrammatic statement which is self-explanatory:

Creative thinkers make a nation by ideas and aesthetic leadership.¹

Butcher helps to form our picture of the creative artist by demanding that he exercise versatility. He asserts, in giving a clue to Aristotle's theory, the following:

He holds undoubtedly with good reason that the clue to Aristotle's theory is to be found in the conception that poetry is an expression of the universal element in life.²

And finally Winchester discusses the manner in which the genius uses language; he bends it to his own peculiar use, refusing to follow slavishly models and smug conventions.

The feeble writer may posture and put on what he takes to be the mask of genius, but no imitation or echo, no fluency of pale phrase, will content the man who has known the pains and joys of strenuous thinking. Intent above all things to utter himself truly, and knowing how hard it is to fit the right word to every flexure of thought and harder still to every shade of feeling and shape of fancy, he needs to bend language to his peculiar use. He may be careless of models, and he may sometimes shock smug conventions; he will make his own style.³

Citations might be multiplied, but perhaps enough has been given to form an adequate picture of the creative artist. This seems to be the creative artist—one who possesses imagination, universality, powerful use of language, feeling, inspiration, experience, development or growth, sweetness

¹ Edgar L. Masters, op. cit., p. 59.
of versification, an ingenuous choice of subjects, a philosophic insight, versality, a critical appraisal of life, and national esthetic leadership—but the greatest of these is imagination.

Whitman's Contributions

We know, then, some of the requisites for a creative writer. How does Whitman qualify? It is felt that Whitman can best be measured by giving first a discussion of his contributions, which would naturally include a discussion of how he stamped his personality on the material which he inherited from various sources.

Emerson has been named as a leading source of influence on Whitman. He is credited with giving him his idea of individuality and self-reliance. Carlyle has, perhaps, given the chief clue to the main difference between Emerson and Whitman. In an appeal to Emerson, Carlyle makes a statement that no one would think of making of Whitman. It is quoted by Van Wyck Brooks.

For the rest I have to object still (what you call objecting to the law of Nature) that we find you a speaker indeed, but as it were a Soliloquizer on the eternal mountain-tops only, in vast solitudes where men and their affairs be all hushed in a very dim remoteness; and only the man and the stars and the earth are visible—come down and do life pictures, passions, facts.1

Emerson, it can thus be said, was fastidious and aloof; provincial and aristocratic.

But Whitman believed in the common man. He was, in a true sense, a man of the people. He loved to associate with those who worked for a living.

1 Wyck Van Brooks, America's Coming of Age (New York, 1924), p. 16.  
2 W. J. Long, op. cit., p. 308.  
3 Edmund Stedman, op. cit., p. 356.  
4 Proof of the fact that Whitman loved to associate with the common man can be seen from the following:
"He applied the down-East philosophy to the daily walks of life and sang the blare and brawn that he found in the streets about him", says Stedman; and Van Wyck Brooks gives this difference:

For having all the ideas of New England, being himself saturated with Emersonianism, he came up from the other side with everything New England did not possess: quantities of rude emotion and a faculty of gathering humane experience almost as great as that of the hero of the Odyssey. He entered fully and many sidedly into the spirit of a great human situation. . . .

What Emerson drew in black and white Whitman filled in with color and set in three dimensions.  

Whitman was a Frankenstein created by Emerson and the other transcendentalists; he took them at their word about humanitarianism; he even came in years to rebuke Alcott and Emerson about their aloofness; he went beyond them in integrating rugged individualism with nationalism, brotherhood and proletarianism.

Thus Whitman's individualism, full-bodied, social, and fraternal, was not exactly like Emerson's; it was modified by his firm belief in the proletariat, comradeship, and solidarity. Because he believed in an egalitarian

\[He/ never laid up, or aimed to lay up, riches: he gave his time and his substance freely to others, belonged to no club nor coterie, associated habitually with the common people—mechanics, coach-drivers, working men of all kinds. . . . He was democratic because he was not in any way separated nor detached from the common people by his quality, his culture or his aspirations. He was bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh. See John Burroughs, "Whitman", Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th edition, XXVIII, p. 610.\]

1 Edmund Stedman, op. cit., p. 355.
2 Van Wyck Brooks, op. cit., p. 113.
democracy and, hence, equal opportunities, he was always critical of the individualism of business enterprises.

If there is any one quality which distinguishes Whitman and his work, it is concreteness. He believed that the highest truths should be felt as well as thought, applied as well as taught. Emerson, on the other hand, dwelt in the realm of the abstract. Carpenter believes that it is this concrete quality which makes Whitman a truly great poet: he is unrivalled in his knowledge of the actual world and of actual life, and in his absolute acceptance of the same.

Not only did Whitman and Emerson differ in their concreteness but also in their abilities to mingle with, and be one of, the common people. John Bailey declares that the main difference between Emerson and Whitman lies in the fact that Whitman had the "common touch" which Emerson did not have. He writes:

The two men, in fact, were in important respects very unlike. It was not merely that Emerson was a man of academic culture. It was not even merely that he could not understand or consort easily with plain uneducated people. A still more marked contrast lay in the fact that he had little of the sensuous in him and did not understand how in Whitman the human and even the physical, constantly took precedence of the intellectual. Emerson's great gifts were those proper to the author's study, the professor's chair, the pulpit of the preacher. Whitman's had more alloy but they were of the more universal order whose home is in the open air or in the life and business of all men, and that is much the same thing as saying that he was a man of greater genius. 

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4 John Bailey, op. cit., p. 112.
Moreover, _Democratic Vistas_ may be considered our second literary Declaration of Independence. Whitman in this great prose work did the opposite to what Emerson had done in the "American Scholar". He pleaded for a literature that would be truly democratic, a literature of the people, by the people, and for the people. Emerson pleaded for "man thinking" and "spoke as an oracle"... Whitman spoke as the "voice of one crying in the wilderness." Emerson had made his plea in behalf of the aristocracy; Whitman pleaded the case of the average man.

Emerson's method was intuition, while Whitman's was observation. He put into his poems the real things that he had observed in his association with men. Emerson could not do this because he did not possess the peculiar faculty of being one of the masses. Emerson had a "somewhat incurious attitude toward details", while Whitman was minutely microscopic in his observation. Whitman, in common with Emerson, was intensely interested in the other world, but he was keenly alert to the things in this world. Emerson loved Nature, while Whitman was Nature's scholar. Emerson had much to say about friendship, but he was not capable of the friendship which Whitman possessed. Whitman said that he would establish "in Mannahatta and in every

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3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
city of these States inland and seaboard... the institution of the dear
love of comrades." The following poem illustrates Whitman's interest in
this world, in comrades and also illustrates the true ecstasy which he found
in friendship. Emerson could never have written the following:

A GLIMPSE

A glimpse through an interstice caught,
Of a crowd of workmen and drivers in a
bar-room around the stove late of a
winter night, and I unremark'd
seated in a corner,
Of a youth who loves me and whom I
love, silently approaching and seating
himself near, that he may hold me by
the hand,

... ...

There we two, content, happy in being
together, speaking little, perhaps not
a word.

Emerson spoke for man; Whitman spoke for men in that he believed that
the "main purport of these States is to give birth to a "superb friendship".
His poem, "To the East and to the West" expresses the belief that friendship
is the hope of the Nation.

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 be found a superb friendship,
exalted, previously unknown,

1 "I Hear It Was Charged Against Me", p. 107.
2 "A Glimpse, p. 109."
Because I perceive it waits, and has been always waiting, latent in all men.

All of this may be summed up by saying that Emerson was idealistic, but Whitman added to this idealism a heavy and important ballast of materialism and proletarianism, full of life and gusto.

In short Whitman "felt intensely what Emerson and other philosophers believed intellectually". He brought philosophy out of the Ivory Tower into the fresh air, into vista, and in so doing added virility, animation, and realism to American literature. It is no exaggeration to say that with Whitman masculinity and life came into our literature.

Not only did Whitman make his inheritance from Emerson more concrete, more tangible, but he also added these qualities to the other sources, particularly Wordsworth.

Wordsworth mentioned using the language of the common man, but Wordsworth did not go so far as Whitman. Whitman even used the slang of his own day, a "barbaric gawp".

Again, Wordsworth's common man was far different from the man Whitman had in mind, or the man whom he described in his literature. Wordsworth's common man was a man of a low station in life; yet he was one who was "just a little above the average" for some reason or other. Whitman described the man who was the average. Foerster makes the following statement which seems to substantiate this assertion:

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1 "To the East and to the West", p. 111.
4 Fred Lewis Pattee, op. cit., p. 176.
Whitman described the average American qualities. He believed that literature should do more than recognize people. It should furnish suggestions of personality to aid men and women in their growth.  

Whitman's treatment of Nature also differs from Wordsworth's. Wordsworth emphasizes the beauty and delight which children feel in the presence of Nature, but which decreases as one increases in age. Whitman always found in Nature a companion, a friend, and a lover who with him partakes of a "unity beyond themselves".

It is true that Whitman and Wordsworth were both pantheists, but Wordsworth's pantheism was restrained by an unresolved Transcendentalism. Wordsworth knew that all men would never be gods nor would all parts be equally divine. Whitman, holding the principles that all men could be gods and all parts equally divine, writes:

Lover divine and perfect comrade  
Waiting content, invisible yet, but certain  
Be thou my God.

Thou, thou, the Ideal Man,  
Fair, able, beautiful, content, and loving,  
Complete in body and dilate in spirit,  
Be thou my God.

Thus, what Wordsworth had theorized, Whitman made practical: he brought the common man into poetry; he avoided the cliches of poetry and brought the

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1 Illustrative of what Whitman meant when he said the common man is seen in "I Hear America Singing", he celebrates mechanics, carpenters, masons, boatmen, shoemakers, wood-cutters, mothers, girls washing and sewing; Wordsworth's common people: The Blind Highland Boy, Michael, Lucy Gray, The Idiot Boy.
4 John Bailey, op. cit., p. 86.
5 Ibid.
"language of the street corner" into literature. Whitman was not overpowered in the presence of Nature; he put his arms around Nature, as it were, and called her friend, lover, companion. Finally, using pantheism as a basis, Whitman equalizes all forces of nature, physical and human.

To Hegel's divine trinity of Father (Abstract Idea), Son (Nature), and Holy Ghost (the Church), Whitman adds a forth, Satan (the spirit of freedom). This is shown in "Chanting the Square Deific".

Chanting the square deific, out of the
One advancing, out of the sides,
Out of the old and new, out of the
square entirely divine,
Solid, four-sided, (all the sides needed,)
from this side Jehovah am I
Old Brahm I, and I Saturnius am:
   
Defiant I, Satan, still live, still utter words,
in new lands duly appearing, (and old
ones also)

Including all life on earth, touching,
including, God, including Saviour and Satan,
Ethereal, pervading all, (for without me
What were all? what were God?)

The political views which he inherited from Hegel he reinterpreted in terms of America, and America alone; the religious views were also applied to America, making Whitman preach against race prejudice, social and class difference, and economic discriminations.

It has been shown that he followed the orient in his mysticism. He did not, however, detach himself from the world; he combined the spiritual or

2 Floyd Stovall, op. cit., p. 411.
3 "Chanting the Square Deific", pp. 370, 372.
4 Bliss Perry, op. cit., p. 307.
mystical with the material, as Bullet says:

... He claims to be "both in and out of the game and watching and wondering at it". He does not contend with the contenders; while they discuss he is silent, knowing the perfect fitness and equanimity of things; but he does not disdain to descend from the Olympus of this perfect confidence into the noise of the greater battle. He is the ardent lover, the caresser of life, absorbing all into himself; he calls himself proudly "the mate and companion of people, all just as immortal and fathomless as myself."

He thus added to his mysticism an intense, sensuous, buoyant realism, and went even further, declaring that all men could become unique combinations of mysticism and realism. In other words, Whitman's reinterpretation of mysticism finally evolved into universal brotherhood.

The Greeks influenced his interest in the human body, and, applying his pantheistic views to the physical view, he concluded that one part of the body was as good and as important as another part; hence sex should not be taboo. To Whitman there was a mystery and divinity about sex; he thus included such poems as "The Body Electric" and "A Woman Waits for Me" in the second edition of his poems. Whitman, accordingly, became a great influence

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2. George Carpenter, op. cit., p. 56.
3. Gerald Bullet, op. cit., p. 44.
5. It was about such poems as these that Whitman and Emerson had their famous conversation on Boston Commons. Emerson, feeling that Whitman had shocked the modesty of the readers, urged Whitman to omit these poems; but Whitman was firm and refused. Ibid., p. 50.
in inaugurating the liberal respect which the world now has for the body. He fought for sanity in matters of sex. There is, to be sure, some criticism of the manner in which Whitman treated sex in the poems of *Children of Adam*. DeSelincourt feels that he does not give enough direction to his enthusiasm for sex. He asserts:

... beyond saying that sex like all else is good, he gives little direction to his enthusiasm, and does nothing to show us under what conditions its implicit goodness will be realised. He seems indeed to make the fundamental mistake of supposing that the forms of truth as he has seen them in that upper transcendental air have only to be brought down and applied, like a transfer, to actual human life for all the conditions of what is right and beautiful to be fulfilled. In brief, he sings not only sex the principle of life, but also sex the realisation, the source of lives, in the same universal language.

Be that as it may, Whitman definitely contributed by helping to dispel some of the false notions which were held concerning sex and the inevitable life processes. If sex is obscene, then life is obscene.

It may seem strange to say that Whitman added to the Bible, but he did just that, not only by expanding or enlarging upon Biblical thought but by the manner in which he rigorously practiced the principles laid down by Christ, who, as was pointed out in Chapter I, was his model. He applied the principles of Christ to the everyday world. It might well be said of Whitman, considering his Civil War sacrifices, that "greater love hath no man than he lay down his life for his brother."

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1 Emory Holloway, *op. cit.*, p. 323.
3 Gerald Bullet, *op. cit.*, p. 44.
In these ways has Whitman made definite additions to the main sources of his thinking which were discussed in this thesis.

Now the question arises, what were his contributions or additions in technique? Harriett Monroe gives two additions which Whitman made to poetic art: one, freedom of form; two, rejection of clichés. She declares:

His first and most obvious service to poetic art was his insistence on freedom of form --his rejection of the usually accepted English metrics and his success in writing great poems without their aid... he must find for himself a rhythm as personal as theirs/the contemporary poets/. His second service was corollary to the first—the rejection of clichés, including archaic diction and so-called poetic phrasing.

And Beaty believes that "Whitman's only metrical innovation consisted in discarding at once both meter and rhyme; each of these had been separately abandoned by older poets".

There is another feature of Whitman's technique which is particularly Whitmanesque: his recurring use of parentheses. He begins or closes a paragraph with a bracketed sentence, or he brackets a paragraph in a poem, or, more significant still, he begins or ends a poem with brackets. Let us look at some examples of all of these, and then let DeSelincourt describe the purpose of the brackets, whose final purpose, he feels, is to make literature contemplate music. The following poem illustrates his use of the brackets in the middle of a poem:

1 Harriett Monroe, op. cit., p. 196.
2 J. O. Beaty, op. cit., p. 371.
3 Basil DeSelincourt, op. cit., p. 108.
4 Ibid.
TWILIGHT

The soft voluptuous opiate shades,
The sun just gone, the eager light
dispelled—(I too will soon be gone,
dispelled)
A haze--nirvana--rest and night--oblivion.¹

And this extract is an example of opening brackets:

SONG OF THE EXPOSITION

(Ah little recks the laborer,
How near his work is holding
him to God.
The loving Laborer through space
and time.)
After all not to create only, or found
only,
But to bring perhaps from afar what is
already founded.²

And finally, the poem which follows is illustrative of the use of brackets to end the poem:

AS I WATCH'D THE PLOUGHMAN PLOUGHING

As I watch'd the ploughman ploughing,
Or the sower sowing in the fields, or
the harvester harvesting,
I saw there too, 0 life and death, your
analogies;
(Life, life is the tillage, and Death is the
harvest according.)

As further illustrations of Whitman's use of bracketing as a part of his technique, the following poems are cited: "Joy, Shipmate, Joy"; "Now Final To The Shore"; "In Cabin'd Ships at Sea"; "As They Draw to a Close"; "The Base of All Metaphysics"; "Adieu To a Soldier"; and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd", all of the seventh section of the latter is bracketed.

¹"Twilight", p. 439.
²"Song of the Exposition", p. 166.
³"As I Watch'd The Ploughman Ploughing", p. 378.
The poems cited are just a few of the poems in which Whitman employed this device. Let DeSelincourt give us the purpose or effect of this bracketing.

This persistent bracketing falls well into the scheme we have laid down of independent units that serve an accumulating effect. The bracket, one need not remark, secures a peculiar detachment for its contents; it also, by placing them outside the current and main flow of the sense, relates them to it in a peculiar way. And although for the time being the flow is broken, it by no means follows, as we saw, that our sense of the flow is broken; on the contrary, it is probably enhanced. We look down upon the stream from a point of vantage and guage its speed and direction. More precisely, the bracket opening a poem or paragraph gives us, of course, the idea which that whole poem or paragraph presupposes, while the closing bracket gives the idea by which what precedes is to be qualified and tempered. We have thus as it were a poem within a poem; or sometimes, when a series of brackets is used, we have a double stream of poetry, as in "By Blue Ontario's Shore" where the waters blend and yet remain discriminate, a deeper and more personal current of feeling persisting under the strength and buoyant onrush of the surface. All this carries out and amplifies the peculiar formal significance of *Leaves of Grass*, with its strange submission of words to unfamiliar musical associations. Continuity and independence being opposing principles of composition, independence emerges in the bracket into relative prominence. The disjunctive spirit of language asserts itself; literature contemplates music.

Another peculiarity of Whitman's technique, which bears a slight similarity to some of Blake's work, is cataloguing. DeSelincourt feels that Whitman deliberately multiplies names in order to appear exceptional; but, on the other hand, he also feels that his cataloguing may be due to the fact that "Spaciousness, fertility, and even the redundance of the vital processes were inspiration to him". In giving a resume of the value of Whitman's cataloguing or enumeration, he says:

They represent, at its extreme, his essential virtue, the quality which makes *Leaves of Grass*, the perfect title for his work. For his poems have in a unique degree the

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1 Basil DeSelincourt, op. cit., pp. 107-108.
2 Ibid., p. 142.
3 Ibid., p. 143.
attribute of diffused equivalence. The parts are all interchangeable; every key fits every door; every sentence seems to put forward a new instance of the ever present, ever elusive truth."

Another feature of his style which deserves mention here, but which was discussed in connection with Wordsworth, is his use of the common everyday language of the average man. He certainly sounded the death knell to formal language in poetry and introduced an informal—even a vulgate—level of diction and vocabulary.

George Santayana, even though he called Whitman's poetry barbaric, says the following:

This abundance of detail without organization, this wealth of perception without intelligence and of imagination without taste, makes the singularity of Whitman's genius. Full of sympathy and receptivity, with a wonderful gift of graphic characterization and an occasional rare grandeur of diction, he fills us with a sense of the individuality and universality of what he describes.

Thus something of the additions which Whitman made to the literary building which he inherited has been shown. Henry Seidel Canby, who called Whitman the problem child of literature because he was a solvent of contradictions and confusions, lists seven achievements of Whitman. They are herein given because they show that Whitman had assimilated his bequests and was able to contribute to the field of literature. If he had not been able to work over what he had received in his brain and under his pen, he would never have been able to make any definite contribution to American literature. The achievements which Canby lists follow:

First, he made articulate and gave an enduring life in the imagination to the American dream of a continent where the people should escape from the injustices of the past and establish a new and better life in which everyone should share.

Second, he made articulate and best defined for the imagination the democratic faith which was and is the only binding national force in the United States.

Thirdly, he established an ideal for international democracy which has proved to be as prophetic of danger as it is shrewd and noble in its ideas.

Fourth, speaking for hearty, physical man, workers, lovers, eaters, and drinkers, he burst through the inhibitions of the genteel age and put sex back into literature as a partner with spirit.

Fifth, he broke with the timidities of the intellectuals of the Eastern seaboard, who were still colonial and imitative of England in their culture and tried to speak for a new and still inarticulate America.

Sixth, he is the pivot in American history on which we swing from the sectional and the provincial to the national and continental in our literature.

Seventh, he did what only great writers have done; he made a great style to express himself and his country in poetry—although, unfortunately, he by no means always used it.¹

Let Whitman almost list his own contributions in "Thou Mother With Thy Equal Brood":

The conceits of the poets of other lands
I'd bring thee not,
Nor the compliments that have served their turn so long,
Nor rhyme, nor the classics, nor perfume of foreign court or indoor library;
But an odor I'd bring as from forests
of pine in Maine, or breath of an Illinois prairie,
With open airs of Virginia or Georgia
or Tennessee, or from Florida's glades,²

¹Ibid., p. 7.
²"Thou Mother With Thy Equal Brood", p. 379.
These statements and citations given by scholars and by Whitman himself seem sufficient proof that Whitman did not follow his sources slavishly; he stamped his own personality in deep, indelible hues on the material which he received and thereby made a contribution. And, if our interpretation of originality, given at the beginning of this chapter is valid, then Whitman was original. Harriett Monroe describes Whitman as a man who worked alone and did what he had to do in such a way that he was unconscious of the fact that the same thing had been done before and that other ways might be preferred.

And she adds a third service to the two which dealt with what he did with or to the sources of his technique. He makes the poet a prophet and poetry religion; moreover all phases of life and nature are made to work in accordance with this conception.

Finally, Van Wyck Brooks contributes what may serve as a résumé of the whole discussion in this section. Whitman, he says, precipitated the American character—everything that is anything in the modern world owes something to Whitman.

Whitman precipitated the American character. All those things which had been separate, self-sufficient, incoordinate—action, theory, idealism, business—he cast into a crucible; and they emerged harmonious and molten, in a fresh democratic ideal, which is based upon the whole personality. Every strong personal impulse, everything that enriches the individual, everything that impels and clarifies in the modern world owes something to Whitman.

It has therefore been pointed out that Whitman made more concrete what he received from Emerson; he lived what Emerson felt intellectually; he fol-

1 Harriett Monroe, op. cit., p. 96.
2 Ibid.
3 Van Wyck Brooks, op. cit., p. 118.
owed Wordsworth so far and no further because he really brought the common man, in the true sense of the words common man, into literature; he added to his Nature inheritance because Nature was his companion and lover, and the two partook of the ultimate unity; he reinterpreted his Hegelian religious, social, and political views in terms of America and America's needs; he added a fourth member to the well known trinity which member, Satan, should signify the spirit of freedom; to his Oriental mysticism he added an intense, sensuous realism and invited all men to become, also, parts of the mystical and realistic unity; the Greeks brought his attention to the body and he concluded that one part of the body was as good as another; and he reinterpreted the Bible and applied its teaching to all aspects of modern life, problems, and trends. If there is any one term that can be applied to all of these, it would be cosmopolitanism. He made something new out of everything that he received because he readjusted his inheritance to changing conditions in the world and in America, and in the spirit of America—sensual, raw, youthful, elemental, coarse, optimistic, athletic, raucous, virile, big-hearted, powerful, all-embracing. No other American poet had even tried to blanket all America into such synthesis as Whitman envisioned and crusaded for. No other bard even tried to integrate the techniques and teachings of the past and harness them to a single vehicle of thought for America and the world. In this, rests his originality, his creative genius. But what are the characteristics of Whitman's genius? The next section will attempt an answer to this through an analysis of Whitman, the man and writer.
Whitman and Creativeness

From his works and from the opinions of many scholars, it seems clear that Whitman did not follow his sources blindly; he took them as a foundation and built a literary building of his own. He was wrong, of course, in sometimes believing that he could forget the past entirely. But says Bailey:

He was right in supposing that he could graft a new branch onto the old tree; and he proved himself right by doing it. He had a new world to bring into poetry, and in spite of many failures, he brought it.¹

To bring a new world order into poetry, a poet must have imagination, a powerful creative imagination. Indeed, Whitman shows "imagination in sudden and novel imagery and in rapture of verse". Perhaps nowhere does he show the power of his imagination more than in "Pioneers! O Pioneers!" Excerpts from this poem follow to illustrate this:

Come my tan-faced children,
Follow well in order, get your weapons ready,
Have you your pistols? have you your sharp-edged axes?
Pioneers! O pioneers!

... . . .
All the past we leave behind,
We debouch upon a new mightier world,
varied world,
Fresh and strong the world we seize, world of labor and the march,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

... . . .

On and on the compact ranks
With accessions ever waiting, with the places of the dead quickly fill'd,
Through the battle, through defeat, moving yet and never stopping,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

¹ John Bailey, op. cit., pp. 70-71.
² Edmund Stedman, op. cit., p. 381.
Has the night descended?
Was the road of late so toilsome? did we stop
discouraged nodding on our way?
Yet a passing hour I yield you in your tracks
to pause oblivious,
Pioneers! O pioneers!
Till with sound of trumpet,
Far, far off the daybreak call—hark! how loud
and clear I hear it wind,
Swift, to the head of the army!—swift! spring
to your places,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

Here there is creative imagination, the images are factual. Whitman has described the march of the pioneers so vividly that one can almost see the line of march. Another feature of this poem which deserves mention here is the technique. If one should read these stanzas aloud, the rhythm falls into the pattern of a march, which fact, it seems, shows the power of his creative imagination and association.

Gerald Bullett is of the opinion that Whitman made full use of the imagination to good effect in "Song of Myself":

He affirms by inference his personal identity
with all created things and with all creative spirits.

"Song of Myself", is an attempt to realise this identity, and to make us realise it, by feat of the imagination.  

And Bliss Perry feels that Whitman will live, will receive a place among the immortals because of the power of his imagination.

He will survive not so much by the absolute perfection
of single lyrical passages as by the amplitude of his imagination, his magical though intermittent power of phrase, and the majesty with which he confronts the eternal verities.  

1 "Pioneers! O Pioneers!, pp. 194, 195, 196, 197.
2 Gerald Bullett, op. cit., p. 32.
3 Bliss Perry, op. cit., p. 307.
Finally, as Stedman says, the best way to escape tradition is through the imagination. In "Ethiopia Saluting the Colors", "Old Ireland", and "Man-of-War Bird", Whitman's imagination enables him not only to depict the idyllic town and country scenes but to project himself into situations and into the thought of others. The first of these three poems is chosen as being illustrative.

Who are you dusky woman, so ancient hardly human,
   With your wooly-white and turban'd head, and bare bony feet?
Why rising by the roadside here, do you the colors greet?
Me master years a hundred since from my parents sunder'd,
   A little child, they caught me as the savage beast is caught,
Then hither me across the sea the cruel slaver brought.

Whitman here has projected himself into the feeling of a slave woman who has been stolen and brought to this country. Any Negro who has read the accounts of his ancestors' abduction can easily realize to what extent Whitman has identified himself with the slave woman.

From what has been said and shown, it seems that Whitman possesses to a marked degree, at least, the first quality of a creative poet: imagination. It is this quality, as previously stated, which can make any old material new.

The second quality of creativeness is universality. Whitman is broad in his sympathies, Bullett says that whatever else he may lack he does not lack universality. He declares:

1 Edmund Stedman, op. cit., p. 380.
2 Ibid.
3 "Ethiopia Saluting the Colors", p. 269.
4 It is the lack of this quality of imagination that puts Phillis Wheatley, John Trumbull, Timothy Dwight, Joel Barlow, David Humphreys, Lemuel Hopkins, and Richard Alsop into the class of "Mocking-bird" poets. As it is wellknown, they closely imitated Pope and neo-classic conventions and failed to produce truly distinctive poetry.
Whatever he lacks of spiritual refinement or of
delicate sensibility, he does not lack catholicity.
It is as though he took to himself the injunction given
Caedmon of old, and sang of all created things. American
as he is, and devoted to America, he is a Universal vision
and a universal song. He, more than any other poet is the
poet of the cosmos. He claims not only to see the whole
human drama, but to act in every part of it. He shares
the hopes and fears, the ecstasies and the anguish, of
every member of the cast. For him the light in which the
whole material universe is bathed shines out at him from
animal no less than from human eyes. And the prostitute,
no less than the President holding his Cabinet Council,
has a place in Whitman's religious communion.1

Whitman himself proclaims his universality. In "Song of Myself" he says,

Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
I am large, I contain multitudes.2

"Passage to India" was suggested by the opening of the Suez Canal and of
3
the railroads across this continent. Whitman uses this as an occasion to
4
herald the breaking down of world barriers and the leaving of humanity free
5
for comradeship. He visions a new world democracy with the United States
6
in the lead.

Passage to India!
Lo, soul, seest thou not God's purpose from
the first?
The earth to be spann'd, connected by
network,
The races, neighbors, to marry and be

1 Gerald Bullett, op. cit., p. 34.
2 "Song of Myself", p. 75.
3 Floyd Stovall, op. cit., p. 411.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 George Carpenter, op. cit., p. 120.
The oceans to be cross'd, the distant
brought near,
The lands to be welded together.¹

Perhaps enough has been said in this thesis to indicate what is, to be
sure, well known: his universality. Another one of his creative qualities
is to be found in his language. Edmund Stedman says that Whitman did not
need a special language. He used the language which he found; the language
of the common people and, as was pointed out earlier in this study, he did

¹ "Passage to India", p. 344. Other poems which show Whitman's catholicity
and universality: "Who Learns My Lesson Complete", "Kosmos", "To a Common
Prostitute", "For Him I Sing", "To Foreign Lands", and "Song of Myself", pp.
3, 7, 24, 324, 328, 329.

One would not be so naive as to imply that Whitman is without blemish
and contradictions. Tennyson has said that there was never a noble man who
did not make ignoble talk. There are those who apotheosize Whitman, and thus
shut their eyes to his failures; and, to be sure, there are those who are the
direct antithesis of his "Disciples"; they can see no poetic quality in his
work. But in between these two extremes, there are those who have objectively
criticized and analyzed Whitman, both as a man and as a writer. Among these
may be named Edmund Stedman, who includes Whitman in the discussion of Ameri-
can writers analyzed in Poets of America. While it is held that Whitman is
the most universal of poets, Stedman shows that "in many ways he does not
conform to his creed". Stedman feels that class feeling holds him within
well-defined bounds.

... in this poet's specification of the objects of his
sympathy, the members of every class, the lofty and the
lowly are duly named; yet there always is an implication
that the employer is inferior to the employed— that the
man of training, the "civilizee", is less manly than the
rough, the pioneer. He suspects those who, by chance or
ability, rise above the crowd. What attention he does pay
them is felt to be in the nature of patronage, and insuf-
ferrable. Other things being equal, a scholar is as good as
an ignoramus, a rich man as a poor man, a civilizee as a
boor. ... It would be easy to cite verses from Whitman
that apparently refute this statement of his feeling, but
the spirit of his whole work confirms it. See Edmund Sted-

³ Ibid., p. 377.
not hesitate to include in his poetry even the less polished of current
Americanisms. Again Stedman says that Whitman is more original in his
style proper than in his technique and describes his language as strong
and down to earth. He writes:

He is far more original in his style proper than
in his metrical inventions. His diction is copious,
strong, full of surprises, utilizing the homely words
of people, and assigning new duties to common verbs
and nouns. He uses French and Spanish catchwords and
slang.1

It was also pointed out earlier in this thesis the opinion which Whitman
himself held about the language of poetry: "It is brawny enough and limber
and full enough. . . it is the powerful language of resistance. . . it is the
dialect of common sense". And Whitman used just that type of language in
his poems. He used the language of the common man with such dexterity that
at times his poems seem conversational, on the vulgate level:

The wife, and she is not one jot less
than the husband,
The daughter, and she is just as
good as the son,
The mother, and she is every bit as
much as the father.2

And the following illustrates his use of foreign words, slang, and the
colloquial language of the ordinary man:

You Hottentot with clicking palate!
You woolly-haired hordes!
You own'd persons dropping sweat
drops or blood-drops!
You human forms with fathomless
ever-impressive countenances
of brutes!

1 Ibid., p. 378.
2 Walt Whitman, "Preface" to Leaves of Grass, op. cit., ed. Emory Holloway,
p. 506.
The attentive reader can easily catch the pungent freshness of Whitman's language. His use of such words as allons, camarado, exposè, adieu, libertad, and monde shows how he blends the foreign with the domestic. It may thus be safely said that Whitman's command of language is colorful, dramatic, creative; hence Whitman, as discussed so far in this study, possesses three qualities of the creative writer: imagination, universality, and language.

The next quality is that of feeling.

It was stated earlier in this chapter that Whitman differed from the other Transcendentalists in that he felt intensely what they believed intellectually. John Bailey, in comparing Whitman with Macaulay, believes that Whitman is capable of more feeling than Macaulay. It was indeed, Whitman's feeling which made him capable of introducing something truly poetic into the poems which otherwise would have been entirely materialistic.

Whitman's sense of feeling is also shown or expressed by the way in which he identifies himself with humanity. Bliss Perry quotes the London Leader...
in this connection. The article in the Leader describes Whitman's ability to feel deeply.

He goes forth into the World, this rough, devil-may-care Yankee, passionately identifies himself with all forms of being, sentient or inanimate; sympathizes deeply with humanity; riots with a kind of Bacchanal fury in the force and fervor of his own sensations; will not have the most vicious or abandoned shut out from final comfort and reconciliation; is delighted with Broadway, New York, and equally in love with the desolate backwoods, and the long stretch of the uninhabited prairie, where the wild beasts wallow in the reeds, and the wilder birds start upward from their nests among the grass; perceives a divine mystery wherever his feet conduct, or his thoughts transport him; and beholds all things tending toward the central and sovereign "Me".¹

In most of his poems in Drum-Taps this pathos or feeling is easily discernible. But, perhaps, Whitman no where exhibits more feeling than in "Come Up from the Fields Father".

Come up from the fields father, here's a letter from our Pete,
And come to the front door mother, here's a letter from thy dear son.

Open the envelope quickly,
0 this is not our son's writing, yet his name is sign'd.

Sentences broken, gunshot wound in the breast,
Cavalry skirmish, taken to hospital
At present low, but will soon be better.

Grieve not so, dear mother (the just-grown daughter speaks through her sobs
The little sisters huddle around speechless and dismay'd)
See, dearest mother, the letter says Pete will soon be better.

¹ Bliss Perry, op. cit., p. 104.
Alas poor boy, he will never be better, (nor may-be needs to be better, that brave and simple soul,) While they stand at home at the door he is dead already, The only son is dead.\textsuperscript{1}

What responsive chords would a poem like this strike in our present day America! How often have the fathers and mothers of countless boys received similar messages concerning their sons! These people, millions of them, could testify to Whitman's depth of feeling. Whitman's sympathies, as revealed in his poems, are indeed broad, intense, and sincere. He is truly the poet of feeling. "The tenderness of a strong and robust nature", says Stedman, "is a winning feature of his songs". But Whitman was also an inspirational poet. Any poet of feeling would naturally be so.

Stedman believes that he was inspired years before the publication of \textit{Leaves of Grass}. Whitman believed that he was to be the prophet of his country; and regardless to obstacles he attempted to fulfil the prophet's role.

In Chapter I, it was also pointed out that Whitman was inspired by the life and work of Isaiah, the great prophet, and in turn aspired to inspire. \textit{Leaves of Grass}, is itself the utterance of mystical inspiration. Moreover, he was more inspired by the life of Christ, and the manner in which he worked.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1} "Come Up From the Fields Father", pp. 255, 256, 257.
\item \textsuperscript{2} Edmund Stedman, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 382.
\item \textsuperscript{3} E. Holloway, \textit{op. cit.}, p. lxxxii.
\item \textsuperscript{4} Edmund Stedman, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 353-354.
\item \textsuperscript{5} E. Holloway, \textit{op. cit.}, p. lxxxii.
\item \textsuperscript{6} Ibid., lxxxiii.
\item \textsuperscript{7} Norman Foerster, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 162.
\end{itemize}
in the hospitals during the Civil War shows the extent of this inspiration.

It is perhaps no exaggeration to say, in view of the discussion given in Chapter I and the citations here given, that *Leaves of Grass* itself is the product of inspiration and that Whitman possesses the fifth quality of creativeness: inspiration.

In a discussion of this type, it seems that there is no need to go into the various experiences of Whitman which would broaden his outlook, such as his travel, journalistic work, educational endeavors, skilled laboring experiences, political efforts, illness, bereavement, and unreturned love.

It is a well-known fact that Whitman's Civil War experiences mellowed and deepened him both as a man and a writer. Stovall declares that his hospital experiences made him a unique figure in the literature of the world.

Indeed, we may add experience to imagination, universality, language, feeling, and inspiration. Can growth be added to these? Floyd Stovall has made a special study of Whitman's growth and development, and he comes to the conclusions discussed in the following paragraph.

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3. Ibid., p. 40.
5. Ibid., p. 34.
8. Ibid., p. 211.
9. Ibid., p. 45.
Whitman's life has been divided into three periods: 1819-1855; 1855-1873; 1873-1892. Stovall says that he developed in these three periods from individualism to nationalism to internationalism; in general philosophy the drift was from love of freedom to love of law; and in religion the drift was from materialistic pantheism towards a highly spiritualized idealism. All of this can be seen in the themes that dominate poetry during each of these periods: in the first, there was an interest in life, especially as a sensation and a spectacle; in the second, the interest was in death; and in the third, the interest was in immortality. The representative song of the first period is "Song of Myself"; of the second, "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd"; and of the third, "Passage to India". Stovall also says that from 1859 to 1869 he developed through experience.

Other citations could be given, but perhaps the testimony of a Whitman scholar who has made a special study of Whitman's growth and development is sufficient evidence that he can lay claim to the seventh quality of creativeness: growth and development. Let it be said here also that this growth in itself signifies that Whitman did not slavishly follow his influences. The next requisite is sweetness of versification.

1 John Bailey, op. cit., p. 21.
2 Floyd Stovall, "Main Drifts in Whitman", op. cit., p. 21.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., p. 17.
To Stedman, Whitman is the most lyric of poets. He asserts:

That there may be no doubt, from page to page (amid the seeming inconsistencies that must characterize a study of Whitman) as to my conclusion on this point /sweetness of versification/ I may as well say now that both instinct and judgement, with our Greek choruses in mind, and Pindar, and the Hebrew bards, long since led me to number him /Whitman/ among the foremost lyric and idyllic poets.¹

Whitman's poem "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" illustrates the sweetness of his versification. The tidal rhythm of the first section quoted below is strikingly similar to the rhythm of the sea and the second section, which is the song of the birds, is indeed similar in choral rhythm to the song of a bird and it is to be sure, lyrical in its versification.

Out of the cradle endlessly rocking,
Out of the mocking-birds throat, the musical shuttle,

Shine! Shine! Shine!
Pour down your warmth, great sun!
While we bask, we two together,

Two together!
Winds blow south, or winds blow north,
Day come white, or day come black,
Home, or rivers and mountains from home
Singing all time, minding no time
While we two keep together.²

¹ Edmund Stedman, op. cit. p. 353.
² Not all authors agree with Stedman concerning the poetic lyric quality of Whitman's verse. Beers says the following:

But as a whole his work is tiresome and without art. It is alive, to be sure, but so is protoplasm. Life is the first thing and form is secondary; yet form, too, is important. The musician too lazy or too impatient to master his instrument breaks it and seizes a megaphone. See Henry Beers, op. cit., p. 87.

And William Long declares:

...it /Whitman's work/ is worth reading but /it is a curious fact that many Europeans hail it as typical American poetry, even while we wonder why anybody should regard it as either American or poetic. See William Long, op. cit., p. 129.

³ "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking", pp. 210, 211.
Though there are, in Whitman, lines and poems that are harsh, metallic, and dissonant in sound and rhythm—especially to those whose ears are attuned to conventional meters, rimes and rhythms—there are many poems, such as "Sea-shore Memories", "Mystic Trumpeter", and (to add to these) "O Captain! My Captain!"; "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd", and "With Huskey Haughty Lips O Sea", that are strong and beautiful in lyric power.

Gerald Bullett adds to these the "Memories of President Lincoln" and substantiates the assertion that Whitman was capable of exquisite music. He writes:

In Memories of President Lincoln he shows himself to be master of a more exquisite music than we had become accustomed to expect from him; for though the beautiful "As I Ebbed With the Ocean of Life" and his loveliest poem, "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking", which appeared in 1860, showed him to be capable of sustaining tenderness without becoming mawkish, these were too solitary in their eminence to justify our anticipating similar favors.

It, therefore, seems safe, despite the opposite views of some of Whitman's critics, to add sweetness of versification to the other qualities of Whitman's genius. The next qualification, an ingenious choice of subjects, seems to be made especially for Whitman; for if there is any one phase in which he excells in originality, it is in the choice of his subjects.

Two adjectives have been applied to Whitman's choice of subjects: varied and sonorous. Most of his subjects are the same as the first lines and in this way

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1 See "Song of Myself", section 15, pp. 34-37; "Spontaneous Me", pp. 88-90; "We Two, How Long We Were Fooled", pp. 91-92; and "Salut Au Monde", pp. 114-123.

2 Swinburne called this poem "the most sonorous nocturn ever chanted in the church of the world"; and Bliss Perry says, "It remains with Lowell's "Commemoration Ode" as the finest imaginative product of the Civil War Period. It has lyric interludes of . . . pure beauty." See A. Sinburne op. cit., p. 306 and Bliss Perry, op. cit., p. 157.

3 Gerald Bullett, op. cit., p. 47.

Whitman ingeniously introduces us to the substance of the poem, for example, "As I Pondered in Silence", "A Song for Occupations", "By the Bivouac's Fitful Flame", "City of Ships", "Night on the Prairies", "Over the Carnage Rose Prophetic A Voice". Some of his subjects, however, are "obscure and grandiose" for example, "Eidolons", "Chanting the Square Deific;", "Me Imperturbe", and "Salute Au Monde". Never entirely satisfied with his expression and phraseology, Whitman worked over his subjects and often changed, for instance, the title "Poem of Walt Whitman, An American" to "Song of Myself" and "Poem of the Propositions of Nakedness" to "Respondez". Moreover, as has already been shown in this study, Whitman's catholicity caused him to treat with a large variety of subjects—some of them regarded in his day as "untouchable" and vulgar. The stevedore, the bus driver, the Negro, the body, the child, the thief, the frontiersman, the roustabout, the politician, as well as sex, democracy, religion, death, immortality, love, friendship, internationalism, did not escape Whitman. Hence Whitman is seen to possess another creative quality, an ingenious choice of subject matter. What about his philosophical leadership?

The next three qualities which appear to overlap, and which therefore may be discussed together are philosophic insight, critical appraisal of life, and national esthetic leadership. It was pointed out in Chapter I that Whitman absorbed many of the philosophies current in the Nineteenth Century and before. Carpenter has told us of a plan or idea which Whitman had in 1857. It seemsthat as a result of inspiration he planned to become a great orator,

1 Edmund Stedman, op. cit., p. 378.
2 George Carpenter, op. cit., p. 70.
3 Ibid.
giving his philosophy to aid the American people.

It was apparently with such a purpose in mind that already stated that he made the memorandum, in June, 1857: "The Great Construction of the New Bible. Not to be diverted from the principal object—the main life the three hundred and sixty-five. It ought to be ready in 1859". His plan was to make himself the great orator of the day, the man who would tell Americans their faults, and instruct them in the social and political virtues. ... He was to be a molder of public opinion.

One needs only to read "I Sit and Look Out" to realize Whitman's deep philosophical insight and his critical appraisal of life. In this particular poem, already cited, Whitman comments on the sorrows of the world: remorse, seduction, jealousy, pestilence, tyranny, meanness, agony, slights, and arrogance.

Indeed, it is quite true that Whitman the poet is also Whitman the teacher. He had, says Bliss Perry, certain ideas about the individual, the Nation, and the world. He asserts:

"Every great poet", said Wordsworth in a well-known passage, "is a teacher. I wish to be considered either as a teacher or as nothing." By this test Whitman belongs with the great poets. One cannot go to him for information about the next election, or for panaceas against all the evils with which democracy is fighting in the twentieth century. But his poetry does, in his own words, "free arouse, dilate" the individual reader. It fulfills what Whitman thought should be the aim of all poetry, namely to fill a man "with vigorous and clean manliness religiousness, and give him good heart as a radical possession and habit". With the natural dogmatism of a good teacher, he held certain views concerning the function of the individual, the function of the United States, and the joyful message of these states to the world. ... He is an ethical force, a regenerator, a spiritual force.

1 George Carpenter, *op. cit.*, p. 78.
Notice the philosophic insight shown in the following. Here Whitman says that the spider sends out filaments on the currents of the air. Finally the thread catches a strong substance and uses this as a bridge to reach the unknown.

A noiseless patient spider,
I mark'd where on a promontory it stood
isolated,
Mark'd how to explore the vacant vast
surrounding,
It launch'd forth filament, filament,
filament, out of itself,
Ever unreeling them ever tirelessly speeding
them.
And you O my soul where you stand,
Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans
of space,
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking
the spheres to connect them,
Till the bridge you will need be form'd, till
the ductile anchor hold,
Till the gossamer thread you fling catch
somewhere, O my soul.1

Floyd Stovall, himself a Whitman scholar, calls the biography by Bliss Perry "perhaps the best impartial biography." It may then be safely said that Whitman qualifies for creativeness when consideration is given to philosophic insight, critical appraisal of life, and national aesthetic leadership. John Bailey supports this belief, also, when he says that Whitman was the "spokesman of a whole nation and then, a thing perhaps greater still, the prophet and evangelist of a great idea".2

1 "A Noiseless Patient Spider", p. 375.
2 Floyd Stovall, op. cit., p. 1v.
3 John Bailey, op. cit., p. 205.

Even though this thesis contends that Whitman was a creative genius, it admits that some of his work is mediocre. This may be said, however, of the works of many great literary figures. Not always do they attain sustained
What about his versality? According to Foerster he was a critic in the same sense that Wordsworth was, a fact already cited and shown in Chapter I; he was a poet, and it is upon his poetry that his fame really rests; but he wrote during his formative period a novel, Franklin Evans; he was a journalist of no mean ability; his other prose works, particularly "Democratic Vistas", are certainly commendable. But his versality best displays itself in his cosmopolitanism. Every movement, circumstance, ideal, performance, custom, achievement, race, color, creed, condition of people, of nations, of beliefs, of life, received his interest, attention, sympathy, interpretation, and treatment. This cosmic preoccupation is at the root of his versality.

In the light of these citations, observations, and statements, Whitman, according to the standards which were previously stated, qualifies as a creative genius. He has, some to a greater degree than others, imagination, literary heights. It is significant, though, that some of Whitman's critics find no virtue in him at all. Edgar Fawcett wrote the following in Colliers Weekly in 1898, says W. S. Kennedy in his work, The Fight of a Book for the World:

On the north side he [Whitman] was bounded by Emerson, brilliant, if self-deluded; on the east by Carlyle, ranting and overrated; on the west by pampas and steppes and prairies of egotism; and on the south by a colossal impertinence. From the point of view of letters, he is a cumbersome lumbering absurdity. See W. S. Kennedy, The Fight of a Book for the World (West Yarmouth, Massachusetts, 1926), p. 84.

and Julian Hawthorne speaks thus about Whitman:

He is remarkably ignorant... an eccentric crank and boor,—commonplace, imitative, grotesque, repulsive, egotistic, a man who will probably not last long. See Ibid., p. 82.

1 George Carpenter, op. cit., p. 18.
2 Ibid., pp. 18-32.
It can not be said too often that Whitman has created wide differences of opinion, some exceedingly unfavorable.

The most unfavorable estimate has naturally come from the humanists, who deplore Whitman's apparent surrender to a mere flux of impressions, and lament his unwillingness to think analyze, and ponder. In Whitman's own day, Lowell, after reading Leaves of Grass the third time, could still see no poetry in it. And in the twentieth century, Norman Foerster, while he admits the great historical importance of Whitman, has concluded, "Turn where one will in his poems, one will look in vain for indications of any discipline, intellectual or ethical, making for self-mastery and spiritual vision". See Walter P. Taylor, op. cit., pp. 237-238.

To be sure Whitman, as Walter Fuller Taylor points out, has commanded the respect of many British critics and American authors.

Whitman commanded the respect of the British critics, Dowden and Symonds, and with reservations of the poet Swinburne. Recent American authors, particularly the radicals, have commonly looked to Whitman as a sort of godfather. Hamlin Garland visited the aged poet in a spirit of almost religious reverence; Edgar Lee Masters assumed Whitman's equality with Homer. The historian of American liberalism, Vernon Louis Parrington, designated him as "a great figure, assuredly the greatest in our literature"—and then felt constrained to add that perhaps, after all, Whitman was "only a great child". See Ibid., p. 238.
Whitman's analogues, I suspect, are rather to be found in great personalities, in men who represent a new attitude, in men who bring a message to their brothers, a truth mainly expressed in their lives and only incidentally through their writings—such men, shall we say, as Francis of Assisi, or George Fox, or many an Oriental teacher of literature and politics; they show new and noble ways of living. Of this type in his own degree, Whitman seems to me to have been. He is the first of the most notable of those who, in the nineteenth century, in Europe and in America, preached the vision of the world as love and comradeship.

And, finally, Morris says:

... apart from the poetry, large, deep-toned, pure and free, is the other element of Leaves of Grass that attracted its first readers in spite of its fancied offenses against a false sense of taste, and made them burst with exhilaration as oxygen might do, or the buoyancy of a fine frosty day after cloud and storm. This is the accent of energetic, tip-toe personality, expressing its sensations, and wisdom drawn from such sensations in shouts of exultation at the beauty of the universe; at being alive to enjoy it; at throwing off the chains of habit; at being the comrade of everybody; and at being an optimist, and especially a democrat. This was a surprise so great to readers that only those already free enough from convention, like Emerson and Thoreau, could catch their breath and take it in. But where it was understood, it was a new dawn, an intoxication of liberty, that has gone on improving in its application to life as years pass.

1 George Carpenter, op. cit., p. 172.
2 Harrison Morris, op. cit., pp. 116-117.
CHAPTER IV

Summary and Conclusion

The facts and observations given in this thesis seem to warrant the conclusion that Walt Whitman was a creative genius of considerable importance.

In Chapter I, it was shown that he was Emerson's literary child in his insistence on freedom, individuality, absolute independence, patriotism, heroism, manliness, chastity, and new worldliness; that he was influenced by Wordsworth's literary theory and practice; that, like Wordsworth, he advanced his literary theory in a preface and a collection of poems, both of which were turning points in literary history; that like Wordsworth he placed emphasis on the common man; that he was similar to Wordsworth in his sensitive reaction to nature; and that they were both "magnificent idlers"; that Hegel influenced his social, political, religious and cosmic views; that he owes his mysticism, his idea that life is a journey, his fondness for kissing men, his sensuousness, and his idea of the all-inclusive "I" to Orientalism; that from the Greeks he derived his specifications for his ideal American: health, liberty, haughty-pride, self-reliance, prudence, tolerance, equality, and divinity; that he is similar to Homer in that the Civil War gave him the themes for some of his greatest works just as the Greek and Trojan War gave Homer the themes for his great works; that the Bible was his source of inspiration and that he used Isaiah and Christ as his ideals. A cursory discussion of his similarity to other authors was also given.

102
In Chapter II is presented a discussion of the sources of his technique: from nature, especially the sea, he received the pattern for his rhythm; long, powerful lines; the irregularity of his lines was determined by the irregularity in the forces of nature; the Bible was the pattern for his stylistic device of parallelism, which is of four kinds: synonymous, cumulative, antithetical, and climatic; his exclusion of rhyme was also traced principally to the Bible; and Blake supported his exclusion of meter and rhyme as a necessary part of poetry; his cataloguing of contemporary names is similar to Blake's cataloguing of contemporary English names; and from Blake he probably received part of his rhythmical pattern, for Blake himself was greatly influenced by the Bible.

The additions which he made to his sources were given in the first part of Chapter III. To all of his sources he added concreteness, intense feeling, proletarianism, and uncompromising egalitarianism. He took Emerson at his word and associated himself with the common man, the man of the street; he added virility to American literature and measured it all by the American standards of the early nineteenth century. He went to the extreme in independence and claimed the same things for the average man that he claimed for himself. The real language of the common man (even slang) was brought into his poetry in adding to Wordsworth; and again, his common man was different from Wordsworth's—they were the common men (belonging in many instances to the unlettered, the vulgate), whereas Wordsworth's common men were a little above the average. He also felt that poetry should do more than recognize the common man; it should teach him how to live and to take pride in himself and in the fruits of his labors. Nature to him was a brother or partner and they were both parts of the great unity. Nature did not overpower
him. Using pantheism as a basis, he equalized everything—body and soul, men and women, white and black, poor and rich—and considered all men potential gods. He applied his social and political views to his native America, and visioned a world democracy in which the United States took the lead; moreover he envisioned a world brotherhood in which all men would be loving comrades. To Hegel's trinity he added the fourth member, Satan. The Greeks made him interested in the human body, and he felt that no parts should be excluded from his poetry through false modesty. He is responsible to a large extent for the sane way in which sex is treated today. In the matter of technique, he excluded both rhyme and meter, established free verse as an acceptable verse form, and fashioned his rhythms after all forces of nature—much in the way that certain modern poets, like Sandburg, Vachel Lindsay and Langston Hughes, are attempting to do.

And finally, it was shown that he possessed the essential qualities of a creative genius: imagination, universality, experience, inspiration, language, feeling, development or growth, sweetness of versification, an ingenious choice of subjects, philosophic insight, versality, a critical appraisal of life, and national aesthetic leadership.

These, then, are Whitman's new conclusions from old premises and the crux of these conclusions is this: The world, together with all its different peoples, creeds, languages, and ideals, is, in fact, a uni-verse, not a multi-verse. For Whitman envisioned, advocated, and fought for a democratic world brotherhood, with the United States in the lead. Can it not be said that he was indeed "like a radio whose aerial was catching waves not yet registered by polite literature?" He has given to his conclusions such weight and truth that they promise to be universal and immortal. To be sure he an-
ticipated Wendell Wilkie's idea of One World by approximately one hundred
years. Was not Wilkie's main theme a democratic world brotherhood—a world
in which all men would indeed have life, liberty, and the pursuit of happi-
ness? Wilkie was a crusader for social and political justice in all places
and to all peoples. Whitman anticipated such a political system in "Passage
to India". Moreover, the San Francisco Conference was but one of the visions
which Whitman had and prophesied about long before Hitler was born. Did not
nations from all over the world send delegates to this, Whitman's beloved
America, to lay plans for a world in which each and every man could live
free from fear? Go even further, if you please, and deny to Whitman the
prophetic quality when one considers past and present Big Three Conferences.
Certainly the United States is doing its part to bring about a world brother-
hood; it may not be a democratic world, but the United States at least hopes
that each country, regardless to its type of government, will guarantee to its
citizens a type of life in which they can reach their highest development
—mentally, physically, and morally. It can truly be said that Whitman blazed
a democratic path through the dark dim forest of the future, which path his
own country and the other countries have just begun to travel.

Come home to America. Consider the sacrifices which each and every one
of us has had to make—the soldier in the air, on the land; the sailor on
the sea, under the sea; the mothers and fathers in their homes; the wives and
sweethearts scattered throughout this expansive land which never failed to
thrill Whitman by its immensity; and even little children in their nurseries
—and see if Whitman's genius did not peer, as it were, through the crystal
of the future and prophesy these sacrifices (even if his work also had con-
temporary application).
Long, too long America,
Traveling roads all even and peaceful you
learned from joys and prosperity
only
But now, ah now, to learn from crises of
anguish, advancing, grappling with direst
fate and recoiling not,
And now to conceive and show to the world
what your children enmasse really
are,
(For who except myself has yet conceived what
your children en-massee really are?)¹

Not only has Whitman's influence been marked and pronounced in the
political world, but he has also made himself felt in the literary world of
America. It was pointed out earlier in this thesis that Whitman had been
called the father of free verse, and in this capacity he served as a libera-
tor or emancipator; he freed our literature from the chains of European
bondage and bade it go forth and sing of America in its entirety. He is in-
deed a precursor of the imagists and is our first real American poet. "His
influence can scarcely be overestimated"; he appeals to the future; he prom-
ises certainly to become immortal. America will almost of a certainty find
in Whitman's philosophy a pattern to follow in the post-war world. This
then is Whitman. His creative genius is that of both inventor and recoverer.
He was an inventor in the sense that, like an inventor, he used and relied
upon the old, the known laws, principles, and performances of others to turn

¹ "Long Too Long America", p. 263.
² Louis Untermeyer, Modern American Poetry (Enlarged and Revised Edition)
³ Ibid., p. xxxvii.
⁴ Ibid., p. xxiii.
out a product new, different, and startling. But in many instances Whitman merely refreshed men's memories of the ideas and principles long forgotten or grown to seed. He recovered these ideas and principles, rebuilt them in the practical language of the average man, and forced them back into the consciousness of a complacent and hostile world caught partly unprepared to receive the old in such daring clothes. Significant recoverer and inventor, Whitman seems, then, to hold a permanent place in the realm of creative art.
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