

SUBLIMITY IN LEAVES OF GRASS

A THESIS

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We hereby recommend that the thesis prepared under
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PREFACE

It was approximately four years ago that my interest in Whitman was first aroused. With no intention of ever writing a thesis I began reading some of Whitman's poems as a prelude to taking the American Literary Tour offered by Texas Woman's University. As I later traveled over the Eastern States viewing some of the scenes which inspired Whitman--Brooklyn, Manhattan, Long Island, the Hudson River, the sea, Lake Ontario, the Mississippi River, the St. Lawrence River, and the Thousand Islands--and as I visited the narrow two-story house on Mickle Street in Camden, New Jersey, and listened to the guide there in the Whitman Home, I felt that I would like to know the poet better. For her course in "Literary America" which first interested me in the American scene from a literary viewpoint and in Whitman and his Leaves of Grass I am indebted to my sister, Miss Varner.

Knowing of my interest in Whitman, Dr. Autrey Nell Wiley suggested the subject for my thesis. I gratefully acknowledge my indebtedness and extend my sincere appreciation to Dr. Wiley, under whose supervision this study was made, for her suggestion of the subject and for her untiring patience, encouragement, and scholarly criticisms.

I am indebted to members of the Texas Woman's University Library Staff--to Miss Cannon for her kind assistance at all times and to Mrs. Dennis for locating for me, among the rare books at the University of Texas, a copy of "Whitman's Diary in Canada."

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CHAPTER I

WHITMAN'S PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

There was a child went forth every day,
And the first object he look'd 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 cycles
 of years.
 ("There Was a Child Went Forth,"
 ll. 1-4)

Many of Whitman's experiences recorded in Leaves of Grass are rooted in those of the child who roamed the countryside absorbing the sights and sounds and making the acquaintance of the people in and around his hometown. They included the picturesque, for in his first long poem "Pictures" Whitman informs his readers that he kept pictures suspended in a little house, a small house but large enough for all the nostalgic memories of childhood, all "the tableaux of life," and all "the groupings of death." He says that he, "cicerone himself," points to these "prodigal pictures" in his poems. Throughout his life--his childhood activities, his newspaper work, his school teaching, his reading, his travels, his roaming in the streets of Broadway, his war work, and his loafing on Timber Creek--he was eagerly seeing all that he could of the American

landscape and of life. The effect upon him was often that of elevation, a sense of awe, in the presence of whatever was inspiring. Of his experiences arousing in him a sense of exaltation--a sense of the sublime--Whitman considers the greatest to be those of his childhood, city life, the sea, ferryboat trips, reading, opera, teaching, national tragedies, travel, and loafing in Camden. In the ensuing pages, I shall discuss these experiences with the exception of travel, which I reserve for Chapter II.

Childhood Experiences

Sources of sublimity in Whitman's childhood were his home life, the sights and sounds of nature, and his amusements. In "A Child Went Forth" the poet indicates that the family relationships in his home were far from congenial;¹ yet he communicates a certain exaltation in his pictures of his parents who, he says, did more than give him birth, for they gave of themselves every day and became part of him. His memory of his father arouses in him a feeling of fear and resentment:

The father, strong, self-sufficient,
 manly, mean, anger'd, unjust,
 The blow, the quick loud word, the tight
 bargain, the crafty lure,
 These became part of that child who went
 forth every day, and who now goes,
 and will always go forth every day.
 (11. 24-25, 39)

¹Gay Wilson Allen, The Solitary Singer ("Evergreen Books"; New York: Grove Press Inc., 1955), p. 8.

His mother, the perfect mother, he recalls with very deep affection. In "Starting from Paumanok" he says that he was "well-begotten and raised by a perfect mother." In "There Was a Child Went Forth" he recalls:

The mother at home quietly placing the
 dishes on the supper-table
 The mother with mild words, clean her
 cap and gown, a wholesome odor falling
 off her person and clothes as she
 walks by.

(ll. 23-24)

He recalls the great happiness of the mother as she serves her family and, with her patience and love, keeps domestic tranquility:

O the mother's joys!
 The watching, the endurance, the
 precious love, the anguish,
 the patiently yielded life.

 O the joy of increase, growth,
 recuperation,
 The joy of soothing and pacifying,
 the joy of concord and harmony.
 ("A Song of Joys," ll. 24-27)

The poet's sense of the sublime deepens when, in the music of the storm, he hears again his mother's voice singing to him the lullaby or hymn she sang when he was a small child:

Ah from a little child,
 Thou knowest soul how to me all
 sounds became music,
 My mother's voice in lullaby or hymn,
 (The voice, O tender voices, memory's
 loving voices,
 Last miracle of all, O dearest mother's,
 sister's, voices.)
 ("Proud Music of the Storm," ll. 59-63)

Much of Whitman's childhood was spent in roaming the countryside near his birthplace, a small village on Long Island.¹ Among the things which became a part of the child were the early lilacs, the grass, the white and red morning-glories, the white and red clover, the third-month lambs, the sow's pink-faint litter, winter grain sprouts, yellow corn, and apple trees. Whitman says in "Song of Myself":

I am enamour'd of growing out-doors,
Of men that live among cattle or taste
of the ocean or woods.
(ll. 255-256)

The reader experiences sublimity with him when he yearns to return to his birthplace:

O to go back to the place where I was born,
To hear the birds sing once more,
To ramble about the house and barn
and over the fields once more,
And through the orchard and along
the old lanes once more.
("A Song of Joys," ll. 28-31)

Reminiscences of scenes of nature are the starting point for Whitman's experiences of sublimity in "As I Watched 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, O life and death,
your analogies;
(Life, life is the tillage, and Death
is the harvest according.)

¹Ibid., pp. 15-16.

As the poet contemplates the analogies--the sowing and the cultivating of the seed as life, and the reaping of the fruits, the reward, as death--he is exalted.

Among the sounds of childhood which the poet catalogues in "Proud Music of the Storm" are the rain, "the breeze among the long leav'd corn," "the sea surf beating on the sand," "the twittering bird," "the hawk's sharp scream," "the wild fowl's notes at night as he migrates north or south," "the psalm in the country church," "the open-air camp meeting," "the fiddler in the tavern," "the lowing cattle," "bleating sheep," and "the crowing cock at dawn." Thus the poet starts with nature but feels a sense of exaltation as he tells his soul that haply what he heard was not the sounds which he catalogued but

Poems bridging the way from Life to Death,
vaguely wafted in night air, uncaught,
unwritten,
Which let us go forth in the bold day and write.
(ll. 163-164)

Whitman recalls with delight, among the pastimes and customs of his boyhood, the youngster stretched atop the load of hay on the slow drawn wagon, the trips with the fishermen and the clam diggers, the trips with the hunters and the trappers, the children coming home for Thanksgiving, the regatta on the bay, the western turkey-shooting matches, the apple-peelings and wanting kisses for all the red fruit found,

the corn huskings, the house raisings, and the friendly bees. These experiences, which in themselves provide some sense of exaltation, make their greatest contribution to Whitman's achievement of sublimity in his larger picture. It was Whitman's purpose to make his poem "a complete picture of humanity, of society in all its phases, and the world in all its sweep of landscape and oceanic spread."¹ The vastness of his purpose, which he undoubtedly has in mind as he paints these miniatures, is the primary source of his sublimity.

City Experiences

Scenes of city life were among the objects which the child looked upon and which became part of him. He remarked to Dr. Bucke, "Remember the book arose out of my life in Brooklyn and New York from 1838 to 1853, absorbing a million people, for fifteen years with an intimacy, an eagerness, an abandon, probably never equalled."² In the vast crowds, the constant movements, and the unceasing noises of the city, his excitement mounts as he lives and relives his experiences. He has a sense of exaltation--an intense excitement--as he thinks of the comradeship, the friendship, and the companionship which he finds in the masses of people³ and the variety

¹Arthur E. Briggs, Walt Whitman: Thinker and Artist (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), p. 276.

²Henry Seidel Canby, Walt Whitman: An American (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1943), p. 50.

³James E. Miller, Jr., Walt Whitman (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1962), p. 134.

of life offered by the city. Preferring the city over nature, he says in "Give Me the Splendid Silent Sun":

Keep your splendid silent sun,
 Keep your woods O Nature, and the quiet places
 by the woods,
 Keep your fields of clover and timothy, and
 your corn-fields and orchards,
 Keep the blossoming buckwheat fields where the
 Ninth-month bees hum;
 Give me faces and streets, give me these
 phantoms incessant and endless along the
 trottoirs!
 Give me interminable eyes--give me women--give
 me comrades and lovers by the thousand!
 Let me see new ones every day--let me hold new
 ones by the hand every day!
 Give me such shows--give me the streets of
 Manhattan!
 Give me Broadway, with the soldiers marching--
 give me the sound of the trumpets and
 drums!

 O such for me! O an intense life, full to repletion
 and varied!
 The life of the theatre, bar-room, huge hotel,
 for me!
 The saloon of the steamer! the crowded excursion
 for me! the torchlight procession!
 The dense brigade bound for the war, with high
 piled military wagons following;
 People, endless, streaming, with strong voices,
 passions, pageants,
 Manhattan streets with their powerful throbs, with
 beating drums as now,
 The endless and noisy chorus, the rustle and
 clank of muskets, (even the sight of the
 wounded,)
 Manhattan crowds, with their turbulent musical
 chorus!
 Manhattan faces and eyes forever for me.
 (11. 1-9, 13-22)

In "Mannahatta" he experiences sublimity as he sees "the numberless crowded streets," "tides swift and ample," "the flowing sea currents," "the countless masts," "immigrants arriving,"

"the carts hauling goods," "trottoirs throng'd," and "a million people--manners free and superb--open voices--hospitality--the most courteous and friendly young men." The source of his exaltation is the constant movement and the potential friendship and comradeship.

The poet is uplifted in spirit as he listens to the sounds of the city:

The blab of the pave, tires of carts, sluff of boot-
soles, talk of the promenaders,
The heavy omnibus, the driver with his interrogating
thumb, the clank of the shod horses on the gran-
ite floor,
The snow-sleighs, clinking, shouted jokes, pelts of
snow-balls,
The hurrahs for popular favorites, the fury of rous'd
mobs,
The flap of the curtain'd litter, a sick man inside
borne to the hospital,
The meeting of enemies, the sudden oath, the blows
and fall,
The excited crowd, the policeman with his star quickly
working his passage to the centre of the crowd,
The impassive stones that receive and return so many
echoes,
What groans of over-fed or half-starv'd who fall
sunstruck or in fits,
What exclamations of women taken suddenly who hurry
home and give birth to babes,
What living and buried speech is always vibrating
here, what howls restrain'd by decorum,
Arrests of criminals, slights, adulterous offers made,
acceptances, rejections with convex lips,
I mind them or the show or resonance of them--I come
and I depart.

("Song of Myself," ll. 154-166)

From youth to old age, the city was a part of the child who went forth. In "Sands at Seventy" the poet still feels excitement as he relives his city experiences:

What hurrying human tides, or day or night!
 What passions, winnings, losses, ardors, swim thy
 waters!
 What whirls of evil, bliss and sorrow, stem thee!
 What curious questioning glances--glints of love!
 Leer, envy, scorn, contempt, hope, aspiration!
 Thou portal--thou arena--thou of the myriad long-
 drawn lines and groups!
 (Could but thy flagstones, curbs, façades, tell
 their inimitable tales;
 Thy windows rich, and huge hotels--thy side-walks
 wide;)
 Thou of the endless sliding, mincing, shuffling
 feet!
 Thou, like the parti-colored world itself--like
 infinite, teeming, mocking life!
 Thou visor'd, vast, unspeakable show and lesson:
 ("Broadway," ll. 1-11)

Sea Experiences

Whitman spent much of his life on "a rocky founded
 island--shores where gayly dash the coming, going, hurrying
 sea waves" ("Mannahatta," l. 3). Of the environmental sources
 of his experiences of sublimity this sea was probably the most
 significant. His sense of the sublime comes from the sea--its
 vastness and its movement, the consolations it offered to
 him, the themes it whispered to him, and the spell it cast
 upon him. Introducing the reader to sea experiences in "In
 Cabin'd Ships at Sea," he contemplates vastness, power, and
 infinity:

In cabin'd ships at sea,
 The boundless blue on every side expanding,
 With whistling winds and music of the waves,
 the large imperious waves.
 (ll. 1-4)

Words of consolation whispered by the sea are recorded passionately in "As I Ebb'd With the Ocean of Life" and "With Husky-Haughty Lips O Sea." Whitman's experience in these two poems is one which seldom occurs in the "Leaves."¹ It is one of despondency. Probably because he felt that his poetry had been rejected, he turned to the sea for consolation. Walking the beach at Paumanok and seeing the scenes so familiar to him--the chaff, the straw, the splinters of wood, and the weeds left by the tide--and hearing the breaking of the waves, he thinks of likenesses that the island presents. It comes to him that his own experiences are symbolized by these objects thrown upon the shore.² Thus despondent he speaks:

I too but signify at the utmost
 a little wash'd-up drift,
 A few sands and dead leaves to gather,
 Gather, and merge myself as part of the
 sands and drift.
 ("As I Ebb'd With the Ocean of
 Life," ll. 22-25)

He seems to sink into the depths of despair as he wonders why he ever dared to sing his songs:

O baffled, balk'd, bent to the very earth,
 Oppress'd with myself that I have dared
 to open my mouth,
 I perceive I have not really understood
 anything, not a single object, and that
 no man ever can,

¹Miller, p. 51.

²Allen, The Solitary Singer, p. 247.

Nature here in sight of the sea taking advantage
 of me to dart upon me and sting me,
 Because I have dared to open my mouth to
 sing at all.

("As I Ebb'd With the Ocean of Life,"
 ll. 25-26, 32-35)

Although the poet feels that his life and work are a failure,
 he believes that just as the tide ebbs and flows he too, who
 has ebbed with the ocean of life, will sing again.¹

Ebb, ocean of life, (the flow will return.)
 (l. 52)

The poet seems also to speak out of despair in "With Husky-
 Haughty Lips O Sea!" As he listens to the tale of the sea,
 he sees a resemblance to his own life.

The tale of cosmic elemental passion
 Thou tellest to a kindred soul.
 (ll. 22-23)

As Gay Wilson Allen suggests, he probably thought of himself
 as unsubdued, capricious, and willful,² but he also felt that
 he was a kindred soul because he too had struggled and had
 met defeat; he had sought acceptance and had been rejected.
 Whitman has a sense of exaltation as he realizes that it is
 only through the greatest struggles and defeats that one
 becomes great. The reader feels Whitman's hope that victory

¹Ibid., p. 248.

²Ibid., p. 514.

has only been withheld and that he may also through his struggles and defeats become a great poet.¹

(Naught but the greatest struggles, wrongs, defeats,
 could make thee greatest--no less could make
 thee,)
 Thy lonely state--something thou ever seek'st and
 seek'st, yet never gain'st,
 Surely some right withheld--some voice, in huge
 monotonous rage, of freedom-lover pent,
 Some vast heart, like a planet's, chain'd and chafing
 in those breakers,
 By lengthen'd swell, and spasm, and panting breath,
 And rhythmic rasping of thy sands and waves,
 And serpent hiss, and savage peals of laughter,
 And undertones of distant lion roar,
 (Sounding, appealing to the sky's deaf ear--but now,
 rapport for once,
 A phantom in the night thy confidant for once,)
 The first and last confession of the globe,
 Outsurging, muttering from thy soul's abysms,
 The tale of cosmic elemental passion,
 Thou tellest to a kindred soul.
 ("With Husky-Haughty Lips O Sea!" ll. 10-16)

Many of the experiences of sublimity in Leaves of Grass have their source in the great themes which the sea whispers to the poet. The reader gets a suggestion of the main theme of the book from "In Cabin'd Ships at Sea," which is not a reminiscence of the land alone, but a song for mariners and all their ships. Speaking with intense feeling in this poem for both the body and the soul,² the poet yearns for his book to speed on and carry his message to every soul sailing the sea of life:

¹Ibid.

²Miller, p. 118.

Thoughts, silent thoughts, of Time and Space and
 Death, like waters flowing,
 Bear me indeed as through the regions infinite,
 Whose air I breathe, whose ripples hear, lave me
 all over,
 Bathe me O God in thee, mounting to thee,
 I and my soul to range in range of thee.
 ("Passage to India," ll. 189-193)

Whitman is convinced that he can sail the seas in perfect confidence knowing that they are safe because they are all the seas of God. He has a feeling of exaltation as he pleads with his soul to sail farther and farther:

Sail forth--steer for the deep waters only,
 Reckless O soul, exploring, I with thee, and thou
 with me,
 For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared
 to go,
 And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all.

 O brave soul!
 O farther farther sail!
 O daring joy, but safe! are they not all the seas
 of God?
 O farther, farther, farther sail!
 ("Passage to India," ll. 248-255)

As the poet, in his memory, stands again on Montauk Point, and as he sees on every side nothing but the tossing waves and the sky, he thinks of life's voyage over tempestuous seas and of the soul's forever seeking the shores, the haven of peaceful rest. The great height, the apparently infinite stretch of sea, and the lofty theme--the restlessness of the soul to return to God--give to the reader a sense of the sublime.

I stand as on some mighty eagle's beak,
 Eastward the sea absorbing, viewing, (nothing
 but sea and sky,)
 The tossing waves, the foam, the ships in the
 distance,
 The wild unrest, the snowy, curling caps--that
 inbound urge and urge of waves,
 Seeking the shores forever.
 ("From Montauk Point," ll. 1-5)

Whitman expresses somewhat the same idea in "The Untold Want."
 Earthly things are never granted. Man is compelled by an
 innate urge to seek that which satisfies the soul.

The untold want by life and land ne'er
 granted,
 Now voyager sail forth to seek and find.

In "Yet, Yet, Ye Downcast Hours" Whitman communicates
 sublimity as he pictures the anguish of the soul who is spir-
 itually lost and is seeking help as he is very soon to begin
 his voyage into eternity:

The sea I am quickly to sail, come
 tell me,
 Come tell me where I am speeding, tell
 me my destination.
 Whither I go from the bed I recline on,
 come tell me.
 (ll. 7-8, 11)

The poet answers in "What Ships Puzzled At Sea" by telling
 the sailor that he needs a good pilot and by offering himself
 and his book as the most perfect pilot:¹

¹Ibid., p. 120.

What ship puzzled at sea, cons for the true
reckoning?
Or coming in, to avoid the bars and follow the
channel a perfect pilot needs?
Here, sailor! here, ship! take aboard the most
perfect pilot,
Whom, in a little boat, putting off and rowing,
I hailing you offer.

In "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," in "Now
Finale to the Shore," and in "Joy, Shipmate, Joy" Whitman
achieves the sublime as he bids farewell to the shore. From
the sea comes the theme for his song in "Out of the Cradle
Endlessly Rocking." In reply to his plea for a clue to his
own fate the sea whispers the word "death":

Whereto answering, the sea,
Delaying not, hurrying not,
Whisper'd me through the night, and very plainly
before daybreak,
Lisp'd to me the low and delicious word death,
And again death, death, death, death,
Hissing melodious, neither like the bird nor
like my arous'd child's heart,
But edging near as privately for me rustling at
my feet,
Creeping thence steadily up to my ears and laving
me softly all over,
Death, death, death, death, death.
(11. 165-169)

To Whitman this theme is sublime. He thinks the word "death"
is the key to the sweetest song of all songs, because he
believes that it is not the end of life's journey but the
beginning of the soul's journey into eternity.¹

¹Ibid., p. 118.

My own songs awaked from that hour,
 And with them the key, the word up from the waves,
 The word of the sweetest song and all songs,
 That strong and delicious word which, creeping to
 my feet,
 (Or like some old crone rocking the cradle, swathed
 in sweet garments, bending aside,)
 The sea whisper'd me.

("Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking,"
 11. 178-183)

In "Now Finale to the Shore" Whitman pictures the voyager who had long adventured over the seas and returned to port, now departing, no more to return, now to sail upon the endless cruise. The poet experiences perfect contentment, almost a feeling of happiness, as he bids farewell to the shore.

Now finalè to the shore,
 Now land and life finalè and farewell,
 Now Voyager depart, (much, much for thee is yet
 in store,)
 Often enough hast thou adventur'd o'er the seas,
 Cautiously cruising, studying the charts,
 Duly again to port and hawser's tie returning;
 But now obey thy cherish'd secret wish,
 Embrace thy friends, leave all in order,
 To port and hawser's tie no more returning,
 Depart upon thy endless cruise old Sailor.

Through the sea image he again expresses his unwavering belief in immortality in "Joy, Shipmate, Joy!" The reader shares with the poet his joy and his gratitude as he too believes that at death our life is closed, that we are no longer anchored on earth, and that our soul's voyage through eternity begins:

Joy, shipmate, joy!
 (Pleas'd to my soul at death I cry,)

Our life is closed, our life begins,
 The long, long anchorage we leave,
 The ship is clear at last, she leaps!
 She swiftly courses from the shore,
 Joy, shipmate, joy!

The sense of the sublime in "Had I the Choice" has its source in the poet's deep yearning to be accepted. As he meditates on the spell cast upon him by the sea, he admits that if he could match the greatest bards--Shakespeare, Tennyson, and Homer--or if he could use the best meter or wit, the choice conceits, and the perfect rhyme, all these he would gladly barter if only his verses could have the power "to cast the spell upon his readers that the sea has cast upon him."¹

Had I the choice to tally greatest
 bards,
 These, these, O sea, all these I'd
 gladly barter,
 Would you the undulation of one wave,
 its trick to me transfer,
 Or breathe one breath of yours upon my
 verse,
 And leave its odor there.

Ferryboat Experiences

Whitman's passion for ferries began at the age of four and continued throughout the remainder of his life. In "Specimen Days" he says that one of his greatest pleasures was going back and forth between Brooklyn and New York on the

¹F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 566.

ferryboats and often up in the pilot house where he could have a good view of the surroundings.¹ In "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" he paints a beautiful picture as he catalogues the various images seen from the ferry: "the haze on the hills," "the vapor as it flew in fleeces tinged with violet," "the white sails of schooners and sloops," "the white wake left by the passage of ships," "the flags of all nations," "the falling of them at sunset," "the sketch afar growing dimmer and dimmer," "the fires from the foundry chimneys burning high and glaringly into the night," "the reflection of summer sky in the water," and the seagulls "high in the air floating with motionless wings, oscillating their bodies." The poet has a sense of the sublime when he experiences the magnificent view, the vast distances, and the heights of the seagulls and the fires from the foundry chimneys.

His experience of greatest sublimity comes to him when he sees in the ferryboat crossing a religious analogy, "a symbol of human fate and destiny."² As he watches the crowds who cross the ferry, he thinks not only of those who have crossed with him but of all those who will cross in years to come. He has a sense of the sublime as he thinks of the infinite number of people who will cross the ferry and

¹Leaves of Grass and Selected Prose, ed. John Kouwenhoven (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), p. 569.

²Miller, p. 97.

of the spiritual unity of all the souls who have crossed and will cross.¹

It avails not, time nor place--distance
 avails not,
 I am with you, you men and women of a
 generation, or ever so many genera-
 tions hence.
 ("Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," ll. 20-21)

He experiences sublimity when he thinks of endless time. He has a feeling of awe when he sees the crowds on the ferryboat passing from shore to shore as the souls of men forever crossing into eternity.

The simple, compact, well-join'd scheme,
 myself disintegrated every one dis-
 integrated yet part of the scheme.
 ("Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," l. 7)

Teaching Experiences

Teaching gave to Whitman some feeling of exaltation. He taught in eight small communities off and on for five years. He began teaching at the age of seventeen in a small school only a short distance from his grandfather's farm.² He shares with his readers only one of his experiences of sublimity, however, when, as he is composing a poem for the inauguration of a public school in Camden, New Jersey,

¹Ibid.

²Allen, The Solitary Singer, pp. 26-32.

undoubtedly his thoughts go back to his school teaching days
and to his former pupils:

An old man's thought of school,
An old man gathering youthful memories
and blooms that youth itself cannot.
("An Old Man's Thought of School,"
11. 1-2)

He has a sense of the sublime as he sees the young lives
which will enter the school, each to build and equip himself
for life's voyage, the soul's voyage over the measureless
seas:

Now only do I know you,
O fair auroral skies--O morning
dew upon the grass!

And these I see, these sparkling eyes,
These stores of mystic meaning, these
young lives,
Building, equipping, like a fleet of ships,
immortal ships,
Soon to sail out over the measureless seas,
On the soul's voyage.
(11. 3-7)

The poet sees not just the boys and girls in "tiresome
spelling, writing, ciphering classes" but infinitely more.
He has a feeling of exaltation as he looks far ahead and sees
the future of all America embodied in the girls and boys, the
teacher, and the school:

(As George Fox rais'd his warning cry, "Is
it this pile of brick and mortar, these
dead floors, windows, rails, you call
the church?
Why this is not the church at all--the church
is living, ever living souls.")

And you America,
 Cast you the real reckoning for your present?
 The lights and shadows of your future, good
 or evil?
 To girlhood, boyhood look, the teacher and the
 school.

(ll. 14-19)

National Tragedies

Three great national tragedies which occurred during Whitman's lifetime moved him deeply: The Civil War, the assassination of President Lincoln, and the assassination of President Garfield. In "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads" Whitman says that without his three or four years of war experience he could never have written Leaves of Grass.¹ In the years that he served as an army nurse at Falmouth, Virginia, and Washington, D. C., he made over six hundred tours and visited from eighty to one hundred thousand sick. He served both northern and southern soldiers from most of the states, taking them gifts, writing letters for them, reading and discussing Bible passages with them, praying at their bedsides, washing and dressing wounds, and ministering to the sick and the dying day or night. He considered those three years the greatest privilege and satisfaction and the greatest lesson of his life.² He recaptures his experiences of sublimity--intense emotions of excitement, of pain, of

¹Kouwenhoven, p. 554.

²Prose Works, ed. Floyd Stovall (New York: New York University Press, 1964), I, 112-113.

agony, of grief, of comradeship, of sympathy, and of pride-- in "Drum Taps." He has a sense of the sublime as he relives his experiences of war from the first call to arms through the final accomplishment of its mission. He feels the thrill and excitement of the city, Manhattan, preparing for the great adventure:¹

To the drum-taps prompt,
 The young men falling in and arming,
 Squads gather everywhere by common consent
 and arm,
 The blood of the city up--arm'd! arm'd! the
 cry everywhere,
 The flags flung out from the steeples of
 churches and from all the public buildings
 and stores,
 War! an arm'd race is advancing! the welcome
 for battle, no turning away!
 War! be it weeks, months, or years, an arm'd
 race is advancing to welcome it,
 Mannahatta a-march--and it's O to sing
 it well!
 It's O for a manly life in the camp.
 ("First O Songs For a Prelude,"
 11. 21-22, 27, 34-35, 46-49)

The feeling quickly changes as he relives his hospital experiences. He feels the pain and the agony endured by the wounded as "he sits by the restless all the dark night." He experiences the need of comradeship and human love amid the great tragedy of war:

Thus in silence in dreams' projections,
 Returning, resuming, I thread my way through
 the hospitals,

¹Miller, p. 83.

The hurt and wounded I pacify with soothing hand,
 I sit by the restless all the dark night, some
 are so young,
 Some suffer so much, I recall the experience
 sweet and sad,
 (Many a soldier's loving arms about this neck
 have cross'd and rested,
 Many a soldier's kiss dwells on these bearded
 lips.)

("The Wound-Dresser," ll. 59-65)

He joins the army as it marches:

Glittering dimly, toiling under the sun--
 the dust-cover'd men,
 In columns rise and fall to the undulations of
 the ground,
 ("An Army Corps on the March," ll. 4-5)

and then he sits on the ground "by the bivouac's fitful flame"
 and, in the silence of the night, he too feels the loneliness
 of the soldier as his thoughts turn to life and death, to
 home and the past, and to loved ones who are far away:

. . . O tender and wondrous thoughts,
 Of life and death, of home and the past and
 loved, and of those that are far away;
 A solemn and slow procession there as I sit
 on the ground,
 By the bivouac's fitful flame.
 ("By the Bivouac's Fitful Flame," ll. 7-11)

He feels intense grief as he keeps his vigil on the field one
 night. He sits with his chin in his hands, over the dead
 body of a comrade. In the long silence of the night, even
 until daybreak, he meditates over his love for the brave
 soldier, and then in his sorrow there come to him faith and
 hope. He has a sense of exaltation as he concludes:

Then on the earth partially reclining sat by
 your side leaning my chin in my hands,
 Passing sweet hours, immortal and mystic hours
 with you dearest comrade--not a tear,
 not a word,
 Vigil of silence, love and death, vigil for you
 my son and my soldier,
 As onward silently stars aloft, eastward new
 ones upward stole,
 Vigil final for you brave boy, (I could not
 save you, swift was your death,
 I faithfully loved you and cared for you living,
 I think we shall surely meet again.)
 ("Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One
 Night," ll. 12-17)

The poet experiences sublimity when he looks into the face of
 the slain enemy and thinks of the great tragedy of war.

For my enemy is dead, a man divine as myself is
 dead,
 I look where he lies white-faced and still in
 the coffin--I draw near,
 Bend down and touch lightly with my lips the
 white face in the coffin.
 ("Reconciliation," ll. 4-6)

He cannot help becoming deeply involved emotionally when he
 realizes the worth of every human being, both friend and foe,
 because each is a creature of the Divine, a child of God.
 Grief and deepest sympathy fill his heart as he tells of the
 letter to the parents of the dead soldier in "Come Up From the
 Fields Father." He shares the anxiety of the mother as

Fast as she can she hurries, something
 ominous, her steps trembling,
 She does not tarry to smooth her hair nor
 adjust her cap.
 (ll. 14-15)

He shares her grief:

She with thin form presently drest in
 black,
 By day her meals untouch'd, then at
 night fitfully sleeping, often waking,
 In the midnight waking, weeping, longing
 with one deep longing,
 O that she might withdraw unnoticed,
 silent from life escape and withdraw,
 To follow, to seek, to be with her dear
 dead son.

(11. 33-37)

When the war is over, he has a feeling of exultation in the accomplishment of its mission. In "Adieu to a Soldier" he says:

Adieu dear Comrade,
 Your mission is fulfill'd.
 (11. 8-9)

Whitman believed the mission to be the unity of America. He considered Lincoln the man responsible for saving the union and, therefore, his greatest hero.¹ It was during his war service in Washington that he became acquainted with Lincoln. Although he probably never met the President, he saw him almost every day. He says in "Specimen Days" that they exchanged vows and very cordial ones.² The assassination of this man whom the poet had come to love and admire was an event which made a great emotional impact on him. Both personal and national grief are the sources of sublimity in his

¹Ralph W. Wescott, Walt Whitman in Camden (Trenton, New Jersey: Walt Whitman Foundation, 1952), p. 10.

²Gay Wilson Allen, Walt Whitman Handbook (Chicago: Packard and Company, 1946), p. 596.

memories of Lincoln. He reveals his admiration for him in

"This Dust Was Once the Man":

This dust was once the man,
Gentle, plain, just and resolute, under whose
cautious hand,
Against the foulest crime in history known in
any land or age,
Was saved the Union of these States.

In "Hush'd Be the Camps Today" he has a sense of exaltation as he shares the grief of all the soldiers for their commander-in-chief:

Sing of the love we bore him--because you,
dweller in camps, know it truly.

As they invault the coffin there,
Sing--as they close the doors of earth
 upon him--one verse,
For the heavy hearts of soldiers.

(11. 9-12)

"When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" derives its sublimity not only from the poet's intense personal grief but also from the grief of a nation for the loss of a great man. The poet has a sense of the sublime as he mourns now and will mourn each spring:

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.
(ll. 1-6)

His sense of the sublime increases as, in the beautiful imagery of the powerful western star hidden by the black murky cloud, he expresses his intense personal grief:

O powerful western fallen star!
 O shades of night--O moody, tearful night!
 O great star disappear'd--O the black murk
 that hides the star!
 O cruel hands that hold me powerless--O
 helpless soul of me!
 O harsh surrounding cloud that will not
 free my soul.
 ("When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard
 Bloom'd," ll. 7-11)

The poet joins the nation in its grief as he follows the coffin through the streets of the cities:

Coffin that passes through lanes and streets,
 Through day and night with the great cloud
 darkening the land,
 With the pomp of the inloop'd flags with
 the cities draped in black,
 With the show of the States themselves as of
 crape-veil'd women standing,
 With processions long and winding and the
 flambeaus of the night,
 With the countless torches lit, with the silent
 sea of faces and the unbared heads,
 With the waiting depot, the arriving coffin,
 and the sombre faces,
 With dirges through the night, with the
 thousand voices rising strong and solemn,
 With all the mournful voices of the dirges
 pour'd around the coffin,
 The dim-lit churches and the shuddering organs--
 where amid these you journey,
 With the tolling bells perpetual clang,
 Here, coffin that slowly passes,
 I give you my sprig of lilac.
 ("When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard
 Bloom'd," ll. 33-45)

Whitman carries his readers to new heights of sublimity when he reveals his concept of death. With such expressions as

"lovely and soothing death," "delicate death," "the sure enwinding arms of cool-enfolding death," and "strong deliveress," he attempts to lead his readers to a joyful acceptance of death.¹ In the carol of the bird he welcomes death:

Come lovely and soothing death,
Undulate round the world, serenely arriving,
arriving,
In the day, in the night, to all, to each,
Sooner or later delicate death.
("When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard
Bloom'd," ll. 135-138)

Whitman was a personal friend of President Garfield. He had ridden the street cars and walked the streets of Washington with him when General Garfield was a congressman from Ohio.² He shares the grief of the nation as he listens to the tolling of the bells announcing the assassination of the president:

The sobbing of the bells, the sudden death-
news everywhere,
The slumbers rouse, the rapport of the People,
(Full well they know that message in the
darkness,
Full well return, respond within their breasts,
their brains, the sad reverberations,)
The passionate toll and clang--city to city,
joining, sounding, passing,
Those heart-beats of a Nation in the night.
("The Sobbing of the Bells")

The reader in the 1960's probably feels more intense emotion than he would have felt in several preceding decades as he

¹Allen, The Solitary Singer, p. 357.

²Ibid., p. 495.

shares Whitman's experiences of the two national tragedies, because only a few short years ago he witnessed and shared, by means of television, the nation's grief in a similar event, the assassination, the funeral procession, and the entombment of its president.

Loafing in Camden

After the emotional strain which he underwent during his war service and after his illness from blood poisoning absorbed from the gangrenous wounds of his soldier patients, Whitman suffered paralysis which plagued him for the remainder of his life.¹ Most of his last twenty years were spent in Camden, New Jersey, where because of his age and his physical condition, his experiences of sublimity, as revealed in "Twilight," "An Ended Day," and "A Clear Midnight," have their sources in thoughts of death. The poet is deeply moved as he contemplates the beauty of the twilight and thinks of his own life which he feels will soon be gone, dispelled as the sun. He shares these experiences of sublimity with his readers in two short poems, "Twilight" and "An Ended Day." In "Twilight" he is inspired by the beauty of the sights of nature:

The soft voluptuous opiate shades,
The sun just gone, the eager light
 dispell'd--I too will soon be
 gone, dispell'd,)
A haze--nirwana--rest and night--oblivion.

¹Charles E. Feinburg, "Walt Whitman and His Doctors," reprinted from Archives of Internal Medicine, December, 1964, pp. 834-842.

In "An Ended Day" he is inspired by the sounds of nature. He spent much of his time in Camden in a woody place near the creek on Stafford Farm. He enjoyed hearing the birds sing early in the morning, but he thought their songs late in the afternoon were "more penetrating and sweeter" and "seemed to touch the soul."¹ The late evening songs of the birds in their happy moods inspired him to write "An Ended Day." He looks forward to the end of the day when the rush is over, his work is completed, and he too can rejoice:

The soothing sanity and blitheness of
 completion
 The pomp and hurried contest--glare and
 rush are done;
 Now triumph! transformation! jubilate!

In "Specimen Days" Whitman calls the late evening hours down in the country "Hours for the Soul." He believes that they are for that purpose because it was in the evening that "the heavens declared the glory of God." He writes that then as if for the first time creation taught him "that untellable lesson, beyond--O, so infinitely beyond! --anything from art, books, sermons, or from science, old or new. The spirit's hour--religion's hour--the visible suggestion of God in space and time-- . . . a flashing glance of Deity, addressed to the soul."² In "A Clear Midnight" the

¹Kowenhoven, p. 406.

²Ibid., pp. 764-775.

poet expresses his delight in the late evening hours. He shares his experience of sublimity as he gazes into the heavens and meditates upon his favorite themes:

This is thy hour O Soul, thy free flight
 into the wordless,
 Away from books, away from art, the day
 erased, the lessons done,
 Thee fully forth emerging, silent, gazing
 pondering the themes thou lovest best,
 Night, sleep, death and the stars.

Camden, just across the Delaware River from Philadelphia, afforded Whitman one of his old and favorite pastimes, ferrying. He spent many nights riding back and forth on the deck of the ferry studying celestial phenomena, which, as Edmund Burke has noted, always produce an idea of grandeur because of the number of stars and their apparent disorder. The confusion of the heavenly bodies indicates a sort of infinity which is a source of the sublime.¹ Whitman is awed by the earth and planets so wonderfully balanced in space. The reader too is awed as he contemplates these thoughts of the poet as they are expressed in "Who Learns My Lesson Complete?"

It is no small matter, this round and
 delicious globe moving so exactly in its
 orbit for ever, and ever, without one jolt
 or the untruth of a single second,

.

¹"On the Sublime and Beautiful," The Harvard Classics, ed. Charles W. Eliot (New York: P. F. Collier and Son, 1909), XXIV, 68.

And that the moon spins round the earth and
 on with the earth, is equally wonderful,
 And that they balance themselves with the sun
 and stars is equally wonderful.

(ll. 13, 25-26)

Opera Experiences

Operas were the source of some of Whitman's most sublime experiences. In "Specimen Days" he admits that he could never have written Leaves of Grass had he not attended the Italian operas all through the years. In relating their effect on him he says, "My younger life was so saturated with the emotions, raptures, and up-lifts of such musical experiences that it would be surprising indeed if all my future work had not been colored by them."¹ The tremendous exaltation he experienced as he listened to opera is communicated in "Song of Myself." The reader agrees with Louise Pound that this might well have been written during the performance so intense are the emotions aroused:²

I hear the chorus, it is a grand opera,
 Ah this indeed is music--this suits me.

A tenor large and fresh as the creation fills me,
 The orbic flex of his mouth is pouring and
 filling me full.

I hear the train'd soprano (what work with hers
 is this?)
 The orchestra whirls me wider than Uranus flies,

¹Kouwenhoven, p. 572.

²"Whitman and Italian Music," Selected Writings of Louise Pound (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1949), pp. 1-11.

It wrenches such ardors from me I did not know I
 possess'd them,
 It sails me, I dab with bare feet, they are
 lick'd by the indolent waves,
 I am cut by bitter and angry hail, I lose my
 breath,
 Steep'd amid honey'd morphine, my windpipe
 throttled in fakes of death,
 At length let up again to feel the puzzle of
 puzzles,
 And that we call Being. (ll. 599-610)

The two opera stars who inspired Whitman most were
 Bettini and Alboni. In "The Dead Tenor" he recaptures his
 experience of sublimity as he hears the voice of Bettini:

As down the stage again,
 With Spanish hat and plumes, and gait inimitable,
 Back from the fading lessons of the past, I'd
 call, I'd tell and own,
 How much from thee! the revelation of the singing
 voice from thee!
 (So firm--so liquid-soft--again that tremulous,
 manly timbre!
 The perfect singing voice--deepest of all to me
 the lesson--trial and test of all:)
 How through those strains distill'd--how the rapt
 ears, the soul of me, absorbing.

Marietta Alboni, the greatest opera singer of
 Whitman's day, appeared in ten operas, each given four times,
 during the winter of 1852-1853. Whitman, who claimed that he
 attended every one of her performances,¹ was so deeply moved
 by her voice that he describes her thus:

¹Allen, The Solitary Singer, p. 114.

The teeming lady comes,
 The lustrous orb, Venus contralto,
 the blooming mother,
 Sister of loftiest gods.
 ("Proud Music of the Storm,"
 11. 92-94)

Her effect upon him was so great that he was never able to write a bird song, not that of the mocking bird in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," nor that of the hermit thrush in "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," without recalling the deep emotion that he had experienced when he heard her sing.¹

Whitman could not understand the language of the operas which aroused in him such intense emotions. His realization that it is possible to convey thoughts and arouse emotions, not just by words alone but by tone, feeling, and implication,² may have inspired him to discover meanings in the sounds around him. In "That Music Always Round Me" he indicates that his experiences at the operas taught him this lesson. He is exalted by the exquisite meanings which accompany the ordinary sounds of nature.

That music always round me, unceasing,
 unbeginning, yet long untaught I did
 not hear,
 But now the chorus I hear and am elated,
 A tenor, strong, ascending with power and
 health, with glad notes of daybreak I
 hear,

¹Matthiessen, p. 562.

²Allen, The Solitary Singer, p. 115.

A soprano at intervals sailing buoyantly
 over the tops of immense waves,
 A transparent base shuddering lusciously
 under and through the universe,
 The triumphant tutti, the funeral wailings
 with sweet flutes and violins, all
 these I fill myself with,
 I hear not the volumes of sound merely, I
 am moved by the exquisite meanings,
 I listen to the different voices winding
 in and out, striving, contending with
 fiery vehemence to excel each other
 in emotion;
 I do not think the performers know them-
 selves--but now I think I begin to
 know them.

Reading Experiences

Some biographers think that books contributed less
 to the gestation of Leaves of Grass than did outdoor experi-
 ences and amusements such as operas, theatrical performances,
 concerts, and museums.¹ Nevertheless an avid reader such as
 Whitman was, who himself could not even remember all the
 books he had read which might have had an influence on his
 poetry,² was certain to have read much which contributed to
 his experiences of sublimity. In "A Backward Glance O'er
 Travel'd Roads" Whitman says that he went off, often for a
 week at a time, down in the country or to the seashore and
 there went over thoroughly the Old and the New Testaments,
 Shakespeare, Ossian, translations of Homer, Eschylus,
 Sophocles, the old German Nibelungen, the ancient Hindoo

¹Allen, Walt Whitman Handbook, p. 28.

²Miller, p. 44.

poems, Dante, and The Iliad. He believed that the reason he was not completely overwhelmed by those mighty masters was that he read them "in the full presence of Nature, under the sun, with the far-spreading landscape and vistas, or the sea rolling in." In this same prose work, "A Backward Glance," the poet states, "If I had not stood before these poems with uncover'd head, fully aware of their colossal grandeur and beauty of form and spirit, I could not have written Leaves of Grass."¹

Of these books which so moved Whitman the one contributing to sublimity of substance in his poetry is the Bible. Possibly because of his deep sympathy for all people, he identifies himself with the Christ. This role is revealed in his attitude toward the common prostitute and in his ministry to the sick. He does not reject the prostitute, but as Christ would have done, he charges her to prepare to meet him when he comes again:

Be composed--be at ease with me--I am Walt
 Whitman, liberal and lusty as Nature,
 Not till the sun excludes you do I exclude you,
 Not till the waters refuse to glisten for you
 and the leaves to rustle for you, do my
 words refuse to glisten and rustle for you.

My girl I appoint with you an appointment, and
 I charge you that you make preparations
 to be worthy to meet me.

¹Kouwenhoven, pp. 552-553.

And I charge you that you be patient and
perfect till I come.

Till then I salute you with a significant
look that you do not forget me.
("To a Common Prostitute.")

As he ministers to the troubled, to the sick and to the
dying, he experiences great ecstasy:

To any one dying, thither I speed and twist
the knob of the door,
Turn the bed-clothes toward the foot of the
bed,
Let the physician and the priest go home.

I seize the descending man and raise him with
resistless will,
O despairer, here is my neck,
By God, you shall not go down! hang your whole
weight upon me.

I dilate you with tremendous breath, I buoy
you up

I am bringing help for the sick as they
pant on their backs.
("Song of Myself," ll. 998-1004, 1011)

Surely there could be no greater exaltation for the poet than
identification with the Christ at the crucifixion and at the
resurrection.

That I could forget the mockers and insults!
That I could forget the trickling tears and
the blows of the bludgeons and hammers!
That I could look with a separate look on my
own crucifixion and bloody crowning!

The grave of rock multiplies what has been
confided to it, or to any graves,
Corpses rise, gashes heal, fastenings roll
from me.
("Song of Myself," ll. 953-955, 958-959)

Thus Whitman communicates sublimity--a feeling of deepest awe--to the reader who believes that because Christ rose from the dead, his gashes healed, he too will rise from the grave with an incorruptible body.

In "To Him That Was Crucified" sublimity springs from the poet's contemplation of one of his favorite themes, brotherhood. He is exalted as he walks the whole earth over, with Christ and his followers, laboring with them to make of all men, throughout the ages to come, brothers and lovers.

My spirit to yours dear brother,
 Do not mind because many sounding your name do
 not understand you,
 I do not sound your name, but I understand you,
 I specify you with joy O my comrade to salute
 you, and to salute those who are with you,
 before and since, and those to come also,
 That we all labor together transmitting the same
 charge and succession,
 We few equals indifferent of lands, indifferent
 of times,
 We, enclosers of all continents, all castes,
 allowers of all theologies,
 Compassionaters, perceivers, rapport of men,
 We walk silent among disputes and assertions,
 but reject not the disputers nor any thing
 that is asserted,
 We hear the bawling and din, we are reach'd at
 by divisions, jealousies, recriminations
 on every side,
 They close peremptorily upon us to surround us,
 my comrade,
 Yet we walk unheld, free, the whole earth over,
 journeying up and down till we make our
 ineffaceable mark upon time and the
 diverse eras,
 Till we saturate time and eras, that the men and
 women of races, ages to come, may prove
 brethren and lovers as we are.

Among the poems added posthumously to Leaves of Grass is "Death's Valley,"¹ which was obviously inspired by one of the most sublime of all scriptures, the twenty-third Psalm. Sometime during the last few months of his life Whitman, by request, wrote the poem to accompany a painting "The Valley of the Shadow of Death." Whitman claims the right to use the symbol because he has watched the death-hours of many soldiers and old people and also because he now is hovering near the dark valley. He communicates his great exaltation as he pictures in the midst of the beautiful trees, flowers, grass, and rippling tides God's eternal right hand waiting to guide him into the unknown.

And out of these and thee,
 I make a scene, a song (not fear of thee,
 Nor gloom's ravines, nor bleak, nor dark--
 for I do not fear thee,
 Nor celebrate the struggle, or contortion, or
 hard-tied knot),
 Of the broad blessed light and perfect air, with
 meadows, rippling tides, and trees and
 flowers and grass,
 And the low hum of living breeze--and in the midst
 God's beautiful eternal right hand,
 Thee, holiest minister of Heaven--thee, envoy,
 usherer, guide at last of all
 Rich, florid, loosener of the structure--knot
 call'd life,
 Sweet, peaceful, welcome Death.
 (11. 12-20)

The extent to which Biblical allusions inspire a sense of

¹Leaves of Grass, ed. Emory Holloway (Garden City: Halcyon House, 1942), p. 463.

the sublime in Leaves of Grass will be discussed in a later chapter.

Mitchell's book A Course of Six Lectures on Astronomy furnished facts and ideas for "Song of Myself" and other poems.¹ It was an invitation to his audience to take an imaginary trip with him into the heavens, and it suggested to Whitman his poetic flights. The poet is filled with awe as he observes, from his position in the sky, the vastness of the universe and the movement and speed of the suns and the satellites.

And in the sky was a nest,
And my soul flew thither and squatted
and looked out
And saw the journey work of suns
and systems of suns.²

He feels great ecstasy as he sees in visions his soul rising to vast heights and speeding, speeding constantly, through space among the stars, the satellites and the meteors.

My ties and ballasts leave me, my elbows rest in
sea-gaps,
I skirt sierras, my palms cover continents,
I am afoot with my vision.
Speeding through space, speeding through heaven
and the stars,
Speeding amid the seven satellites and the broad
ring, and the diameter of eighty thousand
miles,

¹Allen, The Solitary Singer, p. 124.

²Ibid., p. 142.

Speeding with tail'd meteors, throwing fire-balls
 like the rest,
 Carrying the crescent child that carries its own
 full mother in its belly,
 Storming, enjoying, planning, loving, cautioning,
 Backing and filling, appearing and disappearing,
 I tread day and night such roads.

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

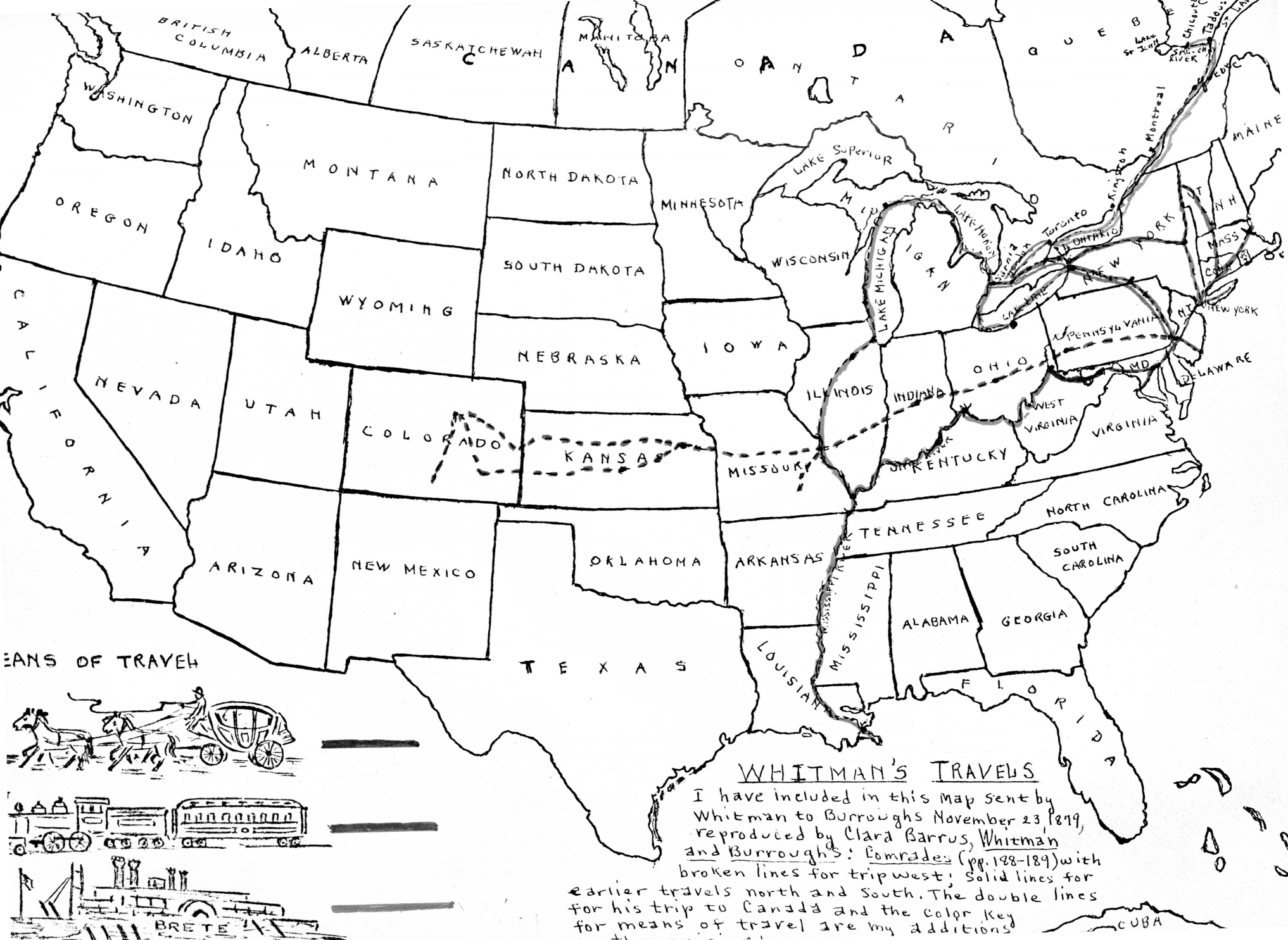
I fly those flights of a fluid and swallowing soul,
 My course runs below the soundings of plummets.
 ("Song of Myself," ll. 714-716, 791-801)

Carlyle's Sartor Resartus is thought by Manning Smith to have been the inspiration for some of Whitman's ideas and themes. Smith compares the theme of "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" to that found in "Sartor" and the theme of "Who Learns My Lesson Complete?" to Carlyle's chapter "Natural Supernaturalism." He finds a similarity between Whitman's thoughts in "The Sleepers" and Teufelsdruckh's "Night Thoughts" in Sartor Resartus, "There Was a Child Went Forth" and Teufelsdruckh's account of his childhood, and "The Song of the Open Road" and Carlyle's mention of the reading of Teufelsdruckh's book as a journey.¹ Whitman, who was undoubtedly inspired as he contemplated the themes and ideas of Carlyle's book, communicates his exaltation when he uses these great conceptions in his own poetry.

¹F. M. Smith, "Whitman's Debt to Carlyle's Sartor Resartus," Modern Language Quarterly, III (1942), 51-65.

Whitman communicates so effectively the sublimity of personal experiences--childhood, city life, the sea, ferry-boat trips, reading, opera, teaching, national tragedies, and loafing in Canada--that the reader, feeling that he has come in contact with, not a book, but a man, verifies the words of Whitman in "So Long":

Camerado, this is no book,
Who touches this, touches a man.
(ll. 53-54)



MEANS OF TRAVEL



WHITMAN'S TRAVELS

I have included in this map sent by Whitman to Burroughs November 23, 1879, reproduced by Clara Barrus, Whitman and Burroughs: Comrades (pp. 188-189) with broken lines for trip west; solid lines for his earlier travels north and south. The double lines for his trip to Canada and the color key for means of travel are my additions.

CUBA

CHAPTER II

WHITMAN'S TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

Until Whitman took his first long trip, at the age of twenty-eight, he had known only a small corner of the nation, an area consisting of a few miles in and around New York City. His three longest trips, using almost all the methods of transportation available--canal boat, ferry boat, river boat, stagecoach, and train--gave him not only a sense of space but a knowledge of the countryside and of the natural resources of the nation. His trips to New Orleans in the south, to Denver in the west, and up the St. Lawrence and the Saguenay Rivers of Canada to the north typified to Whitman the fusion of all parts of the nation.¹ He demonstrated this idea in his personification of America with the "spinal river" and the "compact lands tied at the hips with the belt stringing the huge lakes."²

During his journeys, as was his habit, Whitman recorded in detail his observations of nature, of industries, and of people. While traveling the miles to Denver, he entered in his notebook that he could not keep from thinking

¹Allen, Walt Whitman Handbook, pp. 49-50.

²"Our Old Feuillage," l. 10.

how wonderful it would be if all the American landscapes could be fused in a perfect poem, entirely western and altogether our own without even a trace of European thought or influence.¹ As the map of his travels shows, he covered much of the United States, getting the information which gave him the right to speak for all America² and which afforded him the opportunity to compare what he preconceived with what he saw.³ All the landscapes which he beheld on his journeys stirred him profoundly. Pictures as he viewed them, he laid them away with "life's rare and blessed bits"⁴ in the little house of memories which he experienced anew many times through his art.

New Orleans

Whitman's first opportunity to see a large section of the nation came when he accepted a job on a New Orleans newspaper. His itinerary is described in the following schedule:

¹Kouwenhoven, p. 706.

²Allen, Walt Whitman Handbook, pp. 49-50.

³Allen, The Solitary Singer, p. 92.

⁴Kouwenhoven, p. 718.

Itinerary to New Orleans

<u>From</u>	<u>To</u>	<u>Mode of Travel</u>
Brooklyn	Baltimore	Train
Baltimore	Cumberland	Train
Cumberland	Wheeling	Stagecoach
Wheeling	Cincinnati	Boat down Ohio River
Cincinnati	Louisville	Boat down Ohio River
Louisville	Cairo	Boat down Ohio River
Cairo	New Orleans	Boat down Mississippi

Itinerary from New Orleans

<u>From</u>	<u>To</u>	<u>Mode of Travel</u>
New Orleans	St. Louis	Boat up Mississippi
St. Louis	La Salle	Boat up Missouri
La Salle	Chicago	Canal Boat
Chicago	Milwaukee	Boat on Lake Michigan
Milwaukee	Mackinaw	Boat on Lake Michigan
Mackinaw	Cleveland	Boat on Lakes Huron and Erie
Cleveland	Buffalo	Boat on Lake Erie
Buffalo	Niagara	Train
Niagara	Albany	Train
Albany	New York	Boat down Hudson River

Accompanied by his brother, Jeff, Whitman made his long journey from Brooklyn to New Orleans which gave him his first impression of the vastness of the country.¹ He was all but overcome with amazement at "the mighty Niagara," "the flowing Missouri," "the long-running Mississippi," and the "endless Mississippi." In "Specimen Days" he calls the Mississippi "earth's most important stream." He notes that the valley of this river and its tributaries comprise more than twelve hundred thousand square miles, and remarks that

¹Miller, p. 22.

not even the mighty Amazon, nor the Nile, nor the Danube, nor the three great rivers of China have ever played such a part in the past as the Mississippi is destined to play.¹

Traveling from Cincinnati to New Orleans by steamer, Whitman was impressed by the tremendous amount of freight carried by water. He says his boat seemed to be constantly loaded to the limit with dry goods, groceries, and fowls.² This first long trip--an awakening to the tremendous size, capacity, variety, and fertility of the growing nation³--prepared the poet to picture in his imagination other parts of the country which he had not visited. Awed by the vast, prosperous, and productive America he saw, he begins his catalogue of the greatness of the country in "Starting from Paumanok":

Interlink'd, food-yielding lands!
 Land of coal and iron! land of gold! land of cotton,
 sugar, rice!
 Land of wheat, beef, pork! land of wool and hemp!
 land of the apple and the grape!
 Land of the pastoral plains, the grass-fields of
 the world! land of those sweet-air'd intermin-
 able plateaus!
 Land of the herd, the garden, the healthy house of
 adobie!
 Lands where the north-west Columbia winds, and where
 the south-west Colorado winds!
 Land of the eastern Chesapeake! land of the Delaware!
 Land of Ontario, Erie, Huron, Michigan!

¹Kouwenhoven, p. 708.

²Allen, The Solitary Singer, p. 93.

³Ibid.

Land of the Old Thirteen! Massachusetts land! land
 of Vermont and Connecticut!
 Land of the ocean shores! land of sierras and peaks!
 Land of boatmen and sailors! fishermen's land!
 (ll. 194-204)

The boat ride up the Missouri River, on the return trip from New Orleans, deeply affected the poet as he tells us in "Others May Praise What They Like":

Others may praise what they like;
 But I, from the banks of the running Missouri,
 praise nothing in art or aught else,
 Till it has well inhaled the atmosphere of
 this river, also the western prairie-scent,
 And exudes it all again.

In "Song of Myself" he relives stopping at Niagara, where he went under the fall and saw the whirlpool and other sights,¹

Approaching Manhattan up by the long-
 stretching island,
 Under Niagara, the cataract falling like
 a veil over my countenance.
 (ll. 748-749)

Whitman was fascinated with the south, its sights, its sounds, and its odors--the plantations, the alligator-infested swamps, the birds, and the piney odor. He communicates his impressions in the language of one moved by the sublime in "O Magnet-South":

O magnet-South! O glistening perfumed South!
 my South!
 O quick mettle, rich blood, impulse and love!
 good and evil! O all dear to me!

O the cotton plant! the growing fields of rice,
 sugar, hemp!
 The cactus guarded with thorns, the laurel-tree
 with large white flowers,
 The range afar, the richness and barrenness, the
 old woods charged with mistletoe and
 trailing moss,
 The piney odor and the gloom, the awful natural
 stillness, (here in these dense swamps the
 freebooter carries his gun, and the fugitive
 has his conceal'd hut;)
 O the strange fascination of these half-known half-
 impassable swamps, infested by reptiles,
 resounding with the bellow of the alligator,
 the sad noises of the night-owl and the
 wild-cat, and the whirr of the rattlesnake,
 The mocking-bird, the American mimic, singing
 all the forenoon, singing through the
 moon-lit night,
 The humming-bird, the wild turkey, the raccoon,
 the opossum;
 A Kentucky corn-field, the tall, graceful, long-
 leav'd corn, slender, flapping, bright-
 green, with tassels, with beautiful ears
 each well-sheath'd in its husk;
 O my heart! O tender and fierce pangs, I can
 stand them not, I will depart;
 O to be a Virginian where I grew up! O to be a
 Carolinian!
 O longings irrepressible! O I will go back to
 old Tennessee and never wander more.
 (11. 1-2, 12-22)

Employing the Longinian shift of person to involve
 the reader in the poetic experience, Whitman writes of his
 trip to New Orleans and his yearning at that time for the
 brotherhood of all men:

A leaf for hand in hand;
 You natural persons old and young!
 You on the Mississippi and on all the
 branches and bayous of the Mississippi!
 You friendly boatmen and mechanics!
 you roughs!

You twain! and all processions moving
 along the streets!
 I wish to infuse myself among you till I see
 it common for you to walk hand in hand.
 ("A Leaf for Hand in Hand")

The West

The journey which afforded Whitman his greatest experience of sublimity was probably his trip to the west. Disagreeing with those who held that Yosemite, Niagara Falls, and the upper Yellowstone presented the greatest natural shows, he said that the prairies and plains, while less impressive at first sight, will "last longer, fill the esthetic sense fuller, precede all the rest and make North America's characteristic landscape."¹ While vastness is one source of his sense of sublimity, he indicates it is not the only source. Of his trip he says, "My days and nights, as I travel here--what an exhilaration!--not the air alone, and the sense of vastness, but every local sight and feature."² He stands in awe as in his imagination he sees these vast prairies as

A newer garden of creation, no primal solitude,
 Dense, joyous, modern, populous millions, cities
 and farms,
 With iron interlaced, composite, tied, many in
 one,
 By all the world contributed--freedom's and
 law's and thrift's society,

¹Kowenhoven, p. 707.

²Ibid., p. 706.

The crown and teeming paradise, so far, of time's
 accumulations,
 To justify the past.

("The Prairie States," ll. 1-6)

Although he was fascinated by the daytime sights, it was the views of the late evening and night hours on the prairie which captivated him. Anyone who has experienced a western sunset cannot help but share the poet's ecstasy as he beholds the great beauty of the prairie sunset:

Shot gold, maroon and violet, dazzling silver,
 emerald, fawn,
 The earth's whole amplitude and Nature's
 multiform power consign'd for once to
 colors;
 The light, the general air possess'd by them--
 colors till now unknown.

("A Prairie Sunset," ll. 1-3)

He marvels at the vast extent of the sunset glow:

No limit, confine--not the Western sky alone--
 the high meridian--North, South, all,
 Pure luminous color fighting the silent shadows
 to the last.

("A Prairie Sunset," ll. 4-5)

A feeling of serenity and perfect contentment comes over him as darkness descends and he can enjoy one of his favorite diversions, that of gazing into the heavens.

Night on the prairies,
 The supper is over, the fire on the ground burns
 low,
 The wearied emigrants sleep, wrapt in their
 blankets;
 I walk by myself--I stand and look at the stars,
 which I think now I never realized before.

("Night on the Prairies," ll. 1-4)

Standing and looking at the stars, thinking of death and immortality and the vastness of the universe, he is all but overcome with awe:

Now I absorb immortality and peace,
I admire death and test propositions.
How plenteous! how spiritual! how resumé!
The same old man and soul--the same old aspirations,
and the same content.

I was thinking the day most splendid till I saw
what the not-day exhibited,
I was thinking this globe enough till there
sprang out so noiseless around me myriads
of other globes.
("Night on the Prairies," ll. 5-10)

As the poet is filled with the great thoughts of space and eternity, he feels himself "touch'd with the lives of other globes," he speculates and wonders, he realizes that life cannot reveal all and that he must wait for what death will reveal:

Now while the great thoughts of space and
eternity fill me I will measure myself
by them,
And now touch'd with the lives of other globes
arrived as far along as those of the earth,
Or waiting to arrive, or pass'd on farther than
those of the earth,
I henceforth no more ignore them than I ignore
my own life,
Or the lives of the earth arrived as far as
mine, or waiting to arrive.

O I see now that life cannot exhibit all to me,
as the day cannot,
I see that I am to wait for what will be
exhibited by death.
("Night on the Prairies," ll. 11-17)

Of his experiences in Colorado, the one which Whitman considers the most enjoyable was his "confronting of Platte Canyon just at dawn," a time when the bright sun cast shadows on the gigantic rocks. As the train twisted and turned or "squirmed around corners" through the canyon he was fascinated by the wild savage beauty of the scene, with its hundred peaks, its huge rocks, and its stream of water.¹ As he gazed at this wild array, he thought of the spirit that created this scene:

Spirit that form'd this scene,
 These tumbled rock-piles grim and red,
 These reckless heaven-ambitious peaks,
 These gorges, turbulent-clear streams, this
 naked freshness,
 These formless wild arrays, for reasons of
 their own,
 I know thee, savage spirit--we have communed
 together.

("Spirit That Form'd This Scene,"
 11. 1-6)

An analogy to his own creations came to him as he meditated, as he says in "Specimen Days":

"I have found the law of my own poems," was the unspoken but more-and more decided feeling that came to me as I pass'd, hour after hour, amid all this grim yet joyous elemental abandon--this plenitude of material, entire absence of art, untrammel'd play of primitive Nature--the chasm, the gorge, the crystal mountain stream, repeated scores, hundreds of miles--the broad handling and absolute uncrampedness--the fantastic forms, bathed in transparent browns, faint reds and grays, towering sometimes a thousand, sometimes two or three thousand feet high--at their tops now

¹Ibid., p. 699.

and then huge masses pois'd, and mixing with the clouds, with only their outlines, hazed in misty lilac, visible. ("In Nature's grandest shows," says an old Dutch writer, an ecclesiastic, "amid the ocean's depth, if so might be, or countless worlds rolling above at night, a man thinks of them, weighs all, not for themselves or the abstract, but with reference to his own personality, and how they may affect him or color his destinies.")¹

A similar analogy occurs in "Spirit That Form'd This Scene":

Mine too such wild arrays, for reasons of their
 own;
 Was't charged against my chants they had forgotten
 art?
 To fuse within themselves its rules precise and
 delicatesse?
 The lyrist's measur'd beat, the wrought-out temple's
 grace--column and polish'd arch forgot?
 (11. 7-10)

As he concludes his poem Whitman expresses his intense desire to be accepted and to be remembered as was the Spirit that formed the canyon scene:

But thou that revelest here--spirit that form'd
 this scene,
 They have remember'd thee.
 (11. 11-12)

Canada

About five months after his return from the west Whitman began his third long trip, which was to take him approximately fourteen hundred miles into Canada. The scene from the point of entry gave him his first experience of sublimity. His five-minute view from the Suspension bridge,

¹Ibid., p. 700.

he says, was "a perfect absorption of Niagara, its superb severity of action and color and majestic grouping, in one short indescribable show."¹ Exalted by the vastness of the falls, the river, the high banks, and the sky overhead, he ranked this sublime scene with his former pictures--"the wild sea-storm I once saw one winter day, off Fire Island--the elder Booth in Richard, that famous night forty years ago in the old Bowery--or Alboni in the children's scene in Norma--or night-views, I remember, on the field, after battles in Virginia--or the peculiar sentiment of moonlight and stars over the great Plains, western Kansas--or scooting up New York bay, with a stiff breeze and a good yacht, off Navesink."² Reliving this experience more than once in his poems he communicates a feeling of deep awe each time he mentions the mighty Niagara:

Far from the clank of crowds intervals
 passing rapt and happy,
 Aware of the fresh free giver the flowing
 Missouri, aware of the mighty Niagara.
 ("Starting from Paumanok," ll. 8-9)

All of Canada fascinated the poet. He was elated not only with nature--the sunsets, the skies, the blossoms, the swallows, and the robins--but also with the very air which he breathed. In his "Diary in Canada" he writes,

¹Allen, The Solitary Singer, p. 489.

²Kouwenhoven, p. 718.

It is only here in larger portions of Canada that wondrous second wind, the Indian summer, attains its amplitude and heavenly perfection,--the temperature; the sunny haze; the mellow, rich, delicate almost flavored aid:

"Enough to live--enough to merely be."¹

As he sailed up the mighty St. Lawrence, he must have been almost overwhelmed by the sublime experience. He could not find words in his remarkable vocabulary to describe adequately his impressions of the river, as blank spaces in an entry in his diary indicate:

The waters, the lakes, and the indescribable grandeur and of the St. Lawrence are the beauty of Canada through this vast line of two thousand miles and over. In its peculiar advantages, sanities, and charms, I doubt whether the globe for democratic purposes has its equal.

A grand, sane, temperate land, the amplest and most beautiful and stream of water,--a river and necklace of vast lakes, pure, sweet, eligible, supplied by the chemistry of millions of square miles of gushing springs and melted snows.²

So enamoured was he with the Thousand Islands in the river near Kingston that he spent five days there, absorbing the sights, the beauty of which he says calmed his soul:

The beauty of the spot all through the day, the sunlit waters, the fanning breeze, the rocky and cedar-bronzed islets, the larger islands with fields and farms, the white-winged yachts and shooting row-boats, and over all the blue arching copious--make a sane, calm, eternal picture, to eyes, senses, and my soul.³

¹(Boston: Small, Maynard and Company, 1904), p. 2.

²Ibid., pp. 40-41.

³Ibid., p. 24.

Whitman communicates sublimity to his readers in "A Song of Joys":

O boating on the rivers,
 The voyage down the St. Lawrence, the superb
 scenery, the steamers,
 The ships sailing, the Thousand Islands, the
 occasional timber-raft and the raftsmen
 with long-reaching sweep-oars,
 The little huts on the rafts, and the stream
 of smoke when they cook supper at evening.
 (11. 55-58)

The Northern lights, which the poet says he saw every night as he sailed up the Saguenay River and at Ha Ha Bay, impressed him with their indescribable beauty.¹ He is exalted as, in memory, he sees them again.

Rich as a sunset on the Norway coast, the sky,
 the islands, and the cliffs,
 Or midnight's silent glowing northern lights
 unreachable.
 ("A Riddle Song," 11. 33-34)

Whitman's experiences as he steamed up the St. Lawrence and the Saguenay Rivers lingered in his memory. In "Specimen Days" he remarks that the "Savage Saguenay," with its high rocky hills for banks, is different from all other rivers. He was amazed at the "indescribably weird echoes" which he heard when the escape pipe of the boat was letting off steam or when the pilot blew the whistle. Feeling sure that what he had heard was a band at the hotel up in the

¹Ibid., p. 30.

rocks, he fancied that he could even make out some of the tunes. The two capes Eternity and Trinity stirred him more profoundly than anything of the kind he had ever seen, and he felt quite sure that if Europe or Asia had them, we would have heard of them in all sorts of poems and rhapsodies, and probably a dozen times a year through newspapers and magazines.¹ The poet recaptures his experiences of sublimity years later as he sits on a seaside mountain at the lower entrance of New York Bay:

Steaming the northern rapids--(an old St. Lawrence
 reminiscence,
 A sudden memory-flash comes back, I know not why,
 Here waiting for the sunrise, gazing from this
 hill;)*
 Again 'tis just at morning--a heavy haze contends
 with daybreak,
 Again the trembling, laboring vessel veers me--I
 press through foam--dash'd rocks that almost
 touch me,
 Again I mark where aft the small thin Indian
 helmsman
 Looms in the mist, with brow elate and governing
 hand.

("The Pilot in the Mist")

He is so successful in communicating sublimity that the reader, too, sits by his side at Navesink and sees the sunrise from the hill, the heavy haze at daybreak, the vessel as it presses through the narrow rock ledges, and the small thin Indian at the helm. Suddenly there comes a feeling of rapture as the reader remembers the great Pilot who guides man

¹Kouwenhoven, pp. 722-723.

over life's tempestuous seas, over unknown waves and over dangerous shoals. The poet has not communicated this thought or experience, but, in the words of Gay Wilson Allen, he has exerted an influence on the reader so that the reader, by cooperation with him, has had a religious experience of his own.¹ Whitman intended for this to happen, for he states many times in Leaves of Grass that he merely points the way for the reader to have an experience of his own.² In "Song of Myself" he says,

Not I, not any one else can travel that
 road for you,
 You must travel it for yourself.
 (11. 1200-1201)

Whitman's close observation and his note-taking on his three long trips gave him a knowledge of scenery, of occupations, and of humanity probably unexcelled. They helped him to achieve his purpose of presenting the complete American scene. The reader is exalted as he contemplates the vast array of miniatures of American life which the poet catalogues in "Song of Myself," "Song of Occupations," and other poems--the country that Whitman saw as a nation of happy people, singing as they worked:

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
 Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should
 be blithe and strong,

¹Allen, Walt Whitman Handbook, p. 378.

²Miller, p. 91.

The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank
 or beam,
 The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or
 leaves off work,
 The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat,
 the deck-hand singing on the steamboat deck,
 The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the
 hatter singing as he stands,
 The wood-cutter's song, the ploughboy's on his way
 in the morning, or at noon intermission or at
 sundown,
 The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young
 wife at work, or of the girl sewing or washing,
 Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none
 else,
 The day what belongs to the day--at night the party
 of young fellows, robust, friendly,
 Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.
 ("I Hear America Singing")

In "Song at Sunset," expressing his admiration for and
 his contentment with all America, Whitman communicates to his
 reader a greater appreciation of his native land. The reader,
 reminded of his own travels in America--steaming down the
 Mississippi, wandering over the prairies, roaming the streets
 of cities and the paths of the countryside--feels again the
 excitement and the pleasure he has himself experienced as a
 traveller and joins with the poet in his adoration of the
 western world:

As I steam'd down the Mississippi,
 As I wander'd over the prairies,
 As I have lived, as I have look'd through my windows
 my eyes,
 As I went forth in the morning, as I beheld the
 light breaking in the east,
 As I bathed on the beach of the Eastern Sea, and
 again on the beach of Western Sea,
 As I roam'd the streets of inland Chicago, whatever
 streets I have roam'd,

Or cities or silent woods, or even amid the sights
of war,
Wherever I have been I have charged myself with
contentment and triumph.

I sing to the last equalities modern or old,
I sing the endless finalés of things,
I say Nature continues, glory continues,
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.

O setting sun! though the time has come,
I still warble under you, if none else does,
unmitigated adoration.

(ll. 45-60)

Some thirty years later, old, alone, and sick,
Whitman addressed the "cool-freshing," "gently vitalizing"
breeze which entered his window and door bringing back to him
memories of the vast scenes of his journeys:

Ah, whispering, something again, unseen,
Where late this heated day thou enterest at my
window, door,
Thou, laving, tempering all, cool-freshing, gently
vitalizing
Me, old, alone, sick, weak-down, melted-worn with
sweat;
Thou, nestling, folding close and firm yet soft,
companion better than talk, book, art;
(Thou hast, O Nature! elements! utterance to my
heart beyond the rest--and this is of them,)
So sweet thy primitive taste to breathe within--
thy soothing fingers on my face and hands,
Thou, messenger-magical strange bringer to body and
spirit of me,
(Distances balk'd--occult medicines penetrating me
from head to foot,)
I feel the sky, the prairie vast--I feel the mighty
northern lakes,
I feel the ocean and the forest--somehow I feel the
globe itself swift-swimming in space;
Thou blown from lips so loved, now gone--haply from
endless store, God-sent.
("To the Sunset Breeze," ll. 8-12)

Thus memories of the sky, the vast prairies, the mighty northern lakes, the ocean, and the forest still had the power to move the poet to ecstasy.

Traveling over America Whitman never ceased to wonder at the usual--the grass, flowers, trees, and birds--but it was the extraordinary which remained with him longer. Approximately seventeen hundred years ago Longinus said that Nature

. . . from the first breathed into our hearts an unconquerable passion for whatever is great and more divine than ourselves. Thus within the scope of human enterprise there lie such powers of contemplation and thought that even the whole universe cannot satisfy them, but our ideas often pass beyond the limits that enring us. Look at life from all sides and see how in all things the extraordinary, the great, the beautiful stand supreme, and you will soon realize the object of our creation. So it is by some natural instinct that we admire, surely not the small streams, clear and useful as they are, but the Nile, the Danube, the Rhine, and far above all, the sea.¹

Whitman admired, not "the Nile, the Danube, the Rhine," but the Missouri, the Mississippi, the St. Lawrence, and "far above all, the sea." Inspired by the extraordinary experiences of his travels he had such great powers of contemplation and thought that even the whole universe could not satisfy them. The journey over America became a journey of the soul into eternity.

¹"On the Sublime," The Loeb Classical Library, ed. T. E. Page, E. Capps, and W. H. D. House (Cambridge: University Press, 1939), pp. 226-227.

CHAPTER III

WHITMAN'S IMAGINARY OR MYSTICAL EXPERIENCES

Many of the passages in Leaves of Grass pose a problem for the critic who is attempting to differentiate between experiences which are real and those which are imaginary or mystical. In some instances Whitman may have fused the two. The imaginary experiences, so real to the poet, move him emotionally as intensely as do those of real life. He is exalted by both voices and visions.

Voices

Sharing in the long tradition of inspired poets, Whitman speaks of hearing voices--the voice of a phantom, a muse, a bird, a voyager, a seer, or the ghost of a dead poet. Each suggests to him, in speech or in song, some of his great themes. As he is meditating on his poems, for example, he is accosted by a phantom, who suggests to him the theme of war:

As I ponder'd in silence,
Returning upon my poems, considering, lingering
long,
A Phantom arose before me with distrustful aspect,
Terrible in beauty, age, and power,
The genius of poets of old lands,
As to me directing like flame its eyes,
With finger pointing to many immortal songs,
And menacing voice, What singest thou? it said,
Know'st thou not there is but one theme for ever-
enduring bards?

And that is the theme of War, the fortune of
battles,
The making of perfect soldiers.

("As I Ponder'd in Silence," ll. 1-11)

He shares with his readers his elation as he replies to the phantom that he too sings of war but of a longer and greater one than any, a war fought on a vast battle field--the world--and waged

For life and death, for the Body and for the
eternal Soul,
Lo, I too am come, chanting the chant of battles,
I above all promote brave soldiers.
 (ll. 16-18)

While sitting by "blue Ontario's shore," and meditating on the warlike days and the return of peace, he is again accosted by a phantom, "gigantic superb, with stern visage," who asks him to chant a song "that comes from the soul of America," "a carol of victory," "a march of Libertad," and a song of "the throes of Democracy":

Chant me the poem, it said, that comes from the soul
 of America, chant me the carol of victory,
 And strike up the marches of Libertad, marches
 more powerful yet,
 And sing me before you go the song of the throes
 of Democracy.
 ("By Blue Ontario's Shore," ll. 4-6)

He begins his chant speaking for the nation, a nation who rejects none, accepts all, is powerful and tremendous, but whose work of surpassing all the poets of Europe and Asia still remains to be done.

The immortal poets of Asia and Europe have done
 their work and pass'd to other spheres,
 A work remains, the work of surpassing all they
 have done.

(ll. 49-50)

As the poet listens, he hears the phantom's voice demanding
 bards who alone can fuse the states "into the compact organism
 of a nation." In exaltation he hears the theme of democracy
 suggested:

For the great Idea, the idea of perfect and free
 individuals,
 For that, the bard walks in advance, leader of
 leaders,
 The attitude of him cheers up slaves and horrifies
 foreign despots.

Without extinction is Liberty, without retrograde
 is Equality,
 They live in the feelings of young men and the
 best women,
 (Not for nothing have the indomitable heads of the
 earth been always ready to fall for Liberty.)
 For the great Idea,
 That, O my brethren, that is the mission of poets.
 (ll. 155-162)

Hearing the qualifications of the bard specified, Whitman
 considers his own qualities and accomplishments and concludes
 that he is the one for the task. He begins to see the
 meaning of things:

I swear I begin to see the meaning of these things,
 It is not the earth, it is not America who is so
 great,
 It is I who am great or to be great, it is You up
 there, or any one,
 It is to walk rapidly through civilizations,
 governments, theories,
 Through poems, pageants, shows, to form individuals.

Underneath all, individuals,
 I swear nothing is good to me now that ignores
 individuals,
 The American compact is altogether with individuals,
 The whole theory of the universe is directed un-
 erringly to one single individual--namely to
 You.

(11. 251-260)

His soul is uplifted as his theme comes to him:

I thrill'd with the power's pulsations, and
 the charm of my theme was upon me.
 (1. 319)

In "Over the Carnage Rose Prophetic a Voice," the
 voice asserts that military might cannot solve the problems
 of freedom in America, that it may win the war, but it cannot
 guarantee Liberty and Equality or draw the states into closer
 union:¹

(Were you looking to be held together by lawyers?
 Or by an agreement on a paper? or by arms?
 Nay, nor the world, nor any living thing, will
 so cohere.)

(11. 20-23)

It declares that only the brotherhood of man can preserve
 Liberty and guarantee Equality.

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 yet make Columbia victorious.
 Sons of the Mother of All, you shall yet be
 victorious

¹Allen, The Solitary Singer, p. 339.

You shall yet laugh to scorn the attacks of all the
remainder of the earth.

The dependence of Liberty shall be lovers,
The continuance of Equality shall be comrades.
(ll. 1-6, 16-17)

Whitman yearns for the unity of the land which has been divided
by the war:

These shall tie you and band you stronger than hoops
of iron,
I, ecstatic, O partners! O lands! with the love of
lovers tie you.
(ll. 18-19)

Sometimes the voice in the "Leaves" is that of the
muse who comes to America to aid in fusing the creations of
the past with those of a new land:

After all not to create only, or found only,
But to bring perhaps from afar what is already
founded,
To give it our own identity, average, limitless,
free,
To fill the gross the torpid bulk with vital
religious fire,
Not to repel or destroy so much as accept,
fuse, rehabilitate.
("Song of the Exposition," ll. 4-8)

Invited to leave the old world and to come to America where "a
better, fresher, busier sphere, a wide, domain awaits," the
muse leaves Virgil, Dante, Charlemagne, King Arthur, and a
host of others behind and migrates to America. Whitman pleads
with her to throw away the old themes of war, of romance, and
of love verses and to accept far greater themes:

To you ye reverent sane sisters,
 I raise a voice for far superber themes for poets
 and for art,
 To exalt the present and the real,
 To teach the average man the glory of his daily
 walk and trade.

(ll. 137-140)

The poet becomes exhilarated as he enumerates and presents to the muse the many assets of our great democratic nation and the health and the happiness in the country which shapes the soul for eternal life:

I say I bring thee Muse today and here,
 Whatever forms the average, strong, complete, sweet-
 blooded man or woman, the perfect longeve
 personality,
 And helps it present life to health and happiness,
 and shapes its soul,
 For the eternal real life to come.

(ll. 150, 157-159)

The reader, living in an age when communism is struggling to control the world, cannot fail to become emotionally involved as he contemplates the poet's reminder of his great American heritage. It is with gratitude that he chants with the poet,

Think not our chant, our show, merely for products
 gross or lucre--it is for thee, the soul in
 thee, electric, spiritual!
 Our farms, inventions, crops, we own in thee! cities
 and States in thee!
 Our freedom all in thee! our very lives in thee!

(ll. 221-229)

In "Song of the Universal" Whitman again encounters the muse who gives to him the theme of immortality. The reader is

exalted as he joins the poet in his prayer for a greater faith
in God's plan for the universe and for universal salvation:

Give me O God to sing that thought,
Give me, give him or her I love this quenchless
faith
In Thy ensemble, whatever else withheld withhold
not from us,
Belief in plan of Thee enclosed in Time and Space,
Health, peace, salvation universal.
(ll. 57-61)

While reliving one of his favorite childhood experiences, the poet is inspired by voices. He wanders alone down to the beach and throws himself upon the sand, confronting the waves. There he lies, quietly listening to the voices of the two "feather'd guests" from Alabama.

. . . a curious boy, never too close, never
disturbing them,
Cautiously peering, absorbing, translating.
("Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking,"
ll. 30-31)

The boy is thrilled with the love songs of the two happy birds as they bask together in the sunshine:

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 night come black,
Home, or rivers and mountains from home,
Singing all time, minding no time,
While we two keep together.
(ll. 32-40)

Suddenly the she-bird leaves the nest and "maybe kill'd" never returns. All summer long, at intervals, the boy listens to the lone bird singing his sad songs of longing for his mate.

Blow! blow! blow!
Blow up sea-winds along Paumanok's shore;
I wait and I wait till you blow my mate to me.

Yes, when the stars glisten'd,
All night long on the prong of a moss-scallop'd
stake,
Down almost amid the slapping waves,
Sat the lone singer wonderful causing tears.
(11. 55-58)

As the bird's songs echo through the mind of the poet, who was and is the boy, he becomes ecstatic. Thousands of songs begin to warble within him, never to die.

The boy ecstatic, with his bare feet the waves,
 with his hair the atmosphere dallying,
 The love in the heart long pent, now loose, now at
 last tumultuously bursting,
 The aria's meaning, the ears, the soul, swiftly
 depositing
 The strange tears down the cheeks coursing,
 And already a thousand singers, a thousand songs,
 clearer, louder and more sorrowful than yours;
 A thousand warbling echoes have started to life
 within me, never to die.
 (11. 136-139, 148-149)

Identifying himself with the bird he promises never to cease
perpetuating him but to take as his theme that of "unsatisfied
love":¹

¹Miller, p. 99.

O you singer solitary, singing by yourself,
 projecting me
 O solitary me listening, never more shall I
 cease perpetuating you,
 Never more shall I escape, never more the re-
 verberations,
 Never more the cries of unsatisfied love be
 absent from me.

(ll. 150-153)

Although he has received much from the bird he asks for more.

He pleads for a clew:

O give me the clew! (it lurks in the night here
 somewhere,)
 O if I am to have so much, let me have more.

(ll. 159-160)

The sea creeps steadily closer and utters the word, "death."

Hissing melodious, neither like the bird nor
 like any arous'd child's heart,
 But edging near as privately for me rustling
 at my feet,
 Creeping thence steadily up to my ears and
 laving me softly all over,
 Death, death, death, death, death.

(ll. 170-173)

He does not forget; he fuses the song of the bird with his
 "own songs awaked from that hour" and "with them the key, the
 word up from the waves."¹

Which I do not forget,
 But fuse the song of my dusky demon and brother,
 That he sang to me in the moonlight on Paumanok's
 gray beach,
 With the thousand responsive songs at random,
 My own songs awaked from that hour,

¹Ibid.

And with them the key, the word up from the waves,
 The word of the sweetest song and all songs,
 That strong and delicious word which, creeping
 to my feet,
 (Or like some old crone rocking the cradle, swathed
 in sweet garments, bending aside,)
 The sea whisper'd me.

(ll. 174-184)

The reader shares Whitman's experience of sublimity as the true meaning of the poet's song enters his soul and he realizes that what the poet is indicating is that the word "death" whispered by the sea is the key to eternal life.¹

Voices in "In Cabin'd Ships at Sea" indicate the theme of the poem. The voyagers, as they consider Whitman's "reminiscences of the land," reveal that they feel "the undulating deck beneath" their feet, "the long pulsation," "the ebb and flow of endless motion," "the tones of unseen mystery," "the vague and vast suggestions of the briny world," "the liquid-flowing syllables," and "the boundless vista and the horizon far and dim," and they assert, therefore, that this is ocean's poem.² The boundless vista and horizon dim imply that it is a voyage into eternity. The reader shares Whitman's exaltation as he perceives the mariners sailing the seas as souls voyaging through life.³

In "Eidólons" the poet meets a seer who tells him to chant of eidólons--"the dim beginning," "the growth," "the

¹Ibid., p. 100.

²Ibid., pp. 117-118.

³Gay Wilson Allen, "Preface," Leaves of Grass ("A Signet Classic"; New York: The New American Library, 1962), p. x.

rounding of the circle," "the summit and the merge at last,
 (to surely start again.)" Surely, Whitman experiences sub-
 limity as he contemplates the vast scope of the theme sug-
 gested by the seer, that of today's eidólons joining with
 those of the past.

The present now and here
 America's busy, teeming, intricate whirl,
 An aggregate, and segregate for only thence
 releasing,
 Today's eidólons.

These with the past,
 Of vanish'd lands, of all the reigns of kings
 across the sea,
 Old conquerors, old campaigns, old sailors' voyages,
 Joining eidólons.

(11. 33-40)

The poet communicates his sense of the sublime to the reader
 when he suggests that while we seem to be building wealth,
 strength, and beauty, we are really building our spiritual
 beings. All our toils--thoughts, emotions and deeds--are
 summed up to form our eidólons:

Lo, I, or you,
 Or woman, man, or state, known or unknown,
 We seeming solid wealth, strength, beauty build,
 But really build eidólons.

The ostent evanescent,
 The substance of an artist's mood or sava'n's studies
 long,
 Of warrior's, martyr's, hero's toils,
 To fashion his eidólón.

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 eidólón.

(11. 17-28)

"the body permanent," "the real I myself," "an image," "an eidólon"--at last prepared to meet its mates, eidólons.

In "The Mystic Trumpeter" the poet, "listening alert," catches the strange notes, "now pouring, whirling like a tempest," "now low, subdued, now in the distance lost." The music of the ghost, which he thinks may be that of some dead composer reaches the ears of none other, but it is freely given to him that he may translate. The emotion which he experiences as he listens is a feeling of perfect serenity and contentment:

A holy calm descends like dew upon me,
A walk in cool refreshing night the walks of
Paradise,
I scent the grass, the moist air and the roses;
Thy song expands my numb'd imbonded spirit,
thou freest, launchest me,
Floating and basking upon heaven's lake.
(11. 16-20)

The charm of the music takes him back to the feudal world, to the Crusades, to the knights in search of the holy Graal. He is so moved by it that he thinks he is the instrument that the trumpeter plays:

O trumpeter, methinks I am myself the instrument
thou playest,
Thou melt'st my heart, my brain--thou movest,
drawest, changest them at will;
And now thy sullen notes send darkness through me,
Thou takest away all cheering light, all hope,
I see the enslaved, the overthrown, the hurt, the
oppress'd of the whole earth,
I feel the measureless shame and humiliation of
my race, it becomes all mine,

Mine too the revenges of humanity, the wrongs of
 ages, baffled feuds and hatreds,
 Utter defeat upon me weighs--all lost--the
 foe victorious,
 (Yet 'mid the ruins Pride colossal stands unshaken
 to the last,
 Endurance, resolution to the last.)
 (ll. 50-59)

In Section 5 he asks the trumpeter to take for his theme "brotherhood" and in Section 6 the theme of "wars alarums." He asks him for his "close" to sing a higher strain, to sing to his soul and renew his faith and hope and to give to him a vision of the future. He ends with an emotion of great joy in the ecstasy of life, joy "to merely be" and "to breathe" and joy in freedom, in worship, and in love. But he is proclaiming a universal freedom, freedom from war, sorrow and suffering, with the whole world purged and nothing but joy left.¹

O glad, exulting, culminating song!
 A vigor more than earth's is in thy notes,
 Marches of victory--man disenthral'd--the conqueror
 at last,
 Hymns to the universal God from universal man--all
 joy!
 A reborn race appears--a perfect world, all joy!
 Women and men in wisdom innocence and health--all joy!
 Riotous laughing bacchanals fill'd with joy!
 War, sorrow, suffering gone--the rank earth purged--
 nothing but joy left!
 The ocean fill'd with joy--the atmosphere all joy!
 Joy! joy! in freedom, worship, love! joy in the
 ecstasy of life!

¹Bartholow V. Crawford, Alexander C. Kern, and
 Morriss H. Needleman, American Literature (New York: Barnes
 and Noble, Inc., 1961), p. 136.

Enough to merely be! enough to breathe!
 Joy! joy! all over joy!

(ll. 65-76)

Visions or Mystical Experiences

Readers disagree as to whether some of Whitman's poems are mystical experiences or merely products of his imagination. It is not my purpose to attempt to distinguish between the two; my search is for the experiences of sublimity in "Proud Music of the Storm," "Whispers of Heavenly Death," "The Sleepers," "I Dream'd in a Dream," "Song of Myself," and "Years of the Modern." In the dream-vision "Proud Music of the Storm" the poet becomes spiritually exalted as, when the winds whistle across the prairies, through the forest tree tops, and over the mountains, he hears great orchestral sounds. "Bending with nature's rhythmus all the tongues of nations," filling the midnight late and entering his slumber-chamber, they bend him powerless. Then the poet asks his soul to listen because the singing and the dancing are for his soul:

Come forward O my soul, and let the rest retire,
 Listen, lose not, it is toward thee they tend,
 Parting the midnight, entering my slumber-chamber,
 For thee they sing and dance O soul.

(ll. 14-17)

A Divine conductor signals, Nature responds, and all sounds become music. The great procession of sights and sounds, antique and medieval airs, the folk songs of all nations, the voices of the great opera singers, the Hindu flutes, the

Egyptian harps, the sacred music of the children in the cathedrals, the hymns of China move the poet to ecstasy, and in his trance he prays to the muse to fill him with the voices of the universe:¹

Give me to hold all sounds, (I madly struggling cry,)
 Fill me with all the voices of the universe.
 Endow me with their throbbings, Nature's also,
 The tempests, waters, winds, operas and chants,
 marches and dances,
 Utter, pour in, for I would take them all.
 (11. 138-142)

The poet wakes; and after questioning the music and all the reminiscences of his dream, he tells his soul to go forth "refresh'd amid the day," for he has found the clew he has sought so long. He reminds his soul that what she heard was not the sound of the wind, a dream of raging storm, the flapping of the hawk's wings, music of Italy or Germany, marching soldiers, or the bugle calls of camps, but poems bridging the way from Life to Death. Elated with the sublime theme of his dream, he tells his soul to go forth and write:

And I said, moreover,
 Haply what thou hast heard O soul was not the sound
 of winds,
 Nor dream of raging storm, nor sea-hawk's flapping
 wings nor harsh scream,
 Nor vocalism of sun-bright Italy,
 Nor German organ majestic, nor vast concourse of
 voices, nor layers of harmonies,
 Nor strophes of husbands and wives, nor sound of
 marching soldiers,
 Nor flutes, nor harps, nor the bugle-calls of camps,

¹Allen, The Solitary Singer, p. 410.

But to a new rhythmus fitted for thee,
Poems bridging the way from Life to Death, vaguely
wafted in the night air, uncaught, unwritten,
Which let us go forth in the bold day and write.
(ll. 155-164)

This new theme--the passage from Life to Death--emerges in "Darest Thou Now O Soul." The poet dares his soul to walk with him toward the unknown region with "no map," "no guide," and "no touch of human hand" to the region where "all waits undream'd of," "that inaccessible land." The poet becomes ecstatic as he looks ahead to the time when the cord binding the soul will be broken.

Till when the ties loosen,
All but the ties eternal, Time and Space,
Nor darkness, gravitation, sense, nor any bounds
 bounding us.

Then we burst forth, we float,
In Time and Space O soul, prepared for them,
Equal, equipt at last, (O joy! O fruit of all!)
 them to fulfill O Soul.
 (11. 10-15)

In "The Sleepers" the poet is exalted as he wanders
over the earth:

I wander all night in my vision,
Stepping with light feet, swiftly and noiselessly
 stepping and stopping,
Bending with open eyes over the shut eyes of sleepers,
Wandering and confused, lost to myself, ill-assorted,
 contradictory,
Pausing, gazing, bending, and stopping.
 (11. 1-5)

He presents a vast collection of images which he obtains in his wanderings. In these dream visions he himself becomes a

series of things and people:¹

I am a dance--play up there! the fit is whirling
me fast!

I am the actor, the actress, the voter, the politician,
The imigrant and the exile, the criminal that stood
in the box,

A shroud I see and I am the shroud, I wrap a body
and lie in the coffin.

(ll. 32, 42-44, 68)

The images next become a series of disaster scenes.² He sees the shipwreck, the beautiful swimmer borne away a corpse, General Washington in defeat at Brooklyn and his farewell to his men. The reader has a sense of the sublime when the poet asserts that night and sleep have averaged all:

The stammerer, the sick, the perfect-form'd, the
homely

The criminal that stood in the box, the judge that
sat and sentenced him, the fluent lawyers,
the jury, the audience,

I swear they are averaged now--one is no better
than the other.

The night and sleep have liken'd them and restored
them.

(ll. 137-138, 142-143)

He realizes that the poet is using sleep to symbolize death.³ He has a deep feeling of awe and gratitude as he too believes that at death the body will be restored:

¹Miller, p. 107.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 108.

. . . the insane becomes sane, the suffering
 of sick persons is reliev'd.
 The sweatings and fevers stop, the throat that was
 unsound is sound, the lungs of the consumptive
 are resumed, the poor distressed head is free,
 The joints of the rheumatic move as smoothly as
 ever, and smoother than ever.
 (ll. 173-175)

His emotional involvement deepens as he listens to Whitman's
 chant:

I too pass from the night
 I stay awhile away O night, but I return again to
 you and love you.
 Why should I be afraid to trust myself to you?
 (ll. 179-181)

Whitman's dream of the great city--"the new city of
 friends"--was another sublime experience. In this city,
 which was invincible to the attacks of all the rest of the
 earth, nothing was greater than the love of man for his
 fellowman. This brotherhood was manifested every hour of
 the day in both the actions and the words of the citizens.
 In these times, when there is so much strife in the world
 and so little consideration for human life, the reader shares
 the poet's experience of sublimity as he thinks of that
 great city.

Possibly one of Whitman's greatest experiences of
 sublimity is in "Song of Myself." Many critics agree that
 the poem is some kind of mysticism.¹ Miller even outlines
 the structure in terms of the traditional mystic experience,

¹Ibid., p. 93.

from the entry into, to the emergence from, the mystical state. Other critics however believe that it is no more than a fantasy creation. Certainly all can agree that the poet's visions in his cosmic flight are experiences of sublimity. The poet indicates that his vision transcends space and time.¹ Undoubtedly he experiences ecstasy of motion as he speeds over continents:

Space and Time! now I see it is true what I guessed
at,

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

(ll. 710, 714-716)

He begins with his vast catalogue of the scenes of cities, farms, occupations, customs, and pastimes of all the nations. He walks the old hills of Judaea with "the beautiful gentle God." He identifies himself with the hounded slave, the skipper of the ship-wrecked vessel, the old artillerist, the fireman buried under debris, and finally with the Christ. He is exalted as he views the scenes of all ages and of all places and as he identifies himself with all people. His exaltation becomes more intense as he feels a sense of union with God, brotherhood with men and women, and sympathy with all living things:²

¹Ibid., p. 5.

²Allen, The Solitary Singer, p. 159.

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 the promise 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.
 (ll. 91-98)

The reader has his greatest experience of sublimity
 as he becomes aware that the poet's speeding through time and
 space is the journey of the soul through life and that at the
 end of that journey the Lord will be there.

My rendezvous is appointed, it is certain,
 The Lord will be there and wait till I come on
 perfect terms,
 The great Camarado, the lover true for whom I
 pine will be there.
 (ll. 1187-1190)

Whitman communicates a feeling of deepest awe when he says
 that the end of the journey is not death but eternal life
 and happiness:

Do you see O my brothers and sisters?
 It is not chaos or death--it is form, union, plan--
 it is eternal life--it is Happiness.
 (ll. 1317-1318)

An apocalyptic vision in "Years of the Modern" excites
 the poet tremendously. He prophesies both the break up of the
 old aristocracies and the rise of America to a great world

power. He marvels at modern man as he contemplates his great achievements and inventions.¹

Never was average man, his soul, more energetic,
 more like a God,
 Lo, how he urges and urges, leaving the masses
 no rest!
 His daring foot is on land and sea everywhere,
 he colonizes the Pacific, the archipelagoes,
 With the steamship, the electric telegraph, the
 newspaper, the wholesale engines of war,
 With these and the world-spreading factories he
 interlinks all geography, all lands.
 (11. 15-19)

He has a great faith in the future and feels an uplift of the soul as he visions a future where there is freedom for all:

I see Freedom, completely arm'd and victorious and
 very haughty, with Law on one side and Peace
 on the other.
 (1. 7)

The themes--equality, freedom, unity, brotherhood, and immortality--suggested to the poet by the voices and the visions still comprise the ideals and the hopes of mankind. They are in accordance with sublimity.

¹Gay Wilson Allen, "Walt Whitman and Stefan George," review of H. Pongs' "Walt Whitman und Stefan George," published in Comparative Literature, IV (Fall, 1952), 289-322, Walt Whitman Foundation Bulletin, VI (April, 1953), 5-7.

CHAPTER IV

WHITMAN'S ALLUSIONS

That which is truly sublime, says Longinus, must give to the reader more food for thought than the mere words at first suggest.¹ Allusions in Whitman arouse in others great thoughts which go far beyond the words uttered by the poet. This, in fact, was Whitman's avowed purpose--to lead all who travel with him to have sublime experiences of their own.

Not I, nor anyone else can travel that road for you,
you must travel it for yourself.
("Song of Myself," ll. 1200-1201)

How far the reader travels--how intensely he uses his imagination--often depends on his ability to comprehend both the specific and the complex allusions to the Bible, the operas, and the classics which Whitman has so abundantly woven into his poetry.

Biblical Allusions

In Leaves of Grass Biblical allusions are more numerous than all others. Gay Wilson Allen has observed that

¹"On the Sublime," The Loeb Classical Library, ed. T. E. Page, E. Capps, and W. H. D. Rouse (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939), p. 139.

nearly three times as many specific references appeared in Whitman's early writings as in his later poetry and prose. He says this is not evidence that the influence of the Bible on Whitman had lessened but that, as his mind matured, the influence had become deeper. The Bible came to provide ideals which were reflected in Whitman's poetry but which are not so easily identified. Of the specific and the general Biblical allusions which Allen found in Leaves of Grass,¹ I shall discuss those conducive to sublimity, but to these I shall add others that I have found in Whitman's poems. Thus, I shall present not all the allusions but only those, both specific and complex, which lead the reader into the realm of the sublime arousing feelings of grandeur: Biblical allusions to God or the Lord, to Christ, to man, to events, to parables, to nature, and to places.

In the awe-inspiring allusions to the Lord or to God, Whitman perceives the unlimited power of God demonstrated by "the still small voice," by his predetermined plan for his universe, by his role as comforter, and by his control over the elements of nature. In the allusion to the voice of the Lord, Whitman says:

If I should need to name, O Western World, your
powerfulest scene and show,
'Twould not be you, Niagara--nor you, ye limit-
less prairies--nor your huge rifts of
canyons, Colorado,

¹"Biblical Echoes in Whitman's Works," American Literature, VI (November, 1934), 302-315.

Nor you, Yosemite--nor Yellowstone, with all its
 spasmic geyser loops ascending to the skies,
 appearing and disappearing,
 Nor Oregon's white cones--nor Huron's belt of
 mighty lakes--nor Mississippi's stream,
 --This seething hemisphere's humanity, as now,
 I'd name--the still small voice vibrating--
 America's choosing day,
 ("Election Day, November, 1884,"
 11. 1-5)

the mighty scenes of the Western World roll before the reader who recognizes as more powerful than all "the still small voice vibrating." As he contemplates the scene, he recalls the account of the Lord's appearance to Elijah on Mount Horeb:

And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake:

And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.
 (I Kings 19:11-12)

The reader hears the strong wind, feels the tremor of the earth, and sees the fire. He is inspired with reverence at the manifestation of the power of God, but he recalls that God had not made himself known in these but in a still small voice. Thus the reader is struck with sublime awe as he experiences this aspect of the presence of the Lord.

Whitman, probably influenced by the Calvinistic theology which he heard preached in his boyhood,¹ has used

¹Allen, The Solitary Singer, pp. 19-20.

several references to God's purpose or His predetermined plan.

My three-score years of life summ'd up, and more,
 and past,
 By any grand ideal tried, intentionless, the whole
 a nothing,
 And haply yet some drop within God's scheme's
 ensemble--some wave, or part of wave,
 Like one of yours, ye multitudinous ocean.
 ("By That Long Scan of Waves," ll. 6-9)

Give me O God to sing that thought,
 Give me, give him or her I love this quenchless faith
 In Thy ensemble, whatever else withheld withhold not
 from us,
 Belief in plan of Thee enclosed in Time and Space,
 Health, peace, salvation universal.
 ("Song of the Universal," ll. 57-60)

Lo, soul, seest thou not God's purpose from
 the first?
 ("Passage to India," l. 31)

These three passages are allusions to a part of Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus: "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Ephesians 1:11). The reader experiences an elevation of the soul as he considers the reference to God's plan for His universe, for each individual, and for salvation universal. Another passage alludes to the predetermined plan of God:

My rendezvous is appointed, it is certain,
 The Lord will be there and wait till I come
 on perfect terms.
 ("Song of Myself," ll. 1188-1190)

These lines echo the words of the writer of the book of Job (7:1): "Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth?"

are not his days also like the days of an hireling?" Whitman is contemplating limitless space and time and finding consolation in the thought that his life is not in the hands of fate but in the hands of an all-powerful God and that the Lord has appointed the time that he will remain upon this earth. He has confidence in the assurance that the Lord will be waiting for him to come and that with Him he will continue his journey through all eternity. Through his allusion he shares his exaltation with his reader.

Allusions to the promise of God's peace and comfort almost always produce an elevation of the soul. Whitman's faith in God's promise, which is the dominant note in Leaves of Grass, finds expression in

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 the promise
of my own.

("Song of Myself," ll. 91-92)

This passage closely resembles Paul's words which have been a comfort to Christians throughout the ages, "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7). With reverential awe, the reader meditates on the words of Paul.

An allusion to God's power, which is beyond all comprehension, is implied in "I will cling fast to Thee, O God, though the waves buffet me" ("Prayer of Columbus," l. 54).

His revelation of his implicit faith in the power of God is probably a reference to two Biblical passages: " . . . and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail" (Jeremiah 5:22), and "The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea" (Psalms 93:4). The reader, impressed by the great power of the Lord on high--mightier than the mighty waves of the sea--experiences an intense elevation of the spirit.

The reader's feeling of sublimity, inspired by the poet's allusions to God, has its source in unlimited power, in extreme littleness, in the contrast of vastness and smallness, and in infinity.

Whitman's allusions to Christ are to His relationship to man, His eating of the Last Supper, His Crucifixion, and His Resurrection. In addition to making these direct references, the poet, in his role as the Christ, alludes to words spoken by Christ.

Christ as the brother of all appears in three passages. Whitman sees him in the face of the young soldier:

. . . --I think this face is the face of
 Christ himself,
 Dead and divine and brother of all, and here
 again he lies.
 ("A Sight in Camp," ll. 14-15)

He sees him as the "brother of rejected persons--brother of slaves, felons, idiots, and of insane and diseas'd persons"

("Think of the Soul," l. 12), and as the "Elder Brother" waiting to greet him when his soul has crossed life's seas:

Reckoning ahead O soul, when thou, the time
 achiev'd,
 The seas all cross'd, weather'd the capes,
 the voyage done,
 Surrounded, copest, frontest God, yieldest,
 the aim attain'd,
 As fill'd with friendship, love, complete,
 the Elder Brother found,
 The Younger melts in fondness in his arms.
 ("Passage to India," ll. 219-223)

Thus Whitman moves his reader emotionally, alluding to Christ's words, "For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and my mother" (Mark 3:34).

Haunted and inspired by a picture, "The Last Supper," Whitman says, "I see Christ eating the bread of his last supper in the midst of youths and old persons" ("Salut au Monde," l. 97), and the reader recalls the account of "The Last Supper" and Christ's words to his disciples, recorded in Mark 14:25: "Verily, I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God." Thus he responds to the sorrow which the disciples must have felt at parting. In his thoughts, the reader goes far beyond the words of the poet. He experiences a feeling of deep awe when he considers that he has the privilege of joining in communion supper with Christ, just as did His disciples nearly two thousand years ago, and that he has Christ's personal invitation to share this Lord's Supper in remembrance of Him.

As Whitman alludes to the crucifixion of Christ he arouses in the reader feelings of awe, amazement, indignation, and horror:

I hear the tale of the divine life and bloody death
 of the beautiful God the Christ.
 ("Salut au Monde," l. 39)

That I could forget the mockers and insults!
 That I could forget the trickling tears and
 the blows of the bludgeons and hammers!
 That I could look with a separate look on my
 own crucifixion and bloody crowning!
 ("Song of Myself," ll. 953-955)

Affected by the allusions to the account of the crucifixion of Christ found in Matthew 27:34-57, the reader experiences horror as he recalls the bloody death, and indignation as he thinks of the mockery, the insults, and the casting of lots for his garments. His thoughts go beyond the words of the poet and he has a feeling of amazement and awe as he remembers that Christ's suffering and death were for all mankind.

No greater awe could be experienced than that produced by the resurrection of Christ. Whitman, as he attempts to comfort the mother who has lost her son, alludes to the event.

For know you the one you mourn is not in that
 grave,
 It was an illusion, the son you love was not
 really dead,
 The Lord is not dead, he is risen again young
 and strong in another country,
 Even while you wept there by your fallen harp
 by the grave,
 What you wept for was translated, pass'd from
 the grave,

The winds favor'd and the sea sail'd it,
 And now with rosy and new blood,
 Moves today in a new country.
 ("Old Ireland," ll. 11-18)

These words have their counterpart in Paul's words to the
 Corinthians:

For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised:
 And if Christ be not raised, your faith is
 vain
 Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are
 perished.
 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are
 of all men most miserable.
 But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become
 the first fruits of them that slept.
 For since by man cometh death, by man came also the
 resurrection of the dead.
 (I Corinthians 15:16-21)

Through such allusions as these to the resurrection and to
 the life everlasting, Whitman moves the reader into a sublime
 experience.

The role that Whitman chose to play was patterned
 after the life of Christ. He assumes it in "To a Common
 Prostitute" as he assures the prostitute:

Not till the sun excludes you do I exclude you,
 Not till the waters refuse to glisten for you
 and the leaves to rustle for you, do my
 words refuse to glisten and rustle for you.
 (ll. 2-3)

Whitman's attitude closely resembles Jesus' attitude toward
 the adulterous woman, whom the Scribes and the Pharisees had
 brought to Him, insisting that the law said that she should
 be stoned. Jesus' reply to them was "He that is without sin

among you, let him first cast a stone at her" (John 8:7).

His words may have aroused in Whitman sympathy for the prostitute, whom Whitman charges thus:

My girl I appoint with you an appointment, and I
 charge you that you make preparation to be
 worthy to meet me,
 And I charge you that you be patient and perfect
 till I come.
 Till then I salute you with a significant look
 that you do not forget me.
 (11. 4-6)

To the mind of the reader come the words of Jesus, "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (John 8:11). The role of Christ is assumed also in the lines:

Who is he that would become my follower?
 The way is suspicious, the result uncertain,
 perhaps destructive,
 You would have to give up all else.
 ("Whoever You Are Holding Me Now
 in Hand," 11. 5, 7-8)

The reader is reminded of the words of Jesus to his disciples, "If any man will come after me let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). Contemplating the allusions to Christ, his relationship to man, his crucifixion, his resurrection, and his attitude toward the prostitute, the reader is moved by his unlimited love for all men.

Whitman's allusions to man are to his creation and to the immortality of his soul. The one which is probably the source of greatest sublimity and which is often found in literature is to the creation of man. Amazement and wonder

fill the mind of the reader as he contemplates with the poet
the miracle of miracles:

My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd
from this soil.
("Song of Myself," l. 6)

This dust was once the man,
Gentle, plain, just and resolute, under
whose cautious hand,
Against the foulest crime in history, known
in any land or age,
Was saved the Union of these States.
("This Dust Was Once the Man")

These two passages allude to several Bible verses, of which
the best known are ". . . they die, and return to their
dust" (Psalms 104:29), and ". . . till thou return unto
the ground, for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art,
and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis 3:19).

As the poet studies the faces which he sees while
walking in the city streets or riding on the country roads,
he is awed by the fact that

These faces bear testimony slumbering or awake,
They show their descent from the Master himself.
("Faces," ll. 55-56)

The reader recalls that God said, "Let us make man in our
image, after our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). Whitman emphasizes
throughout his poems the individual worth of a human being.
He mentions often the "divine body" and the sacredness of the
body, as in the following:

Whoever you are, how superb and how divine
 is your body, or any part of it!
 ("Starting from Paumanok," l. 188)

Divine am I inside and out.
 ("Song of Myself," l. 524)

The man's body is sacred and the woman's
 is sacred
 No matter who it is, it is sacred--is it the
 meanest one in the laborer's gang?
 If any thing is sacred the human body is sacred.
 ("I Sing the Body Electric," ll. 84-85, 124)

The divine woman, her body, I see the body,
 I look on it alone,
 The house once full of passion and beauty,
 all else I notice not,
 That little house alone more than them all--
 poor, desperate house!
 Fair, fearful wreck--tenement of a soul--itself
 a soul.
 ("The City Dead House," ll. 5-6, 12-13)

His idea of the sacredness of the body is probably an allusion to the Biblical verse, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (I Corinthians 3:16).

One of Whitman's great themes is the immortality of the soul. As he stands watching the soldiers returning from the war, his soul whispers to each in the ranks and to his reader, who is a "kindred soul," his solemn thoughts:

O the bullet could never kill what you really
 are, dear friend
 Nor the bayonet stab what you really are;
 The soul! yourself I see, great as any, good
 as the best,

Waiting secure and content, which the bullet
 could never kill,
 Nor the bayonet stab *Ø* friend.
 ("How Solemn As One by One," ll. 7-11)

This allusion, which fills the reader with deepest awe, is a reference to the words found in Matthew 10:28: "And fear not them, which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul." Allusions to man--his creation, the sacredness of his body, and the immortality of his soul--add force to one of Whitman's greatest themes, the long journey of the soul through life and into eternity.

Whitman gives experiences of sublimity to the reader through his allusions to two parables of long journeys--the journeys of the prodigal son and of the master of the house. As he thinks of the many doors with their exits and entrances, he recalls the parable of the prodigal son related in Luke 15: 11-32.

The door whence the son left home confident
 and puff'd up,
 The door he enter'd again from a long and
 scandalous absence, diseas'd, broken down,
 without innocence, without means.
 ("Song of the Broad-Axe," ll. 237-238)

The reader's thoughts go beyond the words of the poet, and as he contemplates the significance of the parable, he recalls not only the prodigal child who left his Father's home but the great love of the Father who stands with open arms to greet him when he returns, miserable and forlorn and ready to say, "Father, I have sinned."

Whitman reveals his faith and hope in his allusion to another of Christ's parables.

Is the house shut? Is the Master away?
 Nevertheless, be ready, be not weary of
 watching,
 He will soon return, his messengers come anon.
 ("Europe," ll. 36-39)

He alludes to that wonderful event to which all Christians look forward with great hope, the second coming of Christ, the account of which is found in Mark 13:34-37.

For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch.
 Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning:
 Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping.
 And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.

Whitman's unshakable faith and his admonition uplift the soul of the reader as he contemplates the return of his Master. He experiences great joy over the return of both of the travelers--the child to his Father and the Master to His watching servants. Thus does the poet's allusion to the nature of man contribute to his experience of sublimity.

In addition to the nature of man Whitman is greatly impressed by the other aspect of nature--the universe. One of the most common elements of the earth, grass, presents an enigma and a fascination for him. His reply to the question, "What is grass?" may well be a Biblical allusion.

Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,
 A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropt,
 Bearing the owner's name someway in the corners,
 that we may see and remark and say "Whose?"
 ("Song of Myself," ll. 102-104)

These lines bring to mind the Bible verses, Acts 19:11-12:

And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul:
 So that from his body were brought unto the sick
 handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them,
 and the evil spirits went out of them.

The handkerchief of Paul was a reminder to all those who witnessed the healings that it was God who wrought the miracles by the hands of Paul. The reader has a deep feeling of awe as he thinks of the grass, God's first creation of life, as a "remembrancer" of the greatest of all miracles, the eternal cycle of life, death and the resurrection.¹ Not only the grass but all nature is a reminder of God--"the whole earth and all the stars in the sky are for religion's sake" ("Starting from Paumanok," l. 106). His statement is probably an allusion to the words of the psalmist:

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.

Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.

(Psalms 19:1-2)

With amazement and awe, the reader contemplates the ways in which God makes himself known to his children.

¹Ibid., p. 154.

Biblical places to which Whitman alludes are Mount Ararat, Mount Moriah, Nineveh, Jerusalem, Babel and hell. Two of these--Mount Ararat and Mount Moriah--are great heights. Whitman mentions "you ascending Mount Ararat" ("Salut au Monde," l. 184). The loftiest peak of this mountain stands three thousand feet above the line of perpetual snow. Elevation is usually awe-inspiring. It is not the only source of sublimity, however, in this instance. The mention of Mount Ararat inspires reverence as one remembers that on this mount the ark rested after the flood and the Lord gave his promise never again to destroy the earth on account of men no matter how evil they may be.¹ It was on one of the hills of Mount Moriah, Abraham prepared to sacrifice Isaac.² The recollection of this event arouses in the reader amazement at Abraham's faith, a faith so strong that he was willing to part with his only son in obedience to God. As the reader recalls the events, he thinks of the intense pain which must have filled Abraham's heart when he received God's command, the fear which must have taken hold of Isaac as he was bound and laid on the altar, and the relief of both when the angel of the Lord appeared. As the reader contemplates the significance of the story, that the Lord also provided the Lamb, his only Son, as an offering for the sins of the world, he feels sublime awe.

¹Genesis 8:4, 21.

²Genesis 22:2.

The allusions to Nineveh and to Jerusalem are to scenes of tragedies. With only a few words, "you peering amid the ruins of Nineveh" ("Salut au Monde," l. 184), and "Jerusalem a handful of ashes blown by the wind, extinct" ("Song of the Exposition," l. 43), Whitman gives to the reader pictures of utter desolation. The reader recalls the prophet's warning that God "will stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria, and will make Nineveh a desolation" (Zephaniah 2:13) and that "Nineveh is laid waste" (Nahum 3:7)

Whitman's allusion to Babel does not present a scene of tragedy but one of frustration. In the following,

From imperfection's murkiest cloud,
Darts always forth one ray of perfect light,
One flash of heaven's glory.

To fashion's, custom's discord,
To the mad Babel-din, the deafening orgies,
("Song of the Universal," ll. 32-36)

his reference is to the events which took place after the building of the tower of Babel.

And the Lord said, Behold the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.

Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth.

(Genesis 11:6-9)

After the "mad Babel-din, the deafening orgies," comes happiness, even ecstasy, as

Soothing each lull a strain is heard, just heard,
From some far shore the final chorus sounding.

O the blest eyes, the happy hearts,
That see, that know the guiding thread so fine,
Along the mighty labyrinth.
("Song of the Universal, ll. 37-41)

The reader experiences sublimity when he thinks of the mad Babel-din as the frustrations of life on earth and of the soothing strain of the final chorus as music from that land beyond.

In two of Whitman's three references to hell--"This film of Satan's seething pit" ("Out From Behind This Mask," l. 7) and "Beyond the flames of hell" ("Chanting the Square Deific," l. 38)--are allusions to Revelation 9:2,

And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.

In the third reference--"The pleasures of heaven are with me and the pains of hell are with me" ("Song of Myself," l. 423)--echoes the psalmist, "and the pains of hell gat hold upon me" (Psalms 116:3). The reader has a sense of the sublime as he recalls that the line which the psalmist wrote occurs in his profession of love to God for deliverance from his troubles and sorrows.

Allusions to Music

"The very essence of a work of art is that it enables us to repeat an experience, to live it over again, to feel again the emotion that the original called forth."¹ As Whitman recalls his favorite musical compositions and operas, he not only feels again the emotions which he experienced originally, but he leads those who travel with him to see and to hear "things more beautiful than words can tell" ("Song of the Open Road," l. 120). Most of the allusions to musical compositions and to operas appear in "Proud Music of the Storm," a dream-vision in which the reader hears, not the sounds of the winds and the raging storms but, through the poet's allusions, the huge organs in the cathedral and the singers voicing their adoration in "Gloria in Excelsis" (Glory to God in the Highest), "Agnus Dei" (O Lamb of God), and "Eine feste Burg ist unser Gott" (A Mighty Fortress is Our God) (ll. 124, 127). In deep sorrow he joins the Virgin Mary at the crucifixion of Jesus as he sings Rossini's "Stabat Mater dolorosa."² In rapture he listens to "The Creation" as Whitman, experiencing a feeling of great happiness and perfect joy, alludes to it in the line "The Creation in billows of godhood laves me" (l. 143).

¹Arthur E. Briggs, Walt Whitman: Thinker and Artist (New York: Philosophical Library, 1952), p. 328.

²"Proud Music of the Storm," l. 125.

Longinus says that "nothing makes so much for grandeur as genuine emotions in the right place."¹ In "Proud Music of the Storm," "The Dead Tenor," and "Italian Music in Dakota" Whitman's allusions to operas evoke intense emotions of anger, anguish, hope, joy, love, pity, sorrow, and terror. The reader experiences terror and horror when the poet alludes to Norma:

Across the stage with pallor on her face,
 yet lurid passion
 Stalks Norma brandishing the dagger in
 her hand.
 ("Proud Music of the Storm," ll. 76-77)

He watches Norma advancing upon her sleeping children. Each step that she takes intensifies his emotion of horror, but his feeling subsides when suddenly Norma, seeing her unsuspecting children, falls upon her knees before them.

In his dream-vision, Whitman hears "Meyerbeer's Huguenots, the Prophet, or Robert" ("Proud Music of the Storm," l. 97). The mere mention of the "Huguenots" and the "Prophet" recalls to the reader's mind the horror of the bloody uprisings among Christians and the massacre of the Protestants by the Catholics, but in the midst of the horror he feels a sense of the sublime as he recalls the old Protestant singing "A Mighty Fortress is Our God."

¹"On the Sublime," p. 143.

Whitman's recollection of the opera "La Favorita" arouses in him a deep sorrow:

From Spanish chestnut trees' dense shade,
 By old and heavy convent walls a wailing song,
 Song of lost love, the torch of youth and life
 quench'd in despair,
 Song of the dying swan, Fernando's heart
 is breaking.
 ("Proud Music of the Storm," ll. 86-89)

Fernando, a novice, leaves the convent when he falls in love with a beautiful girl only to discover later that she is the mistress of the king. Heart broken he returns to the convent to renew his vows. The reader is deeply touched as Whitman's allusion to Fernando recalls to his mind the song of the broken hearted lover:

Spirit so fair, brightly descending,
 Then like a dream all sadly ending,
 Hence from my heart, vision deceiving,
 Phantom of love, grief only leaving,
 In thee delighting, all else scorning,
 A father's warning, my country, my fame!
 Ah, faithless dame, a passion inviting,
 Fair honor blighting, branding my name,
 Grief alone thou leav'st phantom of love!¹

The reader, enchanted by the poet's allusion to

. . . Ernani walking the bridal garden,
 Amid the scent of night-roses, radiant, hold-
 ing his bride by the hand,
 ("Proud Music of the Storm," ll. 80-81)

¹Samuel Holland Rous, The Victrola Book of the Opera (Camden: Victor Talking Machine Company, 1919), p. 131.

experiences one of the strongest emotions--that of terror--when in his imagination he hears the "infernal call, the death-pledge of the horn" (l. 82).

Through Whitman's allusion to Manrico,

The perfect singing voice--
How through those strains distill'd--how
the rapt ears, the soul of me, absorbing
Fernando's heart, Manrico's passionate call,
Ernani's, sweet Gennaro's,
("The Dead Tenor," ll. 6-8)

the reader sees again the troubadour Manrico beneath the window of Lenora and hears his beautiful touching lyric "Amor--sublime Amore." He also experiences the sublime love of Gennaro, the young nobleman, for his unknown mother.

As the reader is reminded by Whitman of the opera "William Tell" ("Proud Music of the Storm," l. 96), he finds himself in the midst of an aroused and angry people, and he too becomes indignant because the village was burned and the fields were devastated.

The allusion to "Lucia di Lammermoor" arouses some feeling of anger because the man Lucia marries has deceived her about her true lover. The reader feels it to be less tragic but more pathetic because although Lucy is mad, she is happy in her madness: she believes that she is with her lover. The tragic pathos of the situation is recalled by Whitman:

I see poor crazed Lucia's eyes' unnatural gleam,
Her hair down her back falls loose.
("Proud Music of the Storm," ll. 78-79)

Another allusion which calls forth the same emotion is that to Faust ("Proud Music of the Storm," l. 98), who sold his soul to Mephistopheles. The reader feels pity for him over the tragedy which befalls him but also sympathy as he is aware of the many enchanting ways in which evil is presented and of how prone human beings are to sell their souls for a few fleeting moments of pleasure.

When Whitman listened to Italian music by the Seventeenth Regimental Band, he heard echoes with "meanings unknown before" of "Norma's anguish" and of "Sonnambula's innocent love." As the reader recalls the two operas, he too feels Norma's anguish over the danger which threatened the man that she loved and experiences the sorrow of the innocent Sleepwalker who was found by her jealous lover in Rodolpho's room at the inn. His sorrow disappears when, in the strains of "Proud Music of the Storm," he hears the innocent Amina¹ and rejoices with her because Elvino, convinced that she is not unfaithful, has returned.

Allusions to History

The old familiar epics of history, in the hands of Whitman, still have the power to produce experiences of sublimity. The poet's allusions to historical characters and events arouse emotions of pride, admiration, horror, indignation, and religious ecstasy.

¹L. 90.

The Texan's heart fills with pride and admiration as he, through Whitman's allusive art, recalls one of the greatest epics of this state or nation.

Now I tell what I know in Texas in my early
 youth,
 (I tell not the fall of Alamo,
 Not one escaped to tell the fall of Alamo,
 The hundred and fifty are dumb yet at Alamo.
 ("Song of Myself," ll. 871-875)

The mention of the Alamo, known throughout the world as a symbol of courage, carries the reader to great heights as he pictures that small band of heroic men who gave their lives for the freedom of others.

Whitman does more than merely allude to the massacre of the four hundred and twelve young men in Texas. Although he does not give the name of the location, of the battle, or of the colonel, as he adds line after line each contributing to the intensity of sublimity, the reader easily recognizes the story of the massacre at Goliad. The tale of the valor of Colonel James Fannin and his men as they struggled for freedom and security at the Battle of Coleta stirs the admiration of all Americans, but especially of Texans. This feeling quickly subsides and is replaced by an experience of horror as the poet continues the story of the inhuman butchery at Goliad.

The second First-day morning they were brought
 out in squads and massacred, it was a
 beautiful early summer,
 The work commenced about five o'clock and was
 over by eight.

None obeyed the command to kneel,
Some made a mad and helpless rush, some stood
stark and straight,

A youth not seventeen years old seiz'd his
assassin till two more came to release him,
The three were all torn and cover'd with the
boy's blood.

At eleven o'clock began the burning of the bodies;
That is the tale of the murder of the four
hundred and twelve young men.

("Song of Myself," ll. 885-896)

The feeling turns to rage and indignation when the reader recalls that although many Mexicans opposed the execution, Santa Anna thus broke the accepted rules of war which forbade the shooting of prisoners.

The reader's feelings of pride and admiration are again stirred as he contemplates the valor of that little band of men ambushed by the Indians in "Far Dakota's Canons."

The battle-bulletin,
The Indian ambushade, the craft, the fatal
environment,
The cavalry companies fighting to the last in
sternest heroism,
In the midst of their little circle, with their
slaughter'd horses for breastworks,
The fall of Custer and all his officers and men.
("From Far Dakota's Canons," ll. 4-8)

Whitman's emotions were aroused when he first viewed a painting of "Custer's Last Rally" by John Mulvany. He sat for over an hour completely absorbed.¹ In Leaves of Grass

¹Kouwenhoven, p. 746.

he recaptures and expresses in words his sensations as he contemplated the scene of the frontiersmen, soldiers, and Indians, sketched in the "Dakota Canons." The poet's use of short phrases, each with increasing force gives to the reader a sense of the sublime.

Whitman experiences more than pride and admiration when he recalls the battles fought for the freedom of America. Both the poet and the reader feel General Washington's hurt and sorrow as he sees the slaughter of his men:

The General watch'd them from this hill,
They made repeated desperate attempts to
 burst their environment,
Then drew close together, very compact, their
 flag flying in the middle,
But O from the hills how the cannon were thinning
 and thinning them!

It sickens me yet, that slaughter!
I saw the moisture gather in drops on the
 face of the General.
I saw how he wrung his hands in anguish.
 ("The Centenarian's Story," ll. 60-66)

The reader's exaltation is intensified as his vision enlarges to include the soldiers of all wars.

As Whitman thinks of the great achievements of his time he reminds himself that the present is but a "growth out of the past." The reader steps back with him into history and experiences the aspirations or hopes of the great adventurers--Vasco da Gama, Marco Polo, and Columbus--as they sail forth to seek new routes to other countries. He is exalted as he thinks of the daring adventures of these pioneers.

When Whitman is old, poor, and paralyzed and feels his end near he has one of his greatest experiences of sublimity. As he contemplates the adventures of Columbus he identifies himself with the great explorer.

A batter'd wreck'd old man
 Thrown on this savage shore, far, far from home,

 My terminus near,
 The clouds already closing in upon me,
 The voyage balk'd, the course disputed, lost,
 I yield my ships to Thee.
 ("Prayer of Columbus," ll. 1-2, 47-50)

His religious ecstasy is revealed in the last stanza when he gets a glimpse of the life beyond:

And these things I see suddenly, what mean they?
 As if some miracle, some hand divine unseal'd
 my eyes,
 Shadowy vast shapes smile through the air and
 sky,
 And on the distant waves sail countless ships,
 And anthems in new tongues I hear saluting me.
 ("Prayer of Columbus," ll. 62-66)

The reader is exalted as he considers the ecstasy of Columbus when he sees the distant shore and of the poet when he glimpses the unknown shores.

Allusions to Places

Among the places Whitman alludes to are "the Seven Wonders of the World" ("Passage to India," l. 4) which, he says, the achievements of the present, the modern wonders outvie, and "Parnassus" ("Song of the Exposition," l. 18).

As the reader recalls "the antique ponderous Seven,"¹ he revels in the beauty of the hanging gardens of Babylon and the temple of Diana at Ephesus, and marvels at such monumental accomplishments as the pyramids of Egypt, the Pharos of Alexandria, the statue of Jupiter at Athens, the Colossus of Rhodes, and the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus.²

Allusions to Parnassus are quite frequent in literature, probably because it is the home of Apollo, the muses, and the nymphs and therefore the source of inspiration for music and poetry. Awe-inspiring is the view of this snow capped mountain.

Allusions to Mythology

Whitman's numerous allusions to mythology contribute to the reader's sense of sublimity in proportion to the reader's acquaintance with the deeds of the great heroes which undoubtedly produced in him a sense of exaltation. The reader experiences admiration as he recalls the great strength of Hercules, the brilliance of Hermes, the beauty of Venus, the tremendous power of Jupiter, Zeus, Cronus and Saturn, the bravery and cruelty of Achilles, the bravery of Ajax and Hector, and the sufferings of Ulysses or Odysseus.

¹"Seven Wonders of the World," New Standard Encyclopedia (1929), IX.

²"Parnassus," New Standard Encyclopedia (1929), VIII.

Allusions--to the Bible, music, history, places, and mythology--arouse in the reader the intense emotions which Whitman himself felt and which he so yearned to impart. The poet's sublimity experienced as he roamed America in his travels and in his imagination had its sources in the earth, in the heavens, and in man, in life and death, vastness, heights, great speeds, infinity, power, love, and identification with people and things--all of which Burke lists as conducive to sublimity. Traveling with Whitman, the reader has a sense of the sublime as he shares the poet's great happiness, his deep sadness, his great love for all mankind, and his unwavering faith in people, in God, and in immortality.¹

¹Edmund Burke, "The Sublime and Beautiful," Harvard Classics, ed. Charles W. Eliot, XXIV (New York: The Collier Press, 1909), 20-50.

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