

**The Daguerreotype as Analogy for Whitman's Leaves of Grass**

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**Department of English**

**Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, Ontario**

**In partial fulfillment**

**of the requirements for the**

**degree of Master of Arts**

**by**

**David Antilla ©**

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**Canada**

**Dedication**

to my two sons

Benjamin and Jason

who in the words of Whitman

"afford me, as long as I live, inimitable pictures"

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## Abstract

We commence our examination of the kaleidoscopic range of connections between Whitman and the daguerreotype with a simple, unpretentious news column by Whitman entitled "Visit to Plumbe's Gallery". This leads to speculations of how Whitman could not have missed or ignored the profound infusion of the daguerreotype upon nineteenth century American society.

In the next chapter we witness Whitman's fascination with his own photographic portraits. We also see the revolutionary stagecraft that was employed in his portraits, and how there seems to be a chronological record of transitions from a Brooklyn journalist, to a proletariat "rough", and then to an enlightened sage.

The two chapters that come next examines how Whitman's emphasis on sight and seeing in Leaves of Grass corresponds with key elements in photography, and how the monistic philosophy of Whitman as it relates to the body and the soul is analogous to the direct positive process of early daguerreotypes.

Next we are reminded of Whitman's enthusiasm for scientific advancements, and how the advent of photography seemed to fit

the grid of the poet's mind perfectly. In addition we discern a kinship between Whitman's democratic leaning and the popularity of photography - how both Leaves of Grass and the art of the daguerreotype were "of the people, by the people, for the people".

The final chapter culminates with an examination of the ways in which Whitman's prosodical achievements resemble the techniques in photography. His poetic practice of piling line upon line in catalogue stacks bears an uncanny likeness to individual snapshots.

Thus this thesis aims to observe Leaves of Grass from a new angle and through a new lens. Hopefully we can gain a little understanding of the genesis of the dozen poems that comprised the thin quarto of 1855.

## Acknowledgements

In the course of completing this project I have incurred numerous debts I take fond pleasure in acknowledging.

The creative kernel of this thesis first descended upon me in 1989 by the medium of what Emerson called "primal warblings". The idea was then worked out in a term essay in an American Poetry graduate class directed by Dr. Claude Liman. To him I extend many thanks for encouraging me to consider expanding the essay into a full master's dissertation. And when this project was complete Dr. Liman gave my work the benefit of his critical eye. His review and report showed both the sensitivity and astuteness of a refined poet/professor. It was Dr. Liman who taught me that:

My words are words of a questioning, and to indicate reality;  
this printed and bound book....but the printer and the printing-  
office boy?  
The marriage estate and settlement....but the body and mind of  
the bridegroom? also those of the bride?  
The panorama of the sea....but the sea itself?  
The well-taken photographs....but your wife or friend close and  
solid in your arms ("Song of Myself" 1082-1086)?

And for this I am deeply grateful.

I also take great pleasure in acknowledging the assistance of Dr. William Heath, for his keen interest in the theme of my thesis and his generous sharing with me his scholarship in Whitman. I profited greatly from our regular coffee-time chats respecting the



progress and preparation of my thesis. Dr. Heath's helpful comments, his encouragements, and his good humour, not only won my deep respect for him as a professor but also a friend. Indeed it was Dr. Heath who presented me with a collection of Leaves of Grass some six years ago, thus sparking my initial zeal for Whitman. And it was he who taught me:

These are the thoughts of all men in all ages and lands, they  
are not original with me,  
If they are not yours as much as mine they are nothing or next  
to nothing,  
If they do not enclose everything they are next to nothing,  
If they are not the riddle and the untying of the riddle they  
are nothing,  
If they are not just as close as they are distant they are  
nothing ("Song of Myself" 353-357).

For this I unhesitantly express my full appreciation.

I am grateful too for those who have helped me to see, think, and write more clearly - professors of English at Lakehead University past and present, fellow students enrolled in graduate English studies, and friends in the community.

It remains to thank my family for their fortitude, support and tolerance during the long months required to complete this work. My wife, Betty, stood by the project from the beginning; indeed she helped bring this thesis to fruition. It was Betty who taught me:

To tell the secret of my nights and days,  
To celebrate the need of comrades ("In Paths Untrodden" 17-18).

Thank you very much.

## Introduction

I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere, for such a start. I rubbed my eyes a little, to see if this sunbeam were no illusion; but the solid sense of the book is a sober certainty. It has the best merits, namely, of fortifying and encouraging.<sup>1</sup>

Thus Emerson expresses praise and wonder at the slim quarto of 1855.

And still today we wonder with Emerson. Still today we marvel how such writing could be born full-grown. Still today we must grapple with the invisible stuff that represents the "long foreground somewhere".

Who planted the seeds of Leaves of Grass? From what poetic stock did Whitman emerge? Can any probable influence be given for the eccentric structure and "barbaric yawps" in Whitman's verse - yawps which so immediately and indelibly jolted the generation of 1855? It often seems that Leaves of Grass arrived without an antecedent embryonic stage - that it was suddenly and always "masculine, full-grown and golden". Indeed Whitman himself is chiefly responsible for concocting the aura of mystery that drapes the origins of his poems.

As one follows the writings of Whitman, one soon notices that seldom does he offer any clues or hints, and never does he present us with a tangible map or blueprint of how and where he found his treasure.

It is as if he cunningly constructed a conspiracy of silence in order to heighten the intrinsic uniqueness of Leaves of Grass. We witness his unabashed opinion respecting the rarity of his own writings in the poem "Shut Not Your Doors". Addressing the "proud libraries" he says: "For that which was lacking on all your well-fill'd shelves, yet needed most, I bring"(2). And a few lines further he smudges the fingerprints which might be used to link him with other authors, as if in order to appear more original: "A book separate, not link'd with the rest nor felt by the intellect"(5).

But in the poem "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now In Hand", Whitman explicitly discourages any investigation into the genesis of his poems:

For these leaves and me you will not understand,  
 They will elude you at first and still more afterward, I will  
 certainly elude you.  
 Even while you should think you had unquestionably caught me,  
 behold!  
 Already you see I have escaped from you (27-31).

Our human curiosity urges us not to be fooled by the illusion of smoke and mirrors. Indeed these lines work in a kind of "reverse-psychology".

Whitman's oracular conviction that he cannot be found out arouses us all the more to seize the challenge, stab through the veil, and discover the causes for and influences upon Whitman's stylistic traits. By making an inquiry into the "long foreground somewhere", a firmer grip of the consequence follows.

In the celebrated text American Renaissance F.O. Matthiessen

explores three analogies to Whitman's poetry: opera, oratory, and the ocean.<sup>2</sup> The acoustical significance of these analogies is especially noted by Matthiessen. He alleges with reasoned clarity that the three influences had profoundly molded the mind of the poet as well as the rhythmic sense in Leaves of Grass. Matthiessen's insights must be applauded. However, he would be the first to admit that a simple triad of analogies could barely pierce the veil of a poet who was a "Kosmos" and "contained multitudes". Thus we shall focus our lens on a fourth analogy for Whitman's poetical works.

When we think of literary bench-mark years, the dates 1611 ("King James Version" of the Bible), 1623 ("First Folio" of Shakespeare's work), 1798 (Lyrical Ballads), and 1922 ("The Waste Land" and Ulysses) spring immediately to mind. And the year 1855 should also be included as a pivotal turning-point in literature - for it was in that year that a slim green-covered tract entitled Leaves of Grass was first published. The appearance of this book of twelve poems signaled a deep, lasting, revolutionary protest against prevailing literary tastes. 1855 was also the year in which James McClees, a Philadelphia daguerreotypist published an essay entitled "Elements of Photography."<sup>3</sup> In this work McClees defined and decisively christened the name "photography" for that magical process of image reproduction which, over the previous sixteen years, had already proved to be a deep, lasting, revolutionary development in the visual arts field.

But the yoking together of picture-taking and poem-making based only on the strength of a common revolutionary nature is not enough to develop a rounded analogy. A true analogy does not make nebulous connections. Any perceived resemblance must be cemented to a tangible foundation at the outset. We can seek such a foundation in Whitman's own experiences. When and where and to what extent was Whitman exposed to the daguerreotype invention? Was Whitman truly interested in this new technology of lens and chemical? Research into his early experience as a printer, editor and journalist for the Brooklyn Eagle, as well as a detailed discussion of his enduring personal romance for posing before the camera, will illustrate how Whitman could not have been unaffected by the daguerreotype phenomenon.

Our proposed correspondence between Whitman and the daguerreotype revolution will then focus on philosophical affinities. Did the new lens-gazing and shutter-snapping medium define the "seeing" and "perceiving" awareness which seems so omnipresent in Whitman's poetry? Could the technical ways of framing photographs - "vantage-point" and "focal-distance" - affect the ways in which Whitman frames his "pictures" in Leaves of Grass? Could the visual effects of the daguerreotyped image be compared in any way to the body and soul, and themes of good and evil which Whitman expresses with profound conviction? Are there any plausible links between the daguerreotypal process and Whitman's identification of himself with the common man? It is hoped that the possibility of such

links might be elevated to probabilities, as a result of our study of Whitman's scientific and democratic temperament. The discussion will then turn to the ways in which this revolution in graphic art superimposed a stylistic stamp on Leaves of Grass. Did an awareness of the technical methods and achievements of photography affect the prosodical experiments in Whitman's works? Insights to such questions will be attempted by studying specific concrete examples in both the 1855 edition of Leaves of Grass, as well as the final "Death Bed" edition.

One may react with initial umbrage to any attempt to yoke Whitman with the daguerreotypal process. Not only does daguerreotype not begin cleverly with an "O", unless we involve the term "optics" in our analogy, it also fails to reflect the Coleridgean idea of organicism which expresses so well the very texture of Whitman's work. Such criticism is valid. The production of a daguerreotype is essentially mechanical and even mindless. There is a necessary interference between the viewer and the object viewed. The French poet Charles Baudelaire expressed this very concern as early as 1859:

During this lamentable period, a new industry arose which contributed not a little to confirm stupidity in its faith and to ruin whatever might remain of the divine in the French mind.<sup>4</sup>

Thus we find ourselves encountering limitations to our thesis before the fact. (Perhaps it would be helpful to willingly suspend any prejudice that we may have toward photography, remembering that its role here is merely

as an analogy. And every analogy, every system of correspondence must at some point fragment.)<sup>5</sup>

It is our hope that the evidence will build towards a credible resemblance between Daguerre's invention and Whitman's creation; that our fourth analogy of "optics" can endure a sustained study; that in the end we might de-mystify the "long foreground somewhere". With that behind us we can now load our camera, focus the lens, and shoot.

## Introduction

### Notes

1. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Stephen E. Whicher (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960), p. 362.

2. F.O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance, (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1980), pp. 549-577.

3. Alan Trachtenberg, Reading American Photographs, (U.S.A.: Hill and Wang, 1989), p. 3.

4. B. Newhall, Photography: Essays and Images, (New York: Rapoport Printing Corp., 1980), p. 112.

5. Robert Frost, "Education by Poetry" Robert Frost, Poetry and Prose, ed. Edward Connery Lathem (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), p. 334.



## Chapter 1 - A Portrait of the "long foreground somewhere"

The year 1855 is to American poetry what the year 1776 is to American politics. Both the cargo of tea that was heaved into the Boston harbor and the twelve poems that comprised the slim quarto entitled Leaves of Grass signaled, in their respective areas, a decisive and permanent break with the past and an optimistic reaching forth to things to come. Whitman proclaimed that America's poetic revolution ought not to derive from old European models - no similes, no hollow rhymes, no dry-dust images. "Poems distilled from other poems", says Whitman in his 1855 Preface, "will probably pass away". Instead the new species of poetry must be fresh, alive, democratic, springing directly from the collective American soul.

Just as the arrival of Leaves of Grass represented a full frontal assault upon nineteenth-century literary standards, so the daguerreotype assaulted the artistic standards of the day. The ancient dream of Zeuxis (at whose painted grape clusters the birds pecked) and the repeat of that dream by all painters since his generation was now virtually fulfilled by the marvel of photography. And like the 1855 quarto, the daguerreotype seemed to appear suddenly, Adamic, and "full-grown", as if out of a "null and void", without a traceable lineage. In 1838 black and white photography did not exist. In 1839 it did exist. The early news accounts capture the immediate marvel of the silver plate

picture-making process.

The first to break the news was La Gazette de France (Paris) on January 6, 1839.

We announce an important discovery by our famous diorama painter, M. Daguerre. This discovery partakes of the prodigious. It upsets all scientific theories on light and optics, and it will revolutionize the art of drawing.<sup>1</sup>

In that same year the daguerreotype prodigy was introduced and demonstrated in New York City by Daguerre's own agents. For the next three decades this method of picture-taking had a profound impact in Europe and America. Storefront studios appeared in major cities and itinerant daguerreotypists carried the popularity of the new medium to remote areas. All sorts of people, from slaves to presidents, posed motionless in front of the camera for the required one to three minutes.

Distinguished writers too were intrigued by the "chemical-paintings". In Europe the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer exclaimed: "Photography...offers the most complete satisfaction of our curiosity".<sup>2</sup> In 1854 Soren Kierkegaard observed:

With the daguerreotype everyone will be able to have their portrait taken - formerly it was only the prominent; and at the same time everything is being done to make us all look exactly the same - so that we shall only need one portrait.<sup>3</sup>

Just four years after the birth of photography, Elizabeth Barrett confessed in a letter addressed to Mary Russell Mitford that she "would rather have such a memorial of one I dearly loved, than the noblest

artist's work ever produced."<sup>4</sup> The reaction in America to Daguerre's invention was a reprint of the European zeal. Less than a year after its first demonstration in the New World, Edgar Allan Poe scrutinized this novel method of image making:

For, in truth, the Daguerreotypic plate is infinitely (we use the term advisedly) is infinitely more accurate in its representation than any painting by human hands. If we examine a work of ordinary art, by means of a powerful microscope, all traces of resemblance to nature will disappear - but the closest scrutiny of the photogenic drawing discloses only a more absolute truth, a more perfect identity of aspect with the thing represented. The variations of shade, and the graduation of both linear and aerial perspective are those of truth itself in the supremeness of its perfection.<sup>5</sup>

Poe's criticism is keen. The history of photography did not involve an evolution of image accuracy. The daguerreotypes of 1839 were comparable in clarity of detail to most cameras of the twentieth century.

Other writers too were aware of the new art medium. Margaret Fuller mentions in a 1844 letter addressed to Anna Loring that she had visited an exhibition of daguerreotypes in Boston.<sup>6</sup> Referring to the experience of sitting in front of a portrait camera, Ralph Waldo Emerson observed that "the artist stands and lets you paint yourself". Undivided co-operation is required, otherwise "if you make an ill head, not he but yourself are responsible".<sup>7</sup>

Commenting on the authentic nature of photography Emerson states:

No man quarrels with his shadow, nor will he with his miniature when the Sun was the painter. Here is no interference and the distortions are not the blunders of an artist, but only those of motion, imperfect light, and the like.<sup>8</sup>

And then there is Holgrave the daguerreotypist-hero of Hawthorne's great

Gothic romance The House of the Seven Gables (1851). Through the characterization of Holgrave, Hawthorne reveals an astute grasp of the daguerrean craft.' For example, aspiring photographers during the 1840's had the same kind of frustrated success rate as Holgrave as he repeatedly attempts to create a suitable portrait of Judge Pyncheon. Techniques in studio optics and lighting were still in the trial-and-error stage.

Whitman was no isolationist. As a cosmopolitan man-of-the streets and man-of-the-people he certainly witnessed the rise and rapid proliferation of this technological wonder, as did the preceding collection of contemporary authors. Indeed his connection with a string of newspapers and journals throughout the 1840's would have afforded Whitman a front-seat view of the massive influence that the daguerreotype had in news gathering and reporting. In the 1855 version of "A Song for Occupations", Whitman draws our attention to "The cylinder press..the handpress..the frisket and tympan..the compositor's stick and rule", and then immediately following, "The implements for daguerreotyping", as if by means of association the mention of the press trade prompted the mention of the allied trade of picture-taking.

Actually, Whitman's news publishing résumé would stretch back as far as 1831 when, as a boy of twelve years, he received instructions as a type-setter and compositor by a veteran Brooklyn printer, William Hartshorne.<sup>9</sup> But it was in 1839 that Whitman's career as an editor

commenced - working for the weekly newspaper the Long Islander. This was the year when the long wick that sizzled toward the explosive charge of 1855 was lit. The sixteen-year "long foreground somewhere", as Emerson called it, had commenced coincidentally in the same year that photography was born.

As a professional newsman "Whitman knew more instability than most editors. By September 1845, when he moved back to Brooklyn (from Manhattan), he had worked for about ten different papers".<sup>10</sup> Their names follow in the long "grocery list" style that characterize his Leaves of Grass - Tattler, Sunday Times, Statesman, Plebeian, Sun, Democrat, and New Mirror. His editorial jottings during these years, although more competent and conviction-driven than his early verse, are nevertheless conventional and hackneyed. His topic range included music, local New York history, books, fashions, and politics. But these prose pieces reveal scant promise for the making of the messianic poet most anxiously prophesied by Emerson in the essay "The Poet".

The "promise" was not cultivated in newspaper writing but in the streets of New York and Brooklyn. The same insatiable curiosity for novelty which propels a good newsman propelled Whitman. One visualizes Whitman - husky, bearded, sporting a broad brimmed hat and trousers tucked in boots - brushing shoulders in sidewalk crowds, moving in an unhurried gait, impressing the topography of New York City and the topography of passing faces onto his brain.

Like Thoreau (and even Wordsworth) Whitman was a walker. But Whitman was an urban saunterer; his library was the expressions in the crowded streets, or on the ferries, or of the laborers active in their trades. In this respect his temperament runs counter to Thoreau's which is expressed in his essay "Walking": "When we walk, we naturally go to the fields and woods: what would become of us if we walked only in a garden or a mall?"<sup>11</sup>

Yet one senses that Whitman's walks were not deliberate direct jaunts from point A to point B. Instead he walked block after block - absorbing the pulse and throb and flow of passing pedestrians, carts, and steamers - as if his habit of walking should match the long sprawl of lines in Leaves of Grass. (Indeed, Basil De Selincourt in his essay "The Form: Constructive Principles" from Walt Whitman, A Critical Study advances a convincing analogy to walking in Whitman's poetic style: "Each line hangs by a loop from the line before it. The motion is like the motion of walking; we continually catch up our foremost foot and take a half step beyond").<sup>12</sup> If Whitman were truly a native son of New York City and if Whitman were truly:

...curious, gay - going up and down Mannahatta, through the streets, along the shores, working his way through the crowds, observant and singing ("Pictures"54).

If Whitman truly observed:

Leatherdressing, coachmaking, boilermaking, ropetwisting, distilling, signpainting, limeburning, coopering, cottonpicking.  
The walkingbeam of the steam-engine...the throttle and governors,  
and the up and down rods ("A Song for Occupations" 145-146),

then with certainty he would have noticed the overnight phenomenon of the click and clatter of apertures in street-side daguerrean studios; for it was estimated by the New York Daily Tribune in 1853 that in that year three million daguerreotypes were produced. In fact there were more than one hundred portrait studios in New York City alone.<sup>13</sup>

Among the most noted daguerrean studios were Matthew Brady's at Tenth Street and Broadway in the heart of Manhattan, and John Plumb's, also situated on lower Broadway. As one who kept abreast of the urban pulse, Whitman was acquainted with both galleries. In a February 1846 issue of the Evening Star, he offers the following recommendation:

Idling along, some stop at the lower corner of Fulton street to look at Gent Morris's good natured countenance, daguerreotyped by Brady, who has his rooms there. By the bye, Mr.B. is a capital artist, and deserves every encouragement. His pictures possess a peculiar life-likeness and air of resemblance not often found in works of this sort.- His portraits of several well known characters at the corner always attract attention. I commend him to your Brooklyn gentry.<sup>14</sup>

Here Whitman divulges a critical familiarity with the new art genre. He suggests that Brady's images capture and express an "air of resemblance"- a quality that Whitman has found wanting in the photographs of most daguerreotypists.

For two years (1846 to 1848) Whitman edited the Daily Eagle, one of the prominent newspapers of Brooklyn. The day after Independence Day 1846, he published a lengthy column in that paper entitled "Visit to Plumbe's Gallery". He describes his tour of the establishment as follows:

Nor is it unworthy of notice, that the building is fitted up by him [Plumbe] in many ranges of rooms, each with a daguerrean operator; and not merely as one single room, with one operator, like other places have. The greatest emulation is excited; and persons or parties having portraits taken, retain exclusive possession of one room, during the time.<sup>15</sup>

The studio seems to have been a sort of blueprint for the modern twentieth century photography studio. His fascination with Plumbe's presentation of faces seems genuine.

What a spectacle! In whatever direction you turn your peering gaze, you see naught but human faces! There they stretch, from floor to ceiling - hundreds of them. Ah! What tales might those pictures tell if their mute lips had the power of speech!<sup>16</sup>

What ensues is a testimony of Whitman's own reaction to the display of daguerreotypes - a testimony that offers important clues to the way the "long foreground somewhere" had evolved. Whitman's response to the pictures themselves is threefold. First, he is overwhelmed by the size and scope of the gallery itself, the sheer numbers of human faces that populate the walls, and the crowds that are "continually coming and going" to spectate and savor the exhibition.

We could spend days in that collection, and find enough enjoyment in the thousand human histories, involved in those daguerreotypes.<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps Whitman had imagined "the United States themselves are essentially the greatest" daguerrean gallery.

Second, Whitman recognizes the juxtaposition of the low and the great as something unique, pleasant, and right. Just as he would later sketch in "Song of Myself" the president who "holds a cabinet council...



surrounded by the great secretaries", directly following an image of a harlot who "draggles her shawl, her bonnet...on her tipsy and pimpled neck", so he observes in Plumbe's picture gallery an anonymous photograph of a "handsome female, apparently in the bridal dress" sharing wall space with "the bald head of John Quincy Adams".

Whitman's third response to Plumbe's art show was the visual "life-look" of each of the faces. His appreciation of the photographs anticipates the following declaration in the Preface to the 1855 Leaves of Grass.

Men and women and the earth and all upon it are simply to be taken as they are, the investigation of their past and present and future shall be unintermitted and shall be done with perfect candor.<sup>18</sup>

Every mole, every crease, every string of hair was reproduced in Plumbe's photographs with a brutal honesty - without the idealization found in oil paintings. "An electric chain seems to vibrate, as it were, between our brain and him or her preserved there so well by the limner's cunning."<sup>19</sup>

One common fabric connected Whitman's threefold response to the daguerreotypes in Plumbe's gallery - one common fabric which wove a vast flag of democracy. Americanness declared itself in every aspect. Rushing through the compositions of these photographic images was Whitman's own Manifest Destiny. Never had an art medium fit America so well. The daguerreotype was democratic in its equalization of subjects; it was democratic in its mass appeal; it was democratic in its stark realism.

How could poetry learn from photography? How could poetry acquire the democratic feel of photography? Was there some way to express the flesh and blood of plain Americans just as photography had? Surely these questions simmered in Whitman's mind. Simmered as he "passed through a populous city". Simmered as he imprinted his "brain for future use with its shows, architecture, customs, traditions". Simmered until the poem "Pictures" boiled into being. In this poem, which likely dates back to as early as 1847 to 1849, Whitman's mind began to develop a proto-sepia of a New World poetic which culminated in the Leaves of Grass project of 1855.

Although it was never included in Leaves of Grass, and although the flow of lines seems provisional and clumsy and lacking the maturity of the 1855 collection, "Pictures" is nevertheless critical to our understanding of Whitman's evolving technique. Whitman explicitly invites us to recognize in this poem the kinship between photography and his structurally experimental poetry.

The poem begins with Whitman as curator of his own imaginary daguerrean gallery.

In a little house I keep, many pictures  
 hanging suspended - It is not a fixed house,  
 It is round - it is but a few inches from one side of it to  
 the other side,  
 But behold! it has room enough - in it, hundreds and thousands,-  
 all the varieties (1-3):

The long hours that Whitman spent browsing through the galleries like Plumbe's now become emblematic of the way the memory and imagination summon forth streams of images of people into one's consciousness.

These portraits include those whom Whitman knew:

This is the portrait of my dear Mother - and this of my Father -  
and these of my brothers and sisters (7).

and,

... here mechanics work in their shops, in towns - There the  
carpenter shoves his jack-plane - there the blacksmith  
stands by his anvil, leaning on his upright hammer (77);

and,

... there, tall and slender, stands Ralph Waldo Emerson, of  
New England, at the lecturer's desk lecturing (105),

as well as portraits whom Whitman wished to have met:

And here the divine Christ expounds eternal truth - expounds  
the soul (20),

and,

... here, the questioner, the Athenian of the classical time -  
Socrates, in the market place (23),

The list that ensues includes no less than one hundred and six separate portraits that hang side by side in long rows within Whitman's mental gallery. The sheer variety of portraits and the equalness prescribed to each reveals the extent to which John Plumbe's studio exerted an influence upon the fledgling poet.

Indeed, just as Whitman reported seeing a self-portrait of Plumbe hanging in Plumbe's own establishment, so Whitman sandwiches four of his own portraits between the myriad images in "Pictures". Included in these self-portraits is the "celebrated rough":

And here my Oregon hunting-hut, See me emerging from the door,  
bearing my rifle in my hand (72):

Such self-portraits pre-figure the large egotistical energy that characterizes Leaves of Grass.

It is important to note that in many of the sketches that pass our vision in "Pictures", Whitman is not successful. They move like fumbling proto-types to Leaves of Grass. But at times the rooting of images seems to foreshadow his mature efforts. The following two lines exhibit a competent rendering of the particular:

This is Chicago with railroad depots, with trains arriving  
and departing - and, in their places, immense stores of grain,  
meat, and lumber:  
And here are my slave-gangs, South, at work upon the roads,  
the women indifferently with the men - see, how clumsy, hideous,  
black, pouting, grinning, sly, besotted, sensual, shameless (73-74);

In such pictures Whitman reproduces like decals the direct "cash-value" (as William James would say) experience. He fastens his words to physical things. He strips objects naked as if he had squinted through a camera lens. Such images are no ethereal apparitions. They are not mere words for word's sake. Instead these lines anticipate the way his images connect and vibrate with the blood, sweat and toil of America in his 1855 Leaves of Grass.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of "Pictures" is the employment of the catalogue method. This poem likely represents Whitman's earliest experiment at this sort of writing - something which would eventually develop into his own quintessential stylistic trait. Most certainly it was his most sustained pre-1855 effort. The succession of rapid fire pictures seems to simulate not the slow careful brushwork of the landscape painter,

but the quick clicks of the camera shutter. Clearly Whitman had the daguerreotype in mind when he conceived both the contents and the prosody of his "Pictures" poem.

"Pictures" was eventually levied with the same kind of wholesale authorial pruning (some might say amputation) that "In a Station of the Metro" and "Poetry" received by the editorial scissors of Ezra Pound and Marianne Moore respectively. Shed from the poem proper were one hundred and twenty lines. The remaining scant residue of six lines was reprinted decades later in the 1881 Leaves of Grass as "My Picture Gallery".<sup>20</sup>

Although structurally embryonic, "Pictures" is still fascinating as a key missing link to the "long foreground somewhere". And central to this missing link is the daguerreotype. And if Whitman had imagined the daguerreotype as a basis for this poem, it follows that we should seek certain dauguerreotypical qualities in Leaves of Grass.

We shall now turn our lens to Whitman himself and his obsession for posing before the camera. This kind of biographical study will further solidify the foundation of our analogy between photography and Leaves of Grass.

## Chapter 1 - A Portrait of the "long foreground somewhere"

## Notes

1. B. Newhall, Photography: Essays and Images, (New York: Rapoport Printing Corp., 1980), p.17.
2. Susan Sontag, On Photography, (New York: Delta Publishing Co., Inc., 1978), p. 184.
3. Ibid, p. 207.
4. Ibid, p. 183.
5. Alan Trachtenberg, Reading American Photographs, (U.S.A.: Hill and Wang, 1989), p. 16.
6. Margaret Fuller, The Letters of Margaret Fuller, Vol. 11. 1839-1841 (New York: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 199.
7. Alan Trachtenberg, Reading American Photographs, (U.S.A.: Hill and Wang, 1989), p. 29.
8. Ibid, p. 35.
9. Walt Whitman, Walt Whitman's New York, ed. Henry M. Christman (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1963), pp. 47-48.
10. Justin Kaplan, Walt Whitman, A Life, (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1983), p. 104.
11. Henry David Thoreau, The Portable Thoreau, ed. Carl Bode (New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1985), p. 597.
12. Basil de Salincourt, Walt Whitman, A Critical Study, (London: Martin Secker, 1914), p. 122.
13. B. Newhall, Photography: Essays and Images, (New York: Rapoport Printing Corp., 1980), p. 122.
14. Alan Trachtenberg, Reading American Photographs, (U.S.A.: Hill and Wang, 1989), pp. 60-61.
15. Walt Whitman, The Gathering of the Forces Vol.2. ed. Cleveland Rodgers (New York: G.P. Putman's Sons, 1920), pp. 113-117.
16. Ibid, pp. 113-117.
17. Ibid, pp. 113-117.
18. Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass, The First (1855) Edition. ed. Malcolm Cowley (New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1988), p. 15.
19. Walt Whitman, The Gathering of the Forces Vol.2. ed. Cleveland Rodgers (New York: G.P. Putman's Sons, 1920), pp. 113-117.
20. Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass, ed. Sculley Bradley (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 1973), pp. 401-402.

## Chapter 2 - "The Cameras themselves are tired of me"

The hat too large. The face broad. The mouth buried by the vast wild landscape of a gray beard. And the eyes - eyes that impel us to feel distantly recognized, eyes that gaze compassion, that droop slightly with a pathos left by the war or the 1860's. American literature has known no other face like Whitman's. No other American personage of the nineteenth century (with the possible exception of the man with whom Whitman associated the "Lilac blooming perennial") was so prolifically photographed. Richard Bucke, a very near friend to Whitman, estimated that "there were several hundred photographs"<sup>1</sup> of the "Good Gray Poet". Indeed the daguerreotyped image of Whitman became a sort of cultural icon in itself. His picture appeared in the popular magazines of his era:

I like the magazines ["a Builder's Periodical"] a good lot - it is about one fifth literary: they are to use my portrait next, or next, or sometime before long.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, a photograph of Whitman was even circulated via the medium of cigar box labels.

But of the "several hundred" photographs that were taken of Whitman, only several dozen are extant today. This poor survival rate of the photographs is not, however, the result of Whitman's own negligence. If anything, Whitman desperately wanted his portraits preserved for future generations. Indeed he became quite obsessed with his look in his pictures.

This obsession is proved by how photography seems to emerge as a significant sub-theme in Horace Traubel's record of Whitman's final years in With Walt Whitman in Camden. Throughout this unique first-hand biography by Traubel, we repeatedly observe Whitman pouring over his photographs - culling and commenting on them with an astute critical aptitude. For example, respecting an 1863 photograph of himself, Whitman declares:

As for the picture - it is first rate - everybody at the time considered it capital: Eakins likes it - says it is the most powerful picture of me extant - always excepting his own, to be sure.<sup>3</sup>

And in the following passage from a letter dated 1868 to Mr. John Camden Hotten, we witness Whitman's riveted concern with how he appeared to others. In suggesting his own ideal daguerreotype he reveals an eye for precise critical measure. We quote at length:

I am glad to hear you are having Mr. Conway's photograph engraved in place of the bad print now in the book. If a faithful presentation of that photograph can be given it will satisfy me well - of course it should be reproduced with all its shaggy, dappled, rough - skinned character, and not attempted to be smoothed or prettyified - (if in time I send the following hints) - let the costume be kept very simple and broad, rather kept down too, little as there is of it - preserve the effect of the sweeping lines making all that fine free angle below the chin - I would suggest not to bring in so fully the shoulders and bust as the photograph does - make only the neck, the collar with the immediately neighboring part of the shirt delineated. You will see that the spot at left side of the hair, near the temple, is a white blur, and does not belong to the picture. The eyes part and all around the eyes try to re-produce fully and faithfully, exactly as in the photograph.<sup>4</sup>



Here we discover yet another dimension to Whitman. Not only was he his own printer, editor, publisher, bookseller, critic, and press agent - but also his own choreographer.

Within Whitman's epistolary orbit, photographs were bestowed as gifts, and readily exchanged back and forth. He would receive letters that would read, "That you may know my face I enclose two portraits".<sup>5</sup> Sometimes such letters would be sent by admiring unknowns, and other times by the likes of Carlyle and Tennyson. One such letter that illustrates this network of photo exchanges runs thus:

Dear Mr. Whitman: I was exceedingly pleased at receiving your recent letter, and the photograph wh. followed it immediately afterwards. I admire the photograph very much; rather grudge its having the hat on, and so cutting one out of the full portraiture of your face, but have little doubt, allowing for this detail, it brings me a very meager requital, the enclosed likeness of myself?<sup>6</sup>

It became evident even to others that Whitman's habit of circulating pictures of himself amounted to a self-publicity programme. In order to ensure a constant inventory of give-away photographs, Whitman's attitude "towards the portrait hunter was very amiable".<sup>7</sup> The early daguerreotypes did not produce negatives for multiple reprints (unlike modern photographic techniques). Thus Whitman endured numerous sittings in front of numerous photographers. It came to a point where Whitman would sigh: "I have been photographed, photographed, photographed, until the cameras themselves are tired of me".<sup>8</sup> (One is reminded of Stephen Leacock's comic tale "The Awful Fate of Melpomenus Jones", where

the beleaguered protagonist whimpers: 'Another cup of tea and more photographs! Har! Har!'.)<sup>9</sup>

As a self-publicist whose aim was the ubiquity of his own image, Whitman developed a sort of narcissistic liking for his own likeness. This notion pervades Leaves of Grass: "Who goes there! hankering, gross, mystical, nude?" or, "I do not thank you for liking me as I am and liking the touch of me...I know that it is good for you to do so" ("A Song for Occupations" 7). This same kind of obsession manifested itself in the way he viewed the photographs of himself. He would christen his portraits with names, or promote certain flattering titles suggested by close friends. Hence there are pictures of Whitman bearing such names as: "The Christ-Likeness", "The Laughing Philosopher", "Moses in the Burning Bush", the "Wolf-Skin" portraits, and the "Hugo" portraits.

The natural consequence of Whitman's obsessive interest in photography was a hyper-sensitivity to the critical comments offered by others. He would often solicit opinions on his studio pictures from his friends and acquaintances as a way of reinforcing his own self-congratulatory views. Gratifying comments by near allies would offset the negative remarks of others. Whitman acknowledged: "Not a few people would say my phiz belongs only in the rogues' gallery!".<sup>10</sup>

His photographic standards became increasingly defined. He would weigh a Gardener portrait against a Brady, or a Horned against an Eakins. And he would discern subtle differences in style and composition between

these artists. These differences became enlarged in Whitman's mind - enlarged to the point where he would scorn some and cherish others, as if the photographs themselves were living entities. Whitman admitted:

"I meet new Walt Whitmans every day. There are a dozen of me afloat. I don't know which Walt Whitman I am".<sup>11</sup> Excellence in picture-taking became something which he would not compromise.

I want your man [the photographer] to try and try and try again until the right one is secured. It is like ordering a suit of clothes: I can give the tailor a hint of what I want, but he must lumber out his stock - wait for me to recognize the right piece.<sup>12</sup>

With the distinction of being one of the most photographed figures of the nineteenth century comes a feeling that Whitman was fully cognizant of the psychological power of photography - that the "camera cannot lie". What our eye witnesses we will believe. Mindful of the frequency with which he was photographed, as well as his energetic ego, one doubts the authentic report of his portraits. How much of the great bristly-bearded centenarian was a deliberate stage play? How much of the celebrated "rough" is a fact and how much is an act?

The following account occurred in the summer before the first publication of Leaves of Grass.

I was sauntering along the street; the day was hot: I was dressed just as you see me there. A friend of mine - Gabriel Harrison (you know him? Ah! yes! - he has always been a good friend!) - stood at the door of his place looking at passers-by. He cried out to me at once: "Old man! - Old Man! - come here: come right up stairs with me this minute"- and when he noticed that I hesitated cried still more emphatically: "Do come: come: I'm dying for something to do." The picture was the result.<sup>13</sup>

And that picture became the most anthologized photo of Whitman, not because of its artistic quality (for many later photographs of Whitman exhibit a much deeper psychological penetration, such as the ones by Eakins which are reminiscent of the dark Rembrandt portraits in oils), but because it was affiliated with the original 1855 Leaves of Grass.

Not only was the poetic technique and bardic voice of the 1855 edition revolutionary, so was the portrait that graced its first page.

the engraved daguerreotype of a bearded man in his mid thirties, slouching under a wide-brimmed and high-crowned black felt hat that has "a rakish kind of slant," as the engraver said later, "like the mast of a schooner." His right hand is resting nonchalantly on his hip; the left is hidden in the pocket of his coarse-woven trousers. He wears no coat or waistcoat, his shirt is thrown wide open at the collar to reveal a burly neck and the top of what seems to be a red-flannel undershirt.<sup>14</sup>

What was so special about this picture? What is contained in this portrait that represents such a radical departure? The principal ways in which this single portrait renders a revolutionary feel may be understood within the grid of the Aristotelian fourfold notion of causality.

The first is simply in the "material" look of the portrait. The presentation of Whitman as "coatless and bare-necked, his pelvis thrust forward"<sup>15</sup> would have utterly insulted the standards of decorum in 1855 America, just as the content of the poetry would. "Men of fashion were dressed from head to toe like black tubes".<sup>16</sup> Who was this person who



Picture of Walt Whitman from the 1855 Edition of Leaves of Grass.

both dressed as and openly declared himself a "rough"?

The second way in which the 1855 engraving of Whitman appeared radical was what Aristotle might call "formal". The typical portraits during photography's first decade were characterized by a certain unnaturalness of pose. The faces seemed often gaunt. The subjects seemed frozen like mannequins, with eyes strained in a fixated stare, in facial fixations bordering on asphyxiation. This effect was the result of the sheer length of time one had to sit motionless in front of the open shutter of the camera. A studio sitting represented a trial of one's nerves.

But Whitman's 1855 image shows no strained stare or stilted pose. The weight of his body is shifted onto one leg. The casualness of his attire - shirt gathered into folds, open collar, tilted hat - tends to lend itself to a feel of languor reminiscent of the style of the Greek Hellenistic artists of the fourth century BC, such as Praxiteles (as opposed to the restrained detail of the Classical period). In this way the picture by Harrison achieves a break from the familiar blank stare featured in most other daguerreotypes of the 1840's.

The "efficient" cause in Aristotle's scheme is that which by its real activity produces something. And what Whitman produces is a new personality. From a commonplace Brooklyn journalist emerges a "proletarian bard who was supposed to have done the writing".<sup>17</sup> This is not the average ivory-tower poet who sits with pencil poised in some pretty

parlor. Instead he is "one of the roughs, a kosmos./ Disorderly fleshy and sensual.... eating drinking and breeding" ("Song of Myself" 499-500).

His appearance as a dockman, or mechanic, or carpenter hardly fits the prescribed notion of a learned man of words. This is the calculated portrait which Whitman produced. The stage-craft employed by Whitman was brilliant. Even the way the picture's background was blurred suggests a shrewd manipulation, for it seems that the image appears out of nowhere, without a shadow and without a past, just as the text of Leaves of Grass seems to do.

The final way in which this same picture manifests a revolutionary spirit is in the blending of the photograph with the poetic text. It was designed by Whitman to stand together with the twelve poems of 1855, and not to be yanked out of context. Indeed the engraved picture represented the signature of the author, since the book was published without a name on the cover page. In the following passage from With Walt Whitman in Camden, Whitman envisages Leaves of Grass and the portrait as intrinsically and organically entwined:

as I can and will give, to each generous donor, my book, my  
 portrait, autograph, myself as it were...<sup>17</sup>

When we recognize a certain connective fiber between the portrait and the poems, a further perspective is "rent in twain". If the first person pronoun singular of the opening lines of "Song of Myself" contains a significance greater than the flesh and blood self of the poet, then it

follows that so might the daguerreotypied image on the frontispiece of the 1855 quarto. If the notion of the self in "Song of Myself" is the idealized representative American, then so too is the introductory portrait. For it seems that in the care that Whitman exhibits in his choice of the photograph, he succeeds in producing a larger hero than himself. The lyric "I" of Leaves of Grass is the same as in the engraving. Here is America personified. Here again is the vast ego of Whitman at work - using himself as the medium through which America sings.

Perhaps the logical extension of this notion of a transcendent element in the 1855 portrait of Whitman might be to view Whitman's actual face as a kind of dramatization of America. Fortunately we need not seek far, for Whitman already conceived this hypothesis in his poem "Out from Behind This Mask". What follows is an imaginative look at one's face as a celestial landscape. If we can peer beyond the external slough of one's face and peel off the "bending rough-cut mask", what would we discover?

This glaze of God's serenest purest sky,  
 This film of Satan's seething pit,  
 This heart's geography's map, this limitless small continent,  
     this soundless sea;  
 Out from the convolutions of this globe,  
 This subler astronomic orb than sun or moon, than Jupiter,  
     Venus, Mars,  
 This condensation of the universe... (6-11)

Clearly Whitman perceives the face of his portrait in the same grand scope as his conception of self as "kosmos". We must look beyond the cosmetic features of the face, indeed we must distort those features, in order to



embrace the vast spiritual terrain of this poem. (Whitman's rendering of the face in geographical terms may remind us of the rather grotesque portraits of "Autumn" and "Spring", in terms of fruits and flowers, by the Milanese Renaissance artist Arcrimboldo).

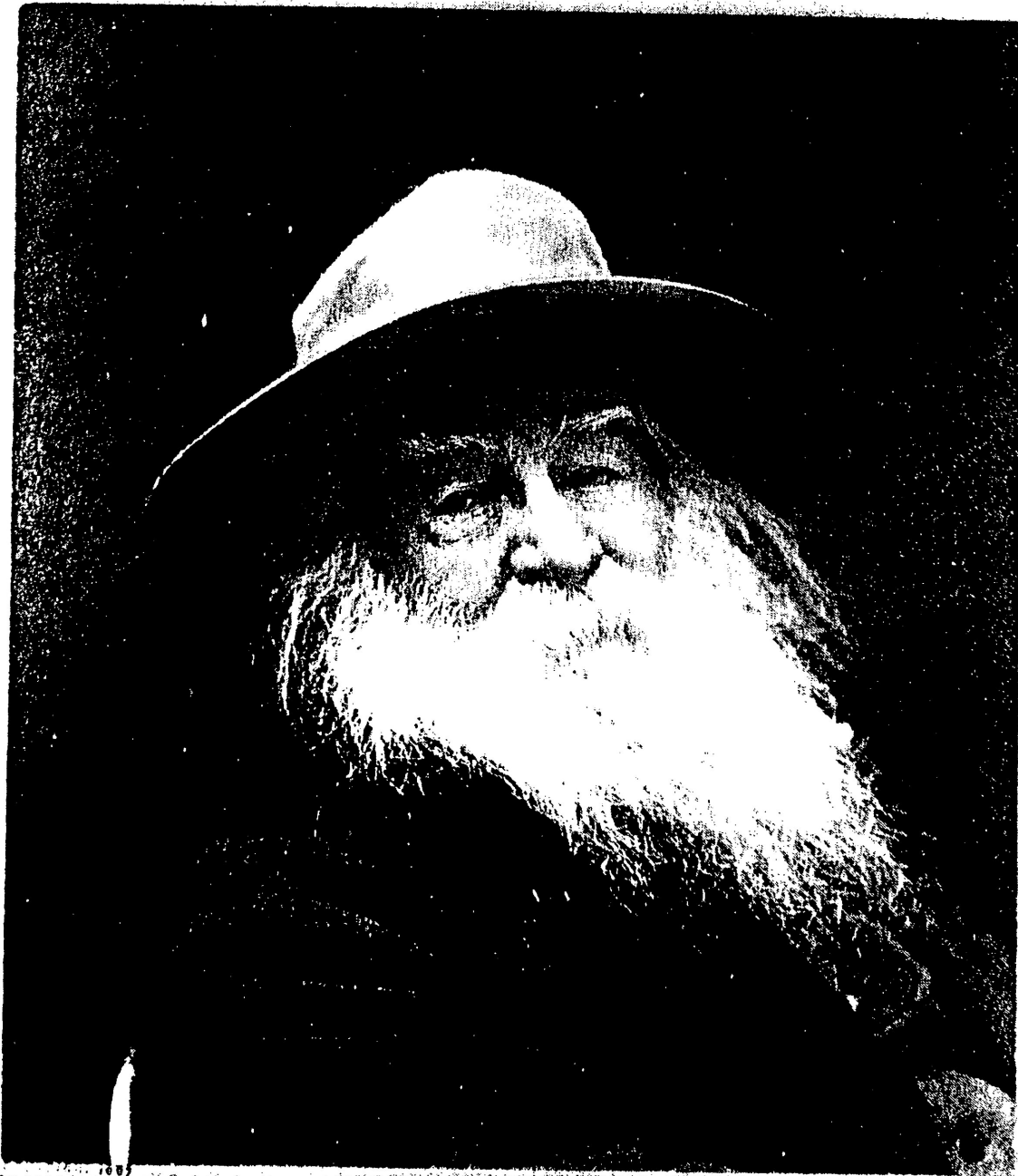
It is fascinating to learn that Whitman considered suppressing the picture of the 1855 edition as depicting a "repulsive, loaferish" image. Whitman admits:

The point was I look so damned flamboyant, as if I was hurling bolts at somebody - full of mad oaths - saying defiantly, to hell with you.<sup>18</sup>

Whitman the choreographer was again speaking - trying to manipulate a transition from Whitman the "rough" to Whitman the sage. His task was not so simple. The defiant facade of the rebel, as depicted in the Harrison daguerreotype, seemed to have etched an indelible mark in the minds of the public. Whitman would lament, "The world insists on having its own way: it don't want a man so much the way he looks as the way it is accustomed to having men look".<sup>19</sup>

With each subsequent edition of Leaves of Grass, Whitman published a new photograph to reflect his up-to-date appearance. In fact one can examine the various portraits of Whitman and track a kind of chronological record of change. With Whitman's change of outlook on himself came the much circulated image of the venerated seer. One of Whitman's favorite photographs was the one which he fondly entitled "The Laughing Philosopher". The great, gristly, grandfatherly beard of this picture

stands as a monument of how far Whitman altered his own image for the sake of his ego. The "rough" had grown up wise. Yet in all Whitman's facade creations one wonders who is the real Walt Whitman? Who is the bare existential self behind the pose? For Whitman, the medium was truly the message.



Walt Whitman 1887

## Chapter 2 - "The Cameras Themselves are tired of Me"

### Notes

1. Justin Kaplan, Walt Whitman, A Life, (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1983), p. 38.
2. Horace Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1906), p. 284.
3. Ibid, p. 390.
4. Ibid, pp. 210-211.
5. Ibid, p. 76.
6. Ibid, p. 112.
7. Ibid, p. 284.
8. Ibid, p. 367.
9. Stephen Leacock "The Awful Fate of Melpomenus Jones" Canadian Anthology, ed. Carl F. Klinck (Toronto: Gage Educational Publishing Limited, 1974), p. 168.
10. Horace Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1906), p. 128.
11. Ibid, p. 108.
12. Ibid, p. 192.
13. Alan Trachtenberg, Reading American Photographs, (U.S.A.: Hill and Wang, 1989), p. 65.
14. Walt Whitman, Leaves Of Grass, The First (1855) Edition. ed. Malcolm Cowley (New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1988), p. vii.
15. Justin Kaplan, Walt Whitman, A Life, (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1983), p. 147.
16. Ibid, p. 147.
17. Horace Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1906), p. 369.
18. Justin Kaplan, Walt Whitman, A Life, (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1983), p. 40.
19. Horace Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1906), p. 154.

### Chapter 3 - "Now I wash the gum from your eyes"

The "eye/I" combination is perhaps the most metaphorically connected homonym in the English language. Both partners in this relationship involve poignant concepts of vision. One tells of a looking out - an objective turning to the landscape of the material world. The other tells of a looking in - a subjective turning to the "inscape" of the mind. Mention was made in the previous chapter of Whitman's "I celebrate myself" ego - of the transformation of the singular first person pronoun from a simple lyric "I" to an expansive epic "I". And we observed how Whitman's hyperbolic ego was also reflected in the photographs of himself. Now we shall train our lens on the second half of this intriguing homonym, namely the eye. And in so doing we shall recognize both the inter-relatedness of the "eye/I" dichotomy, and the inter-relatedness of photography and Whitman's poetry.

Whitman invokes all five physical senses within the first eighteen lines of "Song of Myself": "observing a spear of summer grass", "It is for my mouth forever", "the sniff of green leaves", "The sound of the belched words" and "a few light kisses....a few embraces". As we further explore the fifty-two chants that comprise this poetic (or photographic) montage, we perceive the electric pulse of all five senses flashing omnipresently. But if we had to identify just one sense impression that predominates the rest, we would look to the eye.

That Whitman manifests a keen and quickened auditory sensitivity is without dispute. And that Whitman may be rated as a liberating and tactile poet of the body is without question too. But it is the inquiring activity of the visual eye which occurs with abundant frequency in Leaves of Grass. An emphasis on "seeing" is especially evident in Chants Six to Twenty of "Song of Myself". It is this same visual response to external data that triggers the long catalogue list of Chant Thirty-Three, as well as the sprawling fifth section of the 1855 version of "A Song for Occupations". Sometimes Whitman would employ the verb "see" (or some variation of it) to commence each line of a catalogue list, as in the eighteenth section of "Starting from Paumanok". In fact more than one third of the lines in Whitman's extraordinary, "global village" composition "Salut au Monde!" (83 lines out of 226), start with "I see". When we discern the ubiquity of "seeing" in Leaves of Grass, and when we recognize Whitman as a pre-eminent visual recorder of things, and when we recall his fascination with photography (which is essentially an optical art medium), we then begin to perceive through a clearer lens the analogy between his poetry and the camera.

When we contrast the senses of touch or hearing with sight we realize that the former two require time to apprehend the stuff we call reality. It takes time to hear an allegro or to caress a vase, but we seem to be able to perceptually frame a mountain in an instant. In addition, it might be said that we hear an object only when we hear sounds made by the

object. There is no parallel situation in the case of seeing. It follows that visual experience seems to have more of a direct temporal immediacy than other sensory impressions. In this sense the primacy of sight not only fits with the way photography achieves its effect, but also compliments Whitman's attempt to make Leaves of Grass to appear like an eruption of energy. It seems his poetry was composed in one spontaneous blast of mystical epiphany, as if born full-grown. The illusion of directness and instantaneousness in Leaves of Grass is akin to the immediacy which we equate with photography and the act of "seeing".

Essential to the grammar of photography is the dualistic relation of the "I" and the "eye". Between the photographer and the thing photographed, between the squint and strain of the eye and the apprehension of concrete reality, between the mechanical click of the shutter of the camera and the empirical event that is transfigured onto film, is something we may call blank space. According to the logic of common sense, the observer (whether it be a photographer or the poet Whitman) and the thing observed are always separated by space. (One is reminded of Eliot's "The Hollow Men": "Between the idea/And the reality/Between the motion/And the act/Falls the shadow"). This physical gulf, this spatial interval, this undefined gap of nothingness is created by positioning the world at a distance from oneself. In photographic terms this space which bridges the "I" and what the "eye" sees is called "Focal-distance" or "Focal-range".<sup>1</sup>

This idea of the beholder choosing a favorable distance between himself and the object beheld, shares a kinship with the twentieth century notion of "Aesthetic Distance":

The artist too, who creates the work, needs to be at a distance from his object. The painter makes this patently obvious when he recedes from his model and half-shuts his eyes to get it into focus, then opens them again to study it in detail, always, however, retaining the appropriate distance that will enable him to effect the necessary elimination;<sup>2</sup>

The "I/eye" dichotomy, whose relation with one another represents the focal-distance, also seems to echo the "I/it" combination which Martin Buber describes in his I and Thou treatise: "If 'it' is said, the 'I' of the combination 'I-It' is said along with it".<sup>3</sup> Whitman's grasp of this optic condition runs thus: "And these one and all tend inward to me, and I tend outward to them" ("Song of Myself" 324).

Come closer to me,  
 Push close my lover and take the best I possess  
 Yield closer and closer and give me the best you possess  
 ("A Song of Occupations" 1-3).

We might claim that these lines which introduce "A Song for Occupations" are vintage Whitman. We know by the rhythmic movement of words, and by the way they entreat our involvement, that no other author could have composed them. It is precisely this involvement we have in the poem that is critical to us here. The focal-distance between the "I" (whom we may call the poet) and the "you" (in whom we may frequently see ourselves) seems to vanish when we accept the poet's invitation to participate. In other words, we are smothered by the embrace of the poet's hug. Indeed all



notions of focal-distance seem to vanish whenever we find in Whitman's poetry the "I" or the poet directly addressing the "you" or us the reader.

Yet there are times when Whitman measures, establishes, and maintains a strict focal-distance between himself and others. It seems that this illusion of space in depth occurs whenever Whitman trains his eye not on the reader, but on something representing a third party. Thus, when he entreats the involvement of the reader focal-distance disappears, but when he refers to other characters or things a defined focal-distance is usually evident.

As Whitman maps the streets of Manhattan, and as he surveys the faces of ferry passengers, he seems to always keep his imaginary camera between himself and those whom he encounters. Although Whitman insists on an affinity with other men and women, there is very little direct interplay in his poems between himself - the autobiographical I - and others whom he observes. Instead, his activity resembles that of a voyeur - always peering, always examining, always explaining. As a result he always keeps a safe "comfort zone" between himself and others. Chant Twelve of "Song of Myself" illustrates well this "comfort zone" focal-distance. The chant in its entirety is as follows.

The butcher-boy puts off his killing-clothes, or sharpens his knife  
 at the stall in the market,  
 I loiter enjoying his repartee and his shuffle and breakdown.

Blacksmiths with grimed and hairy chests environ the anvil,  
 Each has his main-sledge....they are all out....there is a great  
 heat in the fire.

From the cinder-strewn threshold I follow their movements,  
 The lithe sheer of their waist plays even with their massive arms,  
 Overhand the hammer roll - overhand so slow - overhand so sure,  
 They do not hasten, each man hits in his place ("Song of Myself"  
 211-218).

It seems strange that for a poet reputed for his physical and tactile qualities, Whitman remains aloof and voyeur-like. Absence of talking in dialogue form with the "butcher-boy" or the "blacksmith" highlights this fact even more. The establishment of a focal-distance is a phenomenon found over and over again in the "Song of Myself": in the wedding picture of the trapper and the Indian bride in Chant Ten, in the famous "bathing" chant, and in the long grocery-list of America in Chant Thirty-three. We notice it in the auction scenes in the otherwise kinaesthetic poem "I Sing the Body Electric". And we can observe this "I/eye" tension in most of "Song of the Broad-axe", "Salute au Monde!" and "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking". This later piece contains the following picture of a carefully wrought focal-distance:

And every day the he-bird to and fro near at hand,  
 And every day the she-bird crouch'd on her nest, silent, with  
     bright eyes,  
 And every day I, a curious boy, never too close, never disturbing  
     them,  
 Cautiously peering, absorbing, translating (28-31).

And in the deceptively simple poem "Faces", Whitman maintains a policy of non-interference as he always preserves a sense of focal-distance:

Sauntering the pavement or riding the country byroads here then  
     are faces,  
 Faces of friendship, precision, caution, suavity, ideality,  
 The spiritual prescient face, the always welcome common benevolent  
     face,

The face of the singing of music, the grand faces of natural lawyers  
 and judges broad at the backtop,  
 The faces of hunters and fishers, bulged at the brows....the shaved  
 blanched faces of orthodox citizens (1-5),

Although the speaker in "Faces" exhibits an intense empathy for the varied countenances that move in and out his range of vision, he never interacts with them. In this way the speaker, like a daguerreotypist, always preserves an arm's length distance. The parade of "Faces" thus remains anonymous, transient, and mute.

Not only does a lack of dramatic dialogue underscore the focal-length between the poet and his record of those he meets. But Whitman creates focal-distance by marking the position of these individuals whom he encounters. Like any competent photographer, Whitman seldom if ever permits his subjects to peer back at him in his poems, (unless of course the speaker of the poem addresses the reader directly, in which case we tend to peer back at him). This denial of recognition is evident for example, in "Faces", in the description of the tradesmen in "A Song for Occupations", and most everywhere in "Song of Myself". Never do the slaves at auction, or the twenty-eight bathers of Chant Eleven, turn to him and say, "you must be the poet Walt Whitman". Never does he allow them to visually play to the camera of his eye. Never do they stare at him with the stock glassy glare which was so characteristic of those photographed by less than competent curbside daguerreotypists.

It seems that by playing the role of an invisible voyeur, Whitman achieves a more natural position for his subjects. The pose of the persons

is not faked. They do not sit looking back at him with a stilted stare. The behavior of the bathers in Chant Eleven, for example, seems unaffected by Whitman's reportage. By lugging a sort of "candid camera" along the streets of New York City, Whitman seems to shift the responsibility of improvisation to those whom the lens of his eyes falls upon. Thus by marking the positions of subjects and by the curious absence of dramatic dialogue Whitman achieves a focal-distance between the "I" and the "eye" - a concept fundamental to photography.

Another concept critical to photography and critical to focused "seeing" is what we may refer to as "Vantage-point".<sup>4</sup> A photographer with a gift for flair will always seek a vantage-point that is creative and unusual. He will sneak back behind the curtain for a rear view or he will climb precarious heights for a "gull's eye" view. Such a photographer will always endeavor to attain a new look or a fresh perspective or a different twist. And like any innovative photographer, Whitman exploited to his advantage the notion of creative vantage-point. Indeed this fact contributes as much to the revolutionary design of Leaves of Grass as does the prosody or sexual license.

Like the notion of focal-distance, vantage-point involves the "I"/eye" homonym. But whereas focal-distance entails a measuring and establishing of space between the poet and that which the poet observes, vantage-point embraces the sense of scene, or the sense of perspective.

When a poet or photographer determines an appropriate place from which to view an event or person or scene, he creates for himself a vantage-point. Whitman, it seems, had a sort of photographic knack for finding unfamiliar and extraordinary positions from which to observe.

Whitman begins "Song of Myself" by assuming a vantage-point that is a "worm's eye" view. We find the "I" of the poem sprawled on the ground in some meadow - relaxing, "loafing" and meditating upon a single "Spear of summer grass". Although Whitman would later expand the image of grass into a cosmic metaphor for things like hope, democracy, singleness within multiplicity, and the "handkerchief of the Lord", in Chant One we are still on our hands and knees, involved with the literal seeing of a blade of common Kentucky grade grass. In this Whitman creates a vantage-point that is unorthodox to say the least.

Still keeping to the terrestrial plane, we find Whitman reflecting upon the resurrection of new life which occurs as a result of "This Compost". The following passage might be called a "mite's eye" view.

Behold this compost! behold it well!  
 Perhaps every mite has once form'd part of a sick person  
 - yet behold!  
 The grass of spring covers the prairies,  
 The bean bursts noiselessly through the mould in the garden,  
 The delicate spear of the onion pierces upward (17-21),

And in the final section of "Song of Myself", Whitman himself defiantly resigns his will to the inevitability of becoming a guest to the soil:  
 "I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love./If you want

me again look for me under your bootsoles". The idea expressed here is reminiscent of Emerson's "Hamatreya" poem.

When we rise up from the ground, we find Whitman projecting himself into the mind of a child, and thereby assuming a child's vantage-point. In "Song of Myself" "A child said, What is the grass? fetching it to me with full hands;/How could I answer the child?....I do not know what it is any more than he" (90-91).

Whitman's intrigue with finding unique vantage-points carries us up to higher planes. In the "Song of Myself" we trace with the poet "The Youngster and the redfaced girl turning aside up the bushy hill,/I peeringly view them from the top" (142-143). And later in the same poem, the speaker traces the migration of a "razor-billed auk" when he says "I ascend to the nest in the fissure of the cliff" (683). In the eleventh section Whitman presents a daring picture of twenty-eight bathers (plus one more, who is the "I" in the poem) and one female voyeur whose vantage-point is "the fine house by the rise of the bank" (196). From her secret place behind a window curtain, she imaginatively seduces the bathers: "An unseen hand also passed over their bodies,/It descended trembling from their temples and ribs" (206-207).

Perhaps the most fascinating vantage-point that Whitman creates is in the "Sleepers" poem. The poem assumes an angelic perspective as the speaker passes over the surreal world of slumber. He never touches those who sleep, but seems to ride ghost-like from chamber to chamber,

omnisciently hovering above the beds where they lie.

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 and gazing and bending and stopping (1-5),

This sort of hummingbird-hover of the speaker is repeated again in the following lines:

I stand with drooping eyes by the worstsuffering and restless,  
 I pass my hands soothingly to and fro a few inches from them;  
 The restless sink in their beds....they fitfully sleep (24-26),

The poem proceeds as the speaker slides in and out of, not only the bedrooms of the sleepers, but the very dreams of the sleepers. In this way the vision of the speaker seems to spread centrifugally throughout the nightscape. Clearly Whitman concocts an extraordinary vantage-point for himself in this poem. And it is this sense of creative perspective that contributes to the fresh revolutionary feel of Leaves of Grass.

Another unconventional vantage-point is created when the poet addresses not merely the reader but specifically the reader of generations hence. This is particularly true in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry".

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

Who was to know what should come home to me?  
 Who knows but I am enjoying this?  
 Who knows, for all the distance, but I am as good as looking at  
 you now, for all you cannot see me (86-91)?

Whitman states in his 1855 Preface how the poet "sees eternity in men and women" because he "sees the farthest". It seems that literal sight impressions in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" give way to prophetic seeing.<sup>5</sup> Inner eyesight transcends physical eyesight. Thus, by seeing the "farthest", Whitman assumes the vantage-point of a seer. And from this perspective of the spiritual realm he can convey the sense of an out-of-body experience.

The living look upon the corpse with their eyesight,  
But without eyesight lingers a different living and looks curiously  
on the corpse ("To Think of Time" 22-23).

Thus Whitman's vision is set to puncture heaven, assume the throne of God, and compose a "Passage to India".

Our final example of vantage-point is found in the little poem "I Sit and look out" where the speaker "looks", "sees", "marks", and "observes", the anguish and suffering of neglect and abused wives, children, soldiers, and slaves. The poem concludes:

All these - all the meanness and agony without end I sitting look  
out upon,  
See, hear, and am silent (9-10).

Like a picture a camera takes, the poem frames the scene, captures the event, but does not capture the din. It ends in silence.

We have traced the ways in which the "I"/eye" homonym oversees the process of picture-taking, as well as the poetic composition of Leaves of Grass. We examined how through focal-distance and vantage-point Whitman



frames pictures for himself and how in looking out he still maintains at least a vestigial awareness of himself. In many ways he personifies the "transparent eyeball" idea that we find in Emerson's Nature essay. And when we accept his invitation to look upon things through his eyes, he seems to "Wash the gum from our own eyes" ("Song of Myself" 1226). It is as if we gain a fresh daguerreotype of Whitman himself.

We now turn from the "I"/eye" dichotomy to another dichotomy which shares a relevance to the philosophy of Whitman and early photographic techniques, namely the body/soul motif.

## Chapter 3 - "Now I wash the gum from your eyes"

## Notes

1. Webster's New World Dictionary, (Toronto: Nelson, Foster & Scott Ltd., 1960), p. 560. "Focal-distance" is defined as "the distance from the optical centre of a lens to the point where the light rays converge; length of focus".

2. P.A. Michelis, "Aesthetic Distance and the charm of Contemporary Art" Aesthetics and the Arts, ed. Lee A. Jacobus, (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1968), p. 30.

3. Martin Buber, I and Thou, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 3.

4. Webster's New World Dictionary, (Toronto: Nelson, Foster & Scott Ltd., 1960), p. 1611. Vantage Point or "Vantage ground" is defined as "a favorable or advantageous view point".

**Chapter 4 - "I am the poet of the body,/And I am the poet of the soul"**

The daguerreotypes with which Whitman would have been familiar were not like the paper negative/position process which we know of photography today. Instead it was a silver plate (or copper plate) direct-positive process. This meant that the portrait and the negative images were one and the same. If you held the daguerreotype in your hands and shifted it slightly you would observe either a negative or a positive image depending on the angle of view and the direction of light cast on the plate.<sup>1</sup> (This trait resembles the recent achievements in laser holography.) In the same way if we examine the "pictures" in Whitman's poems and shift them slightly in our hands, we may discover another case to support the analogy between photography and Leaves of Grass, namely, the fusion of body and soul - and as an adjunct, the fusion of good and evil and of negative/positive mysticism.

In the "Maude's Well" section of The House of the Seven Gables, Holgrave the daguerreotypist invites Phoebe to "see a specimen of my productions". Phoebe's reply attests to the way daguerreotyped portraits would seem to vacillate with lubricated readiness, from a positive print to a phantom print. The visual effect suggested an eerie magic. Phoebe says:

I don't much like pictures of that sort - they are so hard and stern; besides dodging away from the eyes, trying to escape altogether. They are conscious of looking very unamiable, I suppose, and therefore hate to be seen.<sup>2</sup>

No quantum leap ought to be necessary in order to extrapolate notions of a correspondence between the image displacement in daguerrean prints and Whitman's philosophy involving a simultaneous bonding of the physical figure with the spiritual ghost-like figure. Both involve a singular containment of opposites. Both involve a sort of transubstantiation.

(When we consider Holgrave's difficulties with his productions, and when we consider the curious characteristics of the daguerreotypal process, we may be reminded of Oscar Wilde's marvelous saga of horror, The Portrait of Dorian Gray in which the protagonist Dorian Gray represents a paragon of perpetual youth while his own portrait transfigures hellishly, mirroring the malignancy of his soul. Indeed, conjectures of a line of influence running from Hawthorne to Wilde may be a critically plausible effort.)

Whitman is not a dualist. His cosmic philosophy is in full accord with the proclamation by Emerson of the "infinite of the private man". How could one reside in corporeal form and at the same time become infinite, unless the flesh and the soul are one? In the following lines, Whitman describes his efforts to yoke the body and the soul into a monistic mainframe.

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

Lack one lacks both....and the unseen is proved by the seen.  
Till that becomes unseen and receives proof in its turn ("Song of  
Myself" 44-46).

I am the poet of the body,  
 And I am the poet of the soul ("Song of Myself" 422-423).

And in the 1855 Preface Whitman says: "The spirit receives from the body just as much as it gives to the body". Perhaps the entwined collage of body and soul is fostered most in Whitman's final version of "I Sing the Body Electric". Here the message is the sacredness of the human body.

The skin, the sunburnt shade, freckles, hair,  
 The curious sympathy one feels when feeling with the hand the naked  
 meat of the body,  
 The circling rivers the breath, and breathing it in and out,  
 The beauty of the waist, and thence of the hips, and thence downward  
 toward the knees,  
 The thin red jellies within you or within me, the bones and the  
 marrow in the bones,  
 The exquisite realization of health;  
 O I say these are not the parts and poems of the body only, but of  
 the soul,  
 O I say now these are the soul (157-164)!

It becomes plain that the conduction of wattage, to which the poem's title refers, is not invisible, elusive, or silent. Electricity equals the soul which equals the body. In this rhapsody of the vitality of the flesh, Whitman leaves no room for a Cartesian differentiation of mind and matter, body and soul. The two are one.

Whitman, although he likely did not know it, shared this body/soul point of view with the Pauline epistle to the Corinthian Church which claims our bodies are "temples of God" (I Corin.6:19-20). There also appear to be links with the Hindu teachings of the Vedanta which involve the synthesis of spirit and body. But when our lens zooms closer to Whitman, closer to his daily involvement in Manhattan, closer to the

things he was interested in and preoccupied with, we then see how the simultaneous appropriation of body/soul shares an uncanny resemblance with the positive/negative displacement of images in the early daguerreotypes.

If we can apprehend, as Whitman claims, the oneness at the same time of "objects gross and the unseen soul" (1892 edition of "A Song for Occupations" 102), the concept of "kenosis", the "word rendered into flesh" (John 1:14), then it follows that "divine am I inside and out" ("Song of Myself" 526). And also if we possess the capacity for self-deification, then it follows that goodness will subsume and homogenize with evil. And so, if we could examine once again a daguerreotype of Leaves of Grass and shift it to a slight degree in our hands, the appropriation of good and evil would be disclosed at the same time. We could be like Hawthorne's Holgrave whose daguerreotypes of Judge Pyncheon reveal unamiable truths and a fine public pose, both within the very same frame.

When we scan the miles of catalogues in Leaves of Grass, the vast breadth of Whitman's embrace is always apparent. Representatives from every class and status are granted equal place. We hear the voices of the enemy, the lunatic, the halt and the dumb. And

Voices of the interminable generations of slaves,  
Voices of prostitutes and of deformed persons,  
Voices of the diseased and the despairing, and of thieves and  
dwarfs ("Song of Myself" 510-512).

Yet in all these empathetic projections of voices, Whitman never labours a moralistic lesson. Never does he state: "these are righteous but these

others are not". Instead, the good and the evil-prone are enumerated without distinction. This denial of the evil of evil, however metaphysically and realistically naive it may be (one is reminded of Malachi 2:7), is nevertheless integral to Whitman's concept of the equality of things diverse. In Chant 21 of "Song of Myself" the poet decrees:

The pleasures of heaven are with me, and the pains of hell are with  
me,  
The first I graft and increase upon myself....the latter I translate  
into a new tongue (424-425).

Later in the same chant, Whitman admits his own moral apathy towards both virtue and vice. By professing this moral apathy he achieves a personal moral lift, for the troublesome burden of having to evaluate and judge others vanishes.

Perhaps Whitman's most mature treatment of the evil/goodness merge is found in "Chanting the Square Deific". In this mystic poem, the writer envisages a fourfold godhead that equates with the Jehovah, the Christ, the Satan, and the Holy Spirit respectively. That Whitman identifies with each quarter including the heterodoxical "Defiant, I Satan" who is "Comrade of criminals, brother of slaves"(27), is significant. Here Whitman does not discriminate between that which is traditionally regarded as good and that which is evil. Like a daguerreotype, positive and negatives are reflected at the same time - in a kind of "marriage of heaven and hell".

If we again tilt our imaginary daguerreotype of Leaves of Grass to

a slightly different angle, still another analogy to Whitman's monism arises. That Whitman was a mystic, or at least expressed mystic tendencies, is clear. (Where and when and by what influence he knew of the mystic way lies, however, outside the scope of this present study.) When Whitman transcribes his merged dealings with the godhead, he is not relating some esoteric occultism, or frilly fancifulness, or psychophysical ecstasy. For Whitman these events were bonafide mystical happenings - real felt experiences. In "Song of Myself" he rapturously affirms:

In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own face in the  
glass;  
I find letters from God dropped in the street, and every one is  
signed by God's name (1278-1279).

Also, in interpreting his union with the "Kosmos" he says, "I am an acme of things accomplished, and I an encloser of things to be "(1149).

But what strikes us is the particular cast of mind that marks Whitman's testimony. This is not conventional mysticism, as one would expect to discover in the Apostle John's Revelation, or Thomas a Kempis' Of the Imitation of Christ, or even of Eliot's "Ash Wednesday". Whitman's experimental grasp of God's presence comes not by the conventional adoration of the deity - "And I call to mankind, Be not curious about God" ("Song of Myself" 1271). Nor does it come by a conventional quietistic prayerful attitude - "I sound my barbaric yawp over the rooftops of the world" (1323). And least of all, Whitman's stylistic stamp of self-exaltation has not even a sliver of ascetic denial of the senses - "I am



large....I contain multitudes". Instead, his mystic approach, as his run-on catalogues testify, is radically all-inclusive. He claims for himself a superabundant heap of experiences.<sup>3</sup>

This approach runs counter to Christian and Hebraic ideals which involve the paradoxical belief that a fast is a feast and a feast is a fast (Amos 8:10-11), or that less is more and more is less (Matt. 19:24). Even Thoreau in the "Economy" chapter of Walden, sticks to traditional asceticism.

Most of the luxuries, and many of the so-called comforts of life, are not only indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind. With respect to luxuries and comforts, the wisest have ever lived a more simple and meager life than the poor. The ancient philosophers, Chinese, Hindu, Persian, and Greek, were a class than which none has been poorer in outward riches, none so rich in inward.<sup>4</sup>

But Whitman chose to scale the same Olympus, except from a different slope. For him a feast is always a feast, and more is always more. Thus, Whitman's mystic sensibility, because it is positive, represents a somersault of orthodox notions.

Although Whitman does not negate the senses in his scheme of things, there still is a negative element that lurks unnoticed throughout Leaves of Grass - just as one can observe a negative image sneaking quick fleeting glances out of a daguerreotyped portrait. Whitman's mysticism is negative only in the following sense - that he never lists an inventory of his own personal possessions. We really never learn by reading his poems what actual material assets, properties, royalties are owned by him. In

fact, "Song of Myself" commences with the poet-protagonist "undisguised and naked" - stripped of all personal incidentals which could conceivably obstruct one's mystical flight. Again in this way, Whitman is unlike Thoreau, who painstakingly informs us of every miscellaneous item of ownership in Walden. Thus it seems that although Whitman projects his character abundantly in his writing, he offers us little information about his private self and of the possessions he owns.

The peculiar tendency for the daguerreotype to synthesize a negative and a positive image may have been a constant irritation to Hawthorne's Holgrave. But for us, this trait proved useful. The simultaneous negative/positive manifestation of the daguerreotyped image served as an analogy of how Whitman's way of thinking (of the body and soul, good and evil, negative and positive mysticism) proceeds from the knowledge of contraries to their reconciliation. Ironically, what for Holgrave was a negative experience, for us was positive.

## Chapter 4 - "I am the poet of the body,/And I am the poet of the soul"

## Notes

1. Alan Trachtenberg, Reading American Photographs, (U.S.A.: Hill and Wang, 1989), p. 13.
2. Nathaniel Hawthorne, The House of the Seven Gables, (New York: The Reader's Digest Association, Inc., 1985), p. 83.
3. V.K. Chari, "Whitman and Indian Thought", Leaves of Grass, A Norton Critical Edition, ed. Sculley Bradley (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1973), p. 930.
4. Henry David Thoreau, The Portable Thoreau, ed. Carl Bode (New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1985), p. 269.

## Chapter 5 - "Hurrah for positive science!"

"Hurrah for positive science" ("Song of Myself" 488). Hurrah for inventions, discoveries, and "exact demonstration". Hurrah for technologies that clarify, edify, and unify. Hurrah for "Our modern wonders, (the antique ponderous Seven outvied,)" ("Passage to India" 4). Hurrah for:

The etui of surgical instruments, and the etui of oculist's or aurist's instruments, or dentist's instruments;  
Glassblowing, grinding of wheat and corn..casting, and what is cast..  
tinroofing, shingledressing,  
Shipcarpentering, flagging of sidewalks by flaggers..dockbuilding,  
fishcuring, ferrying ("A Song for Occupations" 132-134);

And a very special Hurrah for "the implements for daguerreotyping" ("A Song for Occupations" 139).

The energy level in mid-nineteenth century America was at a boil. The latest news would announce startling discoveries, theories, and technologies with a Polaroid snap-shot rapidity. Whitman was entirely entranced by each advancement in "positive science". "Day by day we are surprised by new ideas, theories, facts, experiments - if we can't get our heads one way we can no doubt get them another: the mine of novelty is inexhaustible."<sup>1</sup> In the first lines of "Passage to India" Whitman celebrates transcontinental navigation, railroads, and communications. It seems the "global village" phenomenon, as expressed by Marshall McLuhan, was already happening.

In the Old World the east the Suez canal,  
The New by its mighty railroad spann'd,  
The seas inlaid with eloquent gentle wires ("Passage to India" 5-7).

The influence of astronomy, of the sweep of the telescope pointed heavenward, is evident in his near perfect poem "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer". The measureless numbers he cites in Section 44 of "Song of Myself" may also derive from astronomical speculations:

We have thus far exhausted trillions of winters and summers;  
There are trillions ahead, and trillions ahead of them (1137-1138).

This same section of "Song of Myself" also reveals Whitman's attraction to classic Darwinian thinking - something which still would have been considered radically avant-garde in 1855.

Before I was born out of my mother generations guided me,  
My embryo has never been torpid....nothing could overlay it;  
For it the nebula cohered to an orb....the long slow strata piled  
to rest it on....vast vegetables gave it sustenance,  
Monstrous sauraooids transported it in their mouths and deposited it  
with care.

All forces have been steadily employed to complete and delight me,  
Now I stand on this spot with my soul (1163-1168).

Here he boldly traces his "well-formed" physique, his cosmos-inspired genius, his "barbaric yawp", back through a train of countless antecedent causes to a mere glob of nebula. And yet, despite his ready acceptance of Darwin's hypothesis (actually, Whitman's position more properly foreshadows the evolutionary ideas of the French philosopher Henri Bergson who believed in a creative vital essence which fuels an "upwardly mobile" evolution), Whitman finds no difficulty accepting a transcendental vision of life as well. He seems to be able to bridge, at least to his own satisfaction, the monkey story and the Adam story, the jungle story and the garden story.

Whitman was also attracted to trendy quasi-scientific notions like phrenology (which today we would find analogous to perhaps the whimsical propositions of astrology). By literally measuring the bumps on one's head, it was claimed by phrenologists, and believed by Whitman, that one's physical and emotional health could be measured.<sup>2</sup> In a fragment from the early "Pictures" poem, Whitman describes the ancient thinker Epicurus as follows: "His physique is full - his voice clear and sonorous - his phrenology perfect". And Whitman, in his Camden years, confesses to Horace Traubel that:

I know what Holmes said about phrenology - that you might as easily tell how much money is in a safe feeling the knob on the door as tell how much brain a man has by feeling the bumps on his head: and I guess most of my friends distrust it - but then you see I am very old fashioned - I probably have not got by the phrenology stage yet.<sup>3</sup>

All these advancements in "positive science" fascinated Whitman. In "To a Locomotive in Winter", Whitman conveys a zealous leaning to things scientific. Here, technology is sketched as a "type of the modern - emblem of motion and power - pulse of the continent" (13). This fact yokes Whitman philosophically to the new picture-taking methods introduced by the French inventor Daguerre. His discovery of mechanically capturing and fixing faithful images from real life represented a major scientific triumph - a unique collaboration of optics and chemistry. On a silver-coated copper plate one was now able to draw, without a brush or crayon, familiar scenes and faces with stark realism. Truly the inauguration of photography in 1839 represented a giant leap in "positive science".

But what did Whitman mean when he attached the adjective "positive" to science?

Exact science and its practical movements are no checks on the greatest poet but always his encouragement and support. The outset and remembrance are there...there the arms that lifted him first and brace him best...there he returns after all his goings and comings. The sailor and traveler...the anatomist chemist astronomer geologist phrenologist spiritualist mathematician historian and lexicographer are not poets, but they are the lawgivers of poets and their construction underlies the structure of every perfect poem.<sup>4</sup>

In this passage from the 1855 Preface to Leaves of Grass, Whitman suggests that scientific thinking is not an end to itself. Science does not exist for science's sake. Instead science must contribute to the cultural or physical betterment of the people, as was the case with the railroad and the telegraph. Whitman also wants to find a willingness on the part of technology to impart its methods and ideas to the artist. "Exact Science" ought to be the construction material and the stepping-stone of every true poem and every true poet. Only in this way can science possess a "positive" purpose.

In the poem "Eidolons", Whitman emphatically describes how the "eidolons", which are a species of logos-infused ether, can transcend scientific scrutiny.

Beyond thy lectures learn'd professor,  
 Beyond thy telescope or spectroscope observer keen, beyond all  
 mathematics,  
 Beyond the doctor's surgery, anatomy, beyond the chemist with  
 his chemistry,  
 The entities of entities, eidolons (61-64).

The inherent finiteness of science is that it can construct, support,

and endorse the quest of an artist only within the constricted realm of measurable experience.

And in the very first stanza of "Passage to India", Whitman extols the merits of modern technological wonders. But he employs these achievements only as a vehicle to springboard his consciousness into the world of the supramundane. The Suez canal and the transatlantic cables are hastily left behind once the journey of the soul to India commences. But the fact remains that science has a useful role in the poet's mystic meandering - and this is what makes science meaningful and "positive".

The most complete example in Leaves of Grass of the utilization of science as a scaffolding and an encouragement to poetry is "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer". In this poem the pupil-protagonist, having followed the formal analyses of the heavens on a classroom chalkboard, retreats (or rather advances) to the outdoors where, in a revelry of a midnight commerce with the stars, he daubs his own private uranography.

Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,  
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,  
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars (6-8).

Here it is clear that science is a "positive" "lawgiver to poetry" only when it is a supplement and not a replacement to art.

The most "positive" blending of scientific invention and artistic vision, during Whitman's generation, was the camera. Contained within the square wooden box with a single Cyclopean eye protruding at the front was the magical apex of science and art. Nothing else symbolized so perfectly



this alchemy of technology and aesthetics. Yet in photography's infancy the art-element was not immediately acknowledged. It seems that the idea of a mechanized art medium insulted the prejudices of the art establishment. It is true that the camera itself is essentially mindless - no different than a canvas, a slab of marble, or a cello in a leather case. But when this mindless box is focused and employed in rendering aesthetic images, we have photography - we have art. Whitman was among the first camp of apologists who advocated the art-element in photography.

In 1861 Whitman wrote a series of anonymous articles for the Brooklyn Standard called "Brooklyniana". In one article he cites an 1855 census which enumerates eighty-six different products manufactured in Brooklyn.<sup>5</sup> The list includes fish hooks, glue, clocks, pianos, lager beer, flour, and soap. But it is what he doesn't include in the list that is significant. Daguerreotyping is curiously absent from the tally. Why? Why would Whitman exclude from his list the production of photographs by the numerous studios in Brooklyn? It is quite possible that Whitman esteemed the photographic industry as the fruit of the imagination, and therefore preferred that it not be degraded or commercialized as a manufacturing commodity.

During his Camden years, Whitman would often convene discussions with Thomas Eakins or Horace Traubel respecting the merits of oil portraits and photo portraits. Of these art talks, Traubel reminisces:

W. [Whitman] has some framed photographic reproductions of Gerone's work left there by Eakins. He sometimes speaks of these, comparing

them with the Millet work.<sup>6</sup>

Whitman's verdict would often come down on the side of the new medium.

Of all portraits of me made by artists I like Eakins' best: it is not perfect but it comes nearest being me. I find I often like the photographs better than the oils - they are perhaps mechanical, but they are honest.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, to his credit, Whitman is somewhat prophetic when he groups photography as an art. In fact it is only in recent years that serious photographers have won a critical recognition of their work as art, and a place for their work in art galleries.

Whitman's faith in the progress of photography as a "positive science" leads him to utter even more astonishing prophesies. In the following passage from Walt Whitman in Camden, Whitman the prophet, (a title he would have loved to have known of himself), in a moment of farseeingness, envisages the possibility of color photography a full fifty years before its inception.

I doubt color photography: how can it ever be? There seem to be insuperable chemical difficulties in the way. Yet how can we doubt anything in this age? Day by day we are surprised by new ideas, theories, facts, experiments -<sup>8</sup>

Truly, in light of the fulfillment of this prediction, if the mire "under our bootsoles" ("Song of Myself" 1330) could yawp with a mania, it would. And thus we have come to see how the daguerreotype stands as a perfect emblem for Whitman's notion of "positive science" - a science that has advanced directly the ascent of art and culture in America. Daguerre's little square box was perhaps the most significant contribution of

technology to art since the potter's wheel. In the beauty of photographs "are the tuft and final applause of science". Whitman's "Hurrah for positive science" in Chapter 23 "Song of Myself" should be a "Hurrah" for the daguerreotype.

## Chapter 5 - "Hurrah for positive science"

## Notes

1. Horace Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1906), p. 292.
2. Justin Kaplan, Walt Whitman, A Life, (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1983), pp. 149-152.
3. Horace Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1906), p. 385.
4. Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass, The First (1855) Edition, ed. Malcolm Cowley (New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1988), p. 14.
5. Walt Whitman, Walt Whitman's New York, ed. Henry M. Christman (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1963), pp. 54-55.
6. Horace Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1906), p. 131.
7. Ibid, p. 131.
8. Ibid, p. 283.

Chapter 6 - "Hang up my picture as that of the tenderest lover"

Lover of "the little one sleeping in its cradle". Lover of the "butcher-boy", the "red-faced girl", "the runaway son". Lover of the "Blacksmith with grimed and hairy chest", the "peddler with his pack on his back", "the drunkard nodding by the bar-room stove", the "fisherman off Newfoundland", the prostitute with the "pimpled neck", the president "surrounded by the great secretaries". Lover of "every hue and trade", "every caste and religion", of the blue soldier and the gray soldier, of the slave and the auctioneer, of Brahma and Buddha, of the murderer and the wasted. Lover of the "idiot", the "homeliest", the "stammerer"; of the farmer, the lawyer, the artist; of the "rowdy", the general, and the daguerreotypist. Lover of lovers male and female. Lover of the people, of the sanctity of the democratic cause. Walt Whitman.

No other poet embraced so many so unconditionally. No other poet incarnated the democratic geist so winningly. Whitman's democracy far transcends mere abstract political treatises, mere forms and functions of a majority-elected government, mere rights and privileges sanctioned by constitutional decree. His belief in the uncompromising parity of all persons everywhere is the one yeast which utterly leavens every line of every poem of Leaves of Grass.

Like a web of fabric, this sense of parity launches forth out of every rhythm "filament, filament, filament", "ever unreeling", "ever

tirelessly speeding" ("A Noiseless Patient Spider" 4-5). If Christ personifies salvation, Petrarch personifies courtly love, Wordsworth nature, then it is abundantly clear that Whitman is the undisputed, unclipped personification of democracy.

It seems only natural that as the literary messiah of American democracy, Whitman would seek to graft himself with things genial to his vision. And if he had to handpick just one thing which marked best his principle of the greatness of equalness, it would have been the camera. Photography was to art what Leaves of Grass was to literature - the consummate pioneering emblem of nineteenth century American culture.

But not everyone shared Whitman's enthusiasm for the daguerreotype revolution. In his essay entitled "Photography", the French poet Charles Baudelaire (whose poetic resemblance to Poe makes him the perfect antithesis to all which Whitman represented) recognized the very traits inherent in photography which Whitman recognized. But the ways these two poets measure the consequence of the traits in photography are polar through and through.

A revengeful God had given ear to the prayers of the multitude. Daguerre was his Messiah. And now the faithful says to himself: 'since photography gives us every guarantee of exactitude that we could desire, then photography and art are the same thing.' From that moment our squalid society rushed, Narcissus to a man, to gaze at its trivial image on a scrap of metal. A madness, and extraordinary fanaticism took possession of all these new sun-worshippers.

Baudelaire, the anti-democrat, perceived too much of the democratic spirit at work in early photography. What he denounced as subversive to art

Whitman would have esteemed a triumph for the people. The daguerreotype was essentially democratic in three ways; by its realism ("guarantee of exactitude"), by its tendency to equalize ("photography and art are the same thing"), and by its popularity ("an extraordinary fanaticism").

Baudelaire admitted that the new method of picture-taking offered exactness of detail. Conventional drawing and painting were a process of synthesis - pictures were made or composed by discriminating between images that were aesthetically pleasing and those that were not. Details of real life could be smudged over on the oil canvas, or altogether edited out in order to create a sense of harmony and unity.

When Daguerre lifted his first print from its chemical bath, and the first image crystallized with stunning detail, the ancient dream of the Greek painter Zeuxis was instantaneously fulfilled. (And it seems that the genre of painting, with its eon-long goal now achieved, went swirling into increasing abstraction, like skating backwards, from Impressionism to Postimpressionism to Cubism to Surrealism to Abstract Expressionism, etc.) Daguerreotypes were not mere approximations but authentic thumb-prints of the original. Even under the scrutiny of a magnifying glass, the facts were astonishingly accurate. The sharpness of definition, and breadth of intermediate shadings between black and white, endowed the daguerreotype with a physicalness and immediacy that no artist of charcoal or oils could match.

The daguerreotype was refreshingly pure. The vocabulary it used was the most mimetic of all art modes. In Hawthorne's The House of the Seven Gables, the daguerreotypist-hero Holgrave acknowledges the stark honesty with which his art documented nature:

I should like to try whether the daguerreotype can bring out disagreeable traits on a perfectly amiable face. But there is certainly truth in what you have said. Most of my likenesses do look unamiable, but the very sufficient reason, I fancy, is because the originals are so. There is a wonderful insight in heaven's broad and simple sunshine. While we give credit only for depicting the merest surface, it actually brings out the secret character with a truth that no painter would ever venture upon, even could he detect it. There is at least no flattery in my humble line of art.<sup>2</sup>

Whitman would concur with Hawthorne's hero. In contrasting photography with art Whitman says: "The artists add and deduct: the artists fool with nature - reform it, revise it, to make it fit their preconceived notion of what should be".<sup>3</sup> Painting, by the very character it possesses, has the inherent limitation to idealize, synthesize and otherwise smother the pulse of the actual. Photography, on the other hand, fixes directly on the particular object or scene without distortion. The photographic process involves not synthesis, nor even selection, but an insistence to treat every detail with equal importance. Thus it is said that photographs are not composed, but "taken". The faithful transcription of every minute detail - every wrinkle, wart, or bead of sweat; every nuance of expression; every "streak of the tulip" - meant that no fact was omitted because of a lack of relatedness, morality, or aesthetic quality. This was "optical democracy".



In the 1855 Preface to Leaves of Grass, Whitman shows a tight kinship with the optical egalitarianism of photography.

Of all mankind the great poet is the equable man. Not in him but off from him things are grotesque or eccentric or fail of their sanity. Nothing out of its place is good and nothing in its place is bad. He bestows on every object or quality its fit proportions neither more nor less.<sup>4</sup>

And several pages later he insists:

The greatest poet has less a marked style and is more the channel of thoughts and things without increase or diminution, and is the free channel of himself. He swears to his art, I will not be meddling, I will not have in my writing any elegance or effect or originality to hand in the way between me and the rest like curtains. I will have nothing hang in the way, not the richest curtains. What I tell I tell for precisely what it is. Let who may exalt or startle or fascinate or soothe I will have purposes as health or heat or snow has and be as regardless of observation. What I experience or portray shall go from my composition without a shred of my composition. You shall stand by my side and look in the mirror with me.<sup>5</sup>

And true to his poetic, Whitman is not "meddlesome" - he does not interfere with his own "composition". Instead he anchors his images to tangible experience as if he had "taken" pictures in a daguerreotypal way. Consider how the following miscellany of lines projects the feeling of a first-hand transcription of particular scenes. Each line is a "snapshot" of aural, visual, and olfactory facts.

The blab of the pave....the tires of carts and the sluff of bootsoles  
and the talk of the promenaders ("Song of Myself" 146),

The carpenter dresses his plank....the tongues of his foreplane whistles  
its wild ascending lisp ("Song of Myself" 258),

The hiss of the surgeon's knife and the gnawing teeth of his saw,  
The wheeze, the cluck, the swash of falling blood....the short wild  
scream, the long dull tapering groan ("Song of Myself" 930-931),

Weapon shapely, naked, wan,  
 Head from the mother's bowels drawn,  
 Wooded flesh and metal bone, limb only one and lip only one,  
 Gray-blue leaf by red-heat grown, helve produced from a little  
 seed sown ("Song of the Broad-Axe" 1-4),

With floods of the yellow gold of the gorgeous, indolent, sinking  
 sun, burning, expanding the air ("When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard  
 Bloom'd" 83),

These lines are, to the core, quintessential Whitman. Indeed the wad of Whitman's words seems to clinch the verisimilitude of empirical things with the same optical democracy as photography. He unveils the coughs and garbs of the raw and naked Americascape, as if he had squinted through a viewfinder and clicked the shutter. One has an overwhelming feel when reading Leaves of Grass that just as a camera which "cannot lie", so Whitman translates reality as it really is.

Baudelaire feared the swelling tendency to group photography with painting as equal sisters. He preferred to preserve a hierarchy of arts, with the new mechanical fad as the most subservient. But, unlike oil portraits which, because of their commissioned costs, catered principally to the upper class, photography was affordable to all. Farmers, mechanics, judges and generals (and as in the case with Whitman, poets) all lined up at the same photo studios, to sit on the same stools, before the same cameras, operated by the same artists.

The camera and the plate are prepared, the lady must sit for her  
 daguerreotype,  
 The bride unrumples her white dress, the minutehand of the clock  
 moves slowly ("Song of Myself" 229-300),

The "minutehand of the clock" would never move rapidly for one who had to hold a gesture stock-still for several minutes. But it is important to note that the photographic process was a levelling process - the time it took to develop a likeness of a wharfman was equal to that of the president. Thus the common laborer could know the momentary fame of presidential time - even if, as Andy Warhol would say, it was only fifteen minutes. And when the images were successful they were fastened into frames and hung on walls side by side, wharfmen adjacent to presidents, as if the pictures were paintings.

Just as the camera observed all subjects alike, and just as in Plumbe's gallery the presidents and the proletariat would assemble on the same wall for display, so in Whitman's own poetry we observe a democratic leveling "of every hue and trade and rank, of every caste and religion" ("Song of Myself" 343).

"What is the grass?" The rejoinder to the simple curiosity of the child alludes to the primacy of the grass metaphor in "Song of Myself". "I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff woven" (92). The grass develops into the perfect expression of America's democratic "disposition" - its hue suggests hopefulness, its ubiquity suggests multiplicity, its commonness suggests equality. And if Whitman's "long scythe whispered and left the hay to make" (Robert Frost's "Mowing"), then we may say the act of mowing the grass is an act of keeping things democratically level like "a uniform hieroglyphic".

Not only is each spear of grass equal to every other spear of grass, but also equal to every other aspect of nature. The singer of "Song of Myself" conveys this epiphany beautifully: "I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journeywork of the stars" (662). It follows that if the "stars declare the handiwork of God" (Psalm 19:1), so do fields of grass. In this same chant Whitman also equalizes the animal realm:

And the cow crunching with depressed head surpasses any statue,  
And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels  
(667-668),

(One is reminded of Mahatma Gandhi's statement that the "cow is a poem of pity".)

The endless parades of persons in Chant 15 of "Song of Myself" and section 7 of "The Sleepers" are designed not only to represent America in its aggregate, but to show how all persons are equal celebrities - there is no one parade marshal or master of ceremonies. In "The Sleepers", one of Whitman's most imaginative compositions, all those who sleep sleep equally:

The stammerer, the sick, the perfect formed, the homely,  
The criminal that stood in the box, the judge that sat and  
sentenced him, the fluent lawyers, the jury, the audience,  
The laughter and weeper, the dancer, the midnight widow, the red  
squaw,  
The consumptive, the erysipalite, the idiot, he that is wronged,  
The antipodes, and every one between this and them in the dark,  
I swear they are averaged now...one is no better than the other,  
The night and sleep have likened them and restored them (155-161).

But for Whitman, this levelling process involves only the raising of valleys, not the reduction of mountains. His "averaging" principle does

not require the president to be humbled, but rather the prostitute to be exalted to the status of the president. In "Song of Myself" we read: "I seize the descending man....I raise him with resistless will" (1006).

Whitman wished that each word in his tributes to the physical trades would gash with a conscience, would exude a "scent of these arm pits" ("Song of Myself" 527), and would be read by hands calloused and soiled. Indeed, by honoring the proletariat, Whitman was accused of preaching "a gospel of dirt".<sup>6</sup> In the following lines from "A Song for Occupations", we perceive how the lowliest is equally immortal to the highest - how "the meek shall inherit the earth" (Matt.5:5):

Why what have you thought of yourself?  
Is it you then that thought yourself less?  
Is it you that thought the President greater than you? or the rich  
better off than you? or the educated wiser than you?

Because you are greasy or pimped - or that you was once drunk, or  
a thief, or diseased, or rheumatic, or a prostitute - or are  
so now - or from frivolity or impotence - or that you are no  
scholar, and never saw your name in print.....do you give in that  
you are any less immortal (24-27)?

In this way all Americans share the same capacity for deification: "In the faces of men and women I see God". Here the poet desires everyone to manifest an ego like his own: "In all people I see myself, none more and not one a bareycorn less ("Song of Myself" 401). It seems that by embracing the widest scope of persons Whitman includes pictures of those who were not particularly photogenic, or perhaps more correctly he would declare: "everyone is equally photogenic".

For a poet, the logical extension of an egalitarian acceptance of

all things would be that all subjects are worthy of poetic inclusion. This idea of course is not new. In the 1798 Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth states how the principal aim of poets ought to be the selection of "incidents and situations from common life". And one of the cardinal rules of Pound's Imagist movement was "to allow absolute freedom in the choice of subject". Whitman too believed that the poet is at liberty to present any picture from nature, since all are equal in importance.

In his open letter to Emerson in the 1856 edition of Leaves of Grass, Whitman asserts that sex must be emancipated from the closets of America in order to foster a healthy attitude:

By silence or obedience the pens of savans, poets, historians, biographers, and the rest, have long connived at the filthy law, and books enslaved to it, that what makes the manhood of a man, that sex, womanhood, maternity, desires, lusty animations, organs, acts, are unmentionable and to be ashamed of, to be driven to skulk out of literature with whatever belongs to them. This filthy law has to be repealed - it stands in the way of great reforms.<sup>7</sup>

And true to his philosophy, in sections 11, 24, and 28 of "Song of Myself", in "from Pent-up Aching Rivers", in "I Sing the Body Electric", in "A Woman Waits for Me", "Spontaneous Me" and elsewhere, he draws images that are "disorderly fleshy and sensual". In these poems Whitman boldly slaps the face of American society - a society still heavily sedated with a repressed Puritan prudery. An example of the unabashed display of sensuality from "Spontaneous Me" runs thus:

Love-thoughts, love juice, love-odor, love-yielding, love-climbers,  
and the climbing sap,  
Arms and hands of love, lips of love, phallic thumb of love, breasts  
of love, bellies press'd and glued together with love,

Earth of chaste love, life that is only life after love,  
 The body of my love, the body of the woman I love, the body of the  
 man, the body of the earth (12-15),

One admires Whitman's strength of conviction to practice what he preached - that if a commitment to democratic equality (as well as to realism) involves the preaching of "a gospel of dirt", then so be it.

It is relevant to note how the tone of candor in Leaves of Grass parallels the early use of the camera. Thomas Eakins, who knew Whitman as a friend, experimented with unconventional poses of the nude - both male and female. His photographs seem especially Whitman-like in the way they exhibit a freedom from sentimental or moralizing associations. Actually, a portfolio of photographed nudes began at the very inception of photography.

The nineteenth century painters of France were among the first to study closely and copy photographs of the nude. Nude models were among the first subjects observed by the infant camera. According to Gernsheim, the French photography Lerebours photographed some nudes as early as 1840, only one year after the historic introduction of Daguerre's process.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, although Whitman's poetry was an affront to the squeamish of his generation, an affinity is apparent between the directions which the early cameras pointed and the directions which Whitman's pen pointed.

Baudelaire's accusations of an "extraordinary fanaticism" amongst those who practiced the photographic art brings us to the third way in which the daguerreotype had a democratic character. The popularity of the new medium was immediate. Not only were photographs cheap to produce,

quick to frame, and convenient to cart, but no formal training was required in order to become a picture-taker. Thus, hordes of weekend hobbyists, enthused by the new dream of a quick and easy memory-making machine, clicked their shutters in an unprecedented rush. In 1850, just one year before the creation of Holgrave, there were seventy-seven photograph studios in New York City alone. It was estimated that in the year 1871 more than 50,000 Americans were employed either directly or indirectly in the photography business.<sup>9</sup>

In the midst of this atmosphere Whitman would have appreciated the way in which a scientific invention could be transformed into an art genre by the hands of the common American. In celebration of this phenomenon, Whitman asserts:

I don't believe in the 'great' photographers - the swells with reputation - I think the other fellow is just a apt to hit it. There is so much in the atmosphere, surrounding - in the whole circumstance. The other fellow is less likely to be a slave to rules.<sup>10</sup>

Photography epitomized the democratization of art.

Whitman - whose commitment to inclusiveness was fundamental; who lined the walls of his portrait studio with farmers, harlots, soldiers, old widows, lumber-jacks, and escaped slaves; who touched the meek and low with words and traced their trail of sweat, their pores, their hair, their veins that pulse America with his poems - would have known great joy in the ubiquity of the little black box and the bath of iodine. Just as photography transformed the trivial into the memorable, so the pictures of



Whitman's long catalogues transformed the miscellaneous into the immortal. Indeed, the picture that emerges of Whitman is that of "The Tenderest Lover" of democracy.

Perhaps we could say that as the name Whitman rhymes philosophically with the concept of democracy, so the daguerreotype shoots philosophically the picture of democracy. Ironically, Baudelaire while correct in his observations respecting photography, was utterly estranged from the spirit of the age, of which the camera was a crowning emblem.

Chapter 6 "Hang up my picture as that of the tenderest lover"

Notes

1. B. Newhall, Photography: Essays and Images, (New York: Rapoport Printing Corp., 1980), p. 112.
2. Nathaniel Hawthorne, The House of the Seven Gables, (New York: The Reader's Digest Association, Inc., 1985), p. 83.
3. Horace Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1906), p. 131.
4. Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass, The First (1855) Edition, ed. Malcolm Cowley (New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1988), p. 8.
5. Ibid, p. 12.
6. Horace Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1906), p. 59.
7. Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass, A Norton Critical Edition, ed. Sculley Bradley (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1973), p. 739.
8. Peter Lacey, The History of the Nude in Photography, (New York: Bantam Books, 1964), p. 6.
9. B. Newhall, Photography: Essays and Images, (New York: Rapoport Printing Corp., 1980), p. 41.
10. Horace Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1906), pp. 192-193.

## Chapter 7 - "Latitude widens, longitude lengthens"

There are times for exploration and times for the development of the territory acquired.<sup>1</sup>

Few poets have dared to propose wholesale technical renovations to literature; dared to "widen the latitude and lengthen the longitude" of inherited poetic form. And fewer are they who have succeeded in such literary "explorations". If we think of authors who have been triumphant trail-breakers - triumphant in mapping a new species of writing seemingly from out of nowhere - the names of Homer, Aeschylus, Dante, Shakespeare, Blake, and in our own century, Joyce, may come to mind. But when we consider how the technical chart of Leaves of Grass is so radically unlike Tennyson's "Maud", Browning's Men and Women, and Longfellow's The Song of Hiawatha (all of which were 1855 publications), we gain an overwhelming sense that Whitman was not only leagues ahead of his time, but is and always shall be leagues ahead of all times. Thus unhesitatingly we grade Whitman with that elect band of poetic pathfinders headed by Homer.

Already we have examined how Whitman's vision of democracy was made to pump fresh and full throughout the miles of lines in Leaves of Grass. And we have examined how the very sinews of that vision were braided loop after loop with the cords that characterize early photography. But Whitman not only introduced a fresh vision to literature, he also mastered a fresh means to render that vision. And so, as we focus our lens upon his technical innovations, we shall see that our analogy with photography is

is still not spent. We still have a roll of film left in our camera.

As one becomes acquainted with the works of Whitman, one soon understands how traditional poetic forms would have been too constricting for the expansive reach of his vision.

Rhymes and rhymers pass away, poems distill'd from poems pass away,  
 The swarms of reflectors and the polite pass, and leave ashes,  
 Admirers, importers, obedient persons, make but the soil of literature,  
 America justifies itself, give it time, no disguise can deceive it  
 or conceal from it, it is impassive enough  
 ("By Blue Ontario's Shore" 213-516),

Whitman needed to discover a cadence to match his spirit - a cadence to manifest the Manifest Destiny and contain the territorial growth of the United States. Indeed, had Whitman squeezed and wrenched "Song of Myself" into a strict metrical mold, his "kosmos" would have been finite, his "yawp" mute, and his sensual punch impotent.

By the rules of conventional metrics, a poem achieves both a relief from a potentially monotonous rhythm, as well as a quickened sense of significance when subtle departures of stress from the base grid (say iambic or trochaic) are strategically employed by the poet. When such a metrical variation from the grid occurs, we have a counterpoise. But when we examine Whitman's poems, we find that there are no iambic pentameter grids, no base patterns against which subtle shifts in stress or rhyme could be made. Indeed, most discussions about the way the lines of Whitman scan prosodically would be as nonsensical as discussions respecting the "vers libre" artistry in say Poe's "The Raven". Perhaps if we could perceive the sum corpus of poems by those contemporary to Whitman as

representing the established framework, then we might say Leaves of Grass is one vast metrical departure or one vast moment of counterpoint.

During the decade before 1855, in that "long foreground somewhere", Whitman ventured to produce his own brand of verse. What emerged was the most reformatory poetic tract in American literature. If (as T.S. Eliot states in "Tradition and the Individual Talent") upon the arrival of every poem, the established literary "order must be, if ever so slightly, altered", then it seems that upon the arrival of Leaves of Grass the "existing order" was shaken to its very foundation. One is pressed to inquire of the taproots of Whitman's experimental structures. What are the prosodic origins of his verse? What could have influenced the free and variable rhythms of "Song of Myself"?

When we recall his near obsession with the new picture-taking invention, and his routine tours of Broadway parlors, and his friendship with Thomas Eakins and Matthew Brady, and his habit of creatively playing to the lens-eye, we begin to behold how photography may have provided an impetus in the development of his craft. Indeed, the likelihood that photography had more than a mere residual role in the maturation of the form in Leaves of Grass becomes increasingly plausible when we remember Whitman's pre-1855 experiment entitled "Pictures". In this poem Whitman explicitly invites an analogy between photography and his structural innovations:

In a little house pictures I keep, many pictures  
 hanging suspended - It is not a fixed house,  
 It is round - it is but a few inches from one side of it to the

other side,  
 But behold! it has room enough - in it, hundreds and thousands, -  
 all varieties (1-3);

The daguerreotypes that follow in this poem are expressed in lines that seem tentative and crippled in their flow - as if they hang crooked on the gallery walls. Nevertheless, the fact remains that this poem endeavors to simulate successive "pictures" via the catalogue method, and thus foreshadows the look of the poems of 1855.

In order for Whitman to render his convictions (and his "pictures") into words, he felt it necessary to liberate the line from the manacles of metrical arithmetic. According to conventional prosody, lines of poems move and merge as phrasal or clausal units. Whether the sentence is complete or not, the commitment to line-breaks in poetry dictates that the verse ought to keep going, even if unsignaled by punctuation. This traditional technique was not suited for the architectural demands of the long enumerated grocery-list style of presenting "pictures" which Whitman had developed. By running lines into one another, he would have obscured the clarity of his "pictures".

Whitman resolved this problem by framing the "pictures" in his long catalogues within the length of a single line; each line would grow organically into whatever length was necessary in order to contain the image. Thus rather than the metrical count imposing an order on the "pictures", Whitman made the "pictures" impose an order on the line. In this way each line girdles its own "picture". Examples of individual lines enclosing individual "snap-shots" may be found in most any catalogue list.

The following passage begins Section 15 of "Song of Myself":

The pure contralto sings in the organloft,  
 The carpenter dresses his plank...the tongue of his foreplane  
 whistles its wild ascending lisp,  
 The married and unmarried children ride home to their thanksgiving  
 dinner,  
 The pilot seizes the king-pin, he heaves down with a strong arm,  
 The mate stands braced in the whaleboat, lance and harpoon are  
 ready,  
 The duck-shooter walks by silent and cautious stretches,  
 The deacons are ordained with crossed hands at the altar,  
 The spinning-girl retreats and advances to hum of the big wheel,

As we observe here, the liberty of lines results in a growth beyond the margins of any book width into large layered heaps providing ample space for the detailing of "pictures". This approach to lining may be likened to an expandable wineskin which inflates as it is filled. The shape and spread of the wineskin, unlike a clay pitcher, is determined by the quantity of content. In this same way, Whitman presents a linear structure founded on phrases not feet.

Indeed if we were to employ conventional calculations, we would be baffled by the many lines in Leaves of Grass which number forty, fifty, or in the case of line 28 of the 1855 version of "A Song for Occupations", seventy-one syllables. Perhaps such mega-lines could be identified as "kilometers", reflecting both a figurative distance, as well as a metrical measure approximating one thousand iambs.

When we zoom our lens nearer to individual lines within catalogue sequences, we may see better how the mechanics of the lines contribute further to the "picture" analogy. Seldom do we find in Leaves of Grass instances of enjambment, seldom will one line spill over into the one

following. Instead Whitman always end-punctuates the lines, as if to prevent an over-lapping of "pictures". Thus each line (and each "picture") becomes sharply demarcated without ambiguity.

And at the other end of the line, at each line-start, we find a trait which also emphasizes this demarcation of the "picture". One may find that it is somewhat out-of-character for the poet who abandoned wholesale the principles of meter, rhyme, and external ornament to preserve throughout his compositions the shop-worn custom of capitalizing the initial letter of each line. This practice, which was followed in blind faith by all poets since the time of Chaucer, should have been an obvious standard to rebel against. Whatever function this convention might have once served was by Whitman's time essentially forgotten to history. Yet Whitman still observed the start position of an upper-case letter in all his poems. If Whitman had a purpose for keeping this practice, it might have been to better separate each line from surrounding lines. In this way the presentation of "pictures" would be articulated more sharply.

Thus the starting of each line by a capital letter and the retiring of each line with punctuation results in a kind of "picture-frame" within which is mounted a self-contained daguerreotype, a "snap-shot" of an original, a sharply-framed uncropped facsimile. Early daguerreotypists also never cropped their pictures but printed them the same size as the exposed plate. Whitman it seems followed their example and filled his "pictures" to the edge in his use of the prolonged visibly-marked line.

Upon inspection of the first edition of Leaves Of Grass, we will



discover the omnipresent use of strings of periods or ellipses bridging together two, three, or more parts of an individual line. The frequent occurrence of ellipses in "Song of Myself" (for example, there are fifteen of them in Section 2 alone) does not indicate the omission of words. Nor do they result in a jagged, disjointed feel - the lines are not caused to wobble on crutches. Instead these strings of periods tend to highlight the bubbling immediacy of the verse. They evoke the feeling that the lines were written in haste, that the pen of the author could barely keep up to the muse, that they are truly the result of a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings".

Similarly, a photograph always conveys the sense of an integrity to the first-hand report, the sense of capturing a fleeting "spot of time", the sense that the spontaneity of the moment has not been tampered with or censored (as might be the feeling one gets from paintings).

Another function of the ellipsis in the 1855 poems is to draw the reader's attention nearer to the detail, to auger the reader deeper into the sense of the "picture". Consider this effect in the following lines from "Song of Myself":

I lean and loafe at my ease....observing a spear of summer grass (5)

or,

Houses and rooms are full of perfumes....the shelves are crowded  
with perfumes (6),

or again,

The atmosphere is not a perfume....it has no taste of the  
distillation....it is odorless (9),

The ellipses in these lines work as organizing devices that propel the movement of theme towards a deductive narrowing of scope, towards an increase in specificity. In the same way, our first impression of a photograph is typically large and general. But upon a close examination of the photograph, greater detail is discerned. We may discover, for example, curious facial expressions, subtle degrees of gray, and even the grain of the photographic plate. In the same way the ellipses draws us into a closer examination of the "picture" contained in each line.

It is unfortunate that Whitman discontinued his distinctive usage of the ellipsis in subsequent editions of Leaves of Grass, substituting for them conventional punctuation such as commas. The abandonment of this stylistic stamp, this ineffable sinew of the line, this bubbling signature of the muse, seems to coincide with the dispersion of the logos-infused mystic energy in his later poems. The gulf that separates the 1855 Whitman from the 1889 Whitman may be described as follows: the early poet possessed the Godhead, the later poet possessed a philosophy about the Godhead. Indeed, the mystic tour that we read of in "Passage to India" seems to be a tour divorced from the tour de force. The discontinuation of the ellipses is just one small outward sign that the original inspiration had mostly diffused into a spent force, just as a camera when bumped during the moment of exposure results in an out-of-focus fuzzy image.

If we sharpen our focus on the ways in which Whitman's use of the line can be likened to a photograph, we may observe his stylistic habit of using present participles. Although they sometimes contribute to a syntactically

clumsy rhythm, the long and extensive employment of participles in the present tense always conveys the sense that the presentation of a "picture" is a sliver of real time, a "momentary stay against confusion". We catch the very sentiment of the actively present moment in the following lines from "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd":

Pictures of growing spring and farms and homes,  
 With the Fourth-month eve at sundown, and the gray smoke lucid and  
 bright,  
 With floods of the yellow gold of the gorgeous, indolent, sinking  
 sun, burning, expanding the air,  
 With the flesh sweet herbage under foot, and the pale green leaves  
 of the trees prolific,  
 In the distance the flowing glaze, the breast of the river, with  
 a wind-dapple here and there (81-85),

Whitman knew that the poignant feeling of the Civil War, the "Foulest crime in history known in any land or age" ("This Dust was once the Man" 3), would be best translated in the present sense. Thus the opening poem in "Drum-Taps" contains the following "pictures":

To the drum-taps prompt,  
 The young men falling in and arming,  
 The mechanics arming, (the trowel, the jack-plane, the black-smith's  
 hammer, tost aside with precipitation,)  
 The lawyer leaving his office and arming, the judge leaving the court,  
 The driver deserting his wagon in the street, jumping down, throwing  
 the reins abruptly down on the horse's backs,  
 The salesman leaving the store, the boss, book-keeper, porter all  
 leaving ("First O Songs for a Prelude" 21-26);

The use of present participles here reinforces the pictorial quality of each of the lines. Each image within each line seems to forever reside in the time-present, just as a photograph, regardless of how foreign or distant or aged it may be, elicits the presence of the present - a kind of self-contained package of time that will always seem, in an almost metaphysical way, ahistorical.

As we study the significance of the line unit in Leave of Grass, a curious revelation presents itself. A cursory look at the lines in the 1855 edition seems to show a material length greater than those in later editions, particularly the "Death Bed" edition of 1891. If we were to measure a random set of poems from both eras by actually counting the quantity of words, our hunch would be proved correct. The tally of five poems from the 1855 edition is thus measured:

"A Song for Occupations"	(2924 words divided by 178 lines equals 16.43 words per line).
"To Think of Time"	(1778 words divided by 135 lines equals 13.17 words per line.).
"The Sleepers"	(2657 words divided by 204 lines equals 13.02 words per line.).
"I Sing the Body Electric"	(1749 words divided by 119 lines equals 14.70 words per line.
"There Was a Child Went Fourth"	(576 words divided by 32 lines equals 18.00 words per line.

In contrast to the preceding statistical count, consider the measure of the following six post-Civil War poems:

"Song of the Universal"	(467 words divided by 65 lines equals 7.18 words per line).
"When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd"	(2149 words divided by 206 lines equals 10.43 words per line).
"O Captain! My Captain!"	(202 words divided by 24 lines equals 8.43 words per line).
"Prayer to India"	(2256 words divided by 255 lines equals 8.85 words per line).
"Prayer to Columbus"	(573 words divided by 66 lines equals 8.69 words per line).
"The Mystic Trumpeter"	(767 words divided by 76 lines equals 10.09 words per line).

Although it is recognized that mere counting of words is a rather crude prosodic means of measuring the length or duration of a line, nevertheless the evidence seems clear: the lines in his later poems are considerably

more brief than those in his earlier poems. On average, just ten lines of verse would contain sixty to eighty more words in 1855 than say 1871, the date for "Passage to India". How does one account for this phenomenon, and more importantly to our thesis, how do such cold statistics relate to our photography analogy?

The length of lines may reflect Whitman's zeal (or loss or zeal) for democracy in America. His democratic idealism was high in 1855, just six years after the defeat of the Mexicans. Perhaps the shorter lines that characterized his post-war poems reflect America's coming of age, America's loss of idealism. In 1871 Whitman published Democratic Vistas which criticizes America for having degenerated into complacency and corruption. Perhaps the lines of his poems had to be abridged, just as the spirit of the greatest poem, "the United States themselves", had become abridged.

Or perhaps the discrepancy in line lengths between his pre-war and his post-war poems are the result of a refining of his craft, a honing of his artistry. There is little debate that the sense of unity and development of motif in poems like "When Lilacs Last in the dooryard Bloom'd" are at a much higher artistic level than the schizophrenic shooting of lines in the catalogue lists of "Song of Myself". The brevity of lines thus refracts his keener craftsmanship in his later years.

But it is an interesting fact that the earliest daguerreotypes required several minutes in order for the exposure to be complete. Human subjects had to freeze their gestures marble-like in order to avoid a blurring of the reproduction. However, by the 1870's, as a result of

constant experimentation and invention, the exposure time in photography was reduced to quick split seconds. It was at this time that the photographers Thomas Eakins and Eadweard Muybridge collaborated in their studies of "animal locomotion" and of the human figure running and jumping, all of which required high-speed cameras.<sup>2</sup>

If, as we have already proposed, individual lines are emblematic of individual daguerreotypes, then it follows that the typographical fullness in the lines of 1855 may suggest the prolonged duration and fullness of time which was required in the picture-taking process in that particular decade. In other words, the quantity of time required to utter a line seems to correspond to the quantity of time to shoot a picture. When cameras evolved into high-speed machines, the duration of time for an exposure was obviously reduced. As if to parallel the evolution in cameras, we observe a radical shortening of line lengths in the later editions of Leaves of Grass.

As we assess the prosodical innovations of Whitman, another photographic resemblance becomes evident. Opening lines of poems or stanzas of poems often seem short, especially when juxtaposed with the long rambling lines within the bulk of the poems. Consider the following lines which initiate his more noted poems:

I celebrate myself ("Song of Myself"- 1855),

I sing the body electric ("I Sing the Body Electric"),

When I heard the learn'd astronomer ("When I Heard the Learn'd  
Astronomer"),

Spontaneous me, nature ("Spontaneous Me"),  
 O take my hand Walt Whitman ("Salut Au Monde")!  
 Recorders ages hence ("Recorders Ages Hence"),  
 Weapon shapely, naked, wan ("A Song of Broad-Axe"),  
 Come closer to me ("A Song for Occupations"),  
 Come said the Muse ("Song of the Universal"),  
 By blue Ontario's shore, ("By Blue Ontario's Shore"),  
 Singing my days ("Passage to India"),  
 I wander all night in my vision ("The Sleepers"),  
 A batter'd, wrecked old man ("Prayer of Columbus"),  
 A noiseless patient spider ("A Noiseless Patient Spider"),

Clearly these lines are more brief than what is considered average by Whitman. It is as if an aperture-like technique were consciously employed by Whitman - a technique that reminds us of the regulating device which controls the amount of light entering the lens of a camera. After the first line Whitman increases the length of the lining so that the typographical results is like the opening of a diaphragm. This graduated method occurs often in Whitman. For example, we see how each line grows a little in length over the one previous in Section 3 of "Passage to India":

Passage to India!  
 Lo soul for thee of tableaus twain,  
 I see in one the Suez canal initiated, open'd,  
 I see the procession of steamships, the Empress Eugenie's leading  
 the van,  
 I mark from on deck the strange landscape, the pure sky, the level  
 sand in the distance (41-45),

This technique of opening up the lens occurs again and again in Leaves of Grass. Another example of this characteristic, this time from

"A Song for Occupations", is as follows:

Come closer to me,  
 Push close my lovers and take the best I possess,  
 Yield closer and closer and give the best you possess (1-3),

And the famous introduction to "Song of Myself" illustrates this photographic feature too:

I celebrate myself,  
 And what I assume you shall assume,  
 For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you (1-3).

Typically, by the fourth line the poem has reached its peak rhythm - the lens has been expanded to receive the maximum amount of light and image.

When Whitman concludes a poem or a section of a poem, he works a reverse method of narrowing the line lengths - a clever closing down of the diaphragm. The ending of Section 5 of "When Lilac Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" illustrates this point. It is as if Whitman's camera were zooming in nearer and nearer to the central image of the box carrying the slain president.

Amid the grass in the fields each side of the lanes, passing the  
 endless grass,  
 Passing the yellow-spear'd wheat, every grain from its shroud in  
 the dark-brown fields uprisen,  
 Passing the apple-tree blows of white and pink in the orchards,  
 Night and day journeys a coffin (28-32).

And again Whitman uses this method of closing down the lens at the end of Section 6 of the same poem:

The dim-lit churches and the shuddering organs - where amid these  
 you journey,  
 With tolling tolling bells' perpetual clang,  
 Here, coffin that slowly passes,  
 I give you my sprig of lilac (42-45).



Thus Whitman's poetic experiments seem more and more analogous with the art of the daguerreotype.

And finally, if we could stand back from each line (or each "picture") and view the totality of the images in any given catalogue list, we would perceive an embroidery of "pictures" resembling a photo album. Although each line frames its own autonomous "picture", the lines in aggregate may remind us of an anthology of photographs or perhaps a gallery collection at Plumbé's daguerrean studio. As a collection they hospitably receive the net value of America, the Manifest Destiny, and the vast cosmic vision of Whitman.

Thus we see how the influence of photography upon Whitman's poetic practice emerges as a credible study. What Whitman said of photographers,

I think we should have the proper photos taken experimentally at once from the bust - or in a week or two....I want your man to try and try and try again until the right one is secured.<sup>3</sup>

applies also to himself. He was a radical experimentalist who totally revised the way we read poetry. Although he wrote as if not a single line were the result of a deliberate counting of metrical feet, he nevertheless shows a profound interest in developing the right medium for his thoughts. One is reminded of T.S.Eliot's statement that "no verse is free for the man who wants to do a good job".<sup>4</sup> Clearly Whitman did a "good job" when he "widened the latitude and lengthened the longitude" of his lines in order to fit the concept of the daguerreotype into his writings.

**Chapter 7 - "Latitude widens, longitude lengthens"****Notes**

1. T.S. Eliot, On Poetry and Poets, (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), p. 35.
2. Phyllis D. Rosenzweig, The Thomas Eakins Collection of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1977), p. 118.
3. Horace Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1906), p. 213.
4. T.S. Eliot, On Poetry and Poets, (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), p. 37.

## Conclusion

Our excursion which started with a simple, unpretentious news column by Whitman entitled "Visit to Plumbe's Gallery" has resulted in a kaleidoscopic range of connections between Whitman and the daguerreotype. We began by considering Whitman as a journalist for a string of New York based newspapers. We speculated that in such a capacity Whitman could not have missed or ignored the sheer infusion of the daguerreotype upon nineteenth century American society. This new invention would have penetrated his consciousness in a profound way.

Next we studied Whitman's fascination with his own limning. Indeed Whitman's personal interest in the new picture-taking medium can be dated to at least his earliest extant photographic portrait in the late 1840's. He was subsequently photographed hundreds of times until he himself declared: "the cameras themselves are tired of me". We also witnessed the revolutionary stagecraft that was employed in his portraits, and how there seems to be a chronological chronicle of transitions from a Brooklyn journalist to a proletariat "rough" to enlightened sage.

In the next chapter we examined how Whitman's emphasis on sight and seeing in Leaves of Grass corresponds with key elements in photography. The inter-relatedness of the "eye/I" dichotomy reminds us of the way Whitman maneuvered his camera to achieve "vantage-point" and "focal-distance" in his poems.

The direct positive process of daguerreotypes, where the positive and the negative images blend into one and the same, afforded us with a

slightly tangential extension of our analogy. We examined the monistic philosophy of Whitman as it relates to the body and the soul, as well as to good and evil and to negative/positive mysticism.

We were reminded of Whitman's zeal for scientific advancements, and how the advent of photography seemed to fit the mold of the poet's mind perfectly. In addition we discerned a kinship between Whitman's democratic leaning and the popularity of photography. The optical democracy of both halves of the analogy seems clear. Both Whitman's poems and the photographic image represent surrogates of reality. They both delineate the augustness of direct concrete particulars without discriminating between relevancies and irrelevancies. Indeed both Leaves of Grass and the art of photography are "of the people, by the people, for the people".

And lastly we analyzed the ways in which Whitman's craftsmanship resembled techniques in photography. Just as photography cleansed worn-out aesthetical values, so Whitman's poetry cleansed the language of America. Just as photography rejected the vast edifice of past models, so Whitman's rejected the stock literary devices of his day. He wanted no rhymes, no arbitrary metrics, "no ornamental similes at all". And just as photography (unlike painting) required very little background knowledge, so Whitman is neither burdened with nor burdens the reader with Biblical, Greek, or Roman allusions. Poems that idealize past models, that are "distilled from other poems", lack guts. Whitman hoped to grind to grit old world models in order to create a new world poetic. Thus he introduces a new poetic architecture by piling line upon line in catalogue stacks. And as we observed, each line possesses an uncanny likeness to individual snapshots.

By heeding Whitman's invitation to "Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all [my] poems" ("Song of Myself" 33), we could hopefully examine Leaves of Grass from a new angle and through a new lens. By training our focus microscopically, as well as by opening the aperture telescopically, we might hopefully vivify and magnify our understanding of the origin of the little tract of 1855. And although we would never claim that photography represents an exclusive or primary source of Whitman's muse, we may conclude that the new method of picture-taking stands as one of many plausible influences.

The general mood of the early pioneers in photography and Leaves of Grass was decidedly optimistic. Both shared a sense of newness and wildness because they both were forward looking - they did not look back to past models. However, our study of the fourth analogy caused us to look back to that "long foreground somewhere". Even though such a "backward glance" may run counter to the spirit of early photography and of Whitman, the picture that emerges of the "Good Gray Poet" as a daguerreotypist par excellence has been worth the effort.

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