Receiv'd with Plaudits in the Capitol: Whitman's Readers and the Politics of the Canon

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

"RECEIV'D WITH PLAUDITS IN THE CAPITOL": WHITMAN'S READERS AND THE POLITICS OF THE CANON

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
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INTRODUCTION

In 1860, Walt Whitman published the line, “When I heard at the close of the day how my name had been receiv’d with plaudits in the capitol, still it was not a happy night for me that followed.” Later in the same poem, he related what gladdened him: “For the one I love most lay sleeping by me under the same cover . . . And his arm lay lightly around my breast—and that night I was happy.” But, as Whitman’s central position in the canon and curriculum of American literature attests, Whitman was received with plaudits in the literary capital as the Victorian “Good Gray Poet,” at the expense of his radical views on class, gender, and sexuality. I have always been fascinated by the fact that Whitman, whom I consider a fundamentally radical figure, personally and textually, somehow made it into the Canon, a thing that, as I learned in graduate school, is supposed to be exclusive and insidiously controlling of national representations and identities. How, then, did *Leaves of Grass*, including as subjects working men, mothers, prostitutes, and what appears to be very intimate male friendship, containing endless catalogues of objects, and flouting, at least in early editions, conventions of punctuation and even titles, make it into this exclusive club? In the course of my research and writing, I have learned that neither Whitman nor canons were exactly what I believed
them to be. I still believe Whitman is a profoundly radical poet and presence, but I have come to discover that his famous self-contradictions make him somewhat like the Bible, sometimes misread or taken out of context, to support any of a number of positions. Whitman enables such readings through his seduction of the reader and through the inclusion of diverse personae throughout his poetry. I have also discovered that canons, like conspiracy theories, are overrated. As it seems to me unlikely that most alleged conspiracies could remain hidden long enough to be effective, so also in my work here I have discovered that the contradictions inherent in canons make them fragile things, and that in their cracks are sown the seeds of their own potential destruction, or at least refiguration. And so in this study I examine these contradictions, in the first chapter looking at some revisions Whitman made himself after the Civil War, imagining how they might be useful to the project of Northern, industrial ascendancy in the Gilded Age. More significantly for my study, though, the refashioning of Whitman was done by his readers constructing the canon of American literature, who were able to make use of Whitman by making out of him a text to answer their various anxieties, whether they be over modernity or masculinity. In chapters two through four, I examine how readers of Whitman at various stages from the late nineteenth century to the 1940s refashioned and conventionalized Whitman’s texts and his image to correspond to their agendas for the study of
American literature. I am particularly interested in the intersections of class, gender and sexuality in this history: how these issues were read through one another as if through lenses, each to diffuse the others.

I do not think Whitman's sexuality is irrelevant, but, while my own subjective interest in what I call Whitman's sexuality is ever present, I do not want to project an experience of modern homosexuality onto Whitman's erotic practice. Though the modern period differentiates greatly my study from the ancient period of David Halperin's, I think his admonition is well-taken here:

The real issue confronting any cultural historian of antiquity, and any critic of contemporary culture, is, first of all, how to recover the terms in which the experiences of individuals belonging to past societies were actually constituted and, second, how to measure and assess the differences between those terms and the ones we currently employ. For, as the very controversy over the scope and applicability of sexual categories illustrates, concepts in the human sciences—unlike in this respect, perhaps, concepts in the natural sciences (such as gravity)—do not merely describe reality but, at least partly, constitute it. 1

My intention is not to side with some current critics who would deny the existence or the relevance of Whitman's homoeroticism, like David Reynolds, who minimizes Whitman's sexuality, saying "his relations with men . . . can be best understood as especially intense manifestations of the kind of same-sex passion that was seen everywhere in antebellum America . . . . [O]vert displays

of affection between people of the same sex were common."² Nor do I agree with Kenneth Lynn, who believes Whitman was ashamed of his homoerotic expressions and controlled and tempered them through socially acceptable outlets, i.e., Civil War nursing and Drum Taps.³ My admiration for Robert K. Martin's ground breaking The Homosexual Tradition in American Poetry is genuine, even though almost twenty years later, in the wake of Foucault and Halperin, it seems naïve. Martin, by privileging his own gay subjectivity, performed the necessary work of making it impossible not to talk about Whitman's sexuality. Unlike Michael Moon, I am cautious about the claims made for Whitman's sense of his own sexuality and his contemporaries' awareness of it. Moon believes "one chief design of the successive editions of Leaves of Grass was to counter the privatizing, standardizing, domesticizing, misogynist, and homophobic social arrangements of industrial, commercial, and (in the post-Civil War era) corporate capitalism that eventually replaced earlier arrangements." I, however, do not believe homophobia was yet an issue in the United States, a country that lagged behind in the formulation of sexuality as a discourse.⁴

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Though sexuality may not play a primary role in each of my chapters, it always motivates my work, even in chapter three, where gender, rather than sexuality, is what most of the nineteenth-century American readers responded to. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick reminds us, issues of gender and sexuality may not be identical, but they are parallel, and from this, I make connections between, on the one hand, a nineteenth-century reader’s construction of a masculinist American canon reading Whitman’s sexuality as ultimate male gender identification and, on the other, certain modernist critics reading Whitman’s sexuality as gender confusion to join what they see as masculine and feminine elements in American culture. Though in chapter one I argue that Whitman removed some personal references to a perception of aberrant sexual feeling/behavior, I also am convinced that at other times Whitman believed that what he called adhesiveness and comradeship were not peculiar or pathological but the very foundation for true democracy:

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

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emotional, muscular, heroic, and refined, but having the deepest relations to general politics.\(^6\)

Whitman’s vigorous denial to John Addington Symonds of any physical implications of “Calamus” has partially at its root the above pre-modern sentiment. The force of discourse of the invert was not what Whitman had in mind when he spoke of comradeship, though there might have been other reasons he resisted Symonds’s question, including self protection.

Whitman’s continual self-fashioning is not an abrupt shift from his earlier, radical work, but a continuation of it, especially as I discuss in chapter one. There, I examine Whitman’s treatment of voice and identity in three sets of revisions of *Leaves of Grass* as his attempts to resolve issues of division and otherness regarding Union, class, and sexuality in the context of post-Civil War, Northern, industrial hegemony. I examine the implications of the excision of two passages in “The Sleepers,” the addition of “Drum Taps”—specifically “Song of the Banner at Daybreak” in that cluster—and the excision of three poems in the “Calamus” cluster—“Who is Now Reading This?” “I Thought That Knowledge Alone Would Suffice,” and “Hours Continuing Long.” I look at these poems in terms of the voices that are represented and repressed through excision—in the case of “The Sleepers” and the “Calamus” poems—or through the interplay and silencing of voices, as in “Song of the

Banner at Daybreak." Throughout, I draw on psychoanalytic theory, including the object relations theory of Melanie Klein, the affect theories of Michael Franz Basch, and Jacques Lacan's theory of the "mirror stage," to illuminate the implications of these revisions for the issues of voice and identity, especially as they relate to irreconcilable difference in Whitman's project to rejoin and heal.

I begin to examine the intersections of class, gender, and sexuality as they manifest themselves in readings of Whitman in chapter two, where I explore how three selected nineteenth-century British critics—John Addington Symonds, George Saintsbury, and Edward Dowden—read Whitman in ways that filled their own contradictory needs and the needs of British society caught between industrial capitalism and scientific positivism on the one hand and pastoral, aristocratic nostalgia on the other. Each of their readings of Whitman treated these issues in contradictory ways, alternately validating and condemning modernity and nostalgia, casting Whitman as a visionary of the best of the new or prophet of the old as an antidote to the disfiguring impulses of modernity. Specifically, I examine their conflicted responses to Whitman around two clusters of issues: (1) the homoeroticism of Whitman's poetry, and the use of the trope "Greek" to describe it either as part of the minoritizing discourse of the invert or as part of an older tradition of homosociality; and (2) Whitman's relation to modernity, as a speaker for it, as
an antidote to it, or as an opportunity to demonstrate pseudo-scientific critical principles. These two issues are frequently intertwined in the writings of these critics. Ambivalence around the homoerotic in Whitman is continued in nineteenth-century American critics' repression of or blindness to the homoerotic in Whitman's poetry and in the early twentieth-century American critics' fantasies of reunion with the maternal voice in Whitman, sometimes enabled by a recognition of the homoerotic.

Though serious American critical attention to Whitman may have been occasioned by favorable English response, American critics soon found Whitman could be made to speak to their needs, specifically in the nineteenth century, combating the popular, "feminine" genteel by putting culture in the realm of the "masculine" entrepreneurial. Hence, we will observe in chapter three a shift in the focus of American literature from the sentimental to a masculinist reaction against the sentimental, made manifest by changes in Whitman's poems anthologized: from the domestic "Come Up from the Fields Father" immediately after the Civil War to the more conventionally masculine and martial "O Captain! My Captain!" in the 1880s.\(^7\) Nineteenth-century America did not possess the exact same structures of gender that Victorian Britain did, nor did it have precisely similar homosocial institutions, like the

English public school and university, which played a role in the development of the discourse of the invert. Accordingly, the uses of Whitman by his nineteenth-century American academic readers were quite different. The genteel culture of the time, paradoxically becoming the popular culture of the time (as discussed by Ann Douglas in *The Feminization of American Culture*), was largely controlled by an alliance of women writers and New England clergy. The study of American literature, as it began to develop in the nineteenth-century American college and university, opposed feminized genteel culture with a masculinist, high-culture canon. In chapter three, I examine the evolution of this culture through its relation to Whitman, exploring the developing relationship of the sentimental, genteel, and academic. To illustrate the gradual untwining of the threads of the sentimental, genteel, and masculinist in academic high culture, I use the writings of John Seely Hart, a professor at Princeton in the mid-nineteenth century, as a baseline demonstrating the mutual implication of the sentimental, the genteel, and the academic. Next, I suggest that Thomas Wentworth Higginson represents a preliminary stage in the unraveling of these traditions. Higginson, a former clergyman himself, remained outside the increasingly professionalized and masculinized academia but took on a hypermasculinized attitude, criticizing Whitman as “unmanly.” Edmund Clarence Stedman figures into this chapter as a representative of another step of the process. An unsuccessful poet turned
critic and Wall Street businessman, Stedman consciously foregrounded and, to an extent, embraced the "feminization" of culture in his writings, yet he promoted, to an extent, a canon of the national and representative, which he defined as "masculine" and which included Whitman. Charles F. Richardson represents further separation of the strains. For Richardson, the New England nativist and the masculine are joined, promoting not only New England dominance but also a nostalgic masculine cultural dominance, promoting Puritan clergy as clergymen not dependent on the patronage of women, as their nineteenth-century "descendants" were. Whitman merits Richardson's attention only because of the attention given him by British critics. After Richardson I survey the rare academic considerations of Whitman by the philologists, who were highly professionalized, active positivists and were interested only in linguistically and historically opaque pre- and early-modern texts. Hence, their considerations of Whitman, rare though they are, range from the disinterestedly linguistic to the politically charged. Fred Newton Scott, for instance, gives Whitman's poetry a dispassionate and rare linguistic consideration that carries a veiled jeremiad on aristocracy and democracy. John Livingston Lowes claims Whitman as part of the masculine Anglo-Saxon race-tradition, opposed to the sentimental. Finally, Vida Dutton Scudder and Bliss Perry represent anticipations of the modernist American critics, like Van Wyck Brooks, seeking, in various ways, to join the high and low culture.
Twentieth-century critics found the nineteenth-century "modern" reification of gender roles problematic for American culture, so they sought to create an androgynous culture, founded on a reversion to reunion with the maternal, with Whitman able to represent the mother. In chapter four I explore the refashioning of Whitman by his twentieth-century readers who were forming the canon of American literature—Van Wyck Brooks, George Santayana, Vernon Parrington, Newton Arvin and F.O. Matthiessen. Prominent in all their writings is a sense of a deep rift in American culture. For some of them, this rift is figured in gendered terms: Brooks's attempt at rejoining the feminine genteel and the masculine entrepreneurial and Santayana's and Matthiessen's fantasies of reunion with the maternal. For others, it is political: Parrington's culture war between the Jeffersonian and the Hamiltonian and Arvin's dramatization of the Whitman who contradicts himself on labor, slavery, Manifest Destiny, and capitalism. And for each of these critics, Whitman is the vessel able to contain these contradictions yet remain whole.

There is much Whitman reception left unexamined by this study, as surely there has to be, and I am not even sure that a comprehensive treatment of this area by one person is humanly possible. My goal here was not to duplicate earlier works like Harold Blodgett's *Walt Whitman in England* (1934) or Charles B. Willard's *Whitman's American Fame: The Growth of His*
Reputation in America After 1892 (1950), which, through their attempts at inclusiveness in specific periods, avoid any critical evaluation of Whitman's reception or his inclusion in the canon. Instead, I have focused on a limited number of readers to survey what I see as significant trends. Most of these readers are prominent and were well-known in their time; others were not but were part of significant trends in the institutions of criticism and the study of literature in English. And what has appeared as the significant constant among Whitman's readers here is a desire for or a fear of a world in which difference is elided. Around this issue we have, for example, the imagined northern reader of the nineteenth century finding comfort in Whitman's rebuilding of Union out of the rubble of the Civil War, as well as Van Wyck Brooks's imagined reunion with the maternal to heal the divisions wrought by industrial modernity. On the side of fear, we have Thomas Wentworth Higginson's condemnations of Whitman's lack of pedigree and Fred Newton Scott's jeremiad against democracy. Throughout this study, we will see that this one issue, figured in the various terms of gender, sexuality, and class, have played a pivotal role in Whitman's reception and brought him into the canon of American literature under auspices both progressive and conservative.
CHAPTER 1

"I CONTAIN MULTITUDES":
VOICE, IDENTITY, AND REVISION IN LEAVES OF GRASS

Though the purpose of my project is an examination of the reception of Leaves of Grass, the process of its inclusion in the canon of American literature, and the implications of this process for the development of American literature, I find it necessary to examine how Whitman's text, especially in its evolution, enabled its varied readings. Criticism never merely functions hermeneutically, decoding and offering up the "true" meaning of the text, but reflects, in some way, the context and agenda of the critic. This is not to say that the meaning generated is necessarily without any reference to the text it purports to interpret. A critic can be drawn to a text or an author precisely because the contexts and agendas of the text speak to those of the critic, consciously and subconsciously. As Shoshana Felman says in "Turning the Screw of Interpretation":

Criticism, to use Austin's terminology, here consists not of a statement, but of a performance of the story of the text; its function is not constative, but performative. Reading here becomes not the cognitive observation of the text's pluralistic meaning, but its "acting out." Indeed it is not so much the critic who comprehends the text, as the text which comprehends the
Certainly, *Leaves of Grass* has provided a rich script to be acted out by the critics of the last hundred forty-two years.

In the introduction, I briefly touched on the various performances we shall see acted out in the subsequent chapters, but in this chapter I will stage my own production, not playing out my own needs but creating a “period piece” as I try to image reading Whitman in the post-Civil War re-United States. Because in the early years of Whitman’s reception there are so few concrete, textually-based remarks on what readers found appealing in Whitman, and there are more than enough recorded comments about what Gilded-Age America disliked, I wanted to try to imagine how *Leaves of Grass*, radical in both form and content, could gain a foothold in late-nineteenth-century American taste. What I found was an enduring, though ambiguous, desire for union, sometimes nostalgic and childlike, sometimes including diversity, other times eliding it. And this preoccupation with union and the management of difference shows up in subsequent readings of Whitman, be it the nineteenth-century American critics’ construction of a tradition of American poetry that is representative when it is not subjective, as we will see with Edmund Clarence Stedman, in chapter three, or the modernist American critics’

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fantasies of reunion with the maternal, a time before the recognition of difference, which we will see in chapter four.

Reading *Leaves of Grass* is somewhat like reading the Bible: one can find support easily for any number of contradictory positions within it, as we shall see from the critics in the following chapters. Before discussing how Whitman's academic readers were able to perform, through their readings of Whitman's texts, their own issues and agendas, I find it necessary first to explore how revisions of *Leaves of Grass* might be seen by an imagined Northern, male, urban reader as addressing and attempting to resolve issues of Union, class, and sexuality. These various issues, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, are displaced onto the notion of voice in *Leaves of Grass*; hence, I will examine the role voice and its sources play in some revisions in *Leaves of Grass*, including the excision of two famous and often discussed passages of "The Sleepers," the deletion of three *Calamus* poems—"Who Is Now Reading This?" "I Thought That Knowledge Alone Would Suffice," and "Hours Continuing Long"—and the addition of *Drum Taps*, especially the initial interplay and ultimate repression of voices in "Song of the Banner at Daybreak." Throughout, I will draw on psychoanalytic theory, including the object-relations theory of Melanie Klein, the affect theories of Michael Franz Basch, and Doris Sommer's discussion of Jacques Lacan's theory of the "mirror stage" as it relates to Whitman, to illuminate the implications of these
revisions on the issues of voice and identity especially regarding Whitman's revisions that (1) remove incompatible differences that questions the possibility of union, such as the "Black Lucifer" passage in "The Sleepers," (2) delete a sense of shame over difference incompatible with his celebration of it, as in the poems removed from "Calamus," and (3) dramatize the impulse for consensus, however unsatisfactorily, like "Song of the Banner at Daybreak."

I. VOICE AND IDENTITY

Whitman himself said, "I am large, I contain multitudes" ("Song of Myself" 51.1326) in his project to unify the divided country he grew to manhood in. It is never easy for a reader to discern who that "I" is and what sympathies or antipathies ought to be projected towards the speaker. In this chapter, I am particularly concerned with the identity of several of the "I's" in various portions of *Leaves of Grass* and their implications for my imagined Gilded-Age, Northern, male reader. It is necessary first to survey recent criticism on the speakers of *Leaves of Grass* before examining that shifting persona's role in various revisions.

Critics generally have agreed that the "I" who speaks in *Leaves of Grass* constantly shifts in terms of its referent, between the specific "I" of the persona of the working class Walt Whitman of *Leaves of Grass* and some sort of deeper, universalized self, with two conflicting views over the meaning of the universal "I." Doris Sommer is skeptical of Whitman's ability to empathize successfully
with as much of American humanity as he would like to. For Sommer Whitman’s “I” is a necessary fiction, especially in the context of his post-Civil War revisions, where it superficially takes on diverse identities but really elides their differences under an imperial “I,” constructing a false sense of consensus. In an article that would set a context to support Sommer’s thesis, George Fredrickson notes cultural inscriptions of a new univocal national identity in such texts as James Russell Lowell’s “Commemoration Ode” and Herman Melville’s *Battle Pieces*, which reflect “[t]he new respect for the nationalism and the positive state . . . engendered by the war.” Lowell celebrated the victory of the Yankee “Roundheads” over the Southern “Cavaliers,” while Melville asserted that “America’s new imperial role [resulting from the war] would require a general acceptance of the conservative doctrine that the passions of the masses must be held in check by the strong hand of authority.” Mitch Breitwieser, however, recognizes two “I’s in *Leaves of Grass* as expressions of the Hegelian dialectic between the particular “I” and the “tallied,” elided “I,” without particular references. Similarly, Allen

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Grossman suggests that though the ends of Whitman’s and Lincoln’s politics were the same, the style of their poetics and policy were profoundly different: Lincoln’s policy shuns contradiction in favor of simplicity while Whitman’s poetics seek inclusion of diversity.  

Lest one think that this controversy waged only in the realm of aesthetics by critics, the better portion of an issue of Political Theory is devoted to the political implications of Whitman’s poetic personæ. In comments similar to Grossman’s, political scientist George Kateb constructs a Whitman who is the prophet of “democratic individualism,” which entails (1) the construction of individuals who are aware of the accidental nature of their subjectivity; (2) the awareness of these individuals that the potential of their subjectivity, unconstrained by present accidents, is limitless; (3) the realization on the part of these individuals that they have been, could have been, or could be other than what they presently are; leading to (4) an ability for a projective empathy on the part of these individuals towards other, perhaps radically different, individuals. In Kateb’s model this democratic individualism is performed by the constantly shifting voice in Whitman’s poetry. The problem of scope in Kateb’s essay is considerable. In not considering the many textual “incarnations” of Whitman in his own lifetime and accepting the 1892 Leaves

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of Grass without considering the contexts shaping the different voices of this edition, Kateb’s project becomes a hermeneutic meditation on the democratic individual. Only in Kateb’s discussion of “The Sleepers” does he admit the fictive nature of the empathy central to democratic individualism, undercutting his argument.6

Though Kateb will admit the fictive nature of the empathy, he does not acknowledge the imperial implications of it, that the margins can be taught to empathize with the center, wiping out their interests and identities, as noted in Nancy L. Rosenblum’s answer to Kateb.7 Michael Mother’s “Walt Whitman: Jacobin Poet of American Democracy,” another answer to Kateb, admits the coexistence of both the Jacobin (subordinating the individual in favor of the general interest) and the Thermodor (representing particular, individual interests) in Whitman’s poetry while admitting the centrality of the Civil War for Whitman and the resulting privilege of Jacobin over Thermodor.8 In the discussion of the various revisions that follow, I find Whitman somewhat guilty of Sommer’s charge of an imperialist “I,” as he continues a trend of infantile regression towards a time before difference seen in earlier poems like “There


Was a Child Went Forth” and “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking.” But more importantly, I think Whitman’s efforts at democratic inclusiveness are genuine, and this is what has attracted so many critics to him and generated the varied readings his work has. I have come to see that the exclusions and additions I discuss in the following pages of this chapter represent a silencing not of diverse voices, but of voices that doubt or even mock the possibilities of democratic inclusiveness.

II. THE SLEEPERS

Now that the above section has introduced readers to the problems of the sources and meanings of voices in Whitman’s poetry, the question of who speaks in Whitman’s poetry and what the source of that voice signifies is aptly raised by a consideration of Whitman’s “The Sleepers,” which first appeared in the 1855 Leaves of Grass. In this poem, the speaking “I” is constantly shifting from an unspecified, observing “I,” to the personae of a variety of living as well as inanimate objects, authentically taking in each persona, judging none. Most critics agree that the poem is set in the realm of dreams, with the speaker’s dreams merging with those of all other sleepers. The poem moves from the alienation of these other dreamers from each other to their ultimate leveling by the speaker of the poem. Two famous deletions from “The Sleepers,” which first appeared in the 1855 Leaves of Grass, the “Black Lucifer” passage and “O Hot-Cheek’d and Blushing,” make this poem a fitting point from which to begin
a discussion of the relation of Whitman's poetic voices and the stifling of his fear that inclusion is not possible.

The removal of what is known as "Black Lucifer" from "The Sleepers" after 1876 exemplifies Whitman's predilection to remove voices so irrevocably in conflict as to deny the possibility of solidarity. The first two stanzas of the fragment take the voice of a black male slave expressing rage and rebellion as he relates the selling of his woman and family under the slave system, while the last two-line stanza takes a different voice, possibly that of the steamboat with its "whale's bulk" and the deathly tap of its flukes (alternately the whale's tail and the anchor enabling the steamship to stop and take and empty its human cargo):

Now Lucifer was not dead—or if he was, I am his sorrowful terrible heir;
I have been wrong'd—I am oppress'd—I hate him that oppresses me,
I will either destroy him, or he shall release me.

Damn him! how he does defile me!
How he informs against my brother and sister, and takes pay for their blood!
How he laughs when I look down the bend, after the steamboat that carries away my woman!
No the vast dusk bulk that is the whale's bulk, it seems mine;
Warily, sportsman! though I lie so sleepy and sluggish, the tap of my flukes is death.⁹

The voices of slave and steamboat are significant, with, on the one hand, the

personal voice of the slave separated from his family, and on the other, the highly displaced voice, which is first the whale, then suggesting the steamboat, which speaks impersonally for the other side of the institution of slavery. These conflicting voices point out all too vividly the overwhelming conflict that led to the Civil War, and it is this conflict that Whitman must erase during Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, in his continuing quest for Union and consensus, a vision made that much harder to believe in after the painful struggles of, as well as leading up to, the Civil War.

Reactions to this deletion are polarized: this universalizing move has been seen as both an aesthetic improvement as well as a mutilation of “The Sleepers.” Edwin Haviland Miller, George Hutchinson, and M. Jimmie Killingsworth disagree that the removal of “Black Lucifer” makes “The Sleepers” a better poem, believing instead that the excision leaves a hole in the poem. Miller finds the passage aptly placed after Whitman’s description of the encounter between his mother and the squaw. As the squaw represents both the absent mother and the father as rival for the mother’s affection, Miller views “Black Lucifer” as an uncanny expression of oedipal rage, with Lucifer signifying the supreme rebel against the father. Hutchinson comments that the ultimate elimination of this poem after 1876 leaves “a gap at the very climax of the poem.” Killingsworth goes even further, suggesting that the
omission of the passage “desexualized, and thereby depoliticized the poem.”

As an example of a critic who views the removal positively, David Cavitch believes that the mood expressed in “Black Lucifer” is incongruous with the mood of the rest of “The Sleepers”:

The reassertion of anger and frustration [in “Black Lucifer”] is out of place in the poem’s emotional structure . . . Whitman chose to remove it entirely, recognizing that its bitterness contradicts the argument, or plot of the poem. The revision illustrates his powerful self-expressiveness being brought into line by his aesthetic judgement over the poem’s integrity.

Similarly James Perrin Warren argues that the historical and topic elements of “Lucifer’s sorrowful terrible heir” undercut the distinction between public and private loss described in Sections 5 and 6 of the poem. While I am sympathetic to the view that the deletion of “Black Lucifer” is a loss, I nevertheless agree with Cavitch’s and Warren’s opinions that “Black Lucifer” contradicts the inclusive project of “The Sleepers” and of Leaves of Grass as a whole.

While critical discussion on this passage demonstrates its problematic

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aesthetic status in relation to "The Sleepers" as a whole, I am willing to grant that Whitman's removal of such potentially political sections could be an attempt to garner universal appeal. But it also displays an unwillingness to deal with dissension so significant that it repudiates the feasibility of union. This revision also exemplifies a movement after the war that repressed the Northern humanitarian interests that gave rise to the abolition movement in favor of Union and nationalism, consonant with Whitman's disavowal of irreconcilable strife. 13

What else is there to be gained from the erasure of "Black Lucifer"? Of course in his continual revision and republication of Leaves of Grass, Whitman could have felt it necessary to update the poems historically. Yet this updating impulse is not consistent throughout his revisions; why, then, allow the passage on the escaped slave in Section 10 of "Song of Myself" to remain? "Black Lucifer" foregrounds, perhaps much too explicitly in the context of "The Sleepers," the conflict that gave rise to Whitman's task of constructing consensus. The voices of the vengeful slave and the steamboat that carries away his woman point out too strongly the factionalism within and the seeming impossibility of any sort of union, political or poetic, an impossibility

13 Fredrickson 186-187. Fredrickson's previously cited discussion of Lowell's "Commemoration Ode" and Melville's Battle Pieces notes that the remnants of any humanitarian abolitionist movement are suppressed by nationalism and northern hegemony. Lincoln, for Lowell, is a great patriot, not an emancipator; Melville, too, gives little stress to the humanitarian anti-slavery strains of the conflict.
which the post-Civil War Whitman, the healer, and also the poet of national identity, could not admit. Hence, Whitman denies division and diversity by this deletion.  

Another significant passage deleted from “The Sleepers” at the same time as “Black Lucifer” is “O Hot-Cheek’d and Blushing”:

O hot-cheek’d and blushing! O foolish hectic!
O for pity’s sake, no one must see me now! my clothes were stolen while I was abed,
Now I am thrust forth, where shall I run?

Pier that I saw dimly last night, when I look’d from the windows!
Pier out from the main, let me catch myself with you, and stay—I will not chafe you,
I feel ashamed to go naked about the world.

I am curious to know where my feet stand and what this is flooding me, childhood or manhood—and the hunger that crosses the bridge between.

The cloth laps a first sweet eating and drinking,
Laps life-swelling yolks—laps ear of rose-corn, milky and just ripen’d;
The white teeth stay, and the boss-tooth advances in darkness,
And liquor is spill’d on lips and bosoms by touching glasses, and the best liquor afterward.  

Critics have seen in this passage, variously, an expression of burgeoning

14 Kerry Larson, *Whitman’s Drama of Consensus* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988) 68. The juxtaposition of Washington’s defeat at Brooklyn in section 5 to “Black Lucifer” in section 6 as points out the utter rupture between the mythological father and sons and also accuses the father of enabling the rupture by allowing slavery to stand.

adolescent sexuality or oral sexuality or vaginal imagery. The voice speaking could be identified with proscribed experiences of male sexuality and, hence, with Whitman at some point in his life. The difficulty inherent in connecting the images in this passage to specific objects is significant in that it suggests Lacan's formulation of the mirror stage, an infantile stage during which the ego cannot recognize difference outside itself. In a simple sense, the "mirror stage" names the child's ability to recognize itself in a mirror, a time roughly from six to eighteen months. But, through the interconnection of the terms "imago" (simply, the image in the mirror), register, and world, Lacan also implies that the beginning of the mirror stage marks the beginning of self-identity, diffuse, fragmented and, most importantly for my purposes, unbounded. He implies that it is at the completion of the "mirror stage" when the child fully recognizes the separateness of objects from the self. The objects of the ego in this poetic fragment, similarly, are appropriately vague, echoing the mirror or pre-Symbolic stage, before the child enters into systems of language or signification: "I am curious to know where my feet stand and what this is flooding me, childhood or manhood—and the hunger that crosses the bridge between" (line 7). This retreat to a refusal to recognize difference is appropriate in Whitman's post-Civil War context, repressing the threat of

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the Other. Whatever the experience depicted in the passage, and the difficulty in locating it is significant, Killingsworth is correct in noting that this deletion covers over the connection between sexuality and the dream experience in “The Sleepers,” and “demonstrates Whitman’s retreat from the rebellious sexual politics of 1855,” which Killingsworth sees manifested tropologically in “excesses, deformations, and deviations that, in blending politics and sexuality, explicitly demonstrate the Kristevan notion that in revolutionary language, ‘the rhythms of the body and the unconscious have managed to break through the rational defenses of conventional social meaning.’” 17

Melanie Klein’s object-relations theory suggests a productive interpretation of these revisions of “The Sleepers” as voices Whitman splits off because the personae they represent threaten him. Klein, a mid-twentieth-century psychoanalytic theorist who worked with and consequently theorized about children, is still much discussed in contexts seeming to have little to do with children, for example, C. Fred Alford’s Melanie Klein and Critical Social Theory: An Account of Politics, Art, and Reason Based on her Psychoanalytic Theory and Leo Bersani’s “The Culture of Redemption’: Marcel Proust and Melanie Klein.” Klein’s theories relate particularly to the infant’s development of a discrete identity and recognition of the discrete identities of those around it as it interacts first with its primary object, the breast, which satisfies its

primary desire of hunger, and then, from the breast's absence, gradually coming to realize the identities of others. Klein theorizes a very early stage of psychological development, the paranoid-schizoid position, so called because the infant at this position is not capable of the integration of its own ego or its relations to other objects. Hence, the infant relates to partial objects, the first and most significant being a relation to the breast rather than to the mother as a whole. Because hunger and satisfaction of that hunger are such primary issues tied up in contexts the infant cannot understand, the infant develops such defenses as splitting, denial, projection, and introjection to deal with its anger and frustration over deprivation and removal of the source of satisfaction. Splitting functions as a means of dividing an object around which the infant has ambivalent feelings. The breast can be split into the good object that satisfies the infant and the bad or persecuting object which is absent or by which the infant is threatened by over-dependence. In later stages of development, the infant can split off its own threatening feelings, project them, and potentially reintroject them. Hannah Segal demonstrates in *Introduction to the Work of Melanie Klein* that adults often superimpose infantile strategies for dealing with or fantasizing about objects of desire on their current situations. One particularly apt example of an adult making use of splitting is one of Segal's own patients who, in a dream, saw a young girl cutting paper, discarding part and keeping part. The girl represented the patient; the paper,
the therapist, and the discarded paper represented facets of the therapist which elicited the patient's ambivalence. By analogy, Whitman's excisions here represent the defenses of splitting and repression. Object-relations theory elucidates the various issues behind the relation of identity to the self, represented in Whitman as the various voices of his texts, especially the text at hand, "The Sleepers," and issues of repression, represented in "The Sleepers" by the removal of "Black Lucifer" and "O Hot-Cheek'd and Blushing."

To view these deletions through a Kleinian lens, as voices Whitman splits off because they threaten him, enriches previous interpretations. E.H. Miller's reading of "Black Lucifer" as an expression of oedipal rage is reinforced by reading this splitting and projection of anger onto a polyvalent figure who suggests both a figure of rebellion in the specific context of slavery as well as the archetypal rebel against the father. The ultimate omission of this passage would be the expurgation of the irresolvable conflict wrought by the oedipal crisis. In terms of Kerry Larson's reading, in which "Black Lucifer" foregrounds the impossibility of the consensus called for by the preceding "Washington at Brooklyn" passage, the repression of the political implications of "Lucifer's" and the steamboat's voices is the repression of the uncontrollable anxiety that consensus is impossible and the horrors of the Civil War could

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happen again, and the only solution is to revert to an erasure of difference. Alterately, the excision of "O Hot-Cheek'd and Blushing," in splitting off and thereby neutralizing the shame of infantile sexuality, and finally repressing it, covers over Whitman's projection of political conflict on an infantile identity crisis.

III. "SONG OF THE BANNER AT DAYBREAK"

"Song of the Banner at Daybreak," which made its first appearance in *Drum Taps* in 1865, though composed in 1861 or earlier, is similar to "The Sleepers" in that several voices speak, but, rather than a shifting speaker, "Song of the Banner" has an explicit dialogue, centered on a conflict providing a different perspective on Whitman's revisions of voices. It is unique among the poems I will discuss here because it is an *addition* rather than an deletion or disavowal, is very conscious of the claims of disparate voices talking about the war, and expresses in miniature the struggle between the prophetic and private voices in *Drum Taps*. The prophetic voice (in such poems as "Over the Carnage") is a voice that looks over the conflict, seeing a grand destiny. The prophetic voice is decidedly national rather than personal, scanning the geography of the land, almost cheerleading. The private voice is just the opposite, carrying a view from inside the war and the "carnage," rather than

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19 Again, Fredrickson's notice (186-187) of other cultural productions of a new unitary national identity, like Lowell's and Melville's, suggests that Whitman's revisions are continuous with this movement.
the view over it. The private voice tells of death vigils over comrades and the grief of families; it mourns over the fallen enemy and, most importantly, expresses doubt. Often, this voice is not so particular as to be identified as North or South, attempting to cover over conflict even in the course of narrating the divisive Civil War.²⁰

The four voices in “Song of the Banner at Daybreak”—poet, pennant, father, and child—play out the movement of Drum Taps in a single poem. The


James E. Miller views the voices in Drum Taps as moving from jubilation through revulsion to reflection. Rather than discerning a homogenous movement, as Miller does, Askin sees a distinctly separate private voice, with the private and prophetic “jostling each other on the same scaffolding.” And only towards the end of the cluster does the private voice inform the utterances of the public voice, though the public voice remains dominant. Her narrative progresses through the cluster noting the repression of the rising private voice by the public voice in earlier poems like “Rise 0 Days” and “Beat! Beat! Drums!” The private voice is allowed to grow and dominate entire poems, like “A March in the Ranks Hard-Prest,” “As I Lay with My Head in Your Lap, Camerado,” and “Year that Trembled and Reel’d Beneath Me” but is ultimately stifled in the sacrificial themes of poems like “A Sight in Camp in the Daybreak Gray and Dim.”

Michael Moon in Disseminating Whitman: Revision and Corporeality in “Leaves of Grass,” interprets Drum Taps by viewing the poems of the cluster through a chronological schema, noting the “sabre rattling” of the earlier poems and privileging the grief of the later poems, stating “one may suspect that some of the grieving tone of the latter poems derives not only from the losses they mourn but also from the poet’s painful and belated sense of the gross inadequacy of his initially enthusiastic response to the coming of war.” Moon also states that Whitman “left both kinds of poems to stand in paratactic relation to each other . . . without any apparent suggestion of what the relation between them might be.” Moon ignores, however, the “imperial” implications the earlier poems present in the context of the Reconstruction.
flag is praised by the poet who speaks for it, rejected by the peace-loving father, and loved by the child. Though the poem attempts to present conflict and resolution, the case against the father is over determined by a three-to-one vote. The very title of the poem, "Song of the Banner at Daybreak," reinforces the overdetermination, telling us in advance that the important voice of the poem will be the Banner. It is the signifier of pure abstraction, of a national consensus that seduces and incorporates other voices, like those of the child and the poet who follows the child, even though in reality it is the poet who gives voice to the banner, the child, and the father and oversees the incorporation of all specific individualities into an abstract consensus. The banner is also uniquely prelinguistic in two ways: (1) simply, of course, in its mode of existence as a banner, it does not rely on formal language to signify; and (2) in the fact that the banner relies much on the narrator (Whitman) for its speech, it is imprinted with the narrator's "identity," and represents, therefore, a re-enactment of Lacan's "mirror stage" as a register of the subject on the world, preceding any recognition of difference outside the self, as discussed above. The narrator, the banner, and the child reject the Symbolic, or Law of the Father, for this pre-Symbolic stage.²¹

²¹ Moon (184, 190-191), through an explicit Freudian reading which differentiates the Banner from the Pennant as the maternal phallus and the filial phallus, respectively, gives "Song of the Banner at Daybreak" a rebellious spin, in which these other phalluses challenge the paternal phallus, which wishes to maintain the status quo, and, therefore, to retain the phallus and its power. This reading is plausible in the context recreated by "The Eighteenth Presidency"; however, in the
Whitman allows dissenters to speak, both in “Song of the Banner” and in the last several poems of *Drum Taps*, albeit often as crass materialists, but later stifles such dissent. Motivated by a wished reversion to the mirror stage, the withdrawal of diverse voices moves from the creation of consensus during war to a silencing of troubling voices both for Whitman’s own sake and for the sake of the consensus of his perceived readership. Ironically, Whitman found that the divisive war gave focus and purpose to the people of the states, and particularly to the soldiers; after the war, during reunification and Reconstruction, Whitman found American society fragmented and rudderless.\(^ {22} \)

As such, dissenters are a particular block to the strange singleness of purpose context of Reconstruction, and keeping in mind Doris Sommer’s assertion of the Whitman whose sense of self is projected onto the other personæ he assumes in his poetry, a Lacanian reading of the banner as a pre-linguistic/pre-Symbolic denial of difference makes more sense. The separation of the banner as maternal phallus from the pennant as filial phallus is an interesting move in Moon’s argument. Though I see no clear textual evidence to suggest that the banner and the pennant are distinct entities and voices, I admit it is also not clear in the text of “Song of the Banner” that the banner and the pennant are synonymous. Moon’s argument begins similarly confused, eliding, or at least not explicitly differentiating the banner and the pennant, early on stating, “[T]he Pennant manifests its meaning not only as the phallus but as the maternal phallus and the maternal body” then six pages later differentiating them: “On the symbolic register, the Child can both ‘like’ and be partially ‘like’ the Banner, the sign of the maternal phallus, but he must become identical with the Pennant, sign of the child-phallus, of his own derivative relationship to both paternal and maternal phallus in the oedipal system.” In this context, according to Moon, the war is a “fantasy . . . of the forsaken and/or prohibited pleasures and terrors of reunion with the maternal body and as a catastrophic pederastic utopia . . .” but he ignores the later implications of the war as state (paternal phallic) violence which ultimately enforces a status quo and is not a child-phallic revolution.

of the Civil War; indeed, Whitman sometimes admitted that crass materialists seemed in control after the war. That the composition of “Song of the Banner” was begun before Fort Sumter fell testifies that Whitman’s revisions arose from his fears over the disunion that led to and were not fully resolved by the Civil War.

The poem begins with the voice of the poet not only setting the scene and announcing the characters, but declaring the primacy of his own voice, that “My song is there in the open air” (line 11), against the claim of the title that it is the Banner’s song. The narrator will provide the specific voices: “Man’s desire and babe’s desire, I’ll twine them in, I’ll put in life” (line 14), inspired by the flapping of the banner, a sound that is paradoxically a non-referential noise and a powerful signifier of sophisticated abstractions: nationhood, union, and consensus.

The second voice to speak is that of the banner, speaking words, but beginning in a childish banality in its call to the poet and child to play, and moving later to the signifier of abstract consensus it will become:

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Come up here, bard, bard,
Come up here, soul, soul,
Come up here, dear little child,
To fly in the clouds and winds with me, and play with the measureless light (lines 21-24).
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The child calls to the father to provide some interpretation of the beckoning of the banner, but the father refuses, instead calling the child’s attention to “the
dazzling things in the houses . . . envied by all the earth” (lines 29-32).

The movement of the father's pleas are interesting. M. Wynn Thomas finds that the father's case is made reasonably at first, moving to expressions of “craven, unprincipled, profit-seeking, business-mad” motives, in a move consonant with Michael Moon's reading of the poem.23 While I agree that the father's voice almost always contains the claims of a capitalist individualism that impedes the single-mindedness of the war and in its own way seeks to stifle dissent, I think the voice also represents honest parental anguish over the potential loss of a child through war, a theme which becomes stronger in the father's last speech:

Child of mine you fill me with anguish,
To be that pennant would be too fearful,
Little you know what it is this day, and after this day, forever,
It is to gain nothing, but risk and defy every thing,
Forward to stand in front of wars—and O, such wars!—what have you to do with them?
With passions of demons, slaughter, premature death? (lines 99-104).

Here, the concerns of the father seem less specifically gendered and could come from a mother who represents the pre-Symbolic, not just the father representing the Symbolic. This speech foreshadows the development of the private voice of the parent in "Come Up from the Fields Father" and "Vigil Strange I Kept on the Battlefield One Night." The father is allowed to speak,

but when his voice resists the unity the flag calls for, the single-mindedness Whitman so admired during the war, he is silenced (he does not speak after line 104 of the 144 line poem).

In the next section, the poet, after describing the actions of nature in the sun, the sea, and the wind, admits that he transforms non-referential, natural phenomena into signifiers:

But I am not the sea nor the red sun,
I am not the wind with girlish laughter,
Not the immense wind which strengthens, not the wind which
lashes,
Not the spirit that ever lashes its own body to terror and death,
But I am that which unseen comes and sings, sings, sings,
Which babbles in brooks and scoots in showers on the land,
Which the birds know in the woods mornings and evenings,
And the shore-sands know and the hissing wave and that banner
and pennant,
Aloft there flapping and flapping (lines 38-46).

The poet's declaration that he is the meaning-maker throws an ironic light upon the fact that it is the child who first sees that the banner incorporates individuals into its consensus: "O father it is alive—it is full of people—it has children" (line 47), and "O it stretches—it spreads and runs so fast—O my father, / It is so broad it covers the whole sky" (lines 50-51). That the child recognizes the banner as the abstract screen onto which diverse identities are projected serves to cover over that it is Whitman the poet who wants to be the unifying force. The father implores the child to cease its attention to the banner and asks the child again to look down to material well being. The
banner entreats the poet to speak for it, again admitting that it has no real meaning:

Point this day, leaving all the rest, to us over all—and yet we know not why,  
For what are we, mere strips of cloth profiting nothing,  
Only flapping in the wind? (lines 58-60).

The poet heeds the banner's call to speak to the child, but only elaborates the child's vision of the flag, incorporating diverse concerns and individuals. The poet proclaims, "I hear and see not strips of cloth alone" (line 61), but also scenes of war—"tramp of armies" and "jubilant shouts of millions of men" (line 61 and 62)—and scenes of commerce incorporating even the father's voice—"numberless farms" (line 68), "stores, depots, of Boston, Baltimore, Charleston, New Orleans" (line 71) and "the countless profit, the busy gatherings, earn'd wages" (line 74). Impending war and the diversity of economic concerns are joined and potentially effaced under one unitary symbol: "See the Identity formed out of thirty-eight spacious and haughty States, (and many more to come)" (line 75). In the rest of this section, the poet describes the banner incorporating war, implying that only in war can such glorious consensus exist.

In lines 81-94, the banner is finally able to express for itself that it is the character of elision and incorporation:

Not now are we any one of these spacious and haughty States,  
(nor any five, nor ten,)  
Nor market nor depot we, nor money-bank in the city,
But these and all . . . (lines 84-86).

The child answers to the father that it is not interested in the material goods the father exhorts it to look to, but instead, seeks incorporation in the signifier of the pennant, even to the point of losing identity: "That pennant I would be and must be" (line 98). The father's anguished reply, quoted above, is that the child will be killed, will lose its identity by participating in the war: "It is to gain nothing, but risk and defy every thing" (line 102).

The banner's extended speech further glorifies the loss of identity in consensus sought by the child: "Demons and death [the ultimate loss of identity] then I sing" (line 105), finally demanding all the lands of the continent dissolve inside it:

Pour in! whelm that which asks, which sings, with all and the yield of all,
Fusing and holding, claiming, devouring the whole (lines 116-117).

Ironically, the identity of "that which sings," here, the banner, has been called into question throughout the poem, both in the poet's first speech, in which he declares that he will weave disparate voices together into the cloth of consensus, and in the earlier speeches of the banner, in which it has little to say.

 Appropriately, the poem ends with a 24-line dilation by the poet, who claims he "waited long, too long" (line 123) to sing the banner's song. The poet "hear[s] from above O pennant of war your ironical call and command," ironical
in that the call and command were first spoken by the child, in a voice given by the poet, to bring diverse images within a single symbol. The call was then developed by the poet, and given to the banner. Finally, the poet praises the abstraction the banner has come to represent:

I too leave the rest—great as it is, it is nothing—houses, machines are nothing—I see them not,
I see but you, O warlike pennant! O banner so broad, with stripes, I sing you only (lines 142-43).

“Song of the Banner,” then, is a figurative attempt to unite the entire nation under the image of the banner, even those voices that resist. The voice of the father must be silenced because it resists unity by insisting that incorporation into the whole means material ruin and personal annihilation. Like the larger *Drum Taps* of which it is a part, “Song of the Banner at Daybreak” presents a highly conflicted view of the war. Though the poem was probably written in 1861, long before Whitman experienced the war first-hand and long before he wrote the other poems of the cluster that sometimes take a negative view of the war, its retention in the cluster justifies an ultimately triumphalist view of the war that can be read in support of the sovereignty of Northern Reconstructionism. 24

IV. *CALAMUS*

“The Sleepers” and “Song of the Banner at Daybreak” offer readers an

opportunity to view how Whitman's revising impulse deals with the threat of the impossibility of consensus, even if these other voices are personally Whitman's. Though Whitman's revisions in and by these poems imply a model of control over the cultural margins by the cultural center, they cannot be viewed simply as the retrograde attempts of privilege at self-protection. Whitman also attempts to play down his self-perceived sexual difference through revisions of *Calamus*, even before or during the discernable emergence of the category of the homosexual. I find that the removal of "Who Is Now Reading This?" "I Thought That Knowledge Alone Would Suffice," and "Hours Continuing Long" represent part of a continuous revisionary process of the cluster whereby Whitman progressively depersonalizes *Calamus* and its forerunner, "Live Oak with Moss," renouncing the personal difference it represents in favor of a less sexualized notion of comradeship to serve democracy.

Fredson Bowers's famous examination of the Valentine-Barrett manuscripts revealed a precursor of *Calamus*, the "Live Oak with Moss" sequence. Bowers reassembled the separated leaves of the "Live Oak" cluster into a personal notebook, showing the original arrangement of twelve poems, which form the core of the 1860 *Calamus*, and which "appear to be unified and to make up an artistically complete story of attachment, crisis, and
reconstitution"\textsuperscript{25} and, which Bowers intimates, are biographical. The subsequent rearrangement and enlargement of the cluster, Bowers believes, allowed "Whitman's original 'sonnet' sequence to manly love [to go] unrecognized until the Valentine-Barrett manuscripts became available for study."\textsuperscript{26} The product of the revision Bowers described is the 1860 Calamus, which M. Jimmie Killingsworth argues combines the sentimental discourse of middle-class, same-sex friendship with unselfconscious working-class engagement in homosexual acts. Calamus's resonance with the Victorian sentimental discourse protected it from charges of immorality, but Killingsworth argues that this correspondence was not merely retrograde. Whitman was attempting to connect a radical sexual politics, which he believed necessary to democracy, to an already-existing discourse. The result of this hybrid is ambiguous, sometimes radical, sometimes submissive.\textsuperscript{27}

I believe the deletion of the intensely personal "Who Is Now Reading This?" "I Thought That Knowledge Alone Would Suffice," and "Hours Continuing Long," all three of which appeared only in the 1860 edition, represent a further step in the ongoing process described by Bowers and


\textsuperscript{27} Killingsworth 98-99, 108-111.
Killingsworth in which Whitman sacrifices his own difference, by taking the "Live Oak" cluster out of its personal context in order to connect it to larger contexts of the middle and working classes, for political purposes. The removal of the above three poems attempts to disconnect difference from shame in favor of furthering the political process of joining the middle-class friendship discourse with working-class practice to lay a foundation for democracy. That these revisions arise from some sense of difference as shame, a correspondence incongruent with Whitman's inclusive project, rather than from Whitman's reaction to unfavorable reception of the homoeroticism of Calamus, is clear because there was, at least until the last one or two decades of the nineteenth century, little overt recognition at all of the homoeroticism of Whitman's poetry. Whitman's difference as guilt is projected onto the nation's crisis of difference that led to the Civil War. Thus, Whitman's own healing offering to a nation ravaged by division and difference is to renounce the shame of his own difference; then he is empowered to construct a great national consensus.

Calamus provides some very interesting perspectives from which to examine Whitman's revisions and explore the reasons behind them. If one is inclined to believe that Whitman was all too ready to revise his poetry and himself to garner popularity, one wonders why Whitman allowed Calamus to exist as what seems to us today to be a telling cluster. Strangely enough, while Whitman's more prudish readers condemned the sexual themes in the
“Children of Adam” cluster or in a poem like “To a Common Prostitute,” it seems that they generally did not know what was going on in the *Calamus* cluster. I can find almost no comments before the 1880s on Whitman’s manliness or imputing any homosexual subtext to his poetry. Thomas Wentworth Higginson’s maligning of Whitman’s masculinity waited until 1881 in his “Recent Poetry” on “Drum Taps” in the *Nation*:

> [A] stalwart poet . . . with the finest physique in America . . . preferred to pass by the recruiting office and take service in the hospital with the non-combatants.28

And after Whitman’s death:

> [T]here is the same curious deficiency shown in him, almost alone among poets, of anything like personal and romantic love. Whenever we come upon anything that suggests a glimpse of it, the object always turns out to be a man and not a woman.29

Among the earliest indications that anyone caught the homoeroticism of Whitman’s poetry was the lampoon of “Song of Myself” in *Vanity Fair* in 1860, the “Counter Jumper”:

> I am the counter jumper, weak and effeminate,  
> I love to loaf and lie about dry goods,  
> I loaf and invite the buyer.  
> I am the essence of retail . . .  
> I am the crate, and the hamper, and the yard-wand,  
> And the box of silks fresh from France  
> And when I came into the world I paid duty,  
> And I never did my duty,  
> And never intend to do it,


For I am the creature of weak depravities;
I am the counter jumper;
I sound my feeble yelp over the woofs of the World.³⁰

This satire of the "counter-jumper," or retail clerk, a conscious parody of "Song of Myself" 1, line 4 and "Song of Myself" 52, line 1333, presupposes insider knowledge of some forerunner of a homosexual subculture of which the retail clerk, in a non-productive profession, is a member and which he represents metonymically. Still, the application of effeminacy to Whitman by parodying one of his poems is rather oblique, as are Higginson's much later charges of effeminacy.

Whitman's revisions of Calamus come then not from condemnations. Rather, these revisions represent Whitman's working through the psychological "affect" of shame, which derives from the interruption of the circuit of mirroring expressions between the child's face and that of the caregiver:

The infant's behavioral adaptation is quite totally dependent on maintaining effective communication with the executive and coordinating part of the infant-mother system. The shame-humiliation response, when it appears, represents the failure or absence of the smile of contact, a reaction to the loss of feedback from others, indicating social isolation and signaling the need for relief from that condition.³¹

"Who Is Now Reading This?" "I Thought that Knowledge Alone Would Suffice,"

³⁰ Vanity Fair 1860 qtd. in Killingsworth 100-101.

and "Hours Continuing Long," though they express shame and guilt, represent Whitman's attempts to provoke the mirroring circuit. Their removal mimics the infantile shame-humiliation reaction of hanging the head and averting the eyes, and this mimicked response arises from a lack of mirroring response to these poems.

All three of the Calamus poems excised by 1871 contain an intensely personal voice, much more personal and much less guarded, allegorized, or symbolically democratized than the voices in the remaining poems of the Calamus cluster. Their removal leaves the Calamus cluster as a narrative of a somewhat desexualized comradeship which exists only as the basis for a new democratic culture, much as in Democratic Vistas where Whitman discusses the role of the abstract poet in laying the foundations of a democratic culture.

"I Thought That Knowledge Alone Would Suffice" [Calamus 8] is so intensely personal that its first four lines read, loosely, as Whitman's autobiography. He who "thought that knowledge alone would suffice" corresponds to the young Whitman, the foppish Long Island school teacher. He whom "lands engrossed," who would "be their orator" and who "met the examples of old and new heros," compare to Whitman the traveler and Whitman the journalist. And we know who the "singer of songs" is. That the Whitman of Democratic Vistas must repudiate the personal Whitman is obvious, for the two are, for Whitman, opposed. For the personal Whitman, it
is enough to be with him whom he loves, who “heed[s] knowledge, and the
grandeur of The States, and the example of heroes, no more.” Whitman finds
his own personal voice, for whatever reason, incompatible with consensus.

Whether or not Whitman’s self-awareness regarding his sexual object
choice between 1860 and 1871 was in any way similar to any modern notion
of homosexual identity, I cannot say. “Hours Continuing Long” [Calamus 9]
and “Who Is Now Reading This?” [Calamus 16] do, however, expose that he
had some awareness, as well as some shame and guilt, over what he perceived
as a unique identity based on his choice of sexual object. “Hours Continuing
Long” exposes the expression of a unique identity thematized by object choice
linked with loss of that object:

    Hours of my torment—I wonder if other men ever have the like,
    out of the like feelings?
    Is there even one other like me—distracted—his friend, his lover,
    lost to him? (lines 7-8).

“Who Is Now Reading This?” expresses a great deal of shame and guilt.
Seemingly neutral assertions about the speaker’s relation to the reader—“Or
may-be a stranger is reading this who has secretly loved me” (line 3)—are
sandwiched between a reader who stands in condemnation of the poet: “May-be
one is now reading this who knows some wrong-doing of my past life,” and “Or
may-be one who meets all my grand assumptions and egotisms with derision”
(lines 2, 4). This juxtaposition in the second stanza (answering the one line
first stanza “Who is now reading this?”) suggests a relation between “wrong-
doing,” “egotism,” and loving a stranger in secret. The final stanza reinforces this relationship, mirroring his own reactions to himself with those of his potential reader: puzzlement, derision over egotism, secret love, and self-knowledge of wrongdoing. In so mirroring his potential reader’s reactions, he desperately attempts to start the mirroring cycle. And when he cannot provoke the mirroring cycle with these poems, he removes them.

The structures of “Hours Continuing Long” and of “Who Is Now Reading This?” are, in themselves, mirror images of each other. The first seven lines of “Hours Continuing Long” discuss the speaker’s own experiences, while the last five lines consider possibilities of the other. In “Who Is Now Reading This?” with the reactions of the potential reader considered first, Whitman constructs an identity outside of himself which judges the poet’s otherness.

The poems that remain in the Calamus cluster after these deletions leave a metaphysicalized and abstracted notion of adhesiveness behind. The “love of comrades” becomes an abstraction behind “Democracy . . . ma femme!” in “For You O Democracy.” Shame and guilt over an identity of otherness are lost in a pre-modern or pre-Symbolic, inclusive pansexuality in “City of Orgies.”

Certainly, not all of Whitman’s revisions of Leaves of Grass can be attributed to his desire to represent the concerns of the cultural center, whether by incorporating, as if by phagocytosis, the Other, or by annulling his own difference. The revisions embodied in the above poems, however, point to
a significant trend in Whitman's developing work, an important reaction to an era which had confronted the threat of the Other in the Civil War and thereafter retained a profound fear of it. More important to literary criticism is this continuing trend in Whitman of subsuming difference into a constructed consensus and wishing for reversion to an infantile stage.
CHAPTER 2

"THE CITY OF ROBUST FRIENDS": MODERNITY, HOMOSOCIALITY, AND HOMOEROTICISM IN SYMONDS, SAINTSBURY AND DOWDEN

Walt Whitman is more truly Greek than any other man of modern times. Hopeful and fearless, accepting the world as he finds it, recognizing the value of each human impulse, shirking no obligations, self-regulated by a law of perfect health, he, in the midst of a chaotic age, emerges clear and distinct, at one with nature, and therefore Greek.¹

It was not the critical giants of Victorian Britain, the Arnolds, Carlyles, and Ruskins, who were responsible for an early and sustained British interest in Whitman but readers whose critical influence is, for the most part, largely forgotten, among them John Addington Symonds, George Saintsbury, and Edward Dowden. The influence of Saintsbury and Dowden has been neglected lately, but their sustained critical considerations of Whitman gave him a degree of academic respectability in the United States. Unlike Saintsbury and Dowden, John Addington Symonds held no academic appointment, but he has enjoyed a renaissance of interest, mainly because of his self-conscious homosexuality. Still, he was a respected critic of the late-nineteenth century,

¹ John Addington Symonds, Studies of the Greek Poets (London: Smith Elder, 1873) 422n.
and his pronouncement of Whitman as "Greek" provoked the responses of many, including Saintsbury and Dowden. In the first chapter I described how some of Whitman's revisions could be read after the Civil War in conservative ways that would serve the needs of Northern hegemony. In this chapter, I will explore how Symonds, Saintsbury, and Dowden read Whitman in ways that filled their own contradictory needs and the needs of British society caught between industrial capitalism and scientific positivism on the one hand and pastoral aristocratic nostalgia on the other. Each of their readings of Whitman treated these issues in contradictory ways, alternately validating and condemning modernity and nostalgia, casting Whitman as a visionary of the best of the new or prophet of the old as an antidote to the disfiguring impulses of modernity. In their conflicted characterizations of Whitman as both prophet of and antidote to the modern, they prefigure his modernist American critics discussed in chapter four: Van Wyck Brooks, George Santayana, Vernon Parrington, Newton Arvin, and F.O. Matthiessen. Specifically, I examine the responses of Symonds, Saintsbury and Dowden to Whitman around two clusters of issues: (1) the homoeroticism of Whitman's poetry and the use of the trope "Greek" to describe it either as part of the minoritizing discourse of the invert or as part of an older tradition of homosociality; and (2) Whitman's relation to modernity, as a speaker for it, as an antidote to it, or as an opportunity to demonstrate pseudo-scientific critical principles. First,
however. I would like to set this discussion in context by exploring the backgrounds of these three critics.

Symonds, Saintsbury, and Dowden share similar histories of bourgeois homes. Symonds and Saintsbury attended Oxford; Dowden attended Queen's College, Cork, and Trinity College, Dublin. Their politics ranged from the conservative to the traditionally liberal. Symonds is now well-known for his discreet efforts to increase toleration of “inverts.” He also participated in the now well-known patterns of sexual contact between upper-class and working class young men, the inequalities of which contrasted with Whitman’s call for equal comradeship as a basis for democracy. Indeed Symonds naming Whitman as “Greek,” considering the inequities necessary for Greek pederasty, is incongruous with Whitman’s own homoerotic project. Saintsbury, though an early supporter of the “art-for-art’s-sake” movement, was a conservative Tory with High Church practices. A “radical formalist,” as René Wellek aptly describes him, Saintsbury was much more interested in the manner of the literature than the matter, especially in poetry, and found it easy to separate form and content. Dowden came from a middle-class, Protestant, land-owning family (a Presbyterian mother and Anglican father), which had been in Ireland

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since Cromwell's time. His politics, accordingly, were somewhat conservative—he was a staunch Irish Unionist—though not as conservative as Saintsbury. All three were influential critics in their time; additionally, Saintsbury was chair of rhetoric and English literature at the University of Edinburgh, and Dowden was professor of English at Trinity College, Dublin. The written works of these three critics are rooted in traditional literary subjects but follow the separate paths of their various interests.

Symonds was able to live a life of relative genteel idleness, thanks to the fortune of his father, a prominent physician. He wrote extensively, including the well-known Studies of the Greek Poets, originally published in 1873 and republished well into the beginning of the twentieth century, and Renaissance in Italy. Ironically, Symonds is remembered not for his extensive body of critical and poetical works, but for materials either published privately or posthumously that deal with homosexuality, including A Problem in Greek Ethics, A Problem in Modern Ethics, and his collaboration with Havelock Ellis, Sexual Inversion. His writings on Whitman include not only his Walt Whitman: A Study (1893) but discussions of Whitman in the first edition of Studies of the Greek Poets (1873), in A Problem in Greek Ethics (1883), and in

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Traces of Saintsbury's critical influence remain today, though his reputation quickly declined with the rise of the New Criticism after his death in 1933. Saintsbury described ideal criticism (i.e., his own) as "catholic," and his writings and tastes included such diverse writers as Dryden and Swinburne. He first directed critical attention towards Whitman in an October 10, 1874, review of *Leaves of Grass* in the *Academy*, long before his professorship, in the days of schoolmastering and journalistic criticism. During the tenure of his professorship, his interest in Whitman seems not to have waned. He included Whitman in many academic studies and surveys written in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first two of the twentieth, most notably *A History of English Prosody: From the Twelfth Century to the Present Day* (1906-10), *A History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe* (1904), and *A History of English Prose Rhythm* (1912). Saintsbury demonstrates his intimate knowledge of Whitman in essays on other writers, as well, peppering his prose on Austen, Longfellow and Pater with quotations from Whitman.\(^5\) The traces of Saintsbury's interest in Whitman, though not extensive, were substantial in their very existence and form. Saintsbury's radical formalism, as it related to Whitman, manifested itself in his largely favorable 1874 review of *Leaves of Grass*:

Fortunately, however, admiration for a creed is easily separable from admiration for the utterance and expression of that creed, and Walt Whitman as a poet is not difficult to disengage from Walt Whitman as an evangelist and politician.6

Still, Saintsbury’s critical judgment in Whitman’s favor was fairly radical, and his later academic studies, such as *A History of English Prosody*, *A History of English Prose Rhythm*, and *A History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe*, which place Whitman alongside and in the tradition of English literature, demonstrate the progressive force of his judgment and the strength of his interest in Whitman. The very context of these readings of *Leaves of Grass* in extended academic studies gives them more power than the 1874 journalistic review of *Leaves of Grass* in the *Academy*. The brevity of these later passages calls for a clear focus on Saintsbury’s part—Whitman’s radical form—and demonstrates Saintsbury’s own radical formalism.

In the earlier review Saintsbury argues for separation of form and content; nevertheless, he defuses the potentially radical content and ultimately embraces it, specifically the homoerotic, by nostalgically placing it in the realm of a homosocial continuum that does not divide the homosocial and the homoerotic and is signified by the trope of the “Greek.” Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick coins the phrase “homosocial desire” as the foundation of *Between Men* to draw together the homosocial and the homoerotic, a continuum much like Adrienne

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Rich’s “lesbian continuum,” which joins “women loving women” and “women supporting the interests of women.” But over the course of the modern age, Sedgwick theorizes, “men supporting the interests of men,” or the homosocial, is sundered from “men loving men,” or the homoerotic, to hide and protect the homosocial, by diverting attention to and challenging the homoerotic. Symonds’s, Saintsbury’s, and Dowden’s readings of Whitman all bear the marks of falling somewhere along this process of separating the homosocial from the homoerotic, pathologizing the homosexual and ignoring the existence of the homoerotic. Whitman’s political radicalism, his impulse for inclusion and “universality,” because it cannot be connected to any convention appropriate to Saintsbury’s Oxford education, Tory politics, or High Church Anglicanism, is disengaged from content and disregarded.

Edward Dowden held the position of Professor of English at Trinity College, Dublin, from the creation of the professorship in 1867 to his death in 1913. He was an early academic reader of Whitman, influential in his time in the U.S. (he lectured at Princeton, where he befriended Woodrow Wilson and was offered a chair and lectureships at the then-new Johns Hopkins). Though roughly contemporaneous with Saintsbury (they both wrote their first reviews of Whitman in the early 1870s), Dowden’s influence was not as long-lived as

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8 Saintsbury, rev. of *Leaves of Grass*, 785.
Saintsbury's, though he is often cited as the professor who did the most to "spread the gospel of 'Leaves of Grass' during the lifetime of the poet." Like Saintsbury, he combined teaching with popular literary journalism and was well known to the editors of such periodicals as the *Contemporary Review*, the *Fortnightly Review*, the *National Review*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and the *Nineteenth Century and After*.

His lack of long-lasting influence, compared to Saintsbury's, stems, perhaps, from the fact that he did not write any compendious work of literary criticism like Saintsbury's *History of English Prosody* (though he planned to collaborate with Saintsbury and Edmund Gosse on a *History of English Literature*). Dowden's book-length works included literary biographies of Shelley, Browning, and Southey; *Studies in Literature* (1909) on the British Romantics; volumes republishing his journalistic essays; and his best-known work, *Shakspere: His Life and Work* (1877). His writings on Whitman are confined to his 1871 review "The Poetry of Democracy" in the *Westminster Review*, slightly revised and republished in *Studies in Literature*, and an interesting comparison of "Calamus" to Shakespeare's Sonnets in *Shakspere: His Life and Work*. Dowden's personal interest in Whitman was great,

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10 Ludwigson 22.
however. He corresponded regularly with John Burroughs (author of *Notes on Walt Whitman*), received correspondence from Whitman, and was at the center of a small circle of Whitmaniacs in Ireland. Dowden’s critical theory, most apparent in *Shakspere: His Mind and Art*, applies evolutionary theories, specifically the theories and terminology of Herbert Spencer’s *Principles of Biology*, to literary biography, depicting the works of Shakespeare as necessarily mirroring the complex personality of Shakespeare himself, developed from his entire range of experiences. The aim of his criticism is more moralistic than positivistic, however, constructing a Shakespeare who is calmer and more practical than “Marlowe, Nash, Greene, and other wild livers.”

From Symonds’s, Saintsbury’s, and Dowden’s readings of Whitman emerged consistent concerns with homoeroticism/homosociality and modernism. The word “Greek” carried acknowledgments and denials of homoeroticism. The relation between the word “Greek” and homoeroticism was ambiguous, and the meaning of the “Greek” was greatly contested in Victorian Britain. Recent discussions of Whitman’s function as a signifier of inversion in Victorian Britain presume a fairly straightforward system of signification

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11 A derisive phrase for British Whitman enthusiasts coined by Algernon Charles Swinburne, “Whitmania,” *Fortnightly Review*, n.s. 42 (1 August 1887) 170-76.

between the signifier "Greek" and signified of the homoerotic. Nevertheless, discussions of *Leaves of Grass*'s homoerotic content vary greatly among our three readers. Additionally, "Greek," as it probably signified to these British readers, had implications that went against Whitman's homoerotic ideal of democratic comradeship. From their studies of the ancient Greeks, they must have known that, as Michel Foucault says:

sexual relations—always conceived in terms of the model act of penetration, assuming a polarity that opposed activity and passivity—were seen as being of the same type as the relationship between a superior and a subordinate, an individual who dominates and one who is dominated, one who commands and one who complies, one who vanquishes and one who is vanquished.  

Though Symonds's use of the trope of the Greek is often vague, his cultural interpretation of it must have included relationships marked by inequity of power, in line with his own experience, even as he acknowledged the radical equality Whitman called for.

Symonds's own writings on the subject, including his *Studies of the Greek Poets, A Problem in Greek Ethics, A Problem in Modern Ethics, and Walt Whitman: A Study*, show that even Symonds, however he may have chosen to


use Greece and its institution of homosexuality, could not avoid the myriad ways this word could signify to his contemporaries. Symonds is the first person to call Whitman Greek, and his investment in this term becomes apparent only as he develops it over the course of time. In *Studies of the Greek Poets*, the reference implies Whitman's closeness to nature in a way that is nostalgic, while also outlining a modern system of ethics that is scientific and cosmological and opposes a morality that is revealed and specifically Christian. Though Symonds decries "paiderasty" as a vice of the Greeks, this condemnation is implicitly undermined through a critique of revealed Christian morality. In *Walt Whitman: A Study*, as well as the privately printed *A Problem in Greek Ethics* and *A Problem in Modern Ethics*, Symonds pushes the issues of sexual relations between men further, mildly condemning them on the one hand and, on the other hand, hoping for their ennoblement in modern times through the idealization of them in their highest Greek forms and by Whitman in "Calamus." By the time of the publication of the three books mentioned above, Symonds had received Whitman's now famous denial of any physical implications for "Calamus," and because he could not claim Whitman for his program, he claims the emotions in "Calamus" as redemptive for the invert and also takes Whitman to task for not considering that "Calamus" might encourage the physical consummation of male friendship.

Saintsbury's discussion of Whitman as "Greek" is provoked by Symonds;
however, he seems not to recognize any discrete existence for the homoerotic but sees it as continuous with the homosocial. He does not overtly deny the physical implications of the “Greek,” and, while he is not very interested in it, he is not threatened by it. Dowden, on the other hand, does not explicitly refer to Symonds, but his avoidance of the “Greek” to describe “Calamus” (he chooses to make vague allusions to male friendship “in the age of chivalry”) seems a decided attempt to eschew Symonds’s discussion of Whitman as “Greek” and implies that Dowden wished to avoid the obvious homoerotic implications of the Greek equation. Rather than attempt to figure out the scope of the recognition of the code embodied in the “Greek,” I will focus on the interaction between Symonds’s gradual development of this figure and the acknowledgments of and resistances to it in Saintsbury and Dowden.

John Addington Symonds’s first application of the trope of the Greek to Whitman seems rather ambiguous, tucked away in a footnote to Studies of the Greek Poets:

Walt Whitman is more truly Greek than any other man of modern times. Hopeful and fearless, accepting the world as he finds it, recognizing the value of each human impulse, shirking no obligations, self-regulated by a law of perfect health, he, in the midst of a chaotic age, emerges clear and distinct, at one with nature, and therefore Greek.  

Interestingly, this note from the 1873 edition of Studies of the Greek Poets seems to have been revised out of subsequent editions, though Symonds did not

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15 John Addington Symonds, Greek Poets (1873) 422n.
hesitate to apply the trope to Whitman in other, later writings, from describing
Whitman's physical features as "Greek" and noting Whitman's closeness to
nature as a "Greek" attribute, to comparing Whitman's notions of adhesiveness
and comradeship to "the martial institution of Greek love," noting that
comradeship "[recalls] to our minds that fellowship in arms which flourished
among Dorian tribes" and telling his readers that "[l]ike Plato, in the Phaedrus,
Whitman describes an enthusiastic type of masculine emotion, leaving its
private details to the moral sense and special inclination of the individuals
concerned."\(^{16}\)

The relation of Symonds's writings to ancient Greece is conflicted and
ambiguous. The "Greek" is not always overtly sexual, though it does always
seem at least to point to it. Even when it is overtly sexual, it is never clearly
defined. "Paiderastia," for example, is never explained. Though it is obvious
that it refers to the pursuit of adolescent males by adult males, it seems
improbable that he thought such reference would increase tolerance for the
invert. But the reference, in a sense, masculinizes the "feminized" concept of
inversion, framed as the tradition of a masculinist society, which happened to
be taught within the masculinist context of English public and university
education. Additionally, Symonds switches from modern ideals to nostalgic
shelters from the potential backlashes against these ideals. His writings that

espouse a modern sexual agenda are usually no more than traditional liberal apologies, often privately printed. His sexuality and the writings on it were suppressed after his death, and only recently has interest in Symonds revived, mainly because of his self-conscious homosexuality. Because of his temerity, his writings never had the impact in his lifetime he had hoped for. The subversive subtexts of other writings had some effect, however, ensuring Whitman's potentially revolutionary presence in Britain, and building Symonds's own reputation, which eventually made his own sexuality an issue to be dealt with.

An example of Symonds's subversive but timid use of the trope of the "Greek" was the early *Studies of the Greek Poets*. In it Symonds characteristically skirts the issue of homosexual institutions in ancient Greece, and, when he raises the issue, it is, on the surface, to rebuke ancient Greek morality regarding slavery, women, and homosexuality. Though the quotation is lengthy, I include the whole of it to trace how the judgment against Greek immorality is turned against itself:

The three points in which the morality of the Greeks was decidedly inferior to that of the modern races were slavery, the social degradation of women, and paiderastia. No panegyrist of the Greeks can attempt to justify any one of these customs, which, it may be said in passing, were closely connected and interdependent in Hellenic civilization. An apologist might, indeed, argue that slavery, as recognized by the Athenians, was superior to many forms of the same evil till lately tolerated by the Christian nations. Mediæval villeinage and Russian serfdom, the Spanish enslavement of Peruvians and Mexicans, and the
American slave-trade flourished in spite of the theoretical opposition of Christianity, and have only succumbed to the advance of rational humanity. The same advocate could show, as Mr. Mahaffy has already done, that in Greece there existed a high ideal of womanhood. All students of history will, however, admit that in relation to the three important points above mentioned the Greeks were comparatively barbarous. At the same time it cannot be contended that these defects were the necessary and immediate outcome of the Hellenic philosophy of life.\textsuperscript{17}

The entire passage, while critical of what Symonds terms Greek morality, subverts the superiority of modern, Christian morality by noting its errors regarding slavery and the treatment of women in Christendom. The most subversive of these moves is made when Symonds compares Greek slavery with the harsh forms of slavery that persisted into the modern age with “theoretical opposition of Christianity,” undone only by “the advance of rational humanity,” setting rationality against revelation. Next, he asserts that underlying the apparent degradation of women was a “high ideal of womanhood,” which furthers the anti-Christian line of the argument by offering a potentially redeemed model of womanhood against Pauline Christian notions of the role and place of women underlying British Victorian society. Finally, while he counters ancient Greek slavery with modern slavery and contests the position of women in ancient Greece, he does nothing to counter assertions of the immorality of Greek homosexuality with worse modern

conditions. "Paiderastia" appears to have no modern counterpart in this passage, leaving unmentioned inversion in general, and in particular the cruel institution of homosexual dominance practiced by the boys in the English public schools, with which Symonds was well-acquainted from his years at Harrow.¹⁸ Neither does he seek to recuperate the institution of “paiderasty” as he will do in later works like *A Problem in Greek Ethics*. While it seems that his strategy regarding homosexuality was timid, he ultimately throws into question the whole notion of the superiority of Christian morality and attempts to subvert it entirely.

After the subversion of Christian morality, Symonds goes on to construct an ancient Greek ethos in *Studies of the Greek Poets* but one riddled with the contradictions that exemplify the conflict between his progressivism and his bourgeois background. In a chapter entitled “The Genius of Greek Art,” the culture of ancient Greece is, alternately, a nostalgic antidote to the complications of life in the industrial world and the basis for a scientific, even pragmatic, system of ethics, an emblem of the triumph of modernity over a pre-modern, religion-based system of morals. In the sphere of morality and ethics, Symonds proposes Greek ethics as a model for a modern replacement of a Christian revealed morality, describing the ethics of ancient Greece as cosmological: “Greek morality was radically scientific: the faith on which it

¹⁸ Grosskurth, *Biography* 32.
eventually leaned was a belief [in] . . . the order of the universe, wherein gods, human societies, and individual human beings had their proper places.” What makes Symonds’s positing of Greek ethics as a modern model rather than a nostalgic one is his positioning of a cosmological ethics in a modern cosmology, firmly rooted in a positivistic faith in the attainments of modern science:

In so far as we gain any knowledge of nature, that knowledge is something solid: the whole bearing of a man who feels that his highest duty consists in conforming himself to laws he may gradually but surely ascertain, is certainly different from that of one who obeys the formulas invented by dead or living priests and prophets to describe the nature of a God whom no man has either seen or heard . . . . The superiority of scientific over theological morality consists meanwhile in its indestructibility.¹⁹

Conversely, the Greek also serves Symonds as a nostalgic remedy to the modern. Early in the “The Genius of Greek Art,” Symonds asserts that the Greek character is primarily that of youth and closeness to nature—“The analogy between the history of a race so undisturbed in its development as the Greek, and the life of a man, is not altogether fanciful.” Ancient Greece provides a focus for a nostalgia contrasting the problems of modernity:

Like a young man newly come from the wrestling-ground, anointed, chapleted, and very calm, the Genius of the Greeks appears before us . . . . The pride and strength of adolescence are his—audacity and endurance, swift passions and exquisite sensibilities, the alternations of sublime repose and boyish noise, grace, pliancy, and stubbornness and power, love of all fair things and radiant in the world, the frank enjoyment of the open air, free merriment, and melancholy well beloved. Of these

adolescent qualities, of this clear and stainless personality, this conscience whole and pure and reconciled to nature, what survives among us now? . . . The blear-eyed mechanic, stifled in a hovel of our sombre Northern towns, canopied through all the year with smoke, deafened with wheels that never cease to creak, stiffened by toil in one cramped posture, oblivious of the sunlight and green fields, could scarcely be taught even to envy the pure, clear life of art made perfect in humanity, which was the pride of Hellas. 20

Beyond the nostalgia for the pastoral, pre-modern as an antidote for the problems of industrial modernity apparent in this passage, Symonds's comparison of a highly-sexual Greek adolescent to the "blear-eyed mechanic," suggests a subtext of the elite homosexual exploitation of young working-class men, with which he would have had some familiarity. In fact, in later works, such as *A Problem in Greek Ethics*, Symonds prescribes a Greek model of homosexuality to provide modern homosexuality with ethical ennoblement and save it from its often classist, exploitative patterns.

Additionally, Ancient Greece provided men in Victorian England with a powerfully nostalgic homosocial model. Homosocial parallels between Victorian England and ancient Greece included the barring of women from the institutions of the British public school, the university, the navy, Parliament, and the club. As in England, where, by and large, women were either chaste, domestic mothers and sisters, or prostitutes and servants, so in Greece respectable women were kept out of the public sphere. Symonds seizes upon

20 Symonds, *Greek Poets* (1879) 1.18, 2.390, 385.
Whitman's view of marriage in a similar vein to justify a British Victorian homosocial exclusion of women from the lives of men:

The intercourse established in matrimony is regarded not so much as an intellectual and moral union, but as an association for mutual assistance in the labours of life, and for the production of noble human specimens. It is an Adamic hygienic view of marriage, satisfying the instincts of the primeval man.\(^{21}\)

While in *Studies of the Greek Poets* subversion takes a back seat to a superficial affirmation of Victorian homosociality, *A Problem in Greek Ethics* (1883) seems to be a bolder approach to Greek homosexuality. Symonds drew on a tradition integral to the education of the more privileged males and therefore a tradition quite powerful to redeem "modern" homosexuality from its moral pariahdom through its homosocial appeal, but because *A Problem in Greek Ethics* was privately published and distributed, it had limited effect.

Again, though Symonds's approach to his subject is bolder, its appeal is hardly radical. He begins by proposing ancient Greece as a lone model for a great society that not only tolerated homosexual relations but valued and institutionalized them. Throughout these passages, he uses the terms "paiderastia" and Greek love interchangeably, and though he here defines "paiderastia" as "boy-love," he also alludes to Achilles and Patroclus, which does not follow the age differential of Greek pederasty. He then discusses three forms of paiderastia: a highly idealized, non-sexualized form; a vulgar,

entirely sexual form; and a hybridized form combining the ideal with the sensual, arising from the impossibility of the pure ideal. Symonds compares this third form to the medieval institution of romantic chivalry, which mixed both the ideal and the sensual. He further contextualizes “Greek Love,” noting the pedagogical importance of paiderasty for boys separated from family influence at a young age and noting, also, the military origins of “Greek Love,” its disdain for effeminacy, and, above all, its association with “manly sports, severe studies, enthusiasm, self-sacrifice, self, control, and deeds of daring.”

All these assertions are supported by allusions to the classics, presumably familiar to educated readers. Nevertheless, Symonds, towards the end of this study, dismisses “Greek Love” in shame as interdependent with the debased position of women in ancient Greece:

We, from the standpoint of a more fully organised society, detect their errors and pronounce that paiderastia was a necessary consequence of their unequal social culture; nor do we fail to notice that just as paiderastia was a post-Homeric intrusion into Greek life, so women, after the age of the Homeric poems, suffered a corresponding depression in the social scale.

He spends the final pages of the study noting how medieval Christianity raised the role of women, while suppressing all sensuality in “the cloister and the hermitage” to check the decay of the Roman Empire. By this move Symonds

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renders Christian morality less absolute and more situational.

Despite the vagueness of Symonds's development of the trope of the Greek, and despite the various meanings it might have held in his larger culture, his real interest in naming Whitman as "Greek" was to claim Whitman for Symonds's own discourse on the developing role of the homosexual. His first correspondence to Whitman of February 7, 1872, begins a long succession of letters badgering Whitman about the physical possibilities of adhesiveness and its connections to the history of passionate friendship in, among other places, ancient Greece:

For many years I have been attempting to express in verse some of the forms of what in a note to Democratic Vistas (as also in a blade of Calamus) you call "adhesiveness." I have traced passionate friendship through Greece, Rome, the medieval & the modern world, & I have now a large body of poems written but not published. In these I trust the spirit of the Past is faithfully set forth as far as my abilities allow.24

As the correspondence continues over nearly 20 years, Symonds's insistence on receiving an answer about the relation of "Calamus" to its physical expression becomes more intense, reaching its summit in his August 3, 1890, letter to Whitman and receiving its ultimate repudiation in Whitman's answer of August 19, 1890, in which Whitman creates the myth of his children.25


25 Symonds, Letters 3:481-484. Whitman's disavowal of the homosexual implications of "Calamus" to Symonds is an interesting and rich subject for
Whitman's denial did not, however, prevent Symonds from using Whitman and his texts in Symonds's own discourse of the invert. In Symonds's *Walt Whitman: A Study* and in a section of *A Problem in Modern Ethics* (some passages between the two are identical), Symonds admits "what he [Whitman] calls the 'adhesiveness' of comradeship is meant to have no interblending with the 'amativeness' of sexual love." Symonds acknowledges the denial in Whitman's correspondence, but takes him to task for promulgating such a theory when "we cannot expect to eliminate all sensual alloy from emotions raised to a high pitch of passionate intensity" and when "those unenviable mortals who are the inheritors of sexual anomalies, will recognise their own emotion in Whitman's superb friendship." He also seems unwilling to take Whitman at his word, suggesting Whitman's earlier intentions around "Calamus" may be different from his later avowed ones. Finally, dismissing his above reservations to Whitman's denials, he hopes that, like the ancient Greek ideal, the ideal of "Calamus" may elevate the passions of the invert:

[T]he question now remains whether he has not suggested the way whereby abnormal instincts may be moralised and raised to higher value. In other words, are those exceptional instincts provided in "Calamus" with the means of their salvation from the filth and mire of brutal appetite? It is difficult to answer this consideration in itself. That Whitman's personal sense of adhesiveness had physical outlet is, today, beyond doubt. His denial seems to be part of the slippage between his own hopes for democratic love between men and the developing minoritizing model of the homosexual/invert, between his desire to control the meanings of his own texts and the desires of others to use them, between the New World and the Old. See Moon 11-14, and Sedgwick, *Between Men* 201-217.
question; for the issue involved is nothing less than the possibility of evoking a new chivalrous enthusiasm, analogous to that of primitive Hellenic society, from emotions which are at present classified among the turpitudes of human nature.  

In reality Symonds’s goal is not to offer a higher ethical standard to the invert but to have Whitman and the Greeks win the invert public approval. But Symonds regularly undercuts this argument by painting the invert as a pathetic victim.

Among the threads running through Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet* is her delineation of various binaries structuring homosexuality. Of particular interest to me is the minoritizing/universalizing binary, which she offers as an alternative to the essentialist/constructivist debate. In a simplified form, an example of the universalizing view would be the sin or crime of sodomy, a perversion which any human person could commit; the construction of the homosexual, a person fundamentally oriented to sexual acts with a member of the same sex, is an example of the minoritizing view.  

She does not seek to choose a term of this binary as much as to use it to view the discourse of sexuality. While common knowledge may hold that the scientific reification of the homosexual shows progress over the ecclesiastical sin of sodomy, it is possible to privilege the universalizing term, 

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26 Symonds, *Walt Whitman* 74-77.

as in Whitman’s hope for adhesiveness as the basis for democracy. Symonds is an example of the operation of both terms of the binary. Though Whitman may reject Symonds because he is too much on the minoritizing side, Symonds wants to stress that comradeship is a “social and political virtue” on the order of “the sacred band of Thebans after the fight at Chaeronea.” Though this link to the past may seem nostalgic, Symonds's treatment of Whitman's relation to ancient Greece is, from Symonds’s perspective, modern. Especially in the context of A Problem in Modern Ethics, in which Symonds spends much time wading through minoritizing and pathologizing discourses, the chapter on Whitman counters this impulse:

In the company of Walt Whitman we are very far away from Gibbon and Carlier, from Tardieux and Casper-Liman, from Krafft-Ebing and Ulrichs . . . [W]hat has all this in common with the painful topic of the preceding sections of my Essay? . . . Whitman recognises among the sacred emotions and social virtues, destined to regenerate political life and to cement nations, an intense, jealous, throbbing, sensitive, expectant love of man for man . . . to counterbalance and to spiritualise what is vulgar and materialistic in the modern world. “Democracy,” he maintains, “infe[s] such loving comradeship, as its most inevitable twin or counterpart, without which it will be incomplete, in vain, and incapable of perpetuating itself.”

Whitman, then, becomes a discourse that resists the disfiguring classifications of industrial capitalism through a nostalgic homosocial appeal which can remain progressive through its ties to democracy.

The explicitness of Symonds’s linkage of the “Greek” with the homoerotic

28 Symonds, Sexual Inversion 79-80, 191-192.
becomes more obvious over time, but is not necessarily so obvious in *Studies of the Greek Poets*. The Rev. St. John Tyrwhitt’s “The Greek Spirit in Modern Literature,” in the March 1877 *Contemporary Review*, castigates Symonds, his seeming approbation of the “unnatural” Greek vice in *Studies of the Greek Poets*, and his choice of Whitman as a modern representative of the Greeks (Tyrwhitt prefers Matthew Arnold). The purpose of Tyrwhitt’s review, though not stated, is to oppose Symonds’s candidacy for Professor of Poetry at Oxford in the wake of reforms that weakened the Anglican church’s hold on Oxford. In Saintsbury’s review of *Leaves of Grass* (1874), which predates Tyrwhitt’s attack, Saintsbury does not seem threatened by Whitman’s homoeroticism or Symonds’s description of Whitman as Greek; in fact, Saintsbury seems not even to recognize a distinction between the homoerotic and the homosocial. Richard Dellamora argues that Tyrwhitt’s attack results from Tyrwhitt’s recognition of the homoerotic code in Symonds’s *Studies of the Greek Poets*. To be sure, condemnation of the Greek vice “against nature” is a significant point of Tyrwhitt’s argument, but the context of the article suggests that the references to the unnatural vice are a metonymy for a less mentioned but more significant charge of paganism or agnosticism, which, if

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Symonds were successful in the election for professor, would further threaten Anglican hegemony at Oxford. Indeed, the realm of the homoerotic was not unknown to the Victorian Anglican Church.31

Saintsbury's critical attention to Whitman spans a period at least as long as Symonds's, yet, despite his contemporaneity with Symonds, Saintsbury does not explicitly recognize the homoeroticism in Whitman, nor does he explicitly recognize Symonds's description of Whitman as "Greek" as a homoerotic code. This is also despite his high church Anglican affiliations, which, in other contexts, might evoke homoeroticism, and despite his probable knowledge of the 1862 scandal at Magdalen College in which Symonds was accused (falsely) of corrupting choristers.

Saintsbury first examined *Leaves of Grass* in the *Academy* in 1874, and in this essay Saintsbury confronts most directly Symonds's naming Whitman "Greek" and Whitman's homoeroticism without an explicit recognition of either. His discussion of the homoeroticism of Whitman's texts displays an inability or an unwillingness to recognize the newly developing category of the invert.

It may be easy to explain the meaning of "Children of Adam," of "Passage to India," and some others; but what shall we make of "Calamus," or of "Leaves of Grass" itself? For the answers we

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must refer the reader to the book that it may give its own reply.\textsuperscript{32} 

The very title of the "Calamus" cluster signifies the new identity he cannot read, ironically preceded by Saintsbury's recognition of "Children of Adam." Either Saintsbury is not aware of these categories or he resists them, instead viewing the homoerotic as continuous with the homosocial, preferring to recognize older conventions of sexual organization. In another discussion of a homoerotic text, Shakespeare's sonnets, Saintsbury refuses to consider the homoerotic apart from the homosocial:

Some of them are evidently addressed in the rather hyperbolical language of affection, common at the time, and derived from the study of Greek and Italian writers, to a man; others, in language not hyperbolical at all, to a woman.\textsuperscript{33}

The effect of this is not so much to deny the homoerotic as to render it unseen, as it was before the late nineteenth century. This rendering the homoerotic unseen and unquestioned by placing it in the tradition of the homosocial was both expressed and obscured by the Victorian trope of the "Greek."\textsuperscript{34} That Saintsbury bolstered an older view which did not sunder the homosocial is supported by his tolerance (remarkable for the time after the LaBouchere Amendment and the Wilde trial) of discussions of homosexuality like Havelock

\textsuperscript{32} Saintsbury, rev. of \textit{Leaves of Grass} 783.

\textsuperscript{33} George Saintsbury, \textit{A History of Elizabethan Literature} (New York: Macmillan, 1927) 162.

\textsuperscript{34} Dellamora, \textit{Masculine Desire} 229, n40.
Ellis's *The New Spirit*, and his friendships with George Wyndham, who assisted Wilde in gathering evidence for his trial, with Lord Roseberry, whose son committed suicide after an affair with Wilde, and with Oxford friend Andrew Lang, whom Richard Dellamora describes as a "homoerotic littérature and anthropologist." Though he had no apparent intimate connection with the homosexual world, except for these friendships, these tenuous connections demonstrate an intimate connection between the homosocial and the homoerotic which we do not recognize today.35

In further discussion of the "Greek" or the homoerotic in Whitman, Saintsbury continues to reinforce the continuity between the homosocial and the homoerotic. As part of an extended discussion of Whitman's treatment of the general "sexual passion," Saintsbury juxtaposes next to this, in the same paragraph, a discussion of comrades:

[I]t would be a great mistake to suppose that sexual passion occupies the chief in Whitman's estimation. There is according to him something above it, something which in any ecstasies he fails not to realize, something which seems more intimately connected in his mind with the welfare of mankind, and the promotion of his ideal republic. This is what he calls "robust American love." He is never tired of repeating "I am the poet of comrades"—Socrates himself seems renascent in this apostle of friendship. In the ears of a world (at least on this side the Atlantic) incredulous of such things, he reiterates the expressions of Plato to Aster, of Socrates respecting Charmides, and in this

respect fully justifies (making allowance for altered manners) Mr. Symonds' assertion of his essentially Greek character.36

In "Greek" fashion "sexual passion," presumably with women, is devalued beside male comradeship. The juxtaposition of these two, passion and comradeship, makes it likely that Saintsbury admitted the sexual implications of the latter by its placement alongside the former. Still, references to the Greek concealed at least as much they revealed.

Saintsbury's acceptance of the homoeroticism of *Leaves of Grass*, especially "Calamus," relies on the filtering of the homoerotic through the convention of the homosocial continuum signified by the trope of the Greek. Saintsbury, forward thinking on formal issues of literature as he was, based his judgments on some sense of convention. Even his acceptance of late-nineteenth-century free verse was conditioned by classifications according to convention: he insisted on calling the works of Ossian, Whitman and Blake stave-prose-poetry.37 His reaction to the form of the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* is unrecorded, but his embrace of the 1871 edition depends on its conventional appearance:

The volume now before us [1871] is very different in outward appearance from the edition of fourteen years ago, which has so long caught the eye by its dissimilarity to its brother occupants of the bookshelf. The old cloth boards, deeply and mystically

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36 Saintsbury, rev. of *Leaves of Grass* 398-400.

stamped with strange emblems, have given way to an outer coat of sober and decent green suitable to any modern English poem. Thick paper and bold type have yielded to the exigencies of the increased matter. The very titles of some of the poems have made concessions to conventionality. . . . Altogether the book might seem to a too-fanciful critic to have abandoned, at least in externals, its former air of youthful and exuberant provocation, and to demand, more soberly if not less confidently, the maturer consideration of the student of letters.\footnote{38 Saintsbury, rev. of \textit{Leaves of Grass} 783.}

Here Saintsbury expresses relief over what he perceives as the more orthodox presentation of the 1871 edition as opposed to the nontraditional appearance of the 1855 edition, unreadable to Saintsbury because of its lack of a conventional context familiar to him, which makes it threatening. Taken in the light of Saintsbury's acceptance of the homoeroticism of \textit{Leaves of Grass} when he can place it within a convention that both reveals and disarms it, Saintsbury's concern with the covers, binding, and typography of the 1855 and 1871 \textit{Leaves of Grass} reads as a parable of discomfort over iconoclastic homosexual subtexts that cannot be organized in older, conventional ways. Saintsbury's discussion of the incorporation of \textit{Drum Taps} into the 1871 edition, immediately following the above quotation, demonstrates how \textit{Drum Taps} and the war function, like the traditional binding and typography, to provide a conventional context of homosociality in which to subsume the homoeroticism of the entire text.\footnote{39 Saintsbury, rev. of \textit{Leaves of Grass} 783-784.}
Dowden’s (mis)recognition of the homoeroticism in *Leaves of Grass* and the relation of his criticism to Symonds’s and Saintsbury’s is rather complex. Dowden eschews metaphorical recognitions of Whitman as Greek or chivalric and in doing so he realizes the democratic impulses behind “Calamus” poetry more fully than either Symonds or Saintsbury:

In the period of chivalry there existed a beautiful relation between man and man, of which no trace remains in existence as an institution—that of knight and squire. The protecting, encouraging, downward glance of the elder, experienced, and superior man was answered by the admiring and aspiring, upward gaze of the younger and inferior. The relation was founded upon inequality; from the inequality of the parties its essential beauty was derived. Is there any possible relation of no less beauty, corresponding to the new condition of things, and founded upon equality? . . . For this love of man for man, as Whitman dreams of it [in “Calamus”], or rather confidently expects it, is to be no rare, no exceptional emotion, making its possessors illustrious by its singular preciousness, but it is to be widespread, common, unnoticeable. . . . Many, Whitman is aware, will regard this assurance of his as a dream; but such loving comradeship seems to him implied in the very existence of a democracy, “without which it will be incomplete, in vain, and incapable of perpetuating itself.”

Dowden avoids the very trope of the “Greek” and alludes through a medieval trope to the inherent inequality of classical Greek homosexuality with the sexually “active” older man, and the “passive” younger man, contrasting it to Whitman’s notion of comradeship. This is not to say that Dowden’s reading of Whitman did not tame the concept of comradeship at all; his accounts of it in

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"The Poetry of Democracy" are practically desexualized. Additionally, equal comradeship is, of necessity, tied to democracy, reinscribing a homosocial rather than a homoerotic context. Comradeship is also the base for Dowden’s construction of a homosocial masculinity, composed of men “possessed of the largest mass of manhood, manhood of the most natural quality, unelaborated, undistilled, freely displaying itself,” as opposed to aristocratic heroes who “are ideal, not naturalistic... laboriously formed after a noble model,” and presumably affected, perhaps even feminized.41

In Dowden’s brief comparison of “Calamus” to Shakespeare’s Sonnets in Shakspere: His Mind and Art, the Sonnets, like “Calamus,” result from “romantic attachment,” but are highly platonized, and the poems are the results of a process whereby a “sadder but wiser” Shakespeare emerges from the unsettling effects of passion for another man. Dowden quotes from the Sonnets to construct a narrative of love but also absence and loss, with a Platonic triumph, which parallels the progression of Calamus.

Dowden begins by asserting his belief that the Sonnets are biographical; then he raises the unnameable specter of Shakespeare’s immorality, excusable because unnamed:

Assuredly, the inference from Shakspere’s writings is not that he held himself, with virginal strength and pride, remote from the blameful pleasures of the world. What no reader will find anywhere in the plays or poems of Shakspere is a cold-blooded,

41 Dowden, “Poetry of Democracy” 27.
hard, or selfish line; all is warm, sensitive, vital, radiant with delight, or a thrill with pain. And what we may dare to affirm of Shakspere's life is, that whatever its sins may have been, they were not hard, selfish, deliberate, cold-blooded sins. The errors of his heart originated in his sensitiveness, in his imagination (not at first inured to the hardness of fidelity to the fact,) in his quick consciousness of existence, and in the self-abandoning devotion of his heart. 42

Ultimately, the only material consequences of this passion, characterized by absence, loss, and pain, are the Sonnets themselves. Desire is displaced onto and satisfied by art:

Such experiences as those recorded in the Sonnets could not pass out of his life, and in the imaginative recurrence of past moods might at any subsequent time become motives of his art. Passion had been purified; and at last the truth of things stood out clear and calm.

After invoking this narrative of desire and loss satisfied only through the symbolic formations of art (the exact narrative Fredson Bowers constructs for "Calamus" in the 1950s), 43 Dowden connects Shakespeare and Whitman. He ends quoting "Here the Frailest Leaves of Me":

Here the frailest leaves of me, and yet my strongest-lasting
Here I shake and hide my thoughts—I myself do not expose them,
And yet they expose me more than all my other poems.

And then he writes of the lines, "These words of Whitman may be taken as a motto of the Sonnets of Shakspere. In these poems Shakspere has hidden

42 Dowden, Shakspere 352.

himself and is exposed.”44 So, too, has Whitman hidden himself in “Calamus,” but in both the cases of Shakespeare and Whitman, what Dowden wishes to expose has limits. The existence of desire is admitted, but the possibility of its consummation is denied.

Elsewhere Dowden hides more of Shakespeare than he exposes. His edition of the Sonnets, meant for the student and the casual reader, amplifies, presumably for a more naïve audience, the conventionally platonic transformation of friendship to art, and abates any passionate or romantic implications, citing conventional Renaissance poetry between men, among them, ironically, Michelangelo’s poetry for Tommaso Cavalieri.45

Inclusiveness, then, has its limits. Dowden asserts that Whitman celebrates no individual, not even Whitman himself, except what he holds in common with others. The move from a potentially threatening multiplicity of voices to an elision of difference, which Whitman himself inaugurates, makes an early appearance in criticism:

The democratic poet celebrates no individual hero, nor does he celebrate himself. “I celebrate myself,” sings Whitman, and the longest poem in “Leaves of Grass” is named by his own name; but the self-celebration throughout is celebration of himself as a man and an American; it is what he possesses in common with all others that he feels to be glorious and worthy of song, not that which differentiates him from others.... In what is common he

44 Dowden, Shakspere 355, 357-358.

finds what is most precious.

Sexual difference, as an emblem of all difference Dowden lists, is defused, depersonalized, and subsumed in the name of a democratic inclusiveness: "The mettlesome, proud, turbulent, brave, self-asserting young Achilles, lover of women and lover of comrades of Whitman's epic, can be no other than the American people." 46

The centrality of homoeroticism in *Leaves of Grass* varies considerably among these three critics. Any consideration of homoeroticism and homosociality is intertwined with discussions of modernity and nostalgia. Here it is interesting to see these critics invoke Whitman in ways that serve their outlooks. Symonds invokes Whitman as both modern and nostalgic, alternately supporting a modern ethics or justifying class privilege, supporting his interactions with working-class young men. Saintsbury, the staunch Tory, bifurcated form and content in Whitman, which enabled Saintsbury to empty the poetry of modern content and allowed him to admire its proto-modern form. This move reminds one of an almost Wildean aesthetic emphasizing surfaces and play and disingenuously denying the importance if not the very existence of content and essence. Dowden sees in Whitman an opportunity to exercise a Tainean/Spencerian pseudo-scientific criticism on the native poetic flora and fauna of the New World. Nevertheless, Dowden's examination is concerned

with moral ends and is not strictly disinterested, at least in the application of this type of criticism to a figure like Shakespeare.

These three critics' uses of Whitman as they relate to modernity is congruent with their discussions of Whitman and the "Greek." Symonds's reaction to Whitman and modernity is contradictory and conflicted. Again, Whitman is the prophet of the best of the new or nostalgic antidote to the worst of it. Saintsbury is, in some ways, less conflicted. As a literary proto-modernist, he embraces Whitman's protomodernist form, acknowledging, as modernism would dictate, continuity with tradition. As Dowden recognized the organic connection between comradeship and democracy, so he recognizes an organic connection between Whitman's uncharted form and the potential of democracy in the New World.

_Walt Whitman: A Study_ is Symonds's largest single work on Whitman. Published just after Symonds's death, it is a series of essays on Whitman, tangentially connected thematically, but often repeating the same concerns and raising the same anxieties over modernity in the course of its ten chapters. One of the significant anxieties Symonds displays repeatedly is the division of his loyalties between modernity, especially as it relates to ethics, and the nostalgia engendered by his bourgeois background that moderates his progressive impulse towards the modern. Along these lines, Symonds believed that Whitman and his art acted as a corrective to the disfiguring impulses of
modern industrial capitalism, sometimes leading Symonds to invoke Whitman as an emblem of the potential of the modern, based in the scientific, at other times, assuring himself and his educated readers that Whitman was not so different from the religion and art they knew and found comfort in.

Beginning with religion, Symonds, though he will admit that Whitman was not technically a Christian, insists, "[I]f the Christianity of Christ, as apart from that of Christendom, be intended, then he fully shared its spirit." While trying to catch some of his readers with his assertion that Whitman’s religion is essentially Christian, Symonds also asserts that Whitman’s religion was not Christianity, any more than it was Mohammedanism or Buddhism, or Græco-Roman Paganism. . . . This religion corresponds exactly to the Scientific Principia of the modern age; to the evolutionary hypothesis with its display of an immense unfolding organism, to the correlation of forces and the conservation of energy, which forbid the doubt of any atom wasted, any part mismade or unaccounted for eventually. 47

Early on, however, this book vacillates between presenting Whitman as the poet of an exciting and scientific modernity and reducing the threat of modernity to Symonds’s readers by casting Whitman as encompassed by the conventional.

I have already discussed Symonds’s ambiguous presentation of the homoeroticism in Whitman’s texts as alternately nostalgically homosocial yet relating to the developing discourses of the invert. In his reading of Whitman’s

47 Symonds, Walt Whitman 29, 31-32.
reference to heterosexual relations, Symonds similarly invokes scientific disinterestedness only to insist that Whitman's treatment of sex is anything but pathological, even fully moral. Symonds begins by linking Whitman's treatment of sex to scientific objectivity:

[Whitman's] originality consisted, I have said, in giving the idealism of poetry and powerful emotion to the blank results of modern science. . . . Science, in her wise impartiality, regards morbid phenomena, disease and decay, crime and aberration, as worthy of attention, upon the same lines as healthy and normal products.

But next Symonds insists that Whitman's discussion of sex is not disinterested but encourages the moral and ethical:

Sharing the scientific spirit in his quality of poet, Whitman was not called to celebrate what is unhealthy and abnormal in humanity. That is a proper subject for the laboratory. . . . It is his duty to insist upon what is wholesome, the things in life which conduce to organic growth, the natural instincts and normal appetites upon which the continuation of the species, the energy of the individual, the welfare of the family, the fabric of the commonwealth, eventually rest.  

This move from the disinterestedly scientific to the ethical accomplishes several things. Obviously, Symonds authorizes Whitman's discussions of sex by claiming scientific objectivity for them. Then Symonds authorizes the discussion with a nostalgic sense of morality, undermining the scientific authorization. The rescue of heterosexual relations from the realm of pathology undermines scientific authority over them, suggesting that

48 Symonds, Walt Whitman 55-56.
Symonds's interests in and hopes for the scientific are directed towards the "pathological" inverted sexuality he spends much more time discussing.

Symonds's discussion of Whitman's democracy, an important theme for his British Victorian readers, is similarly ambivalent. On the one hand he asserts, "The essence of the democratic spirit . . . [is] to penetrate the husk of the commonplace and reach the poetry of things," while on the other hand, Symonds reimposes hierarchy, insisting, "Special revelations, as in the life of Buddha or of Christ, for instance, do not rank in the same class with the 'ever recurring miracle of the sunrise.'" Symonds ignores Whitman's proclamation in "Democratic Vistas" that "The great poems . . . are poisonous to the idea of the pride and dignity of the common people" to assert "Achilles has not ceased to be a fit subject for poem or statue because we discern heroism in an engine-driver." In the same paragraph, Symonds tells us that the man of letters, to prove himself adequate to democracy, must shun the "complacent self and artificial circumstance and decaying feudalism," which he connects to the worst of middle class values ("Snobbery and Pharisaism"). Then Symonds nostalgically asserts that democracy and modernity have promise only if the modern, democratic artist takes hold of the masses as those of "Greek,

49 Symonds, *Walt Whitman* 92-93.


51 Symonds, *Walt Whitman* 100.
Mediæval, Italian, Elizabethan, Louis XIV., Persian, Japanese” cultures to create a “spontaneous rapport with the nations which begat them, and with the central life-force for those nations at the moment of their flourishing.”

Whitman is, for Symonds, the beginning of this new, yet old promise.

Saintsbury is much less conflicted around issues of modernity and nostalgia than Symonds. As noted above, Saintsbury found it possible to empty literature of its content and admire its form, which implies a proto­modernist æsthetic, at least, even though this æsthetic is justified by an appeal to older traditions. Though later in life Saintsbury refused to direct his scholarly attention to living authors, his attitude as a literary critic is demonstrated by his attention in his major works to nineteenth-century American writers who were partly his contemporaries and to innovative verse forms from the nineteenth century. Saintsbury devoted an entire chapter to such diverse American writers as Poe, Longfellow, and Whitman in *A History of English Prosody*, spending a substantial portion of this chapter discussing Whitman. Saintsbury’s wide range of reading interests attests to his appreciation for writing outside a narrowly defined view of tradition, but his acceptance of Whitman is always conditioned by his ability to place Whitman in a tradition. While Saintsbury points out “The impulsive cause of [Whitman’s unique verse form] was, no doubt, that natural and not disgraceful,

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though sometimes slightly comic, desire to be entirely original and American,"
Saintsbury must place Whitman's versification in an older tradition: "The
cause of pattern or suggestion was even more undoubtedly—still leaving the
Emersonian following as unproved—the verse-divisions of the English Bible." 53

In Saintsbury's defense of Whitman's verse form, which he takes up in
both The History of English Prosody and A History of English Prose Rhythm,
he cautiously describes the form as hybrid prose-poetry. He desires that the
use of such a form be limited, that it be kept closer to verse, rather than prose,
but he goes so far as to intimate that it is poetic verse:

[Whitman's lines] are often very beautiful prose, worthy of the
most careful scansion and appreciation such as has been given in
this book. But, as I have already hinted, when they are taken
together, when you at once regard for purposes of observation,
and analyse for purposes of experiment, their system of
juxtaposition, then you perceive that something more than
prose—that something different from prose—has been aimed at
certainly; that it has (in measure differing no doubt according to
the taste of the appreciator) been achieved. 54

When Saintsbury examines Whitman's criticism, mainly Democratic
Vistas, it is judged partially worthy, but only insofar as it supports an older
tradition of English literature. Whitman's appreciation for Scott and
Shakespeare is praised, and Saintsbury finds Whitman's criticism without the
curious blindness of his followers—"English literature is not great' because it

53 George Saintsbury, A History of English Prosody: From the Twelfth Century

54 Saintsbury, Prosody 3: 492; Saintsbury, Prose Rhythm 471-472.
is anti-Democratic and Feudal.” Still, Saintsbury cannot deny that this anti-aristocratic impulse exists in Whitman’s criticism, and must ultimately dismiss it, not, as he says, because he disagrees with the conclusions, but because it starts from the wrong principles, though he never demonstrates what the correct principles are. Saintsbury is able, merely by assertion, to turn Whitman’s critical principles against himself:

That principle and those methods, *mutatis mutandis*, would justify *me* in dismissing—nay, would force me to dismiss—as void, inanimate, worthless, mischievous, something of Heine, much of Shelley, more of Hugo, and very nearly the whole of Whitman himself—four poets in four different countries born, whom, as it happens, if I were the responsible literary advisor of a new King Arthur of Poetry, I should bid him summon among the very first to his Round Table. To the critic, as I understand criticism (and if I may adapt a famous text of Scripture), Feudalism is nothing and Democracy is nothing, but the Spirit of Literature.\(^55\)

Again, Saintsbury empties the content of literature in favor of the form, but does so with a metaphor that betrays his taste for the feudal.

In contrast to Saintsbury, Dowden unambiguously embraces Whitman, form and content, as an example of his application of a scientific criticism based on Hippolyte Taine and Herbert Spencer, evident in the opening sentences of his review of the 1871 *Leaves of Grass*, *Passage to India*, and *Democratic Vistas*:

That school of criticism which has attempted in recent years to

connect the history of literature and art with the larger history of society and the general movement of civilizations, creeds, forms of national life and feeling, and which may be called emphatically the critical school of the present century, or the naturalist as contradistinguished from the dogmatic school, has not yet essayed the application of its method and principles to the literature and art of America. . . . The New World, with its new presentations to the senses, its new ideas and passions, its new social tendencies and habits, must surely, one thinks, have given birth to literary and artistic forms corresponding to itself in strange novelty, unlike in a remarkable degree those sprung from our old-world, and old-world hearts.  

Such an approach to American literature, which celebrates Whitman as “a man not shaped out of old-world clay, not cast in any old-world mould, and hard to name by any old-world name,” anticipates the American Studies movement of the 1920s and contradicts the assertion of Matthew Arnold that Whitman’s originality was his liability as a poet and that the American intellect “must inevitably consent to come, in a considerable measure, in to the European movement” and forego displaying an “eccentric and violent originality.”

The entire tone of Dowden’s review is decidedly anti-Arnoldian, tracing a critical path seemingly inspired by “The American Scholar” and “Democratic Vistas,” expressing Whitman’s disdain for only one class of men, “those whose lives are spent among books.” After briefly surveying the field of American literature, Dowden dismisses Longfellow, Bryant, and Lowell and names

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56 Dowden, “Poetry of Democracy” 16.

Whitman as the first and true “Bard of America, and Bard of democracy.” Dowden outlines the principles of “aristocratic” art—selectivity, excessive concern with form and dismissal of substance, the ennoblement of some words and the vulgarization of others, classist attitudes (the lower classes are treated “voyeuristically,” if at all), a celebration of the past and present rather than a hoping after the future; Dowden then asserts that democratic art embodies exactly the opposite principles and demonstrates Whitman’s fidelity to the principles of democratic art. As Whitman’s circumstances and his honest admission of them justify an original democratic poetry, so too does his original matter justify an original form of verse:

We will not say that his poems, as regards their form, do not, after all, come right, or that for the matter which he handles his manner of treatment may not be the best possible. One feels, as it has been well said, that although no counting of syllables will reveal the mechanism of the music, the music is there, and that “one should not for something change ears with those who cannot hear it.” Whitman himself anticipates a new theory of literary composition for imaginative works, and especially for highest poetry, and desires the recognition of new forces in language, and the creation of a new manner of speech which cares less for what it actually realizes in definite form than “for impetus and effects, and for what it plants and invigorates to grow.”

Of course, not all British critics of this era found Whitman deserving of the approbation; even so, many of them who wrote to voice their disapproval kept Whitman in view. But Symonds, Saintsbury, and Dowden’s critical approval of Whitman did more than mere controversy could to spread his fame.

58 Dowden, “Poetry of Democracy” 21, 23.
They demonstrated how Whitman could be made to speak to their time and place and how *Leaves of Grass* resonated with British Victorian crises over masculinity and modernity. And the fact that they could read Whitman and his poetry in such varied and contradictory ways to calm their own anxieties, perhaps characteristic for their time, suggested that the multiplicity of voices in Whitman could be selected and used to reflect and soothe the crises on the other side of the Atlantic. In many ways these three critics anticipated the attempts of some modernist American critics discussed in chapter four—Van Wyck Brooks, George Santayana, Vernon Parrington, Newton Arvin, and F.O. Matthiessen—in their use of Whitman as an antidote to the problems wrought by industrial modernity, at times progressive, at other times nostalgic. Their response was often progressive, especially in the cases of Symonds and Dowden, seeking solutions to class division, exploitation and despoilment of the land, in a hope of future equality. They were very much unlike their nineteenth-century American counterparts, however, who used Whitman to reinforce, among other things, the deep divisions brought about by industrial modernity, especially sexual division of labor, but also of class and region. For their contemporary American critics, Whitman was at the core of a masculinist construction of American literature, as we shall see in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 3

“OPPOSITE EQUALS ADVANCE”: THE UNTWINING OF THE GENTEEL AND ACADEMIC STRAINS OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN CRITICISM

For from “Beowulf” down to the “Barrack-Room Ballads” a splendidly robust and virile strain has run through English poetry. Think of a few of the many names: “Beowulf” itself, the Romances and the Ballads, the “Canterbury Tales,” “Gammer Gurton’s Needle,” first and second “Henry IV,” Ben Johnson’s comedies, Dryden’s satires, “Tam o’Shanter” and the “Jolly Beggars,” “Don Juan,” the “Bigelow Papers,” “Leaves of Grass.” Common to all of them, despite their infinite array of differences, is a masculine energy that never overlooks the mass in the detail. Ornament, prettiness, finesse are secondary qualities; boldness of conception, frankness of delineation, directness of speech are their distinctive marks. . . . The two points on which I am intent are these: the English tradition includes a magnificently virile strain; and that strain shows itself chiefly in poetry that takes for its province the actions of men.¹

During the last thirty years or so of the nineteenth century, Whitman was increasingly accepted in his native United States, especially in the developing culture of higher education. Whitman’s American acceptance grew for a variety of reasons, including, as Nina Baym notes in her study of American literary histories, the necessity of taking European reception into

account. Baym argues that nineteenth-century histories of American literature follow and promote a Whig political project to create American unity, tame democracy, and assimilate immigrants through the creation of a New England and specifically Puritan intellectual and literary history, further, emphasizing the English origins of the country, teaching non-English students to identify with Anglo-Saxon heritage.2

Indeed, the Anglo-Saxon nature of American literature and culture was not a foregone conclusion in the nineteenth century, with many regrets voiced over lost cultures: Longfellow mourns the loss of French Acadian culture in the long poem “Evangeline” and the long-lost eighteenth sephardic Jewish community in Rhode Island in “The Jewish Cemetery at Newport,” while Cooper contemplates the loss of Native American culture in The Leatherstocking Tales; meanwhile, the U.S. government’s Indian removal program escalated after the Civil War. Timothy Morris contends that the ever-present concern for a “native” American literature, from Emerson onward, displayed a deep anxiety over the displacement of American Indian cultures by the European whites. According to Morris, a class of authors that includes Whitman is cast as the “redskins”—close to nature, energetic and unconstrained—against those authors more clearly part of the English tradition. This recasting of Euro-Americans in the roles of colonized and

colonizer accomplished the concealment of the original conflict. Both these seemingly contradictory projects spring from the same impulse: a desire to create a unifying cultural tradition.

In the progression of the critics discussed in this chapter, these traditions blend, and the initial need for a merely unifying culture becomes a need for a "masculinized" culture that takes over the function of the "native" literature. In this new critical tradition, Whitman comes to function not just as a nod to European tastes but as a native, masculine voice. I believe that the discussion of Whitman in nineteenth-century academic literary histories is not mere tolerance but displays evidence of another project in which these histories partook: the creation of a "masculinized" high culture to counter the popular, sentimental "feminine" literary culture of nineteenth-century America. I take as a starting point Ann Douglas's *The Feminization of American Culture* and her argument that in the nineteenth century the alliance between the newly disestablished clergy and their female parishioners led to moral activism and literary and cultural activity, the beginnings and growth of a "feminized" popular culture. Of the critics I examine here, John Seely Hart, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, and John Livingston Lowes studied for the ministry,

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and Higginson practiced it for a time, all of which demonstrates the shift of higher education from its ministerial roots to professionalism. Higginson, especially, represents Douglas's thesis about the clergy's loss of power and its subsequent efforts in the cultural arena to gain and exercise power, while Hart represents academic abandonment of the clerical for new realms of power in the professional. The academic establishment and the ensuing high culture that it promoted evolved into a reaction against the popular and the sentimental, and Whitman became a part of this masculine, high culture because he was available to be read in a manner supporting it. Nowhere is Whitman's use in this growing backlash clearer than in the change in his poems that were anthologized. Immediately after the Civil War, Whitman's first widely anthologized poem was the sentimental and domestic "Come Up from the Fields Father," which was replaced in the 1880s by the more conventionally masculine and martial "O Captain! My Captain!"  

Throughout this chapter, I make use of the terms "genteel," "feminized," "entrepreneurial," and "masculinized." "Genteel" and its counterpart "entrepreneurial" come from George Santayana's famous essay "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy," in which he sketches out a fundamental bifurcation in American culture between what he sees as its Calvinist origins.

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and its capitalist reality:

This division may be found symbolised in American architecture: a neat reproduction of the colonial mansion—with some modern comforts introduced surreptitiously—stands beside the sky-scraper. The American Will inhabits the sky-scraper; the American Intellect inhabits the colonial mansion. The one is the sphere of the American man; the other, at least predominantly, of the American woman. The one is all aggressive enterprise; the other is all genteel tradition.⁶

Santayana sets forth the linkages between the genteel and the “feminine,” on the one hand, and between enterprise and the “masculine,” on the other. And in this chapter, we will see academic culture trading its allegiance to the genteel, with its increasing linkage to the “feminine,” for an allegiance to enterprise and the “masculine” as I examine the evolution of academic culture through its relation to Whitman. I will start with the writings of John Seely Hart—a professor at Princeton in the mid-nineteenth-century—as a baseline demonstrating the initial implication of the genteel and the academic. Next I will show that Thomas Wentworth Higginson, best known for bringing Emily Dickinson’s poetry to public attention, represents a preliminary stage in the unraveling of these traditions. Higginson, a former clergyman himself, remained outside increasingly professionalized and masculinized academia but took on a hypermasculinized attitude, criticizing Whitman as “unmanly.” Edmund Clarence Stedman figures into this chapter as a representative of

another step of the process. Stedman was a largely unsuccessful poet turned critic and Wall Street businessman who consciously foregrounded and to an extent embraced the "feminization" of culture in his writings yet also promoted a canon of the national and representative (which Stedman defined as "masculine"): Whittier, Lowell, Bryant, Taylor, Stoddard, and Whitman.

Charles F. Richardson represents further separation of the strains. Richardson, a professor at Dartmouth, was somewhat more "professionalized" than Higginson or Stedman, and because he arrives on the scene later than Hart, senses the sentimental and genteel as a threat. As a result, his formulation of a canon of American literature is highly masculinist, deprecating women writers as "poetesses," and, in its emphasis on New England as the origin of American literary and intellectual culture, is a paradigm of Baym's thesis. With Richardson, the New England nativist and the masculine are joined, advancing not only New England dominance but also a nostalgic masculine cultural dominance, promoting Puritan clergy as clergymen not dependent on the patronage of women, as their nineteenth-century "descendants" were.

After Richardson I discuss the rare academic considerations of Whitman by the philologists, who were highly professionalized, active positivists and were interested mainly in linguistically and historically opaque pre- and early-modern texts; hence, their considerations of Whitman, rare though they are,
range from the disinterestedly linguistic to the politically charged. Fred Newton Scott gives Whitman's poetry a seemingly dispassionate linguistic consideration that carries a veiled jeremiad against collapsing the terms art/nature and people/democracy. John Livingston Lowes claims Whitman as part of the masculine Anglo-Saxon race-tradition, opposed to the sentimental and feminine. Finally, Vida Dutton Scudder and Bliss Perry anticipate the modernist American critics, like Van Wyck Brooks, seeking, in various ways, to join the high and low culture. Scudder's *Social Ideas in English Literature* touches briefly on Whitman as a part of a long English literary tradition concerned with social reform, Christian socialism, and sexual equality. In this, Scudder anticipates the writings of Brooks and Parrington, the politics of Matthiessen, and the rehabilitation of Whitman from the left in the second half of the twentieth century, but she also echoes the genteel reformist alliance between clergy and women, demonstrating that from the nineteenth century through the twentieth conservative "masculinist" high culture and sometimes progressive "feminized" popular culture were ultimately inextricable. Perry's anticipation of the modernist American concern with joining the highbrow and the lowbrow places more emphasis on the genteel and the aristocratic than Scudder's formulation. Perry is caught between a nostalgia for strict class division and artisan democracy on the one hand and the need for a culture available to communicate values to an entire nation, not just to the elite.
Whitman is just that nostalgic figure, evoking artisan democracy and protecting Perry and his class from the as yet unknown horrors of industrial capitalism.

John Seely Hart (1810-1877) occupies the preliminary position in this chapter: he makes his critical appearance earlier than most of my other subjects and so represents a time before the separate emergence of the genteel and the academic. Hart serves mainly as a benchmark in my study with which to compare later reactions. He seems professionally disinterested, less concerned with critiquing Whitman than with elucidating him. His interests are inclusive, relative to later literary historians; for example, he is interested in promoting the writing of women. He exists in a time before the split of the genteel from the academic and is part of both traditions. Unaware of perceived threats of immigration, he does not need to assert paranocially a uniform racial heritage, as later writers do; he is comfortable in his relation to the sentimental and the feminine-identified and feels no need to carve out a separate masculinist space at their expense.

Hart did have significant academic connections (unlike Stedman and Higginson); though he did not have the German philological training possessed by the later Anglo-Saxonists, his training and interests (though traditionally clerical and classical) anticipate those of the philologists and professional educators. In some ways he approximates the stereotype of the disestablished
clergyman in Ann Douglas’s *The Feminization of American Culture*. Like many of the men described by Douglas, Hart trained for the ministry at Princeton though never practiced it, and he supported the “sentimental” writing of women in many of his works on American literature and especially in his *Female Prose Writers of America* (1852). But Hart seems less a genteel critic (especially in his nod to Whitman) than an educator presenting a historical selection of literature in its broadest sense, especially in *A Manual of American Literature* (1873). Though Hart’s writings are earlier than Stedman’s and Higginson’s, he is not so much a part of genteel culture but more a proto-professional, the precursor of the modern language teacher. As such, he can afford to have “catholic” tastes; unlike later “professionals,” he does not need to carve out a space of high culture against the popular sentimental female culture.

Central to Hart’s work is *A Manual of American Literature*, the one text in which Hart discusses Whitman, which is also considered to be the first college textbook devoted to American literature.\(^7\) The text is so inclusive that it is impossible for me to give a sense of its scope here. Hart sampled literature from the colonial period to the 1850s, from all over the U.S., and he gave unapologetic coverage to the likes of Poe and Whitman. Giving generous

attention to women writers (considering Catherine Ann Sedgwick the equal to James Fenimore Cooper), he provided a bountiful sample of "non-literary" writings in history, theology, law, politics, science, economics, and education. It is an ample, compendious reference work, which is not so much explicitly advancing an agenda as providing a large range of choices. Though women are generously represented, the text is not what we would now call "multi-ethnic": there is no mention of Native American culture or immigrants, and though he includes Catholic clergy in a chapter on theological and religious writers, he includes no Jewish writers. However, the relative disinterestedness of Hart's literary historical project is demonstrated by his vision of his text as a reference work rather than as a textbook to be used for recitation. In his introduction for teachers, he directs:

1. Study carefully the Introductions of several Chapters, including the subdivisions into Sections.

2. Study carefully, in full, one leading author, in each Chapter or Section, either taking the author who is named in the book as standing at the head of that Section, or selecting some other, at the discretion of the teacher.

3. In connection with this exhaustive study of one author in each Section, learn the portion in coarse print in regard to the other associated authors in that Section.

4. Name merely, without giving any other particulars, some of those authors who are presented in fine print. How many of these minor authors should be named, must be left to the judgment of the teacher. The better way is to
require only a few, and leave the selection to each student. Hart leaves too much up to the teacher using the text to be promoting any too explicit agenda, though his significant gaps represent a blindness to the cultural "other," unlike the contempt shown for it in a later history like Richardson's. Again, the catholicity of his presentation demonstrates that he perceived no threat to his station from feminine popular culture and suggests his implication in it.

Nevertheless, for all his implication in the genteel, Hart shows remarkable independence in his discussion of Whitman, breaking with the genteel view, represented by Higginson, of Whitman's immorality: "Whitman is a rather rigid moralist, but a strong up-bubbling of animal spirits leads him to do and say things which offend society." Hart counts Whitman as one of the few successful "literary nullifiers" and finds neither Whitman's form nor his matter unpoetic, despite its nonconformity:

We may not be able to scan his verse, or to reduce it to a known scheme of prosody, yet every one's ear tells him the lines are rhythmical. As with his verse, so with his matter. He takes subjects accepted in all ages as essentially vulgar and prosaic, and creates out of them forms of delicacy, grace, and beauty.

Hart finds no threat in Whitman's radical democracy and dismissal of the feudal, nor does he criticize Whitman's "kaleidoscopic views of restless,

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9 Hart 376.
shifting, human life as it surges past the poet's gaze.” He finds Whitman's treatment of the “average of life” superior to Dickens's, who wishes “to excite our laughter or our tears,” or Scott's, whose discussions contain “a certain aristocratic condescension,” because to Whitman “even...the vicious and the morally degraded...are our brethren and equals.”

Against this benchmark provided by Hart, both Thomas Wentworth Higginson (1823-1911) and Edmund Clarence Stedman (1823-1908) appear to be situated at the beginnings of the movement of the academic away from the genteel. They practiced the gentlemanly art of literary criticism in an age when the genteel, homosocial model of manhood was threatened by an entrepreneurial, competitive one. The genteel tradition of criticism was becoming feminized, and professionalized modern language studies and philology had little use for American and other contemporary literatures requiring no rigorous analysis and interpretation; hence, these literatures were also “feminized” by late-nineteenth-century academia, as evidenced by the fact that American literature was all but ignored by nineteenth-century philologists. Higginson's and Stedman's responses to these developments were contrary, however. While Stedman, on the one hand, became a businessman and joined the New York Stock Exchange, and, on the other hand, wrote poetry, admitted its feminization, and lamented its lack of masculine

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10 Hart 377.
success—the ability to pay its own way—Higginson refused to concede the feminization of the genteel, instead figuring the debate in terms of a vulgar, entrepreneurial masculinity competing with an aristocratic masculinity. And though many of Higginson’s attacks on Whitman seem homophobic to the modern reader, and, indeed, they seem to present one of the earliest American awarenesses of the homoerotic in Whitman’s poetry, Higginson is concerned more with attacking Whitman as part of the masculinity of the “self-made man,” the vulgar entrepreneur, who has no need of education and ancestry, the very things Higginson relied upon.

Higginson’s hypermasculinity shows itself in the masculinist construction of American literature in *A Reader’s History of American Literature* (1903), assembled with the assistance of Henry Walcott Boynton and, compared with its contemporary texts like Hart’s or Richardson’s, not really a unified literary history at all. It was, rather, the synthesis of a careerful of sketches, woven together with Boynton’s editorial assistance, and Higginson’s volume, like his life, was the opposite of a concentrated, scholarly, professional enterprise. He admits that the difference between his history and others was that he wished to provide a highly selective, aesthetic account of “pure literature produced by Americans” rather than a historical survey of American writers. What makes for pure literature rather than history or philosophy, according to Higginson, is concern with the moral, that which
"raises the mind and hurries it into sublimity";\(^{11}\) thus Higginson is able to consider diarists, orators, and historians, supporting the ideology of his aristocratic paternalism.

Higginson’s classification of writers regionally suggests the construction of a Puritan intellectual and literary heritage. Indeed, elsewhere he parallels the ends of literature to the end of what he, as the ardent abolitionist, saw as the moral struggle of the Civil War:

And it is a comfort thus to end in the faith that, as the foundation of all true greatness is in conscience, so we are safe if we can but carry into science and art the same earnestness of spirit which has fought through the great civil war and slain slavery. As “the Puritan has triumphed” in this stern contest, so must the Puritan triumph in the more graceful emulations that are to come; but it must be the Puritanism of Milton, not of Cromwell only. The invigorating air of great moral principles must breathe through all our literature; it is the expanding spirit of the seventeenth century by which we must conquer now.\(^{12}\)


\(^{11}\) Thomas Wentworth Higginson and Henry Walcott Boynton, A Reader’s History of American Literature (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1903) 4-5.

Higginson asserts that the Southerners are the true aristocrats, rather than the New Englanders, his emphasis on the Northeast serves to establish a literary aristocracy, with intellectual roots back to the Puritans (whom he alternately embraces and repudiates). Whitman is placed in "The Southern Influence" not because he has any ties to the South, but merely so Higginson can place Whitman's roughness alongside southerner Sidney Lanier's chastisement of Whitman's equation of roughness with democracy:

We may, perhaps, include here what is to be said of Whitman, not so much because he lived for a time in the South, as because Lanier's criticism thus brings him freshly to mind. He was, indeed, a person and a poet singularly detached from place. 13

Whitman's real threat to Higginson, then, is Whitman's detachment from region, and, by metonymy, from ancestry and tradition. For Higginson Whitman represents the new entrepreneurial "self-made" man, who threatens to displace the genteel aristocrat, dependent on education and heritage for his place. Lanier's criticisms of Whitman, which Higginson cites, are to the point here (even though they contradict Higginson's interests in physical culture):

Lanier quotes the lines of Whitman, "Fear grace, fear elegance, civilization, délicatesse," and again the passage in which the same poet rejoices in America because, "here are the roughs, beards, ... combativeness, and the like;" and Lanier shows how far were the founders of the Republic—Washington, Jefferson, Franklin, Adams—from this theory that there can be no manhood in decent clothes or well-bred manners. He justly complains that this rougher school has really as much dandyism about it as the other—"the dandyism of the roustabouts," he calls it. ... Lanier

13 Higginson, Reader's 227.
complains of this type of democracy—the merely brawny or sinewy—"that it has no provision for sick, or small, or puny, or plain-featured, or hump-backed, or any deformed people," and that is really "the worst kind of aristocracy, being an aristocracy of nature's favorites in the matter of muscle."\(^1\)

For Higginson (despite his sometime progressivism) and Lanier, the issue is not that of protecting democracy, but of protecting the Eastern, genteel aristocracy from displacement by a newly-monied, professionalized one. Higginson's answer to this jeremiad, however, is that tradition will triumph over the threat; while Higginson records and rejects easy comparisons of Whitman to Ossian and Tupper, he nevertheless notes, "it would be a still greater error to overlook the fact that the mere revolt against the tyranny of form has been made again and again before him, and without securing immortal fame to the author of the experiment." Further proof is provided by Whitman's recantation of innovation: he "omitted some of the most objectionable instances of [utter nudity] from later editions; and was also far more compressed and less simply enumerative than when he began." And Higginson appreciated three of Whitman's later, more conventional verses, "Darest thou now, O soul?" the nostalgically homosocial "Joy, Shipmate, Joy!" and, of course, the nearly rhyming "O Captain! My Captain!"\(^1\)

Higginson's progression of subtle reproaches against Whitman's

\(^{14}\) Higginson, Reader's 221-222.

\(^{15}\) Higginson, Reader's 228-230.
masculinity do seem to be early attacks on a developing formation of the homosexual, and perhaps the earliest implications of recognition of Whitman’s sexuality. But beyond this Higginson’s comments about Whitman’s manliness are also a defense of Higginson’s own genteel manliness in an age when the genteel was becoming feminine.

The deficiencies in Whitman’s masculinity, as Higginson sees them, stem from the fact that Whitman refuses to follow a genteel model of manliness. Over and over Higginson, who took on the manly occupation of soldier for the Civil War, raises the fact that Whitman, with his “fine physique,” chose to serve in the hospitals rather than fight in the war. He felt so strongly against Whitman’s choice of service that he argued against a proposed pension for Whitman on the grounds that if Whitman received one, then every woman who served in a hospital or on a Sanitary Commission deserved one, which would not be expedient or practical. Higginson implies in his argument that any man who was not actually wounded in the war deserved no pension because he was merely fulfilling his genteel manly duty.  

Higginson constantly compares the Civil War services of poet Sidney Lanier and Whitman to demonstrate the superiority of the genteel man:

Whitman represented to Lanier a literary spirit alien to his own. There could be little in common between the fleshliness of "Leaves of Grass" and the refined chivalry that could write in "The Symphony" lines like these . . . . A man who, with pulmonary disease upon him, could still keep in his saddle as a soldier, could feel but little sympathy with one who, with a superb physique, elected to serve in hospital—honorable though that service might be for the feeble-bodied. 17

The effect here is to redeem the genteel, at once taking its seeming impotence (pulmonary disease) and aligning it with a certain level of determination in the face of difficult odds, figuring it as a superior manhood. Whitman, as representative of the "new man," though with a "superb physique," is made impotent, one of the "feeble-bodied."

Though Higginson was in favor of women's suffrage, his attitude towards women remained paternalistic, and his criticisms of Whitman in this regard concern Whitman's refusal to consider women as needful of male protection or to add the romantic to his considerations of sex. Higginson's protective attitude towards women surfaces in his essay "Unmanly Manhood" in The Women's Journal. In this intriguing comparison of Oscar Wilde and Whitman, one of Higginson's criticisms is that Wilde's and Whitman's poetry assault feminine innocence:

Mr. Wilde may talk of Greece; but there is nothing Greek about his poems; his nudities do not suggest the sacred whiteness of an antique statue, but rather the forcible unveiling of some insulted innocence . . . . And their poetry is called "manly poetry"! Is it

manly to fling before the eyes of women page upon page which no
man would read aloud in the presence of women?

Another similarity between Wilde and Whitman is their lack of
action—Whitman’s choice of hospital over military service in the War Between
the States and Wilde’s flight from the impending Irish crisis.\textsuperscript{18}

Finally, Higginson complains of the lack of romance in Whitman’s
treatments of sex and procreation, and it is here that Higginson comes close to
actually calling Whitman a homosexual. His interpretations of Whitman’s
treatments of sex range from descriptions of Whitman as a savage and an
animal—“Whitman’s love, if such it can be called, is the sheer animal longing
of sex for sex”\textsuperscript{19}—to complaints about the lack of the romantic (the
underpinnings of the Victorian heterosexual economy) in Whitman’s
poetry—“Not only has he given us no love poem, in the ordinary use of the
term, but it is as hard to conceive of his writing one as of his chanting a
serenade beneath the window of his mistress”\textsuperscript{20}—finally to a recognition that
Whitman’s romantic language is directed towards men—“[T]here is the same
curious deficiency shown in him, almost alone among poets, of anything like
personal and romantic love. Whenever we come upon anything that suggests

\textsuperscript{18} Thomas Wentworth Higginson, “Unmanly Manhood,” \textit{The Women’s Journal}


\textsuperscript{20} Higginson, \textit{Reader’s} 231.
Where Higginson constructed Whitman as something less than manly perhaps to combat his own perceived cultural marginalization, Edmund Clarence Stedman embraced what he perceived as the “feminine” in his own work while raising up Whitman as part of a masculinist tradition in American poetry and high art. Stedman—notable American critic of the late-nineteenth century, largely failed poet, and Wall Street business man—was perhaps his time’s most important American supporter of Whitman, publishing a balanced but largely supportive review of the poet in the previously hostile *Scribner's Monthly* in 1880. Stedman lived the life bifurcated between enterprise and gentility: the businessman ardently desired to be a poet in a world in which poetry, even more than any other of the genteel arts of culture, seemed to be becoming increasingly feminized and irrelevant, where the realist novel could at least pay its own way, and where criticism justified itself by embracing the pseudo-science of philology and the counting of syllables and stresses. Stedman coped with all this as best he could. His need to stay in business kept him from devoting himself whole-heartedly to poetry, though he was able to devote sufficient time to and gain fame from the seemingly more masculine pursuit of literary criticism. From the vantage of criticism, Stedman was able to support American poetry, bringing Whitman to the light of respectability.

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and nurturing scores of young poets in the last decades of the nineteenth century. But his criticism was not in support of, nor did it pay attention to, the "manly" realist movement; instead, he championed the "feminized" poets, British Victorian and American, carrying on heated exchanges with William Dean Howells in the periodicals over the future of poetry and its ideality versus the realism of the novel. He maintained few academic ties, but managed to be considered seriously in academia, being offered two professorships in poetry at Yale, and delivering a series of lectures on poetry (which led to *The Nature and Elements of Poetry*) at Johns Hopkins in the early 1890s. He was slightly hostile towards the philologists, and in fact the rhapsodic Johns Hopkins lectures and the book are an answer to the German-trained specialists. Eschewing technical discussions of rhyme and metre, Stedman tackles such amorphous issues as "Creation and Self-Expression," "Melancholia," "Beauty," "Truth," "Imagination," and "The Faculty Divine: Passion, Insight, Genius, Faith." He did not think art should be didactic, however, and edited one of the first editions of the works of the "decadent" Edgar Allan Poe. When not waxing on poetry in the abstract, his "practical" criticism, marked by *The Victorian Poets* and *Poets of America*, followed a Tainean bent, examining the poets within their environments, as in his treatment of Whitman.

Stedman's consideration of conventions of masculinity and femininity
as they relate to poetry are plentiful and interesting, as he considers both the source and nature of his own poetic voice and the voices of those he considers major American poets. First, I shall discuss Stedman’s identification of his poetic voice with his mother and his discussions of the masculine and feminine voices in poetry. Whitman will figure into this discussion in that Stedman constructs Whitman as a national, hence objective, hence masculine poet. This labeling of Whitman as “objective” follows my discussion, in chapter one, of the imagined Northern reader’s attraction to Whitman’s elision of particular identity. Then, I will discuss the issue of Stedman’s opinion of and responses to the philologists in *Nature and Elements of Poetry*. Overarching all of this will be the division between the entrepreneurial and the genteel, revealing the irony that Stedman the businessman, who finds his success in the more “manly” and practical pursuit of criticism, promotes genteel culture, and finds the authorization of his poetic and critical voices in the poetry of his mother.

Stedman’s relationship with his mother was quite conflicted. His father, Major Edmund Burke Stedman, died when E.C. was only two years old. His mother, Elizabeth Clementine Dodge Stedman, tried to support herself and her two sons through writing but was forced to send the children to her late husband’s family in Connecticut. Stedman’s letters to her demonstrate his feelings of abandonment, as well as the fact that he turned to writing—first verse and then prose—to cope with her absence and his feelings of
abandonment, using the medium he associated with her. That Stedman's writing is an internalization of and substitute for his mother is demonstrated by his explicit claim that his verbal skills come from her, similar to the manner in which Louisa Van Velsor Whitman authorizes Walt Whitman's poetic voice: 22

From childhood she wrote verse, and always delighted in this means of expressing herself. "I cannot remember," she says, "when I first began to sing in rhyme, but it was not long after I first breathed: always easier for me to compose in verse than in prose, my compositions at school usually took that form, and my early correspondence often ran into rhyme." This natural aptitude for poetical expression grew with her years, and to be a poet became her fervent wish. . . . Many years later, her eldest son [Edmund Clarence] said: "The gift of writing, in verse and prose, is inborn—natural—with my mother. If she had not been a beauty, with an absolute genius for social life, she would have stuck to letters, and have been a famous author." 23

Ironically had Stedman's mother been a famous author, he might not have so connected his writing with her for they might not have been separated while he was so young, and writing, the medium of their correspondence and his only regular contact with her, might not have gathered the associations that it did.

Though Stedman favored women's suffrage and encouraged women


writers, he held a conventional nineteenth-century, genteel view of the place of women in society, believing that women were always better off married and that their true functions were to enrich and grace their husbands’ social spheres, and to be bearers of the traditional and the religious. 24 If Stedman insisted on this male/female, aggressive entrepreneurial/domestic genteel division in the wider social world, he believed it to be natural in the poetic world. In an early consideration of the feminine in poetry—Stedman’s discussion of Elizabeth Barrett Browning in the 1876 *Victorian Poets*—varieties of poetic voice are specifically gendered: the female is subjective, the male objective:

[Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s] delicate genius was purely feminine and subjective, attributes that are made to go together. Most introspective poetry, in spite of Sidney’s injunction, wearies us, because it so often is the petty or morbid sentiment of natures little superior to our own. Men have more conceit, with less tact, than women, and, as a rule, when male poets write objectively they are on the safer side. But when an impassioned woman, yearning to let the world share her poetic rapture or grief, reveals the secrets of her burning heart, generations adore her, literature is enriched, and grosser beings have glimpses of a purity with which we would invest our conceptions of disenthralled spirits in some ideal sphere. 25

But gender does not operate as a balanced binary here. It is possible for a male poet to be subjective, therefore feminized, though it seems rarely to be a good idea. It seems, however, that a woman has no choice but to be subjective.

24 Laura Stedman 2: 518, 520.

In *The Nature and Elements of Poetry*, a rhapsodic discussion based on a series of lectures he gave at Johns Hopkins, Stedman discusses in general terms at one point the feminine contribution to poetry. It is interesting that Stedman first genders poetry in his chapter "Melancholia," which he identifies as the muse of Christianity (from Dürer's engraving by the same name on the frontispiece of the first edition), and with introspection and self-expression, which he considers feminine values opposed to the masculine poetry of nature and nation. Though Stedman's gendering of poetry is affected by, among other things, the increasing marginalization of poetry in the feminine realm of the genteel, as opposed to the seemingly masculine realm of the realist novel, I think it is appropriate to examine his gendering of poetic voice in psychological terms as well as social ones, especially because of his use of the gendered use term "melancholia" as an aesthetic label.

In Judith Butler's writings surveying the psychoanalytic theories Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, and Joan Rivier regarding gender identification, Butler notes the importance of melancholy in the formation of gender identification, providing an interesting link to Stedman's Christian muse. According to Butler, following Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia," melancholia results from the incorporation into the ego of a lost object so as to deny that loss. Ambivalence around the original relation of ego to object leads to self-criticism and self-debasement both towards the ambivalent object
incorporated into the ego and as blame on the ego for the loss of the object (i.e., at times the ego willed the destruction of the object). "Normal" heterosexual development is said to result from "positive" negotiations of the homosexual and incest taboos. First, the homosexual taboo is overcome through melancholy: for the boy, both the homosexual object, the father, and desire for the father, are incorporated; this desire is not transferred to another object. Second, the incest taboo is overcome through mourning: loss of the object of desire, the mother, is admitted, and this desire is transferred to another similarly gendered object.\(^{26}\) My purpose in recounting this ideal narrative is to call it into question, to note that both melancholy and mourning can be applied to resolve the loss of an object, here Stedman's mother, and how this muddies the waters of gender. It would appear that Stedman "successfully" negotiated this ideal narrative, but his relation to his mother also has elements of melancholy/incorporation in addition to elements of mourning: he seeks to preserve her in himself by identifying with her as a writer. Stedman's naming Melancholia/introspection as the \textit{Christian} muse is somewhat puzzling, though presumably this is in opposition to his construction of a classical, "masculine" muse.

Despite Stedman's insistence on the feminine element in poetry, it is hard for him to keep the genders from mixing in one poet:

I think that the impersonal element in art may be termed masculine, and that there is something feminine in a controlling impulse to lay bare one's own heart and experience. This is as it should be: certainly a man's attributes are pride and strength,—strength to wrestle, upon occasion, without speech until the daybreak. The fire of the absolutely virile workman consumes its own smoke. But the artistic temperament is, after all, androgynous. The woman's intuition, sensitiveness, nervous refinement join with the reserved power and creative vigor of the man to form the poet. As those or these predominate, we have the major strain, or the minor appeal for human sympathy and the proffer of it. A man must have a notable gift or a very exalted nature to make people grateful for his confessions. The revelations of the feminine heart are the more beautiful and welcome, because the typical woman is purer, more unselfish, more consecrated, than the typical man. Through her ardent self-revelations our ideals of sanctity are maintained. She may even, like a child, be least self-conscious when most unrestrained in self-expression.\(^{27}\)

Though it is difficult to keep male and female apart, and therefore the distinction made is not strictly "natural," a male poet's self-expression is only successful when uttered with a great deal of restraint and refinement. He is "androgynous," or perhaps even feminized to a degree. The androgyny of artistic temperament in the male poet is interesting in light of the relationship Stedman perceived between his writing and the inheritance of that talent from his mother. It is as though the male poet (Stedman) must incorporate the feminine (the mother) into himself, but he must also deny it, or at least restrain it.

Stedman moves to define contemporary and American poetry, however,

as more objective and masculine than what he believes to be the intimate poetry of his own voice. In a section on "Neurotic Sensitiveness" he states:

Our view of the poetic temperament is doubtless a modern conceit. The ancient took life as he found it, and was content. . . . Desire, the lust for the unattainable, aspiration, regret,—these are our endowment, and our sufferings are due less to our slights and failures than to our sensitiveness. . . . Bear in mind, however, the change latterly exemplified by Wordsworth, Tennyson, Browning, Hugo, and our vigorous American Pleiad of elder minstrels, who have exhibited the sane mind in the sound body. But the question of neurotic disorder did not occur to the age of Sophocles and Pindar. Impersonal effort is as invigorating as nature itself. 28

Stedman desires to make American poetry more classical and masculine in his view of the past national poets and in his hopes for the future in his desire for poetry to be able to pay its own way. This bears out in his discussion of past American poets in *The Nature and Elements of Poetry*:

Poetry that has been the voice and force of a nation occupies, as I have said, a middle ground between our two extremes. It has an altruistic quality. The same generous fervor impetuously distinguished the trumpet-tongued lyrics of our Hebraic Whittier, and the unique outgivings of Lowell's various muse, in behalf of liberty and right. Those were "Noble Numbers;" and, in truth, the representative national sentiment—of which ideas of liberty, domesticity, and religion are chief components—pervades the lyrics of our elder American poets from Bryant to Taylor and Stoddard. Whitman's faith in the common people, in democracy strong and simple, has gained him world-wide honor. Subjective as they are, few poets, in any era or country—and historians will come to recognize this more clearly—have been more national than our own. 29


Even as these poets are national in that they represent elements of their contemporary American culture, it appears that many of these poets are national only insofar as their subjectivity is representative, eliding their personal identities. And if poetry in the past retains some “taint” of subjectivity, Stedman is ever anxious about the ability of the poetry of the present and future to demonstrate its “manliness” by paying its own way:

The *Evening Post* to-night, has an article deploring American neglect of our own novelists—but says nothing of the struggle, slights, neglect, of our New York poets and essayists.

The novelists have not been neglected, on the whole, They have received praise and money equal to their deserts, and the poets, who are also reviewers, have helped them to succeed. But who have helped the poets? 30

So, poetry and poets cannot escape androgyny/feminization, either because they cannot pay their own way in the present or because their poetry, though national, remains subjective, in the past.

Within the above framework, Stedman’s foundation of the tradition of American poetry on Tainean and Spencerian principles in his “practical criticism” serves the purpose of objectivizing and masculinizing it. In his major compilations of American literature—*An American Anthology* (1900) and *A Library of American Literature from the Earliest Settlement to the Present Time* (1888-1890)—he resists canonizing gestures, insisting, instead, that he provides a selective historical record of American poetic utterance, expressing

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30 Laura Stedman 2: 319.
the characters of their respective periods. Stedman's estimation of Whitman must be viewed within Stedman's claims for American literature as a whole, that it is mainly of historical import. By placing Whitman's work in such a context, Stedman is able to cast it as objective poetry of nature and nation and, therefore, masculine, as Stedman makes clear in a March 27, 1889, letter to Whitman that accompanies Stedman's gift of the ten-volume _Library of American Literature:_

>You will justly estimate its significance, and this quite irrespectively of its literary or artistic qualities. There are masterpieces in it. But it is _not_ a collection of masterpieces: it is something of more moment to you and me. It is _America._ It is the symbolic, the essential, America from her infancy to the second Century of her grand Republic. It is the diary, the year-book, the Century-book, of her progress from Colonialism to Nationality. All her health and disease are here: her teething, measles, mumps, joy, delirium, nuptials, conflicts, dreams, delusions, her meanness and her nobility. We purposely make the work _inclusive_—trying to show every facet of this our huge, as yet half-cut, rose-diamond._

Whitman's poetry, like Stedman's anthology, is broadly inclusive, but the inclusion in Whitman's work is a double edged sword which Stedman elsewhere brands as "a disjointed series of kaleidoscopic pieces, not constituting a master work."  

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32 Laura Stedman 2: 121.

This appeal for Whitman's approval of the anthology—based on its inclusiveness parallel to the inclusiveness of Whitman's poetry—is tempered by Stedman's admission of Whitman's own personality and subjectivity in his work in the same letter to Whitman:

Nothing better becomes this compilation than the portion covering your own work. . . . It is my hope that you see, from the manner in which that précis is made up, that I do measurably comprehend your genius and philosophy; that I have understood your purposes in life and in art. A chap was here, 'tother day, who had been visiting you. He reported you as saying: "I wouldn't take off my hat to Apollo, if we should happen to meet." That pleased me immensely, and I "laughed consumedly," as the old Comedies say. Well! there is too much taking off of hats, but I certainly should doff my own to the Sun-God. On the other hand, if it should prove cold in his neighborhood, I should speedily clap it on again. 34

The reported anecdote adds egoism and masculine bravado to the masculine nationalism of the quotation that precedes it. But if nationalism is masculine because it is objective and representative, the egoism also adds an element of feminine subjectivity.

In An American Anthology and A Library of American Literature, Stedman anthologizes a fairly wide sample of poems from Leaves of Grass but focuses largely on such nationalistic poems as "Still though the one I sing," a liberal selection from "Drum Taps," "O Captain! My Captain!" and some "representative subjectivity" from "Song of Myself."

Still, Whitman, for Stedman, opposes gentility and femininity and

34 Laura Stedman 2:121.
makes possible a masculine poetry, whether it be in Whitman's working-class, artisan pose or his advocacy of modern science. Stedman's readings of Whitman as the aggressively masculine poet combine elements of female culture and male action but seem to masculinize the enterprise of poetry more than feminize Whitman. In a short discussion of the frontispiece of the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*, Stedman attempts to assuage the threat Whitman's lack of gentility poses by pointing out that Whitman's persona is not outright anarchic, not unknowably other, but results from a known quantity, a tradition of working-class or artisan masculinity, which stands in for the entrepreneurial or at least opposes the genteel:

The picture of Whitman in trowsers and open shirt, with slouched hat, hand in pocket, and a defiant cast of manner, resolute as it was, had an air not wholly of one who protests against authority, but rather opposes the gonfalon of a "rough" conventionalism to the conventionalism of culture. Not that of the man "too proud to care from whence" he came, but of one very proud of whence he came and what he wore.35

The peril of Whitman, the unknowable other, is mitigated by the transposition of the self-other binary to a more easily mastered binary: culture (female)-rough (male). Similarly, his poetic form is not original, but "is an old fashion, always selected for dithyrambic oracular outpourings—that of the Hebrew lyricists and prophets, and their inspired English translators,—of the Gælic minstrels,—of various Oriental and Shemitic peoples,—of many barbarous

dark-skinned tribes,—and in recent times put to use by Blake, in the ‘Prophetic
Visions,’ and by other and weaker men.” This new binary can stand in for
genteel/entrepreneurial, with Whitman straddling the boundary between the
two, a masculine “rough,” yes, but one who writes poetry. Whitman’s
admission of the validity of science further casts him as the poet of modernity
and productive enterprise, according to Stedman: “He was among the first to
perceive the grandeur of the scientific truths which are to give impulse to a
new and loftier poetic imagination.” 36 Again, the combination masculinizes
poetry.

But Whitman is sometimes too aggressively masculine and
disinterestedly scientific for Stedman’s tastes, especially in Stedman’s
discussions of Whitman’s morals. Stedman copes with this by sometimes
ignoring what he terms Whitman’s “naturalism,” at other times taking
Whitman to task for being unselective and uncultured. Often in this
enterprise, Stedman’s language threatens to undo the female-culture versus
male-nature binary present in Stedman’s writing.

Stedman’s construction of Whitman as an objective poet relies upon a
depiction of Whitman particularly as a poet of nature and nation, a depiction
which, though not inaccurate, is incomplete, conveniently serving to exclude
other versions of Whitman as inconsequential:

36 Stedman, “Whitman” 56, 60.
[Whitman's] admirers, including very authoritative judges at home and abroad, make almost every claim for him except that to which, in my opinion, he is entitled above other American poets. I know no other who surpasses him as a word-painter of nature. . . . His defects lie in his theory of unvarying realism. Nature's poet must adopt her own method; and she hides the processes that are unpleasant to see or consider. Whitman often dwells upon the under side of things,—the decay, the ferment, the germination, which nature conducts in secret, though out of them she produces new life and beauty. 37

Stedman's portrayal of Whitman as the poet of nature allows him to conveniently side-step an issue very real to Whitman's nineteenth-century readers (and non-readers)—the charge of immorality—as a defect in method, with the implication that it is of little concern because Whitman, as nature's poet and science's poet, must treat his subjects completely and objectively.

At other times, however, Stedman does not privilege the male, scientific, entrepreneurial term of this binary, and Whitman is criticized accordingly. Regarding “Children of Adam,” Stedman writes:

The mock-modesty and effeminacy of our falser tendencies in art should be chastised, but [Whitman] misses the true corrective. Delicacy is not impotence, nor rankness the sure mark of virility. . . . Where Mr. Whitman sees nothing but the law of procreation, poetry dwells upon the union of souls, devotion unto death, joys greater for their privacy, things of more worth because whispered between the twilights. It is absolutely true that the design of sexuality is the propagation of species. But the delight of lovers who now inherit the earth is no less a natural right, and those children often are the finest that were begot without thought of offspring. There are other lights in which a dear one may be regarded than as the future mother of men, and these—with their present hour of joy—are unjustly subordinated

in the "Leaves of Grass."  

First, Stedman undermines the parallels culture/femininity and nature/masculinity by stating "Delicacy is not impotence, nor rankness the sure mark of virility." Then, he criticizes Whitman's view of male-female relations as overly "scientized," dominated, as they are, by concerns of procreation. Instead, Stedman wishes for a more sentimental view of male/female relations.

If Stedman's controlling trope is that Whitman masculinizes poetry more than Whitman is feminized by the practice of poetry, Stedman also contradicts this trope by noting Whitman's failure to reach the working people while at the same time attracting the attention of the cultured, placing Whitman in the realm of feminine culture:

[T]hough various editions of his poems have found a sale, he is little read by our common people, who know him so well, and of whose democracy he is the self-avowed herald. In numberless homes of working-men—and all Americans are workers—the books of other poets are treasured. Some mental grip and culture are required, of course, to get hold of the poetry of the future. . . . Whitman is more truly the voice and product of the culture of which he bids us beware. . . . His warmest admirers are of several classes: those who have carried the art of verse to super-refined limits, and seeing nothing farther in that direction, break up the mold for a change; those radical enthusiasts who, like myself, are interested in whatever hopes to bring us more speedily to the golden year; lastly, those who, radically inclined, do not think closely, and make no distinction between his strength and weakness. Thus he is, in a sense, the poet of the

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38 Stedman, "Walt Whitman" 55.
over-refined and the doctrinaires.\textsuperscript{39}

In this one instance, Whitman, the masculinizer of poetry, is feminized by the practice of poetry, or at least by the limited reception of his poetry, and cannot escape the androgyny of the artistic temperament.

Charles Francis Richardson (1851-1913), unlike Stedman, left behind no revealing psychological tidbits in his criticism, and, unlike Higginson, did not pursue any overt active political or social agenda. Richardson is, however, a paradigm of Baym's argument of American literary histories that further a Whig political project by asserting New England roots for literary and intellectual history. Richardson not only places New England at the center of his work but also emphasizes the writing of men by denigrating the work of women. Though Richardson's first writings on Whitman are occasioned by English charges of Whitman's American neglect, Whitman ultimately finds a place, however uncomfortable, in Richardson's "masculinist" and Whig project for American literary history.

Richardson is a genteel critic in the line of Stedman and Higginson and like them began his critical career as a journalist; nevertheless, significant differences remain between them. First, Richardson enjoyed the benefits of an academic affiliation at Dartmouth without an advanced degree, successfully making the jump, which Stedman and Higginson could not, from journalism

\textsuperscript{39} Stedman, "Walt Whitman" 61.
to academia. Richardson also figured his relation to the genteel and the feminine in ways different from those of Stedman and Higginson, by distancing himself from it. Richardson, like Higginson, refused to admit the "feminization" of the genteel, but excised any representation of the feminine from his vision of literature and culture. When he considered a woman author in his writings, which was rarely, she was likely dismissed as a "poetess." Richardson's major project in American literature, however, was to reinforce the construction of its New England origins: "The Puritans of Massachusetts Bay were the direct precursors and the actual founders of most that is good in American letters." In fact, a necessary precondition for his discussion of Whitman in his literary histories is giving him a genteel background, with parents who were "intelligent and locally prominent." 40

One of Richardson's best-known works, A Primer of American Literature (1884), is a series of short sketches that provide historical background rather than aesthetic evaluation. Though the sketches are linked together by no stated master narrative, an insightful reader can determine the master narrative from the contents of the book: the beginnings of a nationalistic canon with roots in Puritan New England. His sketches include the more traditional and familiar—Increase and Cotton Mather, Ben Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, The Federalist, Washington Irving, Longfellow, Whittier, Holmes, Lowell, Poe,

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Cooper, Harte, Howells, and James—as well as the lesser-known—Fitz-Greene Halleck, Richard Hildreth, George Bancroft, John Godfrey Saxe, and Charles Dudley Warner. Except for Louisa May Alcott and Harriet Prescott Spofford, women rarely appear in their own sketches, mostly in such sections as “Other Poets” and “Other Writers.” In *American Literature: 1607-1885*, Richardson expresses his view of the shape and cohesive force behind American literature—race—with such chapter titles as “The Race Elements in American Literature” and “The New Environment of the Saxon Mind.” He is dismissive of Native American culture and believes the culture of immigrants and “foreign race-elements” will be but an inconsequential part of American culture, once they are grafted on to the Anglo-American tree.\(^{41}\)

Throughout, Richardson's racial narrative is not one of threat, but of self-assured superiority, assimilation, and domination. Furthermore, Saxon domination seems specifically to imply Northern, and even New England, domination, beginning with the earliest writers and couched in the familiar trope of the moral superiority of inhabitants of a cold climate over those of a warm one, concluding in assertions that the States have been forged into a largely homogenous whole "by struggle, victory, and defeat of party and faction; by annexation and abandonment of territory; by settlement of political, financial, and social questions; and finally by four years of war." Indeed, the

\(^{41}\) Richardson, *American Literature* 1: 3, 34-35.
first volume of *American Literature*, titled *The Development of American Thought*, begins its substantive discussion of authors with the tangential southerner John Smith (whom Richardson ultimately dismisses), and spends the bulk of its next two chapters addressing New England figures, including William Bradford, John Winthrop, the Mathers, and Jonathan Edwards. Thus, Richardson takes his place somewhere near the beginnings of a tradition of American literature that points to the New England Puritan tradition as the root of an American national literature and intellectualism.\(^42\)

Richardson must mediate between traditional critical principles (derived from England) while maintaining a sense of American independence, especially when it comes to English adulation over Whitman. Whitman is mentioned in “Tones and Tendencies of American Verse,” along with the little-known or the folksy, such as Nathaniel Parker Willis, Lydia Howard Sigourney, Stephen Foster, Sidney Lanier, Ellen Hooper, and Stedman. Richardson takes a middle ground between admitting the merit of Whitman’s works, on the one hand, and condemning and dismissing them on the other. In *American Literature*, for example, Richardson devotes more space and attention to Whitman in “Tones and Tendencies of American Verse” than any other writer in that chapter and gives Whitman the ultimate spot in the chapter, while minimizing his talent, condemning his matter, and dismissing his reception:

In absolute ability he is about equal to Taylor, Stoddard, Stedman, or Aldrich; but by minimizing the spiritual and the artistic, and magnifying the physical and the crudely spontaneous, he has attracted an attention among critics in America, England, and the Continental nations greater, for the moment, than that bestowed upon any contemporary singer of his nation, and fairly rivaling the internal adulation of his exact opposite, Poe.\textsuperscript{43}

Richardson's general response to Whitman carries the expected genteel line of thought.

Especially in American Literature, as his most developed and scholarly work, Richardson is intent on carving out a specifically American criticism and putting himself in that niche:

The critic of American literature should be thoroughly acquainted with both English and American political, social, and literary history; should perceive clearly that in England and America is a dominant and assimilating Saxon folk, working out a similar problem on similar lines; and yet should discriminate between variant conditions, aims, methods, and results. It is not too much to say that no foreign historian of our literature has shown himself possessed of all these qualifications.\textsuperscript{44}

With the implication that the effective critic of American literature must be American, Richardson is able to dismiss as ignorant many European critics, Victor Hugo, for example, who “declared, without hesitation, that Poe was 'the prince of American literature,' and yet, it is said, professed entire ignorance of Emerson's name when it was mentioned to him.” After having made this move

\textsuperscript{43} Richardson, American Literature 2: 269.

\textsuperscript{44} Richardson, American Literature 1: viii.
to establish his own authority, Richardson can dismiss Whitman by disregarding his critics: "still others insist that we really have no American poet save Whitman." 

Despite Richardson's desire to remain an independent American critic, an English controversy involving Whitman occasioned Richardson's first consideration of Whitman, his June 19, 1876, article in the Independent. Scottish poet Robert Buchanan is best known in Whitman circles for an essay in his *The Fleshly School of Poetry and Other Phenomena of the Day*, in which he separates Whitman from the "fleshly" pre-Raphaelites in order to praise Whitman as "a Bard, outrageously original and creative." Buchanan is also known for an article in the March 13, 1876, *London Times*, "The Position of Walt Whitman," in which he excoriated American critics for neglecting Whitman and proposed a subscription to ease Whitman's poverty. With this article, Buchanan provoked a vociferous debate in periodicals on both sides of the Atlantic, including such voices as Charles Dana, Bayard Taylor, Stedman, R.H. Stoddard, and even Whitman himself (anonymously, of course). Richardson attempts what he calls a "middle ground," between what he sees as English adulation and the American rejection charged by Buchanan but largely denied by Richardson and other critics.


Being sure to take a middle course between either contempt or adulation in the *Independent* article, Richardson admits Whitman's poetic genius, acknowledging that Whitman's unorthodox form is "original and legitimate," but, because of this form, he grants Whitman only "second rank among American bards, if we make the first rank to include Longfellow, Lowell, Whittier, Bryant, and Holmes only." Richardson approaches Whitman rather vaguely, citing little of the poetry, noting mostly the conventionality of "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" and "O Captain! My Captain!" as high water marks in what he considers an extremely uneven career. Richardson is able to slight Whitman because he is largely unconventional and untraditional in form, "uncouth [in] attire," and largely outside of the genteel New England tradition.

Another major portion of the discussion of this short article is of "the uncleanliness which disfigures so many of [Whitman's] pages." In the *Independent* article and in *A Primer of American Literature*, in which the discussion of Whitman's moral backwardness takes a prominent place, it is never quite clear what moral shortcomings Richardson is discussing. Again, he tries to take the middle ground, asserting that the "English race is not one of prudes," but noting that Whitman's fault is not mere sensuality, like that of Byron, Shelley, and Swinburne, but grossness, which, though present in Chaucer, Boccaccio, Wycherly, and Behn, is behind the times: "It is the sorriest
of mistakes when a poet tries to mix the bad things of the past with his glorifications of the good things of the present." Richardson complains in the later *American Literature* that Whitman’s treatment of sex is too natural and animalistic. First, Richardson comments on the large part sex plays in *Leaves of Grass*, while sarcastically noting, “other equally important physiological functions, such as digestion and the circulation of the blood, are ignored.” He then admits that Whitman’s treatment of sex is hardly the only or the worst treatment of sex in existence, but finally asserts,

The fact remains, however, that the generative faculty, like the sudorific glands elsewhere gloated over by the same author, is not *per se* a poetic theme, and that Whitman’s treatment of it is destitute of the artistic form which alone makes literature of the corresponding parts of the “Arabian Nights” or the “Decameron.”

Richardson never states what precisely makes for a poetic treatment of sex, but the implications are that the “artistic form” needed to make literature is sublimation and not naturalistic treatment. Richardson avoids overt moral judgment of Whitman but vaguely castigates him for physicality and lack of ideality. Whitman’s “love of neighbor is too ardent, fleshly, immediate, material.”

Generally, in *American Literature*, Richardson refuses to discuss what

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49 Richardson, *American Literature* 2: 278.
was often called Whitman's immorality as immorality. Instead, he prefers to speak mostly in terms of the spiritual or the ideal, as opposed to the physical, or the real:

The vicissitudes of life, death, suffering, struggle, aspiration, occasional triumph, all point us toward an eternal development of spirit. If our continued life be a fact, most that Whitman "celebrates" is temporary and unimportant; while that which he confesses himself unable to treat—the ideal, the ultimately beautiful, the on-faring and forth-faring soul—is the very life of our life.\(^{50}\)

Richardson's phrasing is reminiscent of the debate between Stedman and Howells regarding the ideality of poetry versus the realism of the novel. The elements of "naturalism" that Richardson objects to are Whitman's treatment of sex, "blatant egoism," "sprawling 'Americanism,'" and "panoramic pictures of America between 1855 and 1885." Whitman is rarely a successful poet, according to Richardson, and only "when Whitman's eye turns in the direction of theism, individual immortality, affectionate commemoration of the dead, heartfelt sympathy, loving appreciation of the supernatural beauty of nature."\(^{51}\)

Richardson attempts to sum up his discussion of Whitman in *American Literature* on a positive, though paradoxical note. In the same paragraph, he states that though Whitman's defects render him unfit to be a "seer or an

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\(^{50}\) Richardson, *American Literature* 2: 275.

\(^{51}\) Richardson, *American Literature* 2: 271-272, 276-277, 278.
artist," Whitman's work is still "admirable and enjoyable" and Whitman's "theory of his life poem is defective, but so far as it goes is perfectly legitimate."

Among the positive contents of Whitman's poetry are:

- Its assertions of comradeship (hardly of friendship in the large true sense), pioneer manliness, the essential wholesomeness and nobility of average American character, the self-reliant and self-preserving nature of democracy, the worthlessness of feudalism, the dangers of the merely conventional, the possibilities of the future of "these states."

He finally ventures a canon of what he considers Whitman's finest poems, including some unconventional choices for a nineteenth-century genteel American critic—"Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," "Song of the Broad-Axe," "Pioneers, O Pioneers," "The City Dead-House"—and the more conventional—"Whispers of Heavenly Death," "Come up from the Fields, Father," "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," and "O Captain, my Captain"—calling Whitman "the fittest of all laureates of Lincoln."\(^{52}\) Apart from Richardson's overall negative assessment of Whitman, the sheer volume of his discussions of Whitman point to some attraction of Whitman for Richardson, whether it be an accommodation to the attention of the Europeans or an awareness of affinities between Richardson's masculinist project and the uses of Whitman's poetry.

The next part of my discussion focuses on a different group of Whitman's readers, the professionally trained academics at the turn of the century and

\(^{52}\) Richardson, American Literature 2: 280.
their part in the separation of the genteel and the academic. It is not easy to
draw consistent conclusions about their readings of Whitman because of their
rarity and tangential nature. Philology was a highly professionalized and
masculinized endeavor, and, generally, these professional academics were less
interested in contemporary literature than in linguistically and historically
opaque texts on which they could demonstrate their prowess.53 Their
considerations include relatively vague disinterested responses as well as
responses influenced by the genteel, including the poles of genteel distaste and
genteel social reform. Fred Newton Scott handled Whitman carefully, and
though he was skeptical of Whitman’s greatness, Scott was willing to defer
final judgment to a later date. John Livingston Lowes makes Whitman a part
of his racial and masculine moral imperative for literature on the heels of
World War I, while Vida Dutton Scudder takes Whitman as part of a
progressive Christian Socialist project for English literature that retains its
genteel reformist roots.

The philological training of Fred Newton Scott (1860-1931) lays the
groundwork for a rare technical discussion of Whitman’s poetry, “A Note on
Walt Whitman’s Prosody” (1908), in which Scott asserts that Whitman’s
rhythm emphasizes the pitch-glides of regular speech over conventional poetic
metre:

53 Gerald Graff, Professing Literature: An Institutional History (Chicago: U of
Employing these convenient terms, we may say that Whitman, in his prosody, turned from the nutative [conventional metre] to the motative [pitch-glide] principle, from the rhythm of beats to the rhythm of pitch-glides. Why he did so I have already indicated in part. It was because the rhythm of prose, being larger and freer than the rhythm of verse, seemed nearer to the uncramped spirit of nature from which he drew his inspiration.54

Ultimately, he “cannot believe it likely that the prosody of Whitman will soon drive from the field the prosody of Chaucer, Shakespeare and Wordsworth.”

His final judgment becomes highly suggestive in the context of his earlier metaphoric comparisons of nature, poetry, and government:

The relation between art and nature is like that between a people and its government. The two are one, yet never one. In a sense the people are the government, that is, the nearer the government is to the people, and the more responsive it is to the healthy will and temper of the people, the better. But the two are after all distinct. The instant you let the government go and fall back upon the people as the only political reality, that instant you pass from democracy to anarchy. You have then neither a good government nor a free people. The people can become free and remain free, only by submission to restraint. They can preserve their coherence, their communal individuality, their organic life and opportunity for unlimited expansion of that life, only as these things incessantly find expression in traditional, law-observing, law-embodying institutions.

Applying the analogy to the relations of art and nature, we may say that the artist never ought to be free to express himself, as nature does, in “tufts and tussocks of grass.” He indeed achieves a freedom—all the freedom he needs, all the freedom there is for him—but he invariably achieves it by submitting himself to the restraints of artistic law.55


55 Scott 153, 137.
In the context of this quote, Scott’s belief that Whitman’s prosody will never surpass Chaucer’s and Shakespeare’s implies a rebuke to Whitman’s conviction expressed in *Democratic Vistas* that the culture of feudalism is poor fare for a democratic society.

Based on 1918 Lowell Institute Lectures in Boston, the sweeping *Convention and Revolt in Poetry* (1919) by John Livingston Lowes (1867-1945) places the masculinist construction of high American literature into a similar construction for British literature. In *Convention and Revolt in Poetry*, Lowes seeks to disarm revolt by giving it a history and asserting that traditional forms have their roots in revolutions. As with most other philologists, his considerations of Whitman are generally vague, though he seems largely to accept Whitman as an important poet. In a chapter entitled “The Anglo-Saxon Tradition,” Lowes reveals the ways in which his project reinforces a masculinist and racially defined construction of high literature, as noted in the quote that opened this chapter in which Lowes draws out the “robust and virile strain [that] has run through English poetry,” from “Beowulf” to “Leaves of Grass.”

Lowes’s primary stated concern for the virility of Anglo-Saxon race elements, however, differs from those of C.F. Richardson and many other of the American literary historians of the nineteenth century in its context: “The form

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56 Lowes 313-314.
of a national and racial egoism that has turned a continent into a
shambles”—World War I, just after which Lowes writes. But Lowes’s concern
over the destruction left by the war demonstrates also his faith in the
superiority—moral and masculine—of the Anglo Saxon race, and Whitman is
a part of this masculinist tradition:

And finally, the acceptance of fate as a call and not a quietus,
finds expression in the superb close of Whitman’s “Passage to India”:

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

The poetry which embodies the temper of our stock has tonic
quality.

In Vida Dutton Scudder’s writing, we see an original and highly
selective canon of English and American literature to support a strain of
Christian Socialism in the Anglo tradition, which combines the reforming
impulse of nineteenth-century “feminine” culture with “masculinist” high
culture. Her consideration of Whitman in Social Ideas in English Letters
(1899) is an explicit use of Whitman, making him part of a great tradition of
English Christian Socialism. Scudder assembled a canon of readings dedicated
to social reform, Christian socialist ideals, equitable distribution of wealth and

57 Lowes 339.

58 Lowes 345.
opportunity, and sexual equality. Her synthetic and selective vision anticipates the work of the modernist critics of Whitman I discuss in chapter four—Brooks, Santayana, Parrington, Arvin, and Matthiessen—as she attempts to create a useable literary past, rescued from aristocracy for democracy.

*Social Ideas in English Letters* may be socialist and progressive in its impulse, but it is no less racial in its concerns than more conservative literary histories in what she portrays as the pure English impulse to democracy. *Social Ideas* sets forth an interesting alternative canon giving us *Piers Plowman* as a representative of the Middle Ages, More’s *Utopia* for the Renaissance, Milton and Bunyon for the seventeenth century, and Swift for the eighteenth. Especially in her choice of *Piers Plowman*, she asserts that Christianity brought the seeds of democracy to England and that this Christianity was free from “Roman” influence. More, Milton, and Bunyan become for Scudder further examples of this pure English Christianity. Over the Romantic poets, she favors first the Victorian critics Carlyle, Ruskin, and Arnold for their critiques of the ugliness of industrial modernity; second the novelists Dickens and Thackeray for their criticism of philistinism and idle wealth; and third George Eliot for her social conscience. She notes the religious idealism of the New England settlers, but more to invoke Langland and Bunyan than give any central place to New England in American
In the chapter "A Glimpse of America," Scudder considers the optimism, the simplicity, and the individualism of democracy in American literature:

On the other side of the Atlantic, from 1840 to 1880, a social literature far more cheerful and assured was in progress. Here the democratic ideal, never yet frankly accepted in European nations, was the native intuition of every growing youth. Its difficulties were not yet unfolded; it was seen actually at work, imparting to our young civilization an elasticity such as Christendom had never experienced; a visible symbol of its seemingly inexhaustible promise was outspread in the wide lands of the West. The writings of Lowell, of Whittier, of Thoreau, of Emerson, of Whitman, are alight with hope and aglow with optimism. "The American Scholar," "The Biglow Papers," "The Song of the Open Road," are the eager lyrical expressions of a democracy only just conscious enough of obstacle to gain the splendid thrill of combat. A feeling of power, expectant, exultant, leapt through the new nation. No weight of custom bowed its children down: it was aware that it was established on foundations unknown in the old world; the earth was its own, and it waited, ardent, for the sons of the future.  

Whitman's poetry is an integral and unquestionable part of this literary movement for Scudder, who found in Whitman American democratic ideality, freedom, and bravado, as well as simplicity and a Utopian influence.

Scudder is also not blind to the ways in which the problems of industrial modernity, already a part of Europe, encroach on the idyllic American scene. But almost as if to dispel the clouds on the American horizon,

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60 Scudder 198.
Scudder sees in Whitman the hope of a classless society, a hope that invokes the homoeroticism of some of his poetry:

People are to be found in plenty who have never held any intercourse with wage-earners except either as employers or as benefactors. Such intercourse as this is not abnormal, but it is partial; it brings into relief only certain aspects of character on either side, and these not always the best. The craving for contact of the entire man with man, for full expression and reception of personality, is a pet theory with a poet like Whitman; but it remains theory to most of his readers. To realize or gratify this craving in all the rich relations of actual life by the constant extension of fellowship into new regions is no ignoble desire.\(^61\)

Bliss Perry, like Scudder, attempted to make use of disparate traditions in a way that anticipates Whitman's modernist critics. But where Scudder is mining a democratic tradition out of an often aristocratic ore, Perry seeks a nostalgic aristocratic and artisan democratic alloy, strong enough to withstand the horrors of industrial modernity. Like Whitman's modernist critics, Perry fears industrial modernity, sometimes figured in his writing by the critical professional; unlike modernist critics, his defense is not a joining of the "feminine" genteel and the "masculine" entrepreneurial, but the construction of a male "club," excluding all extremes. The inclusive boundaries of Perry's club are, on the one hand, a nostalgia for a British Romantic aristocracy from Matthew Arnold and, on the other, a nostalgia for American artisan democracy from Whitman, to shut out the threat of industrial capitalism. Similarly, Perry's discussions of Whitman's sexuality serve to protect this male

\(^{61}\) Scudder 294.
homosocial club from the exclusive boundaries of homoerotic desire and the threat of desire for the female, the poles represented by the homoeroticism of "Calamus" and the emasculating threat of desire for the feminine represented by the myth of Whitman's children. The parameters of Perry's club are drawn not only in his writings on Whitman but also in his writings on the profession, like "The Amateur Spirit," which opposes the clubby amateur, who can be nostalgically an aristocrat or a democratic artisan, to the industrial capitalist monster, the professional.

In "The Amateur Spirit" (first published in 1904) Perry admits the lack of commitment and accuracy of the amateur and the precision of the professional but hopes (in vain, he believes) for a combination of the two. Nevertheless, he nostalgically endorses the amateur, tying it to the English leisure class, and endorsing it as a tonic for the capitalistic model of the professional. Perry's yearning is similar to Matthew Arnold's call for a "disinterested criticism" which is intellectual and spiritual but neither partisan nor moral. Additionally, Perry's valorization of the amateur can be a noble resistance to the disfiguring impulse of capitalism which creates "some scientific Frankenstein, some marvelously developed specialty faculty for research or invention or money-making, which dominates and dwarfs all other faculties."  

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Nostalgia for the amateur, however, can be nostalgia for the leisure of class privilege. Perry raises this implication when he objects to the fact that the professional "may not happen to be a 'clubbable' person." This vague allusion to or nostalgia for the class privilege of the British aristocracy is neutralized by an admission that the amateur spirit leaves "public and professional life in Great Britain crippled," but when this spirit is transplanted to America, we have "the qualities of the American pioneer," a turn that rehabilitates the amateur but ignores Perry's important distinction between the amateur and professional: the pioneer, like the professional, is concerned with survival and not amusement. Nevertheless, the pioneer represents nostalgia for artisan democracy, a class system opposed to industrial capitalism. Still, Perry realizes that the professional, along with industrial capitalism, will be the vehicle for U.S. dominance: "Ours must not be a 'nation of amateurs,' but a nation of professionals, if it is to hold its own in the coming struggles,—struggles not merely for commercial dominance, but for the supremacy of political and moral ideals."63

Like the vacillation of his valorization of the amateur as a resistance to capitalism either nostalgic or progressive, so Perry's criticism of Whitman can be read as either a progressive, inclusive move encouraging a culture of

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democracy, or a retrograde impulse to subvert the radical potential of
Whitman's work in favor of the conventional and the patriotic. Perry cannot
choose between Whitman the proto-modernist, with all that implies about
continuity with a tradition, and Whitman the "artless rustic":

In the present state of metrical science no one can say exactly
how much influence Whitman has had upon the development of
poetical forms. That he has been an enfranchising element seems
probable. He was neither, as one school of critics would have it,
"above art" and a law unto himself; nor was he by any means the
artless unsophisticated rustic, with a large and loving nature, but
as Tennyson said of him to Phillips Brooks, "no poet." 64

Perry goes to great pains, at times, to portray Whitman as an Arnoldian
critical reader, quoting Whitman's own "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd
Roads." Whitman's reading list (accomplished in the sufficiently rustic settings
of Long Island Sound, Coney Island Beach, and wooded areas) includes the Old
and New Testaments, Shakespeare, Ossian, the "best translated versions" of
Homer, Eschylus, and Sophocles, the old German Nibelungen, the ancient
"Hindoo" poems, Dante, and Buckley's translation of the Iliad. Perry, however,
must subvert these claims to Whitman's self-education:

To represent Whitman, however, either at this time or at any
later period, as a systematic student of books would be
misleading. His methods of reading were mainly casual and
impressionistic, and he gave to newspapers and magazines the
greater portion of his attention. 65

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64 Bliss Perry, Walt Whitman: His Life and Work (New York: Houghton Mifflin,
1906) 287.

65 Perry, Whitman 37.
After first attempting to satisfy Arnold that Whitman is an adequately self-conscious critical reader, Perry must pay homage to other masters. As a reader of Emerson and Whitman, Perry was aware that they considered above-named "feudal" classics poison to a democratic culture. Newspapers and magazines would provide much better sustenance for a democratic writer.

To that end Perry places Whitman in a tradition of American democratic writers, anticipating F.O. Matthiessen's canon of *American Renaissance*. In the 1840s, Whitman published such stories as "Death in the School-Room," "Wild Frank's Return," "The Last of a Sacred Army," and "The Angel of Tears" in the *Democratic Review* in the company of Hawthorne, Bryant, Longfellow, Lowell, Thoreau, Whittier, and Poe, thus placing Whitman in a tradition of American literature, though such a project might be of dubious merit in an Arnoldian culture. Perry's evaluation of "The Angel of Tears" asserts "how very neatly the young journalist could play, if need be, upon the lute of Edgar Allan Poe" to demonstrate Whitman's ability to self-consciously imitate. According to Perry, Whitman's own later life's work singing the working class, *Leaves of Grass*, draws its subject matter from Whittier's *Songs of Labor*, one poem of which was published in the same issue of the *Democratic Review* as Whitman's 1845 "Revenge and Requital: A Tale of a Murderer Escaped." Whitman's 1845 "Dialogue" against capital punishment appears inspired by Lowell's "On Reading Wordsworth's Sonnets in the Defense of Capital
Punishment,” published in the Democratic Review in 1842. Perry’s canon is an ancestor of Matthiessen’s canon, a tradition of eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century artisan democracy, which, complementing Arnold’s Romantic aristocracy, forms the other boundary of Perry’s club, closing out industrial capitalism and its representative, the professional.

If placing Whitman in an American critical context and tradition were not sufficient, Perry places him in a European Romantic context as well, comparing Whitman favorably to Blake, Wordsworth, and Rousseau and unfavorably to Keats. Whitman’s similarities to Blake and Wordsworth and contrasts to Keats leave an ambivalence in Perry’s writings. Whitman adheres to Blake’s dictum “Poetry Fetter’d Fetters the Human Race,” though Blake’s position in Arnold’s canon is probably tenuous at best because Blake shares with Whitman the role of the mystic.

Another ambivalent comparison of Perry’s is Whitman with Wordsworth. Wordsworth is a similarly ambiguous figure in Arnold’s “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time”; he is an admirable enough poet, but he does not appreciate or significantly engage in the faculty of critical reading. Perry compares, in Whitman and Wordsworth, the influence of nature over education, the “architectonic” structure of Leaves of Grass to the relation of “The Prelude,” “The Excursion,” and “The Recluse,” and

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66 Perry, Whitman 24, 25.
Wordsworth's and Whitman's shared awareness of the exalted nature of the poet's function. Perry's ultimate judgment of the relation between the two places them in parity:

Upon the whole the most original and suggestive poetic figure since Wordsworth, [Whitman] gazed steadily, like Wordsworth, upon the great and permanent objects of nature and the primary emotions of mankind. Of the totality of his work one may well say, "The sky o'erarches here." 67

Perry's comparison of Whitman to Wordsworth puts Whitman in a critical club that gives Whitman some of the sanction of Arnold but excludes him from the aristocratic implications Arnold's critical club represents precisely because, though Arnold admires Wordsworth, he does not think Wordsworth to have a fully developed critical faculty.

Perry's portrayal of Whitman as one of the "children of Rousseau" serves to reinforce both walls of his Arnoldian club. 68 Rousseau, on the one hand, is a pre-revolutionary writer and thinker, which appealed to Arnold. But the Rousseau who authored Contrat Social, which "for the first time in Europe with anything like equal power, was the vision of the vast masses of European society, the millions who tilled the fields and filled the battle-trenches" is one with Whitman, who "utters the word Democratic, the word En-Masse." 69

67 Perry, Whitman 307.

68 Perry, Whitman 227.

69 Perry, Whitman 208.
Again, the boundaries of Perry's club are shored up on one side by nostalgia for aristocracy and on the other by a nostalgia for artisan democracy. As the nostalgia for the aristocracy raised by the invocation of Rousseau neutralizes the horrors of the French Revolution, so the nostalgia for artisan democracy from Whitman protects Perry and his club from the yet unknown horrors of industrial capitalism.

Perry's unfavorable comparison of Whitman to Keats is, in many ways, unsatisfying. Perry muses on Whitman and Keats's relationship upon finding Keats's "To Autumn" on the reverse of a Whitman review clipping, asking: "Why is it that this poem—relatively empty of ethical significance as it is—is sure to live, while we can only say of Whitman's poetry that some of it ought to live?" While Perry admits that Keats's poem is somewhat hollow compared to at least some of Whitman's poetry and admits that Whitman transcended Keats in "imaginative vision," his judgment of Keats as the better artist rests on the Arnoldian criterion of tradition: Keats composed according to accepted and traditional principles; Whitman did not. Whitman draws too much inspiration and subject matter from his context; Keats writes about unchanging universals.70 Perry's selection of the universal over the situational and ethical betrays his anxiety over the threat to his world and his desire to banish the threat of change.

70 Perry, Whitman 303-307.
One of the more interesting club boundaries Perry draws is that of the homosocial club that excludes, at one extreme, the threat of the homoerotic suggested by "Calamus" and, at the other extreme, a manic "Don Juan" desire for the female, suggested by the myth of Whitman's children. Perry raises the subject in his discussion of Whitman's famous August 10, 1890, letter to J.A. Symonds, disavowing the homoerotic implications of "Calamus." Buying the myth of Whitman's children leaves Perry with an equally large threat to his club, a manic, dissipating, even emasculating, desire for the feminine. Perry then spends about two pages defending Whitman from the charge "sins against chastity," asserting Whitman's respect for women and the absence of sexual relations (unspecified, but presumably with a female) in Whitman's life from 1862 onward. One of these assertions of Whitman's lack of desire for the feminine comes, ironically, from Peter Doyle, a Washington D.C. streetcar conductor, one of Whitman's more prominent male companions.\textsuperscript{71}

Scudder and Perry, then, bridge the gap between the nineteenth-century masculinist critics and the modernist critics in the next chapter. Scudder's canon strongly anticipates the social reformist impulses of Vernon Parrington and Newton Arvin, yet she echoes the reformist alliance between the genteel and the feminine present in Hart and Higginson, and her construction of democratic socialism is racial in its Anglo-Saxon Roots, much like Lowes's.

And while Perry attempts to bring together the aristocratic and the artisan, like Van Wyck Brooks's joining of the feminine genteel and the masculine entrepreneurial, unlike the modernist critics, Perry's agenda is not to unify but to draw nostalgic boundaries to exclude the threats of industrial modernity.

In this chapter we have seen the drift of academic culture from the genteel to enterprise and the myriad ways in which Whitman was available to those critics consolidating their positions through their roles in this shift. The progression from Hart's inclusive and unified American culture, the paternalism of Higginson, the androgyny of Stedman, the masculinist discourse of the philologist, and the male club of Perry demonstrate the rupturing force of industrial modernity upon the agrarian/artisan sexual division of labor, carving out the realms of the breadwinner and the domestic angel. While the nineteenth century critics here thought they were digging in their heels to conserve American culture, they were really giving in to the exigencies of industrial modernity and its sexual division of labor, using Whitman as support. They did not entirely use up Whitman, however, and the next generation of critics, in the barren crag left between culture and enterprise, the feminine and the masculine, found a useable past in the androgynous Whitman to attempt to heal the split in American culture.
A great figure, the greatest assuredly in our literature—yet perhaps only a great child—summing up and transmitting into poetry all the passionate aspirations of an America that had passed through the romantic revolution, the poet of selfhood and the prophet of brotherhood, the virile man and the catholic lover—how shall Walt Whitman become dumb or cease to speak to men unless the children of those who are now half-devil and half-God shall prove to be wholly devil—or wholly moron?¹

It was in the first half of the twentieth century that Whitman’s position in the canon became solid and unchallenged. The polarized critical discussions of the nineteenth century, with their heavy-handed judgments around Whitman’s perceived unconventional form and lack of morality, largely disappear. Nevertheless, some significant constants in the criticism of Whitman remain across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The preceding chapter demonstrated how issues of control over culture were figured in terms of a battle between the masculine academic and the feminine popular. In the creation of a select “manly” canon, these critics made use of Whitman

in order to create a “masculinized” professional space to fight the marginalization of literature and criticism by the entrepreneurial realm and by the perceived “feminization” of popular culture. The figurations of gender are employed again in the twentieth century, but in a different context. In this century, the profound split engendered by industrial modernity between the “masculine” entrepreneurial and the “feminine” genteel, begun in the nineteenth century, became the source of a yearning by twentieth-century critics, figured as a simple historical nostalgia for an agrarian, pre-industrial America, and also as a psychological and gendered nostalgia for an infantile state that recognized no difference outside the self and which was often figured by these critics as a union with the maternal, with Whitman representing the maternal. Many of the critics in this chapter grew to age in this cleft between the masculine and the feminine left by the failure of industrial modernity, between ineffectual fathers, who were unable to provide the economic security that the culture prescribed, and domineering or emotionally distant mothers, who were unable to provide the emotional nurturance the culture dictated. In the midst of the failure of industrial modernity’s sexual division of labor, these critics made from Whitman both a historical, nostalgic remedy for the general disfigurations of industrial modernity and a psychological nostalgia for reunion with the maternal that paralleled the historical one by healing divisions and restoring equality.
The twentieth-century uses of Whitman to be discussed here are all concerned with debilitating splits in American culture. Van Wyck Brooks points out the bifurcation of American culture between what he termed the masculine entrepreneurial and the feminine genteel. In Brooks's early forward-looking program to find a "useable" past for American culture, *America's Coming of Age* (1915), Whitman is made a bridge between the masculine and feminine realms. Additionally, the unity Brooks invokes using Whitman represents an infantile state, a nostalgia for union with the maternal, a period in which difference outside the self is not recognized. This nostalgia is more fully realized in *The Times of Melville and Whitman* (1947), the more scholarly, yet less critically progressive exploration of what Brooks sees as an idyllic American past. Next, George Santayana uses terms similar to Brooks's to describe a divided culture but to support impulses entirely nostalgic and fantastic, invoking a nostalgia for a lack of difference, while rejecting the possibility of its realization in democracy. Vernon Parrington's *Main Currents in American Thought* (1927-1930), besides its importance in American literature and its extended treatment of Whitman, seems to have little place in this discussion, considering its straightforward, almost polemical nature. But *Main Currents*, too, is concerned with a split in American culture, tracing a battle between aristocratic and populist impulses and highlighting a trajectory of the decay of populism. Whitman's place in Parrington's final
volume. "The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America," is as a nostalgic holdover from the promise of the Enlightenment. Newton Arvin's socialist study *Walt Whitman* (1938) appears at face value to be more left-leaning and progressively oriented than Parrington's work, but it is, rather, a balanced view of Whitman. And in Arvin's discussion, as in the other critics in this chapter, are traces of a psychological and historical nostalgia to heal the wounds left by industrial modernity. Throughout, Whitman is portrayed as the champion of agrarian and artisan America, even when he is seduced by the appearances of prosperity in the Gilded Age. Arvin's telling comparison of the opening of the Civil War to "matricide," as well as Arvin's attempt to recuperate Whitman's homoeroticism as a base for his socialism, invokes psychological nostalgia. Last in this discussion is F.O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance: Art and Experience in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (1941). For all its importance in defining a canon, *American Renaissance* is hardly a unified work, even in its discussion of Whitman, which ranges from Whitman's theory of language, his mysticism and his inspiration by oratory, opera and the sea, to the similarity of his rhythm to Gerard Manley Hopkins's and the similarities of Whitman's work to contemporary landscape painting. Throughout, however, Matthiessen is concerned with the same issues as the earlier critics. In the discussion of Whitman's language and rhythm and Whitman's mystical vision, Matthiessen deploys a primal Whitman, "close to
the ground" and able to live spontaneously. Additionally, the models of oratory, opera, and the sea provide Matthiessen with a Whitman able to mediate between the masculine and the feminine. Comparing Whitman's poetry to nineteenth-century landscape painting, Matthiessen is able to negotiate the issues of narcissism and solidarity in his discussion of Whitman's portrayal of the "stock type."

Van Wyck Brooks, as an early modernist critic, was influential in many ways in defining a canon of American literature, and Whitman was a pivotal figure in both Brooks's early and late career. His dissatisfaction with the whole of American life was quite real and had roots in the personal: growing up in the "Wall Street Suburb" of Plainfield, New Jersey, Brooks was reared in the cleft of American Victorian life between the masculine entrepreneurial and the feminine genteel, finding both extremes unable to fulfill their obligations. If the masculine realm excused its single-minded ruthlessness by its ability to provide security and comfort to the family, Van Wyck found no security in the failed business ventures of his father, Charles Brooks, who was already a semi-invalid when Van Wyck was born. Nor did Brooks find satisfaction in the realm of the feminine genteel, shallow and at odds with the realm of enterprise. Still, for Brooks, as for many of the Young Americans (Randolph Bourne, Lewis Mumford, Waldo Frank, among them), the feminine remained an important ideal, obscurely associated with infantile union with
the mother, evoked in their criticism variously as a return to the mother, merging souls, mystical unity with the physical environment, and a community of friends.²

In one of his early books, *America's Coming-of-Age* (1915), in which Whitman plays a central role, Brooks continues the attempt to reconcile the "Highbrow" and the "Lowbrow" begun in his first book, *The Wine of the Puritans*. In such early works, however, Brooks does not find a remedy for the bifurcation of American culture even in the past; it is flawed from its schizophrenic beginnings, between "the current of Transcendentalism, originating in the piety of the Puritans" and "on the other hand the current of catchpenny opportunism, originating in the practical shifts of Puritan life, becoming a philosophy in Franklin, passing through American humorists and resulting in the atmosphere of contemporary business life."³

² Casey Nelson Blake, *Beloved Community: The Cultural Criticism of Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank and Lewis Mumford* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1990) 18-19, 22, 24. Blake finds in the life and writings of Van Wyck Brooks (and the other "Young Americans") a psychological pattern similar to that I described in the last chapter relating to Edmund Clarence Stedman and his tracing his talent for writing, especially as a poet, in a psychological union with his mother. Blake refers to the Young American's gendering of culture as the feminine ideal, the ideal state of culture and union, identified with feminine or maternal values, based on Freud's ego ideal. For Brooks and the Young Americans, however, this identification with the feminine was not as overt or unconflicted as that of Stedman, attempting, as the Young Americans did, to foster a culture that mediated between the feminine gentility and masculine enterprise. In fact in his writings, Brooks generally figures the debate in terms that suggest class, "Highbrow" and "Lowbrow," rarely in gendered terms. Only in early, private writing, does Brooks overtly seek after a feminine ideal in culture. *See* Blake p. 42.

Paradoxically, American literature suffers from overpracticality, as if Brooks had not argued earlier that the "Highbrow" was completely ethereal, implying that it might benefit from some practicality. He finds the practicality of first-generation American literature acceptable, akin to "laying down carpets, papering the walls." But from this first practicality arises a second, more enduring one: moralism. The ultimate value of literature becomes "not life, but success or salvation." For Brooks, it is not that the highbrow, the genteel, and the academic do not aim at practical effects, but that their moral ends are out of touch and at odds with what goes on in enterprise, intellectualized and unreal: "The moral ending is simply a rigid and impersonal intellectualization of life, which is, consequently, out of touch with the motives that really determine men."4 It is not clear how such moralism is connected to his other charge that American literature has often been remote from life, "avoiding contact with actuality" like its Puritan roots. Still it seems that for someone vaguely committed to social action and change, as Brooks was, this presupposes an ethical system, and to disparage moral aims in literature is merely to disparage moral aims incongruent with his own. The lowbrow/entrepreneurial does not fare any better for Brooks. Edison is representative of its shallow practicality that understands nothing and feels

4 Brooks, America's 47-48, 53, 54.
no connection with any part of the cosmos. Both the highbrow and the lowbrow are shallow: the highbrow for not being in touch with the realities of society around it, for being stuck in a past age, the lowbrow, in its unredeemed sole quest for money, for not taking the time to consider its place in the cosmos.

From the midst of this utter rupture in American culture between theory and practice, Whitman emerges as “The Precipitant,” the beginnings of an acceptable merging of highbrow and lowbrow, celebrating the actualities of American life while possessing a sense of organic, cosmic connection:

Whitman was the Antæus of this tradition [Transcendentalism] who touched earth with it and gave it hands and feet. For having all the ideas of New England, being himself saturated with Emersonianism, he came up from the other side with everything New England did not possess: quantities of rude emotion and a faculty of gathering humane experience almost as great as that of the hero of the Odyssey. Living habitually among world ideas, world emotions, world impulses and having experienced life on a truly grand scale, this extraordinary person, innocent as a pioneer of what is called urbanity, became nevertheless a man of the world in a sense in which ambassadors are not; and there is every reason to suppose that he would have been perfectly at home in the company of Achilles, or Erasmus, or Louis XIV.

Whitman challenges the “dignity of letters,” which Brooks equates with enterprise’s reliance on its genteel complement to escape from its shallowness: “it has the nature of a right which has been earned, an investment which might have been a yacht, a country-house, or a collection of Rembrandts

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5 Brooks, America’s 60-61.

6 Brooks, America’s 112-113.
instead.” For Brooks, Whitman comes in upon the likes of Stedman and Stoddard—for whom the essence of literature was its remove from their Wall Street and achieved by a refined eighteenth-century style—“thundering” in on them and destroying their fragile, highly-wrought art. Accordingly, Whitman’s role is not to remove himself either from Wall Street or Harvard, from practice or theory, but to mold them together and function as a radical poet, giving a focus to the national character. 7

Whitman’s fault, however, is that he is too celebratory and totally uncritical:

Whitman’s instinct was to affirm everything, to accept everything, to relish the personal and human elements in everything. For himself he accepted “sustenance, clothing, shelter, and continuity.” As regards the world he was equally catholic and passive. Soldiers being the strapping upright animals they are he accepts armies because armies breed them. He enjoys an old restauranteur because he knows how to select champagne, likes to look at nursemaids because they are so trim and wholesome and at fashionable women because they are so pretty and gay, likes money because of a certain strength it implies and business because it is so active, nimble, and adventurous. On the plane of instinct where he properly belongs he is right in each case: on the plane of ideas the practical effect is that, in accepting everything, he accepts the confusion of things and the fait accompli. 8

Brooks’s judgment against Whitman for his lack of discrimination is at odds with Brooks’s injunction against moralism, which leads me to believe that

7 Brooks, America’s 118-119.
8 Brooks, America’s 112-123.
Brooks takes issue not with moralism but with an ethical system at odds with his own.

His articles in The Freeman in the early 1920s explore many issues that complement his earliest estimation of Whitman in America's Coming-of-Age. There Brooks further makes of Whitman a model for Brooks's contemporary writers, including Whitman's evocation of a nostalgic organic unity; conversely, Brooks points out Whitman's limitations that need to be transcended, including his uncritical acceptance of all, which does not allow him to chart a future path.

In an early discussion of Whitman in The Freeman, a review of Léon Bazalgette's Walt Whitman: The Man and His Work, Brooks juxtaposes references to Whitman's closeness to his mother with Bazalgette's assertion of Whitman's modern embodiment of the organicism of the Greeks. This juxtaposition provides interesting support for the connection of the feminine ideal, remembered as maternal union, with the Young Americans' calls for community and organic and cosmic connection. First, Brooks, like Stedman, finds in Whitman a mirror image of his idealization of his own mother. In this Freeman review Brooks notes, "the Wound-Dresser, the poet of 'Calamus,' is found in the son whose mother was 'the great love of his life.'" Brooks quotes Bazalgette at length, most interestingly in Bazalgette's pronouncements on Whitman's evocation of Greek antiquity, which here connotes a modern
recreation of ancient organicism, reminding one of Symonds's writings. His entire person "evoked in the ensemble of his person and not by his face alone, Greek beauty—not that of the decadence which fills our museums with its jaded types, but the strong, primitive Hellenic type, that is to say, absolute harmony in rude power." And his poetry encompasses the power of the ancient bards, who defined ages and peoples: "Since the age of the great bards of Greece and of India, the world had unlearned the sound of such a voice which resurged from the bosom of modern humanity with an accrued power, charged with new significance, bodying forth the aspirations of an aboriginal of American cities."

Whitman's ability to combine personality and national representation Brooks notes in his next consideration of Whitman, a review of Traubel's *With Walt Whitman in Camden* in the "Reviewer's Notebook" of the September 15, 1920, *Freeman*. What Brooks finds particularly interesting is the reflection of Whitman's particular personality in Traubel's biography, compared to the transformation of that personality into universality in Whitman's poetry:

[O]ne can see him clearly enough in his conversation and his unconsidered prose. But of this nothing appears in his verse or in his prefaces. And that is why other men, who are the products of other conditions than Whitman's and the victims of different complexes, find themselves reflected there. The personal characteristics of the man remain, of course, but they have passed, I do not undertake to say how, through a singular transmutation... He is expressing himself, to be sure, but it is

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a self that has become universal.\textsuperscript{10}

The remaining two Freeman articles make clear the difference between the writing of the early Brooks and the late Brooks. These two Freeman articles highlight Whitman’s shortcomings as the mediator between the cultural extremes and, in pointing out Whitman’s shortcomings in the past, chart a path for the future. In Brooks’s later The Times of Melville and Whitman, Whitman symbolizes Brooks’s lapse into a nostalgia that charts no future course. In the May 18, 1921, “Reviewer’s Notebook” Whitman’s one shortcoming was that, though he desired a class of “sacerdotal authors,” he did not see that hierarchy was necessary for the development of aesthetics: “This great serene Quaker, with his miraculous draught of life—was not his own rôle precisely \textit{not} to make distinctions, or to separate in himself one element from another, but to reveal for once nature itself incarnate in a human being?”\textsuperscript{11}

This sentiment is repeated more pointedly in the December 14, 1921, “Reviewer’s Notebook” when Brooks charges that Whitman’s inability to be critical results in a utopian literature that is insufficiently lofty. Comparing

\textsuperscript{10} Van Wyck Brooks, “Reviewer’s Notebook,” Freeman 2 (1920) 22. \textit{See also} the discussion of the “mirror stage” as it relates to Whitman in this study, 16-20. Brooks suggests in Whitman the figure of the mother who is not “other” to the infant, here Brooks. If Whitman is for Brooks a cosmic elision of difference, an evocation of community, it springs from Brooks’s invocation of the feminine ideal of maternal union as an antidote to the bifurcation of American society between the genteel and the entrepreneurial.

\textsuperscript{11} Van Wyck Brooks, “Reviewer’s Notebook” Freeman 3 (1921) 239.
Whitman's Utopia to William Morris's, Brooks says, "To pass from Whitman's Utopia to Morris's is to pass from a Quaker meeting-house into a cathedral. And whatever one's beliefs may be, a modern mind prefers the cathedral." 12 These articles betray Brooks's elitism, and the contrast between the images of the Quaker meeting house and the Cathedral represents the contrast between the genteel Protestantism that legitimated American enterprise and the ideal socialist fellowship of Catholicism. The images are forced here, for Quakerism, because of its marginalism in American culture, was by no means Congregationalism, and Catholicism also represents feudalism, as well as mysterious classless fellowship. Still, Brooks's view to Whitman's shortcomings looks to the future in its call to a further refinement of Whitman's synthesis of high and low.

As if utterly disappointed by the failure of an appropriate synthesis of high and low to materialize, Brooks focuses nostalgically on the culture of artisan democracy in The Times of Melville and Whitman (1947) of his "Makers and Finders" series, in which Brooks becomes more a scholar than a critic, carefully sketching the historical and social background of non-New England writers from the 1840s to the 1880s. Against the formalism of Matthiessen, who restricted membership in the canon club to a limited number of authors, Brooks, while focusing on "major" male figures, takes in the regionalists,

12 Van Wyck Brooks, "Reviewer's Notebook" Freeman 4 (1921) 335.
including Alice and Phoebe Carey, Ambrose Bierce, George Washington Cable, and Bret Harte.

Brooks's interest in social and historical background is demonstrated in his discussion of Whitman's democratic influences. Brooks recounts Whitman's childhood encounters with the democratic heros of the early republic—Aaron Burr, Lafayette, Andrew Jackson and Thomas Paine—and the political engagement of Whitman's young adulthood:

Whitman, who had spoken at a Tammany meeting in City Hall Park in 1841, had plunged with zeal into most of the movements of reform, for restrictions of the slave-system, the abolition of capital punishment, the humaner treatment of animals and especially free trade. Jefferson for him was the "greatest of the great," and the doctrines of the rights of man, the evils of privilege, the absurdity of rank were bred as it were in his bones. They seemed natural particularly on Long Island, the most democratic of regions and the most untouched by aristocratic ideas, the aristocratic theology of the neighbouring Connecticut counties or the social aristocracy of the mainland of New York.\(^\text{13}\)

Brooks discusses Whitman's editorship of the Brooklyn *Eagle* as foreshadowing the poet's point of view, criticizing "all unwholesome foreign sway," advocating fair wages, help for the unemployed, and public baths. The young editor encouraged young men to pursue outdoor recreation and young women to be taught scientific principles as an antidote to prudery and sentimentality. Brooks also places Whitman in the circle of acquaintance of the reformers of nineteenth-century America: John Humphrey Noyes of the Oneida community,

Robert Dale Owen, the Zoarites, the Rappites, the Swedenborgians, and the Millerites.\(^{14}\) Besides being an interesting and impressive scholarly display on Brooks's part, his discussion of social and historical background, especially as it relates to Whitman, displays a nostalgia for a past where reform movements were so integrated into daily life that they were hard to avoid. Unlike figures in Brooks's early works, those from the past in "Makers and Finders" are no longer flawed models to be improved upon for future projects, merely artifacts of an idealized past.

Just as Brooks's scholarly nostalgia mirrors his personal nostalgia for organic unity, so his focus on the conservatism that emerges later in Whitman's life is continuous with the organicism that Brooks found so appealing in Whitman:

Later Whitman's imagination spread from America to include the world, and the dearest dream was what he called an internationality of poets and poems, uniting the nations more closely than all the treaties. At the same time his mind extended backward, and as he gradually came to feel the value of tradition he ceased to believe that America should break wholly with the past. There had always been something conservative in him. He liked to dwell on the old farm-ways and what he described as the "mother of many children," for the human types that appealed to him were "frightfully out of line," he said, with the largely imported models of the new novels and poems.\(^{15}\)

Brooks also notes Whitman's sympathy for Carlyle's distaste of radicals, which

\(^{14}\) Brooks, *Times* 140, 177.

\(^{15}\) Brooks, *Times* 188.
in the older Whitman took the form of suspicion of abolitionists and "free-love cranks"; he also notes Whitman's essays on the preservation of landmarks "that meant much to Americans of older stock." Most telling here, in Brooks's connection of Whitman's later conservatism with organicism, is his choice of the "mother of many children" from Whitman as an ideal type, because Brooks's organicism was in many ways an attempt to reconnect with the ideal feminine in union with the Mother. Passage to India becomes a part of the older Whitman's attempt to make connections between the evolution of the past into the present; the spirituality of the East with the materialism of the West.\footnote{16 Brooks, \textit{Times} 188, 189.}

In other places, Brooks is particularly fascinated with Whitman's attempts to unite disparate elements, and the discussion of Whitman's literary education—reading at the Coney Island shore—becomes an extended meditation on the shore as the union of the water and the land, the real and the ideal, and this union is the impetus for \textit{Leaves of Grass}:

The shore, where the water married the land, symbolized for him the blending of the real and the ideal, for each became part of the other on this wavering line, and he remembered feeling once that he must write a book expressing what he called "this liquid mystic theme." Then it came to him that the seashore should rather be a general influence with him, a pervading gauge or tally in his composition.\footnote{17 Brooks, \textit{Times} 125.}
By the 1940s, Whitman's sexuality could not be ignored, and Brooks makes Whitman "rather under- than over-sexed, mildly bisexual and mostly unconscious of the homosexual implications in *Calamus* and other passages in his poems and prose." Brooks makes this assertion despite evidence that would support Whitman's exclusive homosexuality that Brooks acknowledges, including a quote from Whitman's brother that the young Whitman was not "attracted to girls." Brooks even admits that Whitman probably made up the story about his illegitimate children. But Brooks's half-hearted denial of Whitman's exclusive homosexuality serves affirmative purposes. Whitman is not only bisexual; he is bi-gendered, representing union with the maternal: "For the rest, there was much of the woman in Whitman's composition. This gave one the sense of an endless present, such as women give, in *Leaves of Grass*, a feeling of the depth and reality of the here and now." Brooks also represents an early recognition, the implications of which he was not fully aware, that Whitman's sexuality was not entirely continuous with that of Symonds, Proust, and Wilde, which was, in many ways, a product of industrial modernity. Instead, Whitman's sexuality was closer to an older model of homosociality:

Was not his "hearty comradeship," his "manly friendship, fond and loving, pure and sweet, strong and life-long," much the same as Melville's feeling for Jack Chase and Billy Budd, whose presence had expanded his veins like the sun or like wine? He "permitted no familiarities," Peter Doyle recalled, the Washington horse-car conductor who was Whitman's friend, and
his vision of "companionship thick as trees" was as far from the vision of Proust or Wilde as Whitman's America was remote from their France or England. Homosexuality in the sense of perversion could scarcely have thriven in the climate of his time and place or in one who so liked "manliness" and all that was bracing, hardy and sane and was drawn to the strongly marked of both the sexes.\(^{18}\)

While there are continuities between "the vision of Proust and Wilde" and the vision of Whitman, and, indeed, Whitman remained very fond of Symonds and Wilde, it is nevertheless true that some pre-modern homosociality clung to Whitman's vision of comradeship, in addition to a fairly modern view of the equality of the sexes, which contrasted with the misogyny often present in the British homosexual culture.\(^{19}\) Most interesting is Brooks's close juxtaposition of his assertions that Whitman's vision of comradeship was too "manly" to be linked to the European "perversion" with his assertion that there was something of the woman in Whitman. This juxtaposition further demonstrates the use Brooks found in calling Whitman mildly bisexual: it sanitized a potential pathology (because Brooks believed Whitman was unconscious of the homoeroticism in his poetry) and it reinforced Whitman's use as the representative of an American culture that joined the feminine and the masculine, the nostalgic masculinity of artisan America, rather than the competitive entrepreneurial masculinity.

\(^{18}\) Brooks, Times 184.

\(^{19}\) See chapter two.
Ultimately, in *The Times of Melville and Whitman*, Brooks depicts Whitman's post-Civil War years as a combination of disappointment, anger, and optimism. This mixture of emotions also serves Brooks's project of providing a union of opposites, but not as a program for the future. Instead, Brooks meditates on a nostalgically situated artisan/agrarian unity, notes its disintegration in Whitman's time, and registers Whitman's mixed reactions, not rejecting the greed and waste of enterprise, but accepting it as a precondition to further general growth. This period produced such optimistic poems as "Pioneers! O Pioneers!" and "Passage to India," which accepted the advances of expansion and technology and anticipated the material unity these might bring, as well as the jeremiad of "Democratic Vistas." Interestingly, Whitman is almost a mirror for Brooks after the Depression, after World War II, and after his nervous breakdown, putting forth an optimistic (and for Brooks, if not for Whitman, a nostalgic) facade, repressing dissatisfaction over the present:

So, paradoxically enough perhaps, Whitman's most patriotic poems were produced in this age that drove so many to despair; his optimism was higher than ever and his faith in democracy stronger, although he expected less of the immediate future.²⁰

On the surface, Santayana and Brooks both appear concerned with the dichotomy in American culture between the genteel and the entrepreneurial, but they differ significantly in their programs even though they use similar

terms. Brooks, as we have seen, desires a cultural middle ground between what he considers the useless, ethereal genteel and the vulgar entrepreneurial. Santayana seems hard pressed either to choose between the extremes or to offer a replacement for the genteel foundations of academia for which his own program seems to call. In fact, in Santayana's writings on Whitman one finds the same detached perspective and resistance to commitment that is in much of Santayana's other work. Robert Dawidoff connects Santayana's detached perspective to his "closet": an awareness on some level of his sexual difference combined with a conscious ambivalence about and rejection of action concerning that sexual difference which led, especially in his Americanist writings, to pointing out the moralism inherent in the genteel tradition without ever wanting to change it. Reinforcing the sense of disengagement his sexual difference brought was his cultural difference, his Spanish Catholic heritage in Protestant Brahmin Boston. These two aspects of his personality, both of which he distanced himself from, led to his distance from American culture, which allowed him a clear view to critique it, but also enabled an aloofness and lack of commitment that kept him from any desire to change it. His views on the genteel tradition range from his early verse, "Young Sammy's First Wild Oats," in which he took the side of the imperialist impulses in America during the Spanish-American War, over the liberal anti-imperialism of the genteel tradition, to assertions in "The Genteel Tradition in American
Philosophy” that the genteel tradition had yet to be replaced, nor, as I previously noted, did he make any attempt to replace it.\textsuperscript{21}

Santayana’s relationship to Whitman is of a piece with Santayana’s relationship to every aspect of American culture: he is sometimes attracted to Whitman, sometimes critical, but ultimately noncommittal. Whitman’s appeal to Santayana was psycho-sexual: Whitman’s democratic aesthetic represents (as we have seen before) a pre-oedipal lack of difference and hierarchy, and reunion with the maternal.\textsuperscript{22} Santayana’s lack of commitment to Whitman is yet another manifestation of this pre-oedipal lack of difference, an unwillingness to make distinctions; however, because Santayana often expressed anti-democratic sentiments, his stance is skewed towards the psychological rather than the political. And this psychological appeal of Whitman’s is most apparent in Santayana’s closing hymn to nature, echoing Whitman, in “The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy.” Just as my study has aimed to show that Whitman’s poetry can be and has been put to radically different ideological uses, so, too, the contrast of Brooks and Santayana reinforces this point and demonstrates that pre-oedipal nostalgia can be put to diverse ideological services. While the early Brooks finds a


concrete and genuine progressive political hope in the pre-oedipal identification with the maternal, for Santayana it is nothing more than a powerful fantasy, a way to make the larger political world inconsequential, additionally making palatable his Machiavellian view of the political. Santayana's figuration of Whitman as the pre-oedipal mother appears as a strong allure of Whitman in Santayana's earliest published piece on Whitman and culminates in the hymn to nature at the end of "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy," a paean to Whitman, though at times in between and in his last published work on Whitman Santayana's desire for hierarchy emerges, and Whitman is rebuked.

Santayana's first essay on Whitman, "Walt Whitman: A Dialogue," published in the May 1890 Harvard Monthly, takes the form of an apologetic dialogue between the pro-Whitman "Van Tender" and the anti-Whitman "McStout." The piece displays a largely favorable estimate of Whitman in Van Tender, with McStout reiterating what must have been well-known genteel opinions against Whitman. Van Tender answers McStout's objections and generally has the last word, but McStout is neither soundly repudiated nor made to look ridiculous. And at the conclusion of the dialogue, neither interlocutor comes out clearly ahead, and the importance of the entire dialogue is dismissed by Van Tender, which does serve to reinforce his subconscious evocation of Whitman as representative of the pre-oedipal realm in which
objects are without rank or distinction.

Throughout, Van Tender valorizes Whitman's primitivism, his closeness to nature, and his crude but primal unwillingness to make distinctions and create hierarchies of value. In answer to McStout's criticism that Whitman "has neither the accent of the Christians, nor the style of a Christian, pagan, nor man," Van Tender evokes a nostalgic fantasy that is more pre-symbolic than it is Edenic in its allusion to learning:

If only a man could become an artist in his words, and yet retain the innocence of his feelings! But to learn a method of expression is to become insensible to all it can't express. The schools don't teach us to paint what we see, but to see what others have painted.  

While Van Tender finds the embodiment of this fantasy for the primal in Whitman, he half admits that the return to such an early state can only be a fantasy, as if, foreshadowing Lacan, the very entry into language, becoming "an artist in . . . words," precludes "retaining the innocence of . . . feelings."

But further on, Van Tender ignores this implied dismissal of yearning for the pre-linguistic as mere nostalgic fantasy. The power of Whitman's poetic catalogues makes palpable this fantasy:

You may laugh at his catalogues of objects, at his enumeration of places. But the hurrying of these images through the mind gives me a sense of space, of a multiplicity of things spread endlessly around me. I become aware of the life of millions of men, of great stretches of marsh, desert, and ocean. Have you never thought

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of the poetry of the planet? Fancy this little ball spinning along so fast, and yet so little in a hurry. Imagine the film of blue-gray water and the flat patches of land, now green, now brown, and dim clouds creeping over all. And near the ocean, here and there, conceive the troops of men and animals darkening the earth like so many ants. And think how little the murmur of one thousand jargons ruffles the air, and how the praises of each god are drowned in the vaults of his temple! \(^{24}\)

Through the progression of this quote, the idea of specific objects and places as they occur in catalogue, broaden to "millions of men, of great stretches of marsh, desert, and ocean" and finally lose their identity in "the film of blue-gray water" and the "murmur of one thousand jargons," paralleling the action of Whitman's own "imperial I" subsuming difference in primal unity from elided identity.

Van Tender also sees Whitman as a corrective to what he points to as the anthropocentrism of Calvinism, Transcendentalism, and their later academic offspring, idealism:

Whitman would teach you, if you would only read him, to see in things their intrinsic nature and life, rather than the utility they may have for one another. That is his great merit, his sublime justice. It is a kind of profound piety that recognizes the life of every thing in nature, and spares it, and worships its intrinsic worth. There is something brutal and fatuous in the habit we commonly have of passing the parts of nature in review and pronouncing them good or bad according to the effect they have on our lives. \(^{25}\)

Ultimately, though, Santayana's will to disengagement from judgment leads

\(^{24}\) Santayana "Whitman" 87-88.

\(^{25}\) Santayana, "Whitman" 90.
him to a disengagement from the possibility of moral action, which buttressed his dismissal of his Harvard colleague’s moral indignation over the imperialistic Spanish-American War and which led to his later flirtations with fascism.

But the reality that this pre-oedipal and pre-linguistic elision of difference is only a personal fantasy, albeit a powerfully attractive one, is finally made clear by the frame of the dialogue. Van Tender and McStout’s conversation takes places as they are on their way to be the spectators at some sort of athletic competition. At the end of the dialogue, they have missed the match but encounter the spectators and participants of the game, and they remark, “We’ve won, though. You can tell by their faces.” Van Tender notes their existence on the margins of society: “So you see we weren’t really needed. For all our philosophy, the world wags on.”26 Their very position as would-be spectators who never actually make it to the action, with the masculine realm of sports standing in for entrepreneurial American culture, foregrounds Santayana’s contentions elsewhere that genteel academic culture is out of touch.

Santayana’s next discussion of Whitman, in *The Sense of Beauty: Being the Outlines of Aesthetic Theory* (1896), flirts again with the attraction of an early infantile stage before language and distinction, and insightfully locates

26 Santayana, “Whitman” 92.
it in the very titles of Whitman’s poetry:

Everywhere it greets us with passionate preference; not flowers but leaves of grass, not music but drum-taps, not composition but aggregation, not the hero but the average man, not the crisis but the vulgarest moment; and by this resolute marshaling of nullities, by his effort to show us everything as a momentary pulsation of a liquid and structureless whole.  

This is what Santayana earlier describes as the æsthetic of democracy, the “effect of multiplicity in uniformity,” while asserting that æsthetics do not cause revolutions but do “consecrate” them. Santayana carefully notes the above æsthetic pleasure as a fantasy, implying that one should have reservations about enacting democratic principles as fully as they are enacted in Whitman’s æsthetic:

For whatever practical dangers we may see in this terrible leveling, our æsthetic faculty can condemn no actual effect; its privilege is to be pleased by opposites, and to be capable of finding chaos sublime without ceasing to make nature beautiful.  

Again, while the early Van Wyck Brooks wants to turn this nostalgic maternal union into a cultural program, Santayana warns here that such leveling is undesirable and impossible outside of fantasy.

Santayana’s next two published pieces on Whitman, the critical introduction to Whitman in *American Prose: Selections with Critical Introductions by Various Writers* (1899), edited by George Rice Carpenter, and


"The Poetry of Barbarism" (1900), published a year apart from each other, echo each other textually, but "The Poetry of Barbarism" sets the consideration of Whitman within a fuller æsthetic and philosophical context. Though the naming of verse as the poetry of barbarism would appear on first glance to be pejorative, Santayana's aim is not so much judgmental as descriptive. He says of Whitman's catalogues, "We find the swarms of men and objects rendered as they might strike the retina in a sort of waking dream. It is the most sincere possible confession of the lowest—I mean the most primitive—type of perception." And in "The Poetry of Barbarism" as elsewhere, Santayana displays a fascination with Whitman's catalogues. Nevertheless, the first section of "The Poetry of Barbarism" valorizes the poetry of Homeric times: "Nowhere else can we find so noble a rendering of human nature, so spontaneous a delight in life, so uncompromising a dedication to beauty, and such a gift of seeing beauty in everything." He criticizes his contemporary poets, not because of any failure on their part, but for a barbarous culture at large. Santayana finds his contemporary poets "incapable of any high wisdom" and with "no total vision, no grasp on the whole reality, and consequently no capacity for a sane and steady ideal." But this deficiency of his contemporary poets comes from the split culture they find themselves in. Modern society is characterized by two splits: first, between classic and Christian pasts; and second, a conscious separation from the past. Again, any loss incurred by the
poetry of barbarism springs from its existence in a split culture, one that has lost primal unity.

But, "[t]he poetry of barbarism is not without its charm . . . . Irrational stimulation may tire us in the end, but it excites us in the beginning; and how many conventional poets, tender and prolix, have there not been, who tire us now without ever having excited anybody?" Santayana then cites Whitman and Browning as examples of the poetry of barbarism, "analytical poets . . . who seek to reveal and express the elemental as opposed to the conventional." 29

Santayana notes again Whitman's passive registering sensorium, again using language that evokes nostalgia for the prelinguistic/union with the maternal:

He had had no education and his natural delight in imbibing sensations had not been trained to the uses of practical or theoretical intelligence. He basked in the sunshine of perception and wallowed in the stream of his own sensibility, as later at Camden in the shallows of his favorite brook. Even during the civil war, when he heard the drum-taps so clearly, he could only gaze at the picturesque and terrible aspects of the struggle, and linger among the wounded day after day with a canine devotion; he could not be aroused either to clear thought or to positive action. So also in his poems; a multiplicity of images pass before him and he yields himself to each in turn with absolute passivity. The world has no inside; it is a phantasmagoria of continuous visions, vivid, impressive, but monotonous and hard to distinguish in memory, like the waves of the sea or the decorations of some barbarous temple, sublime only by the infinite aggregation of parts. 30


30 Santayana, Works 4: 110, emphasis added.
Santayana then makes the connection between the “mass of images without structure and the notion of an absolute democracy” and notes the progression from structureless images to an infantile egotism:

The literature of democracy was to ignore all extraordinary gifts of genius or virtue, all distinction drawn even from great passions or romantic adventures. In Whitman’s works, in which this new literature is foreshadowed, there is accordingly not a single character nor a single story. His only hero is Myself, the “single separate person,” endowed with the primary impulses, with health, and with sensitiveness to the elementary aspects of Nature. \(^{31}\)

Constantly, Santayana invokes images of Whitman as reaching for a primitive state of being, calling his style “the innocent style of Adam, when the animals filed before him one by one and he called each of them by its name” while subtly undercutting the possibility of such a move, placing Whitman in a context harboring illusions “as favourable as possible to the imaginary experiment of beginning the world over again.” Then Santayana goes as far as to deny even the possibility of a society without distinction, “not merely when wealth and intelligence began to take shape in the American Commonwealth,” but “at the very foundation of the world, when those laws of evolution were established which Whitman, like Rousseau, failed to understand.” In the above quote, and with a reference to Herbert Spencer that follows that passage, Santayana constructs a social Darwinism atop merely biological principles. Finally, he reasons that one of Whitman’s prime goals,

popularity with the masses, was unobtainable because the common folk acknowledge rank and distinction, which they seek for themselves. This leads to Santayana’s final estimation of Whitman, whose value, according to Santayana, lies outside the realm of the social; Whitman is, for Santayana, an escape from division, rank, and responsibility: “When the intellect is in abeyance, when we would ‘turn and live with the animals, they are so placed and self-contained,’ when we are weary of conscience and of ambition, and would yield ourselves for a while to the dream of sense, Walt Whitman is a welcome companion.” Though Santayana’s objections to Whitman manifest Santayana’s social Darwinism, Santayana cannot yet ignore his powerful attraction to the unity of the pre-linguistic state that Whitman’s poetry evokes for him.32

Santayana’s farewell to the United States, “The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy” (1913), also raises discussion of two figures—Whitman, of course, and William James—James not, this time, as an example of the genteel tradition, but, along with Whitman, as an interruption to it. Here, as elsewhere, Santayana asserts that American culture is split: “The American Will inhabits the sky-scraper; the American Intellect inhabits the colonial mansion. The one is the sphere of the American man; the other, at least predominantly, of the American woman. The one is all aggressive enterprise;

the other is all genteel tradition." Santayana notes that the genteel tradition's idealism is the child of tragic Calvinism and subjective transcendentalism. For the culture of the "American Will," however, sin has evaporated, and nature, rather than being a mirror of the self, has become a commodity, thus leading to the split between the will and the intellect.\textsuperscript{33}

Whitman's rebellion is against the genteel tradition, but Santayana does not make it clear here if and/or how Whitman is continuous with the culture of the will, though his carrying of democracy into psychology and morals and his "lazy, and self-indulgent" pantheism, which asserted that "everything real was good enough," echoes Santayana's earlier comments on the decline of Calvinism:

His neighbours helped more than they hindered him; he wished their number to increase. Good will became the great American virtue; and a passion arose for counting heads, and square miles, and cubic feet, and minutes saved—as if there had been anything to save them for. . . . If you told the modern American that he is totally depraved, he would think you were joking, as he himself usually is. He is convinced that he always has been, and always will be, victorious and blameless.\textsuperscript{34}

Whitman's democracy gives the "various sights, moods, and emotions . . . one vote," thus rebelling against the genteel tradition, but Santayana notes that Whitman does not justify his revolution with an ensuing reconstruction.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[34] Santayana, "Genteel" 202-203, 199.
\end{footnotes}
Similarly, Santayana, for all his criticism of the genteel tradition, offers no alternative to it, and in Whitman Santayana has constructed a mirror for his own critique without reform, an empty fantasy without hope.

In sharp contrast to Santayana's empty fantasy is Vernon Parrington's committed program of sketching out a progressive literary history. Parrington explores two streams in *Main Currents in American Thought*, the Jeffersonian and the Hamiltonian, using the Jeffersonian tradition to combat Hamiltonian gains from the concentration of wealth as a result of industrial modernity. And yet, similar to Santayana, Parrington's wistful view of the Jeffersonian past is darkened by the historical trajectory of Federalist dominance he sketches:

>This much nevertheless is clear: an industrialized society is reshaping the philosophy fashioned by an agrarian world; the passion for liberty is lessening and the individual, in the presence of creature comforts, is being dwarfed; the drift of centralization is shaping its inevitable tyrannies to bind us with. Whether the quick concern for human rights, that was the noble bequest of our fathers who had drunk of the waters of French romantic faith, will be carried over into the future, to unhorse the machine that now rides men and to leaven the sodden mass that is industrial America, is a question to which the gods as yet have given no answer. Yet it is not without hope that intelligent America is in revolt. The artist is in revolt, the intellectual is in revolt, the conscience of America is in revolt.35

That touches of the nostalgic as well of the progressive exist in Parrington's treatment of Whitman is evident from the very beginning. The chapter on Whitman is titled "The Afterglow of the Enlightenment," with

35 Parrington 3: x.
Whitman “the completest embodiment ... of a democracy that the America of the Gilded Age was daily betraying.” On a simple level, Whitman’s shadowing of the Enlightenment is found in his verbal echoes of Paine and Leggett, and this straightforward polemical level exists throughout *Main Currents*.

On the level of the entire three-volume study, Parrington effects a unity of sorts, rejecting æsthetic considerations so that he may consider a broader range of texts:

Our literary historians have labored under too heavy a handicap of the genteel tradition—to borrow Professor Santayana’s happy phrase—to enter sympathetically into a world of masculine intellects and material struggles. They have sought daintier fare than polemics, and in consequence mediocre verse has obscured political speculation, and poetasters have shouldered aside vigorous creative thinkers.

While the above quotation points to a rejection of the “feminine genteel” in favor of the “masculine political,” Parrington by no means ignores conventional literature; he finds a freedom to pursue texts of all sorts, and in this way, his literary history is more than a marriage of the practical and the æsthetic. It is a consideration without even the suggestion of such boundaries from grounds political, economic and social. Rather than American literature, the more inclusive American thought is what Parrington studied, unified by the

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36 Parrington 3: 69.

37 Parrington 1: xii.
emphasis he placed on the shaping force of economics upon the texts.

The same balance of Whitman's dual impulses toward narcissism and fraternity seen in other twentieth-century critics is seen in Parrington's consideration of Whitman, with Whitman's utter subjectivity at the center, leading to the universal:

Thronging troops of pictures passed before him, vivid, vital, transcripts of reality, the sharp impress of some experience or fleeting observation—his own and no one's else, and therefore authentic. Delighting in the cosmos he saw reflecting its myriad phases in the mirror of his own ego, he sank into experience joyously like a strong swimmer idling in the salt waves. Borne up by the caressing waters, repressing nothing, rejecting nothing, he found life good in all its manifestations. As an Emersonian he was content to receive his sanctions from within, and as he yielded to the stimulus of the environing present his imagination expanded, his spirits rose to earth's jubilee, his speech fell into lyric cadences, and from the exalted abandon of egoistic experience there issued a strong rich note of the universal. 38

And if, as Parrington states, "[t]he old Jacksonian leveling had been negative; its freedoms had been individual, its anarchisms selfish and unsocial," Whitman had not lost the Enlightenment ideals of liberty, equality, fraternity. Parrington consistently portrays Whitman as centered in himself, not narcissistic, and moving out to contact with others:

To discover this divine clue and be drawn by the unseen thread into the orbit of things, to suffer the Me—the "human identity of understanding, emotions, spirit"—to fuse with the Not Me—"the whole of the material, objective universe and laws, with what is behind them in time and space"—became therefore for Whitman

38 Parrington 3: 70.
the grand objective of man's life and effort.\textsuperscript{39}

Whitman takes his place as an emblem within Parrington's conflicted work, championing the liberal Jeffersonian tradition, which Whitman represents. But \textit{Main Currents} is suffused with a fear that Jeffersonian liberalism has all but been eradicated by the reincarnation of Hamiltonian federalism in industrial modernity's concentration of capital:

So in the twilight of the romantic revolution Whitman quietly slipped away. The great hopes on which he fed have been belied by after events—so his critics say; as the great hopes of the Enlightenment have been belied. Certainly in this welter of today, with science become the drab and slut of war and industrialism, with sterile money-slaves instead of men, Whitman's expansive hopes seem grotesque enough. Democracy may indeed be only a euphemism for the rulership of fools. Yet in a time of huge infidelities, in the dun breakdown and disintegration of all faiths, it is not wholly useless to recall the large proportions of Walt Whitman, his tenderness, his heartiness, his faith, his hope.\textsuperscript{40}

While Parrington, at the end of the 1920s, manages to find only some nostalgic hope in an ocean of despair, Newton Arvin, writing in the midst of the Great Depression and taking inspiration from Parrington's Jeffersonian canon, hopes that crisis will effect the triumph of socialism. The base question of his study "Was Whitman a Socialist?" Arvin admits is technically anachronistic because Whitman comes out of an agrarian and artisan context, not an industrial one. Arvin portrays Whitman at his extremes, noting all his

\textsuperscript{39} Parrington 3: 76, 79.

\textsuperscript{40} Parrington 3: 85.
contradictory opinions on slavery, race, and capital. In his discussion of "Union," Arvin suggests a nostalgia bordering on the psychological as he describes the firing on Fort Sumter as "matricide." Discussing socialism and comradeship, Arvin positions Whitman's homosexuality as representative of a primitive "germ" in the general population that will cement the future of socialism. And through it all, disparate entities are joined, and difference is erased.

Though the context of Arvin's writings in the 1930s show his investment in socialism,\textsuperscript{41} Walt Whitman was much more nuanced than the context that gave rise to it would imply and than its critics admit. While, as the title of chapter one implies, "the main concern" is the question of Whitman's socialism, Arvin agrees that the question is not technically a genuine one:

[I]t is obvious enough that Whitman was a Jacksonian Democrat whose life was mostly spent in the midst of a culture still prevailingly individualistic and not even on the verge of a transition to socialism. Far from being a thoroughgoing socialist poet, he was the highly affirmative poet of American middle-class culture in the era of Emerson, of Vanderbilt, of Lincoln.\textsuperscript{42}

And yet, Arvin asserts that there is "something more" than the above in Whitman and this something more seems, as presented in the ultimate chapter, to be based on comradeship, a proto-socialistic emotion. Along the


\textsuperscript{42} Newton Arvin, Whitman (New York: Macmillan, 1938) 2-3.
way to that final chapter, Arvin weaves a scholarly and insightfully critical biography, exploring the various written artifacts Whitman left in addition to his poetry.

Again, though Arvin explores Whitman's nascent socialism, his secondary concern is to pull together Whitman's contradictions, almost as a model for the solidarity of socialism but also figured in terms of nostalgia for an infantile sense of unity. One of the best examples of Arvin's attempts to pull together Whitman's contradictions is his discussion of the networked issues of expansionism, slavery, the civil war, and labor. In Arvin's second chapter "The Tenor of Politics," he discusses the political roots of the young Whitman in Jefferson, Jackson, and the Locofocos, along with the ambiguities and unpleasantries of Whitman's stances on U.S. territorial expansion and slavery. Arvin notes that Whitman favored the Mexican-American War as a chance for territorial expansion, not from any raw imperialist notions, but from more paternalistic ones:

It was not the "list of power and territory," he could say sincerely, however naively, that made Americans support the war so heartily: that might be the motive for expanding "a less liberal form of government"—but not ours. "It is for the interest of mankind that its power and territory should be extended—the farther the better." . . . The fact remains that the young Whitman's imperialism was subjectively quite as idealistic a faith as his democracy.43

Arvin calls Whitman's support of expansionism "imperialism," implying that

43 Arvin 27.
no matter how idealistic, paternalism is still suspect, but Arvin notes that the defeat of the Wilmot Proviso, prohibiting the spread of slavery into new territories, made Whitman aware that expansion threatened to spread more than democracy and drove him out of the Democratic Party.\textsuperscript{44}

Arvin gives more extended treatment in this chapter to nuances of Whitman's position on slavery, as well as its ambiguities and his vacillations. Whitman's thoughts on slavery were not clear cut and, sadly, Whitman's public opinion was generally that of a New York democrat. Arvin raises the comment of Eldridge that Whitman "never seemed to care for [Negroes] . . . or they for him, although he never manifested any particular aversion to them." Additionally, Arvin notes a troubling letter Whitman wrote to his mother, commenting on a celebration of African-Americans upon their success in a Washington mayoral election, calling it "very disgusting and alarming in some respects," and describing that the celebrants "looked like so many wild brutes let loose."\textsuperscript{45}

Arvin makes a distinction, however, between Whitman the "mere citizen" and Whitman the poet, contrasting sentiments like those in the above paragraph to another in Whitman's notebook:

Whitman the mere citizen, however, was not always at one with Whitman the poet, the imaginative man, the artist. Consider, for

\textsuperscript{44}Arvin 27-28.

\textsuperscript{45}Arvin 31, 32.
example, a passage in one of his private notebooks that, written probably in the early fifties, has only recently found its way into print. "Everyone that speaks his word for slavery," it runs, "is himself the worst slave—the spirit of a freeman is not light enough in him to show that all the fatness of the earth were bitter to a bondaged neck." . . . The good philistine that he was during so many hours in his life, could pick no quarrel with social arrangements as he found them; the turbulent poet who lived in the same body was not so easily silenced. Whatever the householder Whitman might say, his daimon, his unconscious, was a real Abolitionist, and it insisted on being heard no matter how obliquely. 46

By way of further contrast, Arvin refers to the admiring line on the black dray driver in "Song of Myself": "I behold the picturesque giant and love him"; and from "Salut au Monde!": "You dim-descended, black, divine-soul'd African, large, fine-headed, nobly-form'd, superbly destin'd, on equal terms with me!" Arvin also chronicles Whitman's growing cynicism about the politics of compromise in the 1850s by placing some of Whitman's poetry in context: references to the death of John Brown in "Year of Meteors," to the compromises of the 1850s in "Dough-Face Song," "Blood Money," and "To the States, To Identify the 16th, 17th, or 18th Presidentiad," and to the Fugitive Slave Law in "A Boston Ballad." Further evidence of the rapprochement between the New York Democrat and the soul of the poet is an editorial in the *Eagle* titled "American Workingmen versus Slavery," in which Whitman makes a strategic appeal to workingmen to oppose the extension of slavery in territories gained from Mexico on the ground that it would devalue all labor:

46 Arvin 35-36.
This, he wrote, was "a question between the grand body of white workingmen, the millions of mechanics, farmers, and operatives of our country, with their interests on the one side—and the interests of a few thousand rich, 'polished,' and aristocratic owners of slaves at the South, on the other side." The real case against slavery, he here came close to saying, is not that it is unjust to the slave, but that it is "destructive to the dignity and independence of all who work, and to labor itself." This being true, he called upon "every mechanic of the North, East, and West"—upon carpenters and masons, stone-cutters and blacksmiths, cartmen and shoemakers and machinists—to proclaim to the world in massive tones that their calling was not to be sunk to a brutish level and that they would not under any circumstances endure the further extension of slavery. 47

Arvin next discusses the connection between the Civil War and the concept of Union, attempting to contextualize "Union" for his contemporary reader:

If any political feeling was stronger in Whitman than his devotion to political and social freedom, it was his profound devotion to the idea of the Union. The depth and the fervor of this sentiment it may not be easy for us now to recapture: it has ceased to be a powerful imaginative conviction with Americans because the fact it stands for has ceased to be challenged and the achievement it represents is no longer in the process of being realized. . . . These were among the reasons why the Union seemed so great a good to the men and women among whom he grew up: on it the status of America among the nations of the world seemed almost wholly to depend, and they could hardly imagine a social or political hope for the future that would not have been crushed by dismemberment. Beneath this feeling lay a solid bed of economic truth: it was a fact that the middle-class democratic order on which their well-being rested, would certainly have been terribly shaken and perhaps compromised for generations by the breakdown of federalism. In their imaginations, however, as in Whitman's, the Union was no mere pragmatic expedient; it was a high political ideal, and since

47 Arvin 38, 40, 50-52, 55, 42.
history was at work on that side, it deserved to be.\textsuperscript{48}

Arvin hints at the psychological appeal of "Union" when, discussing the firing on Fort Sumter, he describes Whitman's reaction as "the sensations of a man who has just heard of a peculiarly atrocious matricide."\textsuperscript{49} This is one of the few allusions to the realm of the psychological in this otherwise strongly historical and social study. In this foregrounding of the importance of "Union" to Whitman, Arvin recognizes a psychological issue suggested in the first chapter of my study, in discussions of the imperial "I" in Whitman, and in fantasies for reunion with the maternal in Stedman, Brooks, and Santayana. "Union" is more than a practical arrangement, attaining almost mythical status, and, in his invocation of the Civil War as "matricide," Arvin betrays in himself an attraction similar to Whitman's in his evocation of reunion with the maternal.

Arvin's fifth and final chapter, "For Purposes Beyond," comes closest to providing an answer to his anachronistic question "Was Whitman a Socialist?" Here, as throughout, he notes that Whitman's middle-class individualism kept him from embracing socialism, the utopian movements of the nineteenth century, and trade unionism. But Arvin sees in Whitman "the prophet not only of democracy as liberty but of democracy as equality ... from which arbitrary distinctions and the privileges of caste and fortune have been banished."

\textsuperscript{48} Arvin 57.

\textsuperscript{49} Arvin 60, emphasis added.
Arvin, in what seems to me to be one of the earliest frank and positive connections of Whitman and homosexuality, links the homoeroticism of "Calamus" in particular and *Leaves of Grass* in general to the solidarity of socialism. For Arvin, comradeship emerges in the "Calamus" poems in 1860 as a counterbalance to the strident individualism of the first two editions, demonstrated by Whitman's introduction to an English edition of *Leaves of Grass*, in which Whitman holds that individualism isolates while "the ideal of Love fuses and combines the whole. Out of the fusing of these twain, opposite as they are, I seek to make a homogenous Song."\(^5\)

Arvin devotes much effort to making this connection between Whitman's homosexuality and socialism, quoting Whitman—"The special meaning of the Calamus cluster of LEAVES OF GRASS . . . resides mainly in its Political significance"—and countering those like W.C. Rivers and Mark Van Doren, who argue that since Whitman's politics are based on a pathology, they are inapplicable to society at large:

Mr. Mark Van Doren has pointed out that what Whitman half-consciously meant by "manly attachment" was not simply a normal brotherly feeling among men but homosexual love: it was the unwitting expression of his own abnormal sexuality, and as such has no serious meaning—certainly no serious political meaning—for healthy men and women. His "democratic dogmas," since they base themselves on this eccentric and unwholesome emotion—this "wateriest of foundations for democracy"—are wholly without meaning, wholly invalid, for the men of to-day and of the future. "No society can be made out of

\(^5\) Arvin 233ff, 261, 262, 271.
him," says Mr. Van Doren of Whitman. "We could not be like him if we would. He has revealed himself to us, and that is all." 51

Not dismissing this judgment blithely, Arvin admits that "Whitman's political outlook was distorted in at least one way by his emotional organization: it did certainly lead him to hope for too much from the cohesive force of spontaneous affection, and to make much too light—in a carefree, transcendental way—of the 'institutions' which he said he was neither for nor against." But Arvin will not condemn a political movement solely for its psychological base, citing the "homosexual strain" in Plato and citing "Rousseau's paranoia." Arvin makes an interesting pseudo-psychological argument that the germs of pathology appear in all human beings, and, because of this, there is hope that Whitman's homosexuality can have democratic applications for all humanity:

There are the harmless germs of paranoia in all healthy human beings, or Rousseau might well have been a wholly ineffectual prophet; and a similar thing must be said of Whitman's idiosyncrasy. There is, so to say, a harmless, wholesome, sane "homosexuality" that pervades normal humanity as the most powerless bacilli of tuberculosis appear in the healthiest of lungs: it were not so, we could hardly account for the abnormal emergence of the tendency in whole peoples and its dominance in particular cultures. . . . Is it then unaccountable if—just as Rousseau's delusion of persecution could become the effective symbol of many genuine persecutions—so Whitman's very specially circumstanced "love of comrades" should become the symbol for an incomparably more general and historic drive toward a true fraternity? 52

51 Arvin 273-274.
52 Arvin 274, 276-278.
Even after the Civil War, Whitman, Arvin points out, was concerned with “the problem of developing a true union among the re-united states” and ends the chapter pointing to solidarity as a necessary precondition for the internationalism of socialism. As in Santayana, we see a nostalgia for a primitive union, here contextualized in the Civil War not as just a fantasy but also as a hope for the future of socialism, and here also evoked by a primitive pre-cedipal pansexuality, traces of which remain in all humans and which can be oriented to the future.

On the surface of it, Arvin’s *Walt Whitman* and F.O. Matthiessen’s *American Renaissance* appear poles apart politically. While Arvin was inspired by the possibilities of socialism in the midst of the Great Depression, Matthiessen’s inspiration came from the critical principles of T.S. Eliot, infamous for their aristocratic bent. But Arvin and Matthiessen do have much in common. Arvin may have written a socialist study of Whitman, but Matthiessen was a committed Christian Socialist and active member of the Progressive Party in the 1940s. Arvin’s sexuality was rather ambiguous: he was briefly married, but was charged with “obscenity and lewdness” in 1960 in connection with the possession of homoerotic pornography. Matthiessen lived in a committed homosexual relationship with the painter Russell Cheney until Cheney’s death. Their seemingly diverse works have similarities as well.

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53 Arvin 286ff.
In its very conception *American Renaissance* was both a use and a subversion of Eliot’s critical principals, adapting them to a democratic canon rather than an aristocratic one. Matthiessen is also concerned with bringing together extremes, not of Whitman’s political positions, but of his diverse formal models.

In *American Renaissance* Matthiessen aimed to coopt Eliot’s aristocratic new criticism, even as he cites Eliot as a touchstone, applying his method to American writers, thus deploying an aesthetic of democracy:

Emerson, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Whitman, and Melville all wrote literature for democracy in a double sense. They felt that it was incumbent upon their generation to give fulfillment to the potentialities freed by the Revolution, to provide a culture commensurate with America’s political opportunity. Their tones were sometimes optimistic, sometimes blatantly, even dangerously expansive, sometimes disillusioned, even despairing, but what emerges from the total pattern of their achievement—if we will make an effort to repossess it—is literature for our democracy.54

Matthiessen’s aesthetic canon is oddly narrow in the wake of Parrington. He off-handedly admits that some may find his choices arbitrary, but he rejects the popular writers of the nineteenth century—among them, Whittier, Longfellow, Warner, and Southworth—offering as the only justification for his choice that “during the century that has ensued, the successive generations of common readers, who make the decisions, would seem finally to have agreed that the authors of the pre-Civil War era who bulk largest in stature are the

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five who are my subject.” Though it is not clear who these readers are, or what makes these authors the best, his penchant is for formally complex works:

My aim has been to follow these books through their implications, to observe them as the culmination of their authors’ talents, to assess them in relation to one another and to the drift of our literature since, and, so far as possible, to evaluate them in accordance with the enduring requirements for great art. That last aim will seem to many only a pious phrase, but it describes the critic’s chief responsibility. His obligation is to examine an author’s resources of language and genres, in a word, to be preoccupied with form.55

Matthiessen’s obsession with form, set by the precedents of the aristocratic canon of Eliot, somewhat undermines his democratic impulse by undermining democratic inclusiveness, excluding works that were more widely read and might more effectively reflect and illuminate their democratic culture, in favor of more arcane authors, including Whitman. All in all, *American Renaissance* is a rather complex and sometimes confusing text, springing from its use and subversion of Eliot, as well as from the conflict between its democratic impulse and the narrow canon it establishes.

The two chapters in *American Renaissance* on Whitman are an odd, seemingly disconnected amalgam, including issues of language, mystical visions, Tocqueville, oratory, opera, the sea, and landscape painting. What barely connects the various issues is a concern with the æsthetics of democracy, whether this be a discussion of the roots of Whitman’s poetic

55 Matthiessen xi.
diction in the language of the people and in the popular oratory, or the similarity of Whitman's homely subject matter to that of the painters Mount, Millet, and Eakins. A secondary concern with sex and gender appears in some places. The shadows cast by sex and gender throughout these chapters is an important subtext to Matthiessen's aesthetics of democracy, involving what he sees as Whitman's identification with the maternal or with the female voice. His figurations of "the passivity of the poet's body" in the mystical vision of Section 5 of "Song of Myself" as "vaguely pathological and homosexual" also allows, as he says, "the ability to live spontaneously on primitive levels," which speaks of an infantile, hence nostalgic, rather than homosexual, sexuality. In the figures of the mother and the infant, Matthiessen is deploying a subtle nostalgia, I would argue, for artisan/agrarian democracy. Anyone who might doubt Matthiessen's nostalgia for preindustrial democracy should remember that the period of his very specific canon is 1850 to 1855, when America was on the brink of industrialization:

In dealing with their work I hope that I have not ignored the implications of such facts as that the farmer rather than the businessman was still the average American, and that the terminus to the agricultural era in our history falls somewhere between 1850 and 1865, since the railroad, the iron ship, the factory, and the national labor union all began to be dominant forces within those years, and forecast a new epoch. The forties probably gave rise to more movements of reform than any other decade in our history; they marked the last struggle of the liberal spirit of the eighteenth century in conflict with the rising forces of exploitation. The triumph of the new age was foreshadowed in
the gold rush, in the full emergence of the acquisitive spirit.  

In his first section on Whitman, “Words! book-words! what are you?” Matthiessen speaks of Whitman’s language, conveying a sense of Whitman’s failures as well as his successes. Among the shortcomings that Matthiessen presents are, in *An American Primer*, Whitman’s consistent failure to devise a poetic diction that is true to the lively use of language in the hands of the common people, and his failure to reach the same wide audience as his model of oratory. One also gets a sense of Whitman’s successes, when Matthiessen provides close readings of the directness of certain of Whitman’s lines or when Matthiessen reminds the reader of the audience that Whitman captured over time.

According to Matthiessen, Whitman believed “language was not ‘an abstract construction’ made by the learned, but that it had arisen out of the work and needs, the joys and struggles and desires of long generations of humanity, and that it had ‘its bases broad and low, close to the ground.’” By virtue of this fact, language was for Whitman a living medium, and the new possibilities of America called for even more evolution of the language. Especially, Whitman attempted a poetic diction that would break free of traditional, hence foreign, models, on the one hand rooted in the language of common Americans, on the other hand vague and mystical enough to attempt

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56 Matthiessen ix.
to evoke the possibilities of democracy in the New World. His failures, as Emerson noted, led to “a remarkable mixture of the Bhavat-Geeta and the New York Herald.” Matthiessen’s conundrum was that he wanted to portray Whitman’s diction as coming from the language of the common folk, though there are real problems with such an assertion—the coinages “homologize,” ‘doxologize,’ ‘questionize,’ ‘compromit,’ or ‘happify’—and Matthiessen realizes this. Still, the result evokes nostalgia, if not for the root of language, then for a child-like use of language, with its moments of freshness as well as moments of misuse:

Whitman reveals the particularly American combination of childish freshness with a mechanical and desiccated repetition of book terms that had had significance for the more complex civilization in which they had their roots and growth.57

This problem of the “fresh” and “close to the ground,” implying utter concreteness, combined with the mystical and the vague, continues in Matthiessen’s discussion in the next section, “Vision and Attitude.” Here Matthiessen presents the clash between Tocqueville’s concern that the lack of distinction in democratic society enables a quick generalizing move from the individual to the vague and universal and Whitman’s actual accomplishment of this move in his poetry.58 What possible horrible consequences justified Tocqueville’s fear of vague poetry is not initially clear, though Matthiessen will

57 Matthiessen 517, 526, 533, 531.

58 Matthiessen 533-534.
trace that out later, an all-too-easy jump from Emerson's individualism to the rise of Hitler.

The beginnings of this lineage Matthiessen finds in Section 5 of “Song of Myself,” the mystical vision in which the imagery suggests an act of auto-fellatio, with an active soul and a passive body, leading the poet to a mystical knowledge that “a kelson of the creation is love.” Inherent in this passage is, as I have previously mentioned, not only what Matthiessen terms homosexual passivity and nonproductivity, but even more a suggestion of infantile polymorphous perversity unaware of the difference between self and other:

The vision is the fullest expression of the sources from which Whitman's poetry rose, and consequently provides a central problem in appreciation. Readers with a distaste for loosely defined mysticism have plenty of grounds for objection in the way the poet's belief in divine inspiration is clothed in imagery that obscures all distinctions between body and soul by portraying the soul as merely the sexual agent. Moreover, in the passivity of the poet's body there is a quality vaguely pathological and homosexual. This is in keeping with the regressive, infantile fluidity, imaginatively polyperversion, which breaks down all mature barriers, a little further on in “Song of Myself,” to declare that he is “maternal as well as paternal, a child as well as a man.” Nevertheless, this fluidity of sexual sympathy made possible Whitman's fallow receptivity to life. The ability to live spontaneously on primitive levels, whose very existence was denied by the educated mind of his time, wiped out arbitrary conventions and yielded a broader experience than that of any of his contemporaries. And he did not simply exhibit pathological symptoms; he created poetry. It becomes essential therefore to scrutinize his vision and the attitude towards life to which it gave rise. Such scrutiny can lead us both to his conception of the creative process, and to the reasons for his choice of themes and
Matthiessen traces the roots of this mysticism to the influence of his mother's family's Quakerism, known not only for its radical egalitarianism but also for solipsism. Matthiessen notes that Whitman more than once defines "prophecy" as an outpouring of the soul, and further, that "[Nineteenth-century Quaker preacher Elias] Hicks' appeal to [Whitman] can be summed up in his two introductory statements, that the Quaker leader had pointed 'to the fountain of all naked theology' as being 'in yourself,' and that he was the most democratic of all the prophets."  

Matthiessen notes Whitman's move from the individual to the general "stock personality," making even Christ the type of the "dear brother" typified as a dead soldier in "A Sight in Camp." Here Matthiessen realizes Tocqueville's fear of the infantile nostalgia that makes a universe of the self:

This religious assurance, unleashed from all control in dogma or creed, must be called no less than terrifying in the lengths to which it was to go in proclaiming the individual as his own Messiah. For this tendency, so mildly innocent in Emerson, so confused and bombastic in Whitman, was to result in the hardness of Nietzsche. . . . When the doctrine of the Superman was again transformed, or rather, brutally distorted, the voice of Hitler's megalomania was to be heard sounding through it.  

What keeps Whitman from such megalomaniacal potential is that his

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59 Matthiessen 535-536.

60 Matthiessen 536-538.

61 Matthiessen 546.
mysticism leads him outside himself, as in the close to the mystical vision passage of Section 5:

Despite Whitman's willingness to speak as the prophet of all religions, affirming the fundamental lack of difference between them, and despite his propensity to even vaster inclusions, the lines that round off the account of what his vision brought him betray something else: that the source of his real poetry was not in the grandiose or rotund but in the common and humble.⁶²

Whitman's closeness to "the common and humble" leads Matthiessen to quote the end of that section of *Leaves of Grass*:

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a kelson of the creation is love
And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the fields
And brown ants in the little wells beneath them,
And mossy scabs of worm fence, heap'd stones, elder, mullein and poke-weed.
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Matthiessen also sees in this passage an "affirmation to the brotherhood of man," which leads him to a careful consideration of the extended metaphor of the grass in "Song of Myself," and its implications of unity, as it moves from "the flag of my disposition" to "the handkerchief of the Lord," to fertility, "the produced babe of the vegetation," to equality "growing among black folks as among white," to immortality, "the beautiful uncut hair of graves."

Matthiessen's strategic use of homosexuality in his discussion of Section 5, then, contrasts markedly with Arvin's. Arvin's risky move is to make Whitman's homosexuality the root of Whitman's socialism. In this passage of Matthiessen's, homosexuality is a root, but an infantile one, narcissistic in its

⁶² Matthiessen 546.
fullest implications. Instead of Whitman being drawn out of himself by comrades, he is drawn out by “common and humble” symbols that evoke brotherhood. Thus, Whitman is strangely desexualized.\(^6^3\)

Matthiessen’s next consideration is “Three Analogies for a Poem,” exploring Whitman’s self-professed inspiration from oratory, opera, and the sea. Here, too, figurations of gender draw these dissimilar models together. Admitting the incompatibility of these three models, Matthiessen tells us “Nevertheless, Whitman persisted in feeling connections between them.” Matthiessen’s primary concerns for oratory, as it relates to Whitman’s poetry, are aesthetic and cultural. Aesthetically, he is interested in the way in which the cadences and aurality of oratory influenced Whitman’s poetry, and culturally, he wants to demonstrate that Whitman’s poetry is rooted in a uniquely democratic art. Matthiessen then spends some time speaking about the structural impact of opera on Whitman’s poetry, specifically Whitman’s

\(^6^3\) See Matthiessen 85 for a later footnote, in which he again dodges the implications of comradeship. He presents Whitman’s letter to an army friend which, he says, “gives the fullest expression of the much disputed question of what he meant by comradeship.” Regarding the physical implications of comradeship, the letter is ambiguous at best, never speaking of physical expression though suggesting it: “I have been and am now, thinking so of you, dear young man, and of your love, or more rightly speaking, our love for each other—so curious, so sweet, I say so religious—We met there in the Hospital—how little we have been together—seems to me we ought to be some together every day of our lives—I don’t care about talking or amusement—but just to be together, and work together, or go off in the open air together.” This language could also reflect the excesses of Victorian same-sex friendship. Additionally, references to domesticity, inquiries about the correspondent’s son, wife, and parents, do not negate the possibility of eroticism in comradeship, but could point to a premodern pansexuality.
references to the contrasts of recitative and aria in his work, and their most effective deployment in “Out of the cradle endlessly rocking.” The formal influence of the sea is that of the undulating rhythm of the waves and the larger sense of continual movement implied by them, so that, in a poem like “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” the emphasis is on the pleasure of the journey, not on the destination. Each of these three models provide Matthiessen with fruitful considerations of Whitman’s form; nevertheless, they remain disparate models.

What is most interesting is the juxtaposition of these three elements with little seeming relation. But this juxtaposition, upon closer examination, suggests an enduring theme of Whitman criticism: a nostalgia, figured through the sexes, for an American culture not bifurcated between the productive masculine and the genteel feminine. Though Matthiessen never explicitly calls it thus, oratory is a “masculine” art, one even “heterosexually” productive, because it exists to persuade, to produce action in the listener, generally political (in an era of male suffrage). Opera provides a vivid contrast: “[I]n the genetic account of his work, it is indisputable that operatic singing first awoke him, in the America of Tyler and Polk, to the range and vibration of feeling that could be projected into art.” Not only is it more purely aesthetic, serving no obvious end beyond itself, but Matthiessen also genders it, marking it a

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64 Matthiessen 550-561.
Especially while he was "brooding over poems still to come," he knew himself subtly touched and challenged by his memories of [Marietta] Alboni. Indeed, he had never been able to write a bird song, not that of the mocking-bird in "Out of the cradle endlessly rocking," or that of the hermit-thrush in his tribute to Lincoln, without being continually attended by his "recollection of the deep emotion" that had affected him in the great soprano's singing. 65

Matthiessen completes this identification of Whitman with the feminine noting Burroughs’s remark that “there is something indescribable in his look, in his eye, as in that of the mother of many children” and noting that Whitman owed his temperament to “his own placid generous-hearted Van Velsor mother, from his far more intimate devotion to her than to his father.” In the title to his section, “The Ocean” Matthiessen chooses a subtitle from Whitman, “The solid marrying the liquid,” foregrounding this concern with unity, even though he makes little of it in the section itself, quoting, however, at some length from Specimen Days:

Even as a boy, I had the fancy, the wish, to write a piece, perhaps a poem about the sea-shore—that suggesting, dividing line, contact, junction, the solid marrying the liquid—that curious lurking something, (as doubtless every objective form finally becomes to the subjective spirit,) which means far more than its mere first sight, grand as that is—blending the real and the ideal, and each made portion of the other. Hours, days, in my Long Island youth and early manhood . . . I remember well, I felt that I must one day write a book expressing this liquid, mystic theme. Afterward, I recollect, how it came to me that instead of any special lyrical or epical or literary attempt, the sea-shore

65 Matthiessen 562.
should be an invisible influence, a pervading gauge and tally for me, in my composition.\textsuperscript{66}

Here Whitman's rhythm becomes, for Matthiessen, the primal, mystical means by which opposites are joined, described by Matthiessen as "sexual symbolism," because the influence is not the sea; rather, it is the seashore, the amorphous point at which opposites meet and mix. Whitman was, after all, a child of Long Island, not a sailor; the sea had meaning for him not in and of itself (as it would for Melville) but insofar as it interacts with the shore. Whitman, as Matthiessen notes, "delighted to conjure with the original name of his city when he said that 'Mannahatta means the place around which the hurried (or feverish) waters are continually coming or whence they are going." Further, commenting on Coleridge's "principle that the reconciliation of opposites is essential for the creation of any great art," Matthiessen notes that Whitman applied this principle explicitly in the above passage by his italicization of the word influence: "the invisible flowing-in of the waves upon his composition." Most important in all this is the elemental, primal implication of the sea.\textsuperscript{67}

Matthiessen uses his fourth section on Whitman, "Rhythm in its last ruggedness and decomposition," to discuss the disappearance of boundary between Whitman's poetry and prose, citing such examples as the "old time sea fight" in "Song of Myself" and "By Blue Ontario's Shore," both which had begun

\textsuperscript{66} Whitman, qtd. in Matthiessen 563-565.

\textsuperscript{67} Matthiessen 566, 568.
life as prose. Also in this section is an extended comparison of Whitman's and Gerard Manley Hopkins's poetic rhythms, with an inevitable discussion of their homosexual tendencies. What draws all this together is Matthiessen's earlier reading of Whitman's "Vision" where he makes Whitman's homosexuality and its "passivity" to stand for a primal state, infantile in its lack of distinction. Matthiessen notes Whitman's fluidity of movement between poetry and prose, indeed, the often utter lack of distinction between them, and juxtaposes to this a discussion of Whitman's sexuality, suggesting again the connection.

Included are Eliot's and Pound's dismissals that Whitman's verse had not enough rhythm to be anything but prose and that he was at his worse when following the "rules" of his time. Matthiessen also offers what I could term an "anti-nostalgic" position of Whitman's, in which he declared that the traditional verse forms were not fit for modern topics and dismisses them to the realm of light verse: "He felt that the restrictions of formal verse could not fit the great modern themes, the enlargement of the people's experiences, the advance of science, the new facts of industry; that for these . . . the muse must resume 'that other medium of expression, more flexible, more eligible,' soaring 'to the freer, vast, diviner heaven of prose.'"68 Perhaps, ironically, this anti-nostalgia is also about nostalgia for union. Whitman desires a more earthy, fundamental, radical, basic expression, fit to the times.

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68 Matthiessen 580-581.
More interesting is the theme that completes this section: the linkage Matthiessen implies, but does not explore, between Whitman's poetic rhythm and his sexuality. First there is Henry James's shift of opinion, which focuses on the poetry of Whitman's prose, especially Whitman's letters to Peter Doyle:

The mature Henry James found in Whitman's letters to Peter Doyle (reviewing them in 1898) qualities similar to those here, “the beauty of the natural,” “the man's own overflow” in “the love of life.” The expression of emotion is less self-conscious in the letters than in the hospital sketches.  

For the remainder of the section, Whitman and Gerard Manley Hopkins are paralleled in their rhythms and sexuality. Matthiessen, mostly letting Hopkins speak on the subject, rhetorically suggests and resists such a comparison, quoting correspondence between Hopkins and Robert Bridges:

It was always Hopkins' contention against Bridges' incredulity that his “sprung rhythm” was “the most natural of things,” since “it is the rhythm of common speech and of written prose, when rhythm is perceived in them.” It was indisputable, too, that Whitman's native instinct had rediscovered something similar to what Hopkins believed he had found . . . . Still there was all the difference in the world between Whitman's occasional unconscious approximations and Hopkins' deliberately planned and highly wrought effects.

This suggestion of similarity and resistance to it is paramount to the comparison, and what ultimately separates Hopkins from Whitman is a certain degree of self-consciousness, not only in terms of their craft, but also in

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69 Matthiessen 582.

70 Matthiessen 585-586.
Hopkins’s self-conscious protestations against Whitman:

And he confessed what he “should not otherwise have said, that I always knew in my heart Walt Whitman’s mind to be more like my own than any other man’s living. As he is a very great scoundrel this is not a pleasant confession. And this also makes me the more desirous to read him and the more determined I will not.” He must have been referring to Whitman’s homosexuality and his own avoidance of this latent strain in himself. For when he later sent Bridges his sonnet, “Harry Ploughman,” where this feeling rises closest to the surface in his pleasure in the liquid movement of the workman’s body, he hoped that there was not “anything like it in Walt Whitman, as perhaps there may be, and I should be sorry for that.”

In contrast to Hopkins’s self-consciousness, Whitman’s rhythm is depicted as happenstance and not always successful. Hopkins’s is “deliberately planned and highly wrought.” The implications of this for their sexualities are two-fold. As I have said elsewhere, Whitman’s sexuality was unconscious, almost premodern, left to develop in a culture that was, compared to Hopkins’s, relatively mute on the subject, not providing the consciousness of it that Hopkins’s culture did. Hopkins, on the other hand, comes from a burgeoning British Victorian construction of sexuality, whether or not he practiced it. Hopkins is also coming from the context of the Roman Catholic clergy, which foregrounds same-sex relations by explicitly condemning them, while creating a non-procreative, non-heterosexual place, celibacy, as an ideal, which, in fact, could provide space for same-sex expression within the clergy. Hopkins cannot help but be self-conscious of sexuality, perhaps to the point of impotence, from

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71 Matthiessen 585.
his British Victorian and Catholic vantage point. Whitman’s awareness of his sexuality reflects much of his contemporary American culture, lagging behind Europe, in many ways premodern and polymorphous. Hopkins cannot escape the shaping power of his culture, both personally and as a writer; Whitman the autodidact began life immune to them or in a premodern culture largely lacking them and develops a sense of his relation to them only later.

Matthiessen’s next section, “Landscapes projected masculine, full-sized and golden,” a discussion of Whitman’s relation to genre and landscape painters of the nineteenth century, was doubtless inspired by Matthiessen’s lover and life partner, painter Russell Cheney. Matthiessen attempts a comparison of Whitman’s poetry to the works of W.S. Mount, Jean François Millet, and Thomas Eakins. The extended comparison is sometimes strained and not always convincing, but Matthiessen’s rhetorical goal was to demonstrate that Whitman, like these painters, copied from nature and, more importantly, to demonstrate a difference from Eakins, especially, in Whitman’s depiction of the “stock-type,” a concept of representation that seeks to erase difference.

Most interesting here is Whitman’s later awareness of his work in relation to painting, especially his comment that “the Leaves are really only Millet in another form.” His attraction to Millet lay in Millet’s depiction of the common people, and Whitman took this to mean a depiction that was indeed
common, not unique or grotesque, in contrast to Whitman’s reaction to the local-color school of American literature:

When Hamlin Garland talked to him enthusiastically about the local-color school of Cable, Harris, and Mary Wilkins as the forerunner of powerful native art, Whitman took strenuous exception. He objected because these writers did not seem “content with the normal man,” whereas in all his coming and going among the camps of the Civil War he had been everywhere struck with “the decorum”—a word he liked to use—“of the common soldier, his good manners, his quiet heroism, his generosity, even his good, real grammar.” Those typical qualities of the farmer and the mechanic were obscured by emphasis on regional peculiarities, and Whitman was firm in saying that the novel or drama claiming to show our life “is false if it deals mainly or largely with abnormal or grotesque characters.”

The difference between Eakins and Whitman is precisely that “though Whitman and Eakins are alike in taking democratic character for their main theme, the poet broadly celebrates the sacredness of every human being, whereas the painter scrutinizes the traits of the specific individual before him.” And after a particularly detailed New Critical reading of the sound and sense of the funeral of the stage driver in “Song of Myself,” Matthiessen notes, “In its final form Whitman’s portrait is hardly that of an individual, but of what he would have called a ‘stock type.’ He would have considered its merits to consist in its suggestion of universal traits, in its being a genuine ‘sample of the life and death of workmen.’”

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72 Matthiessen 602, 603.

73 Matthiessen 609, 612.
Here we see Matthiessen’s ability to take a very vivid and concrete description in Whitman and read it as something not specifically detailed because, unlike the subjects of the local color school, it is not quirky. Like the imagined reader in chapter one, Matthiessen reads elision of difference in Whitman’s writing to serve his own modernist American purpose. This purpose is made clearer in the context of the entire discussion of Whitman in *American Renaissance*: the elision of difference, the joining of disparate models of inspiration in one poet all point to a nostalgia for a time before difference, and the nostalgia is not merely psychological but also the political yearning for the simplicity of artisan democracy in the 1850s. Arvin’s study is similarly nostalgic both psychologically and politically but with a future orientation. While Matthiessen constructed an aesthetic of democracy, rooted in past models, Arvin charts a future hope for democracy, rooted in the homoeroticism of Whitman’s poetry, which for Arvin symbolizes an infantile sexuality. Both Parrington and Santayana are drawn to Whitman as to what might be an unrealizable fantasy. But where Santayana denies that the leveling necessary for democracy can actually exist, for Parrington the fantasy is for an actual “golden age,” the recurrence of which is unlikely, but not finally impossible. And at the base of the modernist moment in Whitman criticism is Brooks, who embodies facets of all the other critics discussed in this chapter. The empty nostalgia of the later Brooks justifies Santayana’s aloof cultural critique,
Parrington's despair, and Matthiessen's esoteric program. Conversely, the early Brooks's forward-looking program for American culture provides a model for Parrington's hope for the resurrection of Enlightenment thought and practice, Arvin's hope for a fuller democracy rooted in the seeds of comradeship, and Matthiessen's aesthetic of democracy that implies a model for the future. Though Brooks's later work has the final word, it was his early work that inspired half a century of critical optimism.

With this chapter a consideration of identity and union have come full circle. The critics discussed in this final chapter are concerned with issues that have recurred throughout this study. In the first chapter I explored post-Civil War revisions in *Leaves of Grass*, especially with an eye towards Union and Reconstruction, the healing of divisions, the inclusion of diversity and, more sinisterly sometimes, the hegemony of Northern industrial capital. My goal was to explain how such a seeming aesthetic and political radical could garner any attention in the conservative Gilded Age, and I demonstrated, by examining a few of revisions of *Leaves of Grass* from that period, that it is possible to view Whitman's later revisions, specifically his "imperial I" and inclusion and elision of difference within himself as useful to this Northern
hegemony. After exploring critical opinion on voice and identity in *Leaves of Grass*, and whether difference is included in Whitman's "I" or obliterated by it, I posited that the excision of two passages from "The Sleepers"—"Black Lucifer" and "O hot-cheek'd and blushing!"—would appeal to the Northern reader because they eliminate irreconcilable difference. Similarly, Whitman's excisions of three poems in the "Calamus" cluster—"Who is Now Reading This?" "I Thought That Knowledge Alone Would Suffice," and "Hours Continuing Long"—could represent the renunciation of shame equated with difference so that he may construct a new consensus in the wake of the Civil War. Finally, I argued that in "Song of the Banner at Daybreak" from *Drum Taps* Whitman specifically addresses the threat of discordant voices on the eve of the Civil War, silencing the voice of the father in favor of the voices of the child and the banner, epitomizing the infantile and the prelinguistic. In the present chapter, twentieth-century critics were drawn to Whitman's consolidation of difference as an antidote to the disfigurations of industrial modernity, which was hastened, it must be admitted, by the outcome of the Civil War.

The nineteenth-century critics discussed in chapter three found in Whitman a sense of gendered division, which allowed them to appropriate Whitman into a masculinist, high-culture canon, deliberately set against what they saw as the popular feminine culture. This reaction developed over time.
Initially, the genteel and the academic were mutually implicated, as in the writings of John Seely Hart and Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who retained a paternalistic relationship to the cultural products and positions of women, though their reactions to Whitman differed. Next in the progression was Edmund Clarence Stedman, who alternately decried and embraced the "feminization" of genteel culture, which was its inability to pay its own way in a "masculine" entrepreneurial world and claimed Whitman as part of a masculine poetical tradition. Charles F. Richardson, hoping to speak as a truly "American" critic, creates a New England literary heritage, dominated by clergymen, as he deprecates the work of women. Again, though he tries to develop a strong American critical voice, his consideration of Whitman is occasioned by British attention, and Whitman finds an uncomfortable place at best in Richardson's masculinist canon. The philologists and professors of the later part of the century also made Whitman part of various politically inclined projects, John Livingston Lowes "manly" Anglo-Saxon canon emerging from the uneasy peace of World War I, the Christian socialist project of Vida Dutton Scudder, which re-implicates the academic in the reforming impulses of the genteel, and the divided artisan and aristocratic nostalgia of Bliss Perry. The twentieth-century critics in this chapter also saw culture bifurcated between figurations of the masculine and feminine. In Whitman they found an aesthetic force that rejoined masculine and feminine, and for some, Whitman's joining
force was archetypically feminine, representing infantile union with the maternal.

Finally, the Victorian British critics in chapter two, Symonds, Saintsbury and Dowden, like the American modernists, found in Whitman a nostalgic antidote to the disfigurations of industrial modernity, a sense of homosocial unity, while at the same time using Whitman to sketch out a scientific system of ethics. Symonds was the first to claim Whitman as "Greek," in ways that simultaneously sought to chart out an organic modernist ethics, rooted in scientific knowledge rather than revelation, as well as protect the erotic privileges of homosociality. Saintsbury wholeheartedly endorsed Symonds's connection of Whitman with the Greek as an emblem of homosocial privilege. Dowden, however, distanced himself from Symonds's trope of the "Greek" and all the baggage of inequality it implied, because he saw a radical democracy in Whitman's comradeship. Twentieth-century critics in this chapter also recognized the political valences of comradeship, as well as its psychological implications. Arvin finds in Whitman's homoeroticism the seed for the future of democracy, while Brooks makes Whitman subconsciously bisexual, ensuring the union of the masculine and the feminine in one person.

Each critical representation of Whitman presented here, like every other representation of Whitman before it and since, is necessarily partial and represents the critic at least as much as it does Whitman. The years leading
up to and following the centenary of Whitman's death have not seen the exhaustion of critical attention, but its continuation. These later critical evaluations of Whitman have mostly been rehabilitations of Whitman from the left, including Robert Martin's *The Homosexual Tradition in American Poetry*, Betsy Erkkila's *Whitman the Political Poet*, M. Jimmie Killingsworth's *Whitman's Poetry of the Body*, and Michael Moon's *Disseminating Whitman*. Considerations from the right include Kenneth Lynn's *Air-Line to Seattle* and David Reynolds's *Walt Whitman's America*. The absolute claims of both sides in the opposed rehabilitative projects, however, tend to misrepresent Whitman to some degree, making him either too much the "Good Gray Poet," repressing his sexuality and commitment to radical democracy, or too much the "Good Gay Marxist," ignoring not only the anachronism of this construction, but also his disdain of abolition and his commitment to Manifest Destiny. The person of Whitman and his texts are never used up because their pluralistic meanings provide much material for acting out by generations of critics. And this is precisely as Whitman intended it in his seduction of the reader, providing for his endless successions of readers a place that each can fill in turn.

My pronouncements on Whitman's sexuality have been somewhat tentative, not because I deny its importance or its existence but because I am convinced that, in its many manifestations over the many editions of *Leaves of Grass*, it cannot be equated easily with modern homosexuality. I believe that
recent Whitman criticism and recent queer theory have overreached in their privileging of the author's modern subjectivity over history, even though I am sympathetic with the political implications of their work. Like David Halperin in his study of ancient Greece, I am inclined to keep in mind the "otherness" of the past and not make easy assumptions about congruities between the past and the present. 74 Though I affirm that Whitman's vision of "comradeship" has sexual roots, I argue that it is not a minoritizing discourse, not aiming towards the modern homosexual, but a universalizing discourse, positing "loving comradeship" as an antidote to masculine competition and a necessary foundation for the success of democracy. But at the same time my reticence in drawing parallels between Whitman's vision of comradeship and modern homosexuality is challenged by the vision of contemporary queer theorists, especially those who write about Whitman and nineteenth-century American culture. These theorists remind me that I have found myself unable to answer questions I asked when I began this project. For example, I have not accounted for the silence of Whitman's contemporaries on the obvious homoerotic implications of much of his poetry. I am still not sure if the silence signifies a pre-modern blindness towards the possible physical implications of male friendship or outright repression and, hence, the beginnings of modern homophobia.

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74 David Halperin, One Hundred Years of Homosexuality (New York: Routledge, 1989) 26-27.
A recent work exploring sex in the writings of one of Whitman's contemporaries is James Creech's *Closet Writing/Gay Reading: The Case of Melville's Pierre*. Based on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's distinction in *Between Men* between judgmental "kitsch attribution" ("what demented person could have created that?") and appreciative "camp recognition" ("that depravity was created for me!"), Creech posits a "camp" reading of Melville's *Pierre*, privileging his subject position as a late-twentieth-century gay man. Creech takes what is traditionally read as the heterosexual interest plot, and transforms it into a homosexual incest plot, between Pierre and his dead father. In preparation for this reading, Creech surveys queer theory and debates Halperin, leading him to assert that, if it is useful to acknowledge the "otherness" of the past, it is also useful to project a modern "perversion" on the past.75

But if Creech is asserting that *Pierre* is "closeted" writing, the same cannot always be said of *Leaves of Grass*, especially of earlier versions. *Leaves of Grass* from 1855 through 1865 is far from closeted, perhaps because Whitman at that time could not conceive of the closet; that is, he saw no homo/hetero dichotomy. Certainly, and especially in *Drum Taps*, the homoeroticism is ushered towards the closet, but not always entirely into it.

While Creech posits that Melville goes from self-awareness of a proto-homosexual identity to the textual action of encoding and closeting, Whitman goes from textual (and probable physical) action without a discursive awareness (in the Foucauldian sense) to awareness and a lesser degree of closeting. Melville's textual expression of his sexuality is a product of his sense of the depravity of it, according to Creech, while Whitman's earliest textual expressions of his are normative and universalizing.

A problematic assumption of Creech's is his deployment of the conventional language of ardent friendship as a "cover" for homosexual writers. Here he still presupposes an unproblematic modern homosexual/heterosexual dichotomy, never exploring how the two might overlap. While it is certain that many ardent same-sex friendships did not find physical expression, it is possible that the ones that did were taken for granted. And this naïve presupposition of the homo/hetero dichotomy is a problem in much of our contemporary queer theory. We need to discover in nineteenth-century America (which most certainly lags behind Europe) how far the homosocial included the homoerotic. I cannot now begin to say if this overlapping I imagine existed or how we may begin to discover its extent, but I do think that Creech's insistence on "repression" in Melville's case perpetuates a dichotomy that can argue that the language does or does not

76 Creech 66.
belie physical expression. It is much more radical, as well as honest, to say that we don't know. The traditional answer to the ardent language is "there is no evidence to suggest that these relationships were physical." The corollary—"There is no evidence to suggest that they were not physical"—is rarely raised. What is needed here are not suppositions based on our own modern subjectivities but more historical research. In The Tender Passion, volume two of his broad and well-researched The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud, historian Peter Gay does a fairly good job of exploring how these discourses might overlap, in the direction of what I suggest.  

Particularly appropriate to this discussion is the 1836 diary of Albert Dodd, a student in Hartford, Connecticut. The diary demonstrates the interchangeability of gender in the ardent language, a point not lost on Dodd. Nevertheless, as Gay points out, Dodd feels no guilt about these emotions:

What is beyond doubt is that Albert Dodd, discovering his capacious gift for erotic investment in the first days of Queen Victoria's reign, loved men and women indiscriminately without undue self-laceration, without visible private guilt or degrading public shame.  

Creech speaks of naïveté about "homosexual relations" before the Wilde trial, but how much of this is mere ignorance of what was going on as opposed to how widespread was behavior that was not yet formally classified and forbidden?


78 Gay 211-212.
It is possible that people shocked and outraged by the Wilde trial were untroubled by and engaging in such behavior fifty years earlier, and we may never know the answer. To posit that there were gay people before the word was coined is to limit the possibilities of sexual expression to those Creech wants to identify. Certainly, Creech makes a good case that such textual closeting occurred later in the century, but I am skeptical about how fruitful this strategy is in the first half of the century. Certainly Whitman closets his texts as the century progresses, but I think that early on neither Whitman nor his earlier readers recognize the homoeroticism as threatening.

Another recent and prominent work that explores, among other things, the link between sex and texts in the nineteenth century is Michael Moon’s *Disseminating Whitman: Revision and Corporeality in Leaves of Grass*. Moon argues that the first four editions of *Leaves of Grass*

> counter the privatizing, standardizing, domesticizing, misogynist, and homophobic social arrangements of industrial, commercial, and (in the post-Civil War era) corporate capitalism that eventually replaced earlier arrangements. 79

The difference between Creech’s work and Moon’s *Disseminating Whitman* can be boiled down to this: Creech’s Melville is writing for a “coterie,” relying on the trope of Melville’s and the reader’s knowing “winks”; Moon’s Whitman, though self-censoring in his revisions, attempted at subversive effects throughout his society.

79 Moon 10.
Moon attempts this analysis of revision, self-censorship, and subversion by reading specific poems as emblems of their representative editions. Though Moon's psychoanalytic readings of the representative poems are sophisticated, he fails to motivate these readings by placing them in specific historical contexts. The lack of context behind Moon's psychoanalytic argument is most obvious in his neglecting to provide any motivation behind the profound shifts from chapter to chapter: from fluidity of identity and specularity to the deep divisions resulting from the oedipal conflict, to depictions of decomposition, to the privileging of multiple phalluses besides the paternal phallus.

Sometimes, Moon does set his readings in historical contexts so that he may cast Whitman unambiguously as sexually and politically radical, with little sense of the complications involved. Admittedly, Moon's discussion of Whitman's subversive presentations in the early fiction and the 1855 edition are preceded by the introduction's discussion of the developing nineteenth-century discourses reifying sex, gender, and class. Reading Whitman's self-censorship in the first edition as subversive discourse, however, tells only part of the story. Whitman's self-censorship also made the radical invisible and enabled a century of conventionalizing criticism of Whitman that has only recently begun to be undone. In other places, Moon withholds historical context at some points in his argument in order to make his point, and then presents that context later. Moon alternately presupposes Whitman's
progressive political stances (anti-racist and anti-sexist, then anti-phallic) without ever problematizing the political implications of Whitman's conflicted statements on slavery, abolition, and emancipation.

Moon similarly bypasses the political implications of Whitman's imperial "I." Sketching out the poles of the argument over the imperial "I" between democratic inclusiveness and a "psychotic" narcissism that appropriates others to the self, Moon correctly notes that neither pole of this argument is adequate. But, rather than viewing the imperial "I" as a symbol of Manifest Destiny and the pathology of democracy that elides the differences of its minorities, Moon reads the relation between Whitman's "I" and an androgynous land of America as an example of fluidity. This is not to say that Moon's view is incorrect, only partial. It is part of Whitman's technique and style to use pronouns without referents, allowing diverse readers to identify with and connect to these pronouns.

But I think that the error both Creech's and Moon's works share is an over-privileging of subjectivity. Moon, a leading "queer theorist" writing in the early nineties, the heyday of radical queer activism, posits a purely radical Whitman whose work counters "the privatizing, standardizing, domesticizing, misogynist, and homophobic social arrangements of industrial, commercial, and (in the post-Civil War era) corporate capitalism that eventually replaced
earlier arrangements." I do not believe that Moon is entirely wrong, but I do think it is extreme and unsupported. Certainly American social arrangements were becoming privatized, standardized, domesticized, and so forth as the century wore on, but I think Newton Arvin demonstrated that Whitman was frequently seduced by these development and did not radically oppose them. And Creech, by his own admission, has written a "professional 'coming-out book,'" opposed to the character of his previous writing: "[t]he critical voice in which I had always written before simply forbade the dubious complex of self-knowing and identification which has subtended the present project from the outset." As a result, Creech, though he has taken much time to explore the field of "queer theory" or "gay and lesbian studies," has not assimilated its important lessons, leaving a naive subjectivity in his study that would be excusable in a 15-year-old text like Robert Martin's *The Homosexual Tradition in American Poetry*.

As my study has shown, there is no dearth of readers who have found themselves in *Leaves of Grass*, and the real illuminating drama is the ways these readers have found themselves there, rather than how I see myself reflected. Indeed, we have seen the ways in which readers I can identify as homosexual—Symonds, Santyana, Arvin, and Matthiessen—found covert ways

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80 Moon 10.

81 Creech 186.
to address and appreciate the reflection they found in Whitman. The reflection Whitman's contemporary American readers saw was quite different from what the twentieth century saw. The further work this study calls for is careful research and scholarship, in the vein of Peter Gay's, rather than subjective critical exercises seeking to find ourselves in Whitman. Particularly, I now feel compelled to research further nineteenth-century American reaction to particular poems that we identify today as homoerotic to discover if these readers were afraid of articulating what they saw as shameful or if they were unable to see what we see, either because it was not codified but taken for granted or because it was simply unthinkable. Just as Peter Gay found in Albert Dodd's journal a window to a mode of existence foreign to us, so I expect that the further study I have outlined will provide further historical insight into how the nineteenth century was like or unlike ours.
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