EMERSONIAN IDEAS IN WHITMAN'S EARLY WRITINGS

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THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the North Texas State Teachers College in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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Denton, Texas
August, 1948
PREFACE

The subject of this thesis was suggested by Whitman's contradictory statements concerning his early knowledge of Emerson, and by the emphasis which several Whitman scholars place on the importance of establishing Whitman's early debt to Emerson. The first chapter reviews the chief external evidences of Whitman's knowledge of Emerson. The remaining chapters present the significant ideas which appeared in the writings of both authors before 1855, when Whitman published his first edition of Leaves of Grass. I have attempted not so much to prove Emerson's early influence as to discover how much Whitman could have learned from Emerson if he had had no other source.

I have attempted to use all of both authors' works which were written by 1855. Of Emerson's writings, I have used volumes I, II, III, IV, and IX of the Centenary Edition, edited by E. W. Emerson. These volumes contain Nature and Emerson's early addresses and lectures, his first and second series of essays (1841 and 1844), Representative Men (1850), and the poems of 1847.

My most important source of Whitman's early prose has been the 1855 edition of Leaves of Grass -- the author's preface as well as the poems. I have been obliged to use the
facsimile reprint of this edition because the original was unavailable, but this has been no handicap since the text is the same. Occasionally I have referred to the unnamed poems of this edition by the names which they were later given, but unless otherwise specified all quotations from Leaves of Grass are as they appeared in this first edition.

Except for the preface to Leaves of Grass, the most fruitful prose source of Whitman's early Emersonian ideas has been the manuscript notebooks printed in Emory Holloway's Un- collected Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman. Two other valuable sources have been the "Notes for Lectures" in Clifton Joseph Furness's Walt Whitman's Workshop and the "Preparatory Reading and Thought" from Dr. R. M. Bucke's Notes and Frag- ments, reprinted in The Complete Writings of Walt Whitman. I have used the Complete Writings also for the few later poems which I have cited, and have made occasional references to Whitman's early journalistic writing printed in Holloway's collection and in The Gathering of the Forces, edited by Cleveland Rodgers and John Black.

I have tried to be specific about the dates of Whitman's early notes. I have always given the date of a reference if it is known, except in a few citations from The Gathering of the Forces: the title in this case indicates the date rather definitely, since this work contains only editorials written in 1846 and 1847, while Whitman was editor of the Brooklyn Daily Eagle. Occasionally, where the date is not known for
several consecutive references from Bucke's *Notes and Fragments* or from Furness's *Walt Whitman's Workshop*, I have omitted the repetition of this information, since I have referred only to the parts of these books which contain materials thought to have been written by 1855. In all cases where I have cited works known to have been written after that year, I have been careful to give the date of their publication, and the probable date of their composition if that is pertinent.

I have emphasized ideas, but I have tried to indicate similarities of style wherever they exist. I have used parallel quotations as often as the similarity is so definite that it suggests Whitman's familiarity with a certain passage in Emerson's writings.

The philosophical nature of the material handled and the purpose of this thesis have combined to multiply the difficulties of compilation and interpretation. I have been conscious of the awkwardness of citing long series of quotations concerning the same idea, but have been unable to avoid the difficulty, since the mystical nature of Emerson's and Whitman's ideas makes the evidence which they offer valuable through its very volume. I have been conscious, too, of the danger of exaggerating similarity of ideas, since I have naturally looked for likenesses. I hope that I have not distorted either author's real meaning to accommodate it to the purpose of my research.
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CHAPTER I

EXTERNAL EVIDENCE

Tracing Emerson's influence on Whitman is of course a tremendous undertaking. This attempt does not pretend to be exhaustive, or to offer conclusive proof that Whitman gained any given idea from Emerson. Transcendentalism, the spirit of expansiveness, Oriental ideas of the divinity of man and of the presence of God in man and nature -- all were in the air. Whitman might have arrived independently at any of the beliefs which he held in common with Emerson, and he was doubtless influenced, directly or through other channels, by the English Romanticists, the German transcendentalists, the Quakers -- numerous thinkers other than Emerson. The fact remains, however, that many of Whitman's ideas are strikingly similar to Emerson's; and there are external indications of influence. This thesis will be an attempt to gather together the important ideas set forth in Whitman's early writing which are to be found also in Emerson's lectures, essays, and poems written before 1855. It will attempt to show what Whitman might have gained from Emerson if he had had no other source, and if a creative intellect had not the power of originating its own ideas. This chapter will set forth briefly the facts from the lives of the two men which deal with their knowledge of one another, with the possibility of influence.
An important and well-known fact from late in Whitman's life needs to be disposed of early, out of chronological order, because what one makes of it concerns the purpose of this whole research. If it were necessary to believe absolutely what the sick, aging poet, his memory weakened by paralysis, told some of his friends about Emerson's influence, then all seeming similarities of the two authors' works would have to be marked off as coincidental, and no influence might be traced. It is precisely because Whitman disliked the idea of being influenced, as a slur to his creativeness and originality, that he preferred sometimes to believe what he wrote to Kennedy in 1887:

> It is of no importance whether I had read Emerson before starting Leaves of Grass or not. The fact happens to be positively that I had not . . . .

> If I were to unbosom to you in the matter I should say that I never cared so very much for Emerson's writings, prose or poems, but from his first personal visit and two hours with me (in Brooklyn in 1866 or '66?) I had a strange attachment and love for him and his contact, talk, company, magnetism. I welcomed him deepest and always -- yet it began and continued on his part, quite entirely. HE always sought ME. We probably had a dozen (possibly twenty) of these meetings, talks, walks, etc."

There are several counts against this old man's fancy. The first is Whitman's generally recognized tendency, in his old age, to make a legend of himself, and perhaps really to forget. The second is his own testimony of his debt to

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Emerson, summed up in his well-known saying, from an earlier time when his memory was more to be depended on: "I was simmering, simmering, simmering; Emerson brought me to a boil."²

The time indicated in this sentence, which Trowbridge believes was spoken to him in 1860, is the summer of 1854. Whitman was working on a building job then, and carrying a book to read while he ate his lunch. On one of these days, he told Trowbridge, he discovered Emerson's writing, and he always took it with him after that. Emerson helped him to "find himself." And in response to Trowbridge's question whether he would have "come to himself" without Emerson, he replied: "Yes, but it would have taken longer."³ Trowbridge says, then, that when "some of the later friends of Whitman" argue that Whitman had written his first Leaves before he read Emerson, "When they urge his own authority for their contention, I can only reply that he told me distinctly the contrary, when his memory was fresher."⁴

Trowbridge gives an illustration of what happened to Whitman's memory, which seems a sufficient argument for discrediting anything Whitman may have claimed in his middle years which is not borne out by the facts of his earlier

³Ibid.
⁴Ibid.
life. In "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads," first published in 1884, Whitman gave credit to the Civil War for the strength, the success, even the very existence of his writing —

"Without these three or four years [1862 to 1865] and the experiences they gave, Leaves of Grass would not now be existing." Whereas he had only to look at his title-pages [Trowbridge says] to see that not his first, nor his second, but his third edition, comprising the larger and by far the most important part of his poetic work, was published in 1860, months before the first gun of the war was fired or a single state had seceded. After this, we need not wonder that he forgot he had read Emerson before writing his first Leaves.

There are many other bits of external evidence which indicate that Whitman knew Emerson's works before the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* was published. The fact that Whitman sent Emerson a presentation copy of his first edition would seem sufficient in itself to prove that he already admired the man he was soon to call "master," and knew his writing. Emerson's answering letter, with which Whitman rather thoughtlessly advertised his second edition, surely indicates by its very enthusiasm that Emerson recognized in Whitman's first poems ideas which were to him of paramount importance. Emerson wrote, of the *Leaves*:

5 "A Backward Glance" is available now in Walt Whitman's *Backward Glances*, edited by Sculley Bradley and John A. Stevenson. The sentence which Trowbridge quotes appears on page 46.

I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed. I am very happy in reading it, as great power makes us happy. . . .

I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere, for such a start. I rubbed my eyes a little, to see if this sunbeam were no illusion; but the solid sense of the book is a sober certainty. It has the best merits, namely, of fortifying and encouraging.7

It was in Whitman's open letter of reply, published in the 1856 edition of the Leaves, that he called Emerson "master" -- "Master, I am a man who has perfect faith. Master, we have not come through centuries, caste, heroism, fables, to halt in this land today."8 The letter is a plea for a more vigorous American literature, and a tribute to Emerson's movement in that direction:

Those shores you found. I say you have led The States there -- have led me there. I say that none has ever done or ever can do, a greater deed for The States, than your deed. . . .

Receive, dear Master, these statements and assurances through me, for all the young men, and for an earnest that we know none before you, but the best following you; and that we demand to take your name into our keeping, and that we understand what you have indicated, and find the same indicated in ourselves, and that we will stick to it and enlarge upon it through These States.9

Whitman's publication of Emerson's letter of praise naturally shocked Emerson, who indicated that his comments would not have been so wholly favorable if he had dreamed

7 This letter appears on p. 7, before the editor's introduction, in the facsimile edition of Leaves of Grass, Portland, Maine, Thomas Bird Mosher and William Francis Gable, 1919. All references to Leaves of Grass are to this edition.
8 Quoted by George Rice Carpenter, Walt Whitman, p. 74.
9 Ibid., pp. 74 and 75.
that they were to be so misused. The position of champion thus thrust upon Emerson was made doubly awkward by the addition, in the second edition of the Leaves, of much material which Emerson had never read, and to which he, like many other readers, objected. The most famous of Whitman's several meetings with Emerson is probably the walk on Boston Common in 1861, when Emerson stated his objections to Whitman's treatment of sex, and suggested omitting several objectionable passages from the second edition, and from the new third edition, of the Leaves. Whitman wrote, years later, an account of their meeting:

Each point of Emerson's statement was unanswerable, no judge's charge ever more complete and convincing, I could never hear the points better put -- and then I felt down in my soul the clear and unmistakable conviction to disobey all, and pursue my own way.

Whitman was especially anxious in his old age that it be understood that Emerson had objected to his poems, not because he thought them immoral, but because he thought that their treatment of sex would limit their influence and sale, would be misinterpreted and made to give them a bad name. "Emerson didn't say anything in the Leaves was bad; no; he only said people would insist upon thinking some things bad."

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11 Walt Whitman, The Complete Writings of Walt Whitman, edited by Richard Maurice Bucke, V, 25 and 27. Whitman said that he wrote this account twenty-one years after the meeting.

12 Horace Traubel, With Whitman in Camden, III, 321.
In what is perhaps his fullest statement on the subject, Whitman explained to Traubel both Emerson's objections to his poems and his own refusal to act upon them:

"Emerson's objections to the outcast passages of Leaves of Grass," said Whitman tonight, "were neither moral or literary, but were given with an eye to my worldly success. He believed the book would sell — said that the American people should know the book; yes, would know it but for its sex handicap. . . . Emerson's position has been misunderstood; he offered absolutely no spiritual argument against the poetry exactly as it stood. . . . he did not see that if I had cut sex out I might just as well have cut everything out — the full scheme would no longer exist — it would have been violated in its most sensitive spot." 13

But if Emerson did not object morally to Whitman's treatment of sex, he did, nevertheless, object. And he objected to other things. Never again was his expressed opinion of Whitman as a writer to be so wholeheartedly enthusiastic as it had been in that first letter of praise — and even then Emerson had thought reservations, if he had not expressed them. In 1856 he wrote, in a letter to Carlyle:

One book, last summer, came out in New York, a nondescript monster, which yet had terrible eyes and buffalo strength, and was indisputably American — which I thought to send you, but the book throve so badly with a few to whom I showed it, and wanted good morals so much, that I never did. Yet I believe now again, I shall. It is called Leaves of Grass, —— was written and printed by a journeyman printer in Brooklyn, New York, named Walter Whitman, and after you have looked into it, if you think, as you may, that it is only an auctioneer's inventory of a warehouse, you can light your pipe with it.14

13 Ibid., I, 50. Whitman had made some modifications, however, when his poems were published in England.

14 The Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson, II, 251.
Emerson was to criticize Whitman again for his "inventories." John Burroughs recorded in his notebook for December, 1870, the following remark:

Walt said a friend of his, Mr. Marvin, met Emerson in Boston the other day and when Walt was mentioned Mr. Emerson said, "Yes, Walt [?] sends me his books. But tell Walt I am not satisfied, not satisfied. I expect him -- to make -- the songs of the -- nation -- but he seems to be contented to --- make the inventories." Walt laughed and said it tickled him much. It was capital. But it did not disturb him at all. "I know what I am about better than Emerson does. Yet I love to hear what the gods have to say."¹⁵

Emerson thought so little of Whitman as a poet -- at least as a popular poet -- that he omitted his works from the Parnassus of American poetry published in 1874.¹⁶ In 1877, Emerson said of Whitman: "I thought he had some merit at one time: there was a good deal of promise in his first edition -- but he is a wayward, fanciful man."¹⁷ -- and he went on to criticize Whitman for his loudness and his immature behavior at their recent meeting in New York. Yet Emerson rated Whitman high as a force in developing American literature. In his journal for 1863, Emerson had written, under the heading of "Good out of evil": "One must thank the genius of Brigham Young for the creation of Salt Lake City. . . . And one must thank Walt Whitman for service to American literature in the Appalachian enlargement of his outline and treatment."¹⁸

¹⁵Clara Barrus, editor, Life and Letters of John Burroughs, I, 144.

¹⁶Ibid., 179.

¹⁷Carpenter, Days with Walt Whitman, p. 166.

¹⁸Ralph Waldo Emerson, Journals, IX, 540.
Even more valuable than Emerson's comments on Whitman are Whitman's own statements about his relationship with Emerson. In 1872, in a letter to Dowden, Whitman wrote:

Emerson has just been this way (Baltimore and Washington) lecturing. He maintains the same attitude -- draws on the same themes -- as twenty-five years ago. It all seems to me quite attenuated (the first drawing of a good pot of tea, you know, and Emerson's was the heavenly herb itself -- but what must one say to a second, and even a third or fourth infusion?) I send you a newspaper report of his lecture here a night or two ago. It is a fair sample. 19

As Gohdes points out, this passage seems to indicate that Whitman was familiar with Emerson's "attitude" and "theme" not only before 1855, but by about 1847. "Moreover, there is no reason for doubting the accuracy of the date assigned, because the statement is almost unique in having been made prior to the time when mental disintegration consequent upon his paralysis had set in." 20

There are several mentions of Emerson in Whitman's early writing, and several other indications of his acquaintance with Emerson's works. In an editorial in the Brooklyn Eagle for December 15, 1847, Whitman quotes from the essay, "Spiritual Laws," which he calls "one of Ralph Waldo Emerson's inimitable lectures." 21 An early poem entitled "Pictures," written almost certainly at the very beginning of the 1850's,


indicates Whitman's familiarity with Emerson the lecturer -- "and there, tall and slender, stands Ralph Waldo Emerson, of New England, at the lecturer's desk, lecturing..." A note in the margin of a magazine for May, 1847, jotted down probably in the early fifties, mentions "the superiority of Emerson's writings." Two clipped newspaper notices of the publication of Emerson's *English Traits*, found among Whitman's personal belongings, indicate that in 1856 Whitman was eagerly following Emerson's career as an author.

Cohdes points out how much information about Emerson Whitman could have gathered from the *Democratic Review* during the time while he was one of its contributors, and stresses the importance of such a source, since Whitman is known to have gained much of his information from magazines. From 1841 to 1845, the *Review* published criticisms of *Nature* and of Emerson's poems, and several articles containing incidental references -- articles on philosophy and religion.

During the Civil War, before Whitman began to minimize his indebtedness to Emerson, he received letters of introduction from him, to Sumner and Chase, and money with which to buy small gifts for hospitalized soldiers.

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22Emory Holloway, "Whitman's Embryonic Verse," *Southwest Review, X*, July, 1925, p. 38
23Whitman, *Complete Writings*, IX, 159
24Cohdes, *op. cit.*., pp. 85 and 86
25Ibid., p. 82
26Ibid., p. 87
Whitman's second attitude toward Emerson was an attitude of defiance, almost -- of reluctance to admit influence. Yet even during this period, Moore believes, Emerson's influence is plainly visible:

Emerson is the great man who infected Whitman with pregnant thought. A search through Whitman's prose and verse reveals that no other writer, past or present, had a remotely comparable influence upon him. Emerson and his writings are never long out of Whitman's mind -- conscious or subconscious. He preoccupies Whitman even in the period of the disclaimer quoted above.27

Whitman's typical attitude during this "period of the disclaimer" is expressed in "Emerson's Books (The Shadows of Them)," which now appears among the "Notes Left Over" in Whitman's "Collect." Here Whitman criticizes Emerson's writing as being too concentrated in thought, too conscious in style. Emerson tends to overvalue form and conceits at the expense of power, Whitman says, in a criticism which contradicts all usual opinions of Emerson's writing. It is significant to note that if Whitman actually did not read Emerson until after 1855, as he sometimes claimed, he was hardly a "youngster;" he was at least thirty-seven!

The reminiscence that years ago I began like most youngsters to have a touch (though it came late, and was only on the surface) of Emerson - on - the - brain - that I read his writings reverently and address'd him in print as "Master," and for a month or so thought of him as such -- I retain not only with composure, but positive satisfaction. I have noticed that most young people of eager minds pass through this stage of exercise.28

28 Whitman, Complete Writings, V, 270.
Then comes Whitman's greatest tribute to Emerson, perhaps the greatest tribute that could be made, surely the best possible explanation of Whitman's changing attitude toward Emerson. Whitman was a pupil of Emerson; he, certainly, had no desire to be "any man's mere follower": he set up independently for himself, and in so doing sometimes disclaimed too violently any dependence on his teacher --

The best part of Emersonianism is, it breeds the giant that destroys itself. Who wants to be any man's mere follower? lurks behind every page. No teacher ever taught, that so provided for his pupil's setting up independently -- no truer evolutionist.29

It is not a contradiction, then, to say that Whitman was more truly a disciple of Emerson, being different, than he would have been if he had followed Emerson slavishly. Emerson could have no disciple in the usual sense, for to believe in his expressed beliefs is to believe, not in him, but in oneself. This, certainly, Whitman did.

In all his seeming efforts to free himself from the charge of literary discipleship, Whitman seldom seemed to have any hard feeling for Emerson the man. In 1861, Whitman dined with the Emersons and recorded this comment: "The best of the occasion was the sight of Emerson himself . . . . a healthy color in the cheeks, and good light in the eyes, cheery expression, and just the amount of talking that best suited, namely, a word or short phrase only where needed, and almost always with a smile.30

29 Ibid. 30 Ibid., p. 24
Whitman was conscious always of Emerson's presence, and of his expression. He spoke somewhere of the pleasure he derived from watching Emerson's face -- of Emerson's "clear-peering vision." In his old age, Whitman spoke to Traubel of Emerson's "bright" manner, and told him that "When you looked at Emerson it never occurred to you that there could be any villainies in the world."  

Whitman told Traubel that Emerson's main attraction for him had always been personal, not literary -- "The world does not know what our relations really were -- they think of our friendship as a literary friendship: it was a bit that but it was mostly something else -- it was certainly more than that--for I loved Emerson for his personality and I always felt that he loved me for something I brought him from the rush of the big cities and the mass of men."  

In his talks with Traubel, Whitman stressed his personal relations with Emerson. In the ten months during which Traubel recorded Whitman's conversations, Whitman mentioned Emerson more than two hundred times -- seemed particularly eager that the world know his affection and admiration for Emerson the man. He stressed especially his use of Emerson's letter, and Emerson's grounds of complaint about his Children of Adam poems, taking care to make it clear that they had no personal hard feelings. Whitman felt somewhat freer to criticize Emerson's writings: he called Emerson's expressed ideas of

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31 Traubel, op. cit., II, 230.
32 Ibid., 106.
33 Ibid., I, 61.
love "a little bookish," and remarked that Emerson was never wholly democratic. "But I hate to allow anything that qualifies Emerson." Emerson is great -- oh! very great: I have not attempted to decide how great, how vast, how subtle: but very, very: he was a far-reaching force: a star of the first, the very first, magnitude maybe: without a doubt that.

Whitman told Traubel: "Read all the Emerson you can -- it is the best preparatory soil. Emerson is not conclusive on all points, but no man more helps to a conclusion."

Emerson helped Whitman to a conclusion, and Whitman came back in the end, as in the beginning, to the acknowledgement of his debt. The reasons for his middle period of denial are not hard to find; some are in Emerson's behavior -- his reticence, his withdrawal of praise and approval -- "I seem to have various feelings about Emerson but I am always loyal at heart. Emerson gratified me as a young man by what he did -- he sometimes tantalized me as an old man by what he failed to do."

Whitman told Traubel that he had met Emerson "twenty or more times," indicating in this larger estimate than the "dozen (possibly twenty)" visits he had mentioned to Kennedy, his willingness now to be indebted to Emerson, his eagerness that their association be known. When Traubel

34 Ibid., II, 52. 35 Ibid., I, 23. 36 Ibid., III, 185.
37 Ibid., I, 256. 38 Ibid., II, 69. 39 Ibid.
reminded Whitman that he had called Emerson "master," Whitman's answer was very different from his earlier reference to the "month or so when he had thought of him as such."40

"So I did -- and master he was for me then. But I got my roots stronger in the earth. . . ." 41
"And when you say your last word about Emerson -- just before you shut up shop for good -- What will it be?"
"It will be loyal: after all impatience, loyal, loyal."41

There can be little doubt, after a consideration of external evidence only, that Whitman was indebted to Emerson, and there are several indications that the debt was established early. Trowbridge states definitely that "The Emersonian influence is often clearly traceable in Whitman's early poems, seldom in the later."42 Both Gohdes and Moore, in their articles on the subject, say that the change in style and increased depth of thought evident in Whitman's first edition of Leaves of Grass were altogether too great and too sudden to be explained without some powerful outside influence, even considering the mystical nature of Whitman's inspiration. As Gohdes puts it: "The importance of establishing the fact that Whitman knew Emerson's literary products before 1855 can scarcely be exaggerated, not only because of the varying opinions on that score held by different critics,

40 See footnote 28, p. 11 above.
41 Traubel, op. cit., II, 69.
42 Trowbridge, op. cit., p. 166.
but because the first edition of the poems, containing as it does the vital sum and substance of its author's doctrine, cannot otherwise be accounted for ... ."43 Gohdes goes on to say that some such explanation is absolutely necessary to explain "the sudden metamorphosis of a second-rate Brooklyn journalist ... into a clarion-voiced prophet of Democracy."44 Moore echoes Gohdes's conclusion: "it is impossible to believe that the man who conceived and expressed such thoroughly mediocre things as Whitman did from the age of twenty to thirty should have performed so remarkably in the following five years without some powerful external stimulus."45

This thesis is an attempt, not to prove or disprove these scholars' assertions, but to see how well they are borne out by available evidence. The external evidence given in this first chapter establishes the fact that Whitman was acquainted with Emerson's writing before 1855. The remaining chapters will be a presentation of the significant ideas which are found in both Emerson's and Whitman's writings published by 1855, the ideas which Whitman could have derived from Emerson if he had had no other source.

43Gohdes, op. cit., p. 80. 44Ibid. 45Moore, op. cit., p. 76.
CHAPTER II

MAN

One difficulty involved in a study of this kind concerns the near impossibility of pinning down, labeling, ideas -- particularly such Transcendental, "Romantic," mystical ideas as those stressed by Emerson and Whitman. Another difficulty is suggested by both authors' stated opinions of consistency. Emerson wrote, in "Self-Reliance": "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds." On the same page he expressed his opinion in terms more like Whitman's own: "Suppose you should contradict yourself; what then?"¹ In "Song of Myself," Whitman was to write:

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

On account of this seeming contradiction and inconsistency, there is great danger of twisting either author's real, usual intention upon a given point -- especially since Emerson, at least, was given to showing one side of a truth at a time. Whitman wrote, in Leaves of Grass, "The words of my book nothing, the drift of it everything."³ The "drift" of his writing, and surely of Emerson's too, is consistent; only the words are contradictory.

²Leaves of Grass, p. 55.
³Complete Writings, I, 14; in "Shut Not Your Doors," first published in 1865.
When Whitman read a comment on Emerson's lack of consistency, he penciled in the margin: "Still if this be so in spirit as well as form it were a fatal defect." Emerson's own notions of unity under outward diversity, his statements about a larger consistency, and the total impression gained from reading his works -- all indicate that his inconsistency was not "so in spirit," that Emerson was a staunch believer in consistency in a large sense. It was only "a foolish consistency" which he condemned, and did not cultivate. The foolish consistency, the small consistency of words, which Emerson and Whitman lacked, may make it difficult to present their opinions accurately in quotations. Their attitude toward a deeper consistency, their consistency in the "drift" of their thought, makes it possible to determine where their beliefs are the same, and is certainly a point of similarity.

Emerson and Whitman were consistent in their underlying beliefs, in their basic philosophy. They were consistent in their idealism, their optimism, their hope for the future. Their optimism was made possible by -- or perhaps, more accurately, was manifested in -- their belief that God is in man, that reality is at least as truly spiritual as material, that matter is not opposed to spirit but is its symbol, that the same laws govern matter and spirit -- nature and society,

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4 Complete Writings, IX, 160. Date not known.
nature and art, nature and the soul of man. They believed that
all the universe is in harmony, that it is unified by its cor-
responding laws and purposes, and that the whole is good.

Emerson's belief that man is the manifestation of God in
the conscious gave him almost unlimited faith in the individ-
ual. Man, he believed, is the word made flesh,\(^6\) the only con-
sideration.\(^7\) The state is not superior to him\(^8\); no society
is so large as one man\(^9\). No mountain can measure with him;
"adamant is soft to wit."\(^10\) Whitman wrote, of the common man:
"There is something more important than Arts and Literature &
the mighty Factories & great Architecture of cities, & ships
at the wharves, and bank-safes fill'd with coin, or mints with
bullion -- rather, these are not the least worth except as
conduc-ing to this result -- a race of perfect men, women &
children, grandly developd in body, emotions, heroism & intel-
lect -- not a select class so developd but the general popu-
lation."\(^11\) Whitman said of the great man that the noblest
cities are for him.\(^12\) "Produce great persons," he had written
in an early note; "the rest surely follows."\(^13\)

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\(^6\) Ibid., p. 76.
\(^7\) "Politics," Works, III, 204.
\(^8\) Ibid., p. 199.
\(^11\) Clifton Joseph Furness, editor, Walt Whitman's Workshop,
p. 36; hereafter referred to as Whitman's Workshop. Date not
definitely known.
\(^12\) Leaves of Grass, p. 86.
\(^13\) Complete Writings, IX, 95. Date not given.
Man, to Whitman as to Emerson, was greater than anything else -- greater than gods, even!

I write not hymns
I see the building of churches
If I build God a church it shall be a church to men
and women.
If I write hymns they shall be all to men and women.\(^\text{14}\)
If I become a devotes, it shall be to men and women.\(^\text{14}\)

Whitman believed that an individual is as superb as a nation,\(^\text{15}\) that man is above final answers -- creeds, philosophies, institutions\(^\text{16}\) -- that nothing is more divine than man.\(^\text{17}\)

Like Emerson, Whitman believed that man is by nature good, not evil\(^\text{18}\) -- "And let no one suppose that it is so difficult a task to make the mind of a child moral and virtuous."\(^\text{19}\)

Emerson had written, of children: "They shed their own abundant beauty on the objects they behold." They are not at the mercy of such poor educators as we adults often prove to be.\(^\text{20}\)

He called the assumption of man's depravity "the only prof-ligacy and profanation."\(^\text{21}\)

Emerson and Whitman both believed, much as Wordsworth did, that man has fallen from grace, is out of harmony with nature, but that the child still begins life on a higher plane, better able to remember the deeper truths, more in

\(^{14}\) Whitman's Workshop, p. 43. Date not definitely known.

\(^{15}\) Preface to Leaves of Grass, p. xii.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., p. xi. \(^{17}\) Ibid., p. viii.

\(^{18}\) Emerson's statement is in "The Over-Soul," Works, II, 275.

\(^{19}\) Cleveland Rodgers and John Black, editors, The Gathering of the Forces, I, 129; hereafter referred to by title.


harmony with things. Thinking of the Biblical story of man's fall, Emerson had written that man is a God in ruins. He has wronged himself; he is out of harmony with Nature. Whitman believed that man's heart, alone of all things, is unbalanced. But neither Emerson nor Whitman doubted man's essential goodness, his desire to live again under Nature's universal laws, or his eventual triumph. Their faith was based on their belief in man's divinity, Emerson's doctrine of the over-soul. Emerson saw great possibilities for his god in ruins and looked to the future for their realization. He found reason for hope in his conviction that man is one. Whitman asserted that man might some day be equal to God, that even now Christ is alive in man —

I am alive in New York and San Francisco,
Again I tread the streets after two thousand years.

Governments, creeds, objects, matter are for man, not otherwise. Man is all, Emerson said; the world will come round to him. Man's soul is a life; it is. Nature, he wrote,

24 Uncollected Poetry and Prose, II, 80.
26 "Divinity School Address," Works, I, 106.
27 Uncollected Poetry and Prose, II, 64 and 67. In a manuscript notebook for 1847.
28 Leaves of Grass, pp. 60 and 64.
30 "Compensation," Works, II, 120.
"is the opposite of the soul, answering to it part for part. One is seal and one is print." 31

Emerson quoted the supreme Krishna's answer to a sage's question: "What is the great end of all, you shall now learn from me. It is soul -- one in all bodies, pervading, uniform, perfect, preëminent over nature, exempt from birth, growth and decay, omnipresent, made up of true knowledge, independent, unconnected with unrealities, with name, species and the rest, in time past, present and to come." 32

Emerson further quoted the Krishna as saying, "All is for the soul." Whitman wrote, in "A Song for Occupations":

...you and your soul enclose all things, regardless of estimation,
In them your themes and hints and provokers. ...

These "themes and hints and provokers," these things other than the soul, Emerson called Nature.

Man is the center of things, Emerson had written 34—the center of nature and the center of all. His soul is "wiser than the whole world." 35 The world is terminated in man; 36 he is the end of nature, 37 "the channel through which

32 "Plato; or, the Philosopher," Works, IV, 50.
33 Leaves of Grass, p. 63.
35 "Divinity School Address," Works, I, 145.
heaven flows to earth." "An individual man is a fruit which it cost all the foregoing ages to form and ripen." 38 Men are the age. 39 Men are the world, to themselves and to one another. 40

One world, Whitman wrote, was aware of his existence:
"One world is aware, and by far the largest to me, and that is myself." 41

To Whitman, then, as to Emerson, the universal is housed in the individual man; he, or his soul, is the "form of the formless." 42 Man is a microcosm. Man's soul is a part of the universal soul. Emerson had written: "We learn that God is; that he is in me; and that all things are shadows of him." 43 He would perhaps not have said, with Whitman, "nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's-self is;" 44 for Whitman's statement sounds egotistical. But Emerson surely believed what Whitman meant; that God is in man, that He thinks through man, that man is "great," to himself and to other men, precisely according to how much he contains that is not his partial self, but something greater and more whole—how much of inspiration, of intuition, of the Over-Soul,

40 Ibid., and "Love," Works, II, 186.
44 Leaves of Grass, p. 53.
Emerson defined the Over-Soul as "that Unity within which every man's particular being is contained and made one with all other...; he called it the common heart of all, the overpowering reality, the soul of the whole, the wise silence, the universal beauty. "Nothing is mightier than we, when we are vehicles of a truth before which the State and the individual are alike ephemeral." "The truth is to be found best in ourselves and in our intuitions." Lack of harmony with the over-soul, with divine love, is "true confusion," "right insanity." Through inspiration and revelation we know truth, see unity, "are wiser than we know."

Emerson identified the over-soul with divine love; he believed that man's thoughts are God thinking through man. In his poem "The Problem," an artist had "built better than he knew." Whitman described a mystical experience:

Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and joy and knowledge that pass all the art and argument of the earth; And I know that the hand of God is the elderhand of my own; And I know that the spirit of God is the eldest brother of my own,

45 "The Over-Soul," Works, II, 268 and 269.
49 "The Over-Soul," Works, II, 279 and 280.
And that all the men ever born are also my brothers
... and the women my sisters and lovers,
And that a kelson of the creation is love; 51

Emerson spoke of cherishing one's soul, of inspiration's
making solitude anywhere. 52 Whitman loafed and invited his
soul, listened and accrued. 53 Emerson spoke of man's partial
nature, of his blindness and weakness when he would stand
alone, without inspiration. 54 Whitman spoke of the strength
of outward manifestations of deity -- a strength which would
be overpowering were it not for the deity within:

Dazzling and tremendous how quick the sunrise would
kill me,
If I could not now and always send sunrise out of me.
We also ascend dazzling and tremendous as the sun,
We found our own my soul in the calm and cool of the
daybreak. 55

There is a suggestion here of an idea of Emerson's which
Whitman was later to state definitely -- the idea that too
deep a searching of the mind, too deep an imbibing of truth,
is dangerous. We see things only one at a time, 56 Emerson
believed: God screens us from ideas until we are ready for
them. 57 We dare not look into the mind too far. Thinking

51 *Leaves of Grass*, pp. 15 and 16.
53 *Leaves of Grass*, pp. 13 and 31.
55 *Leaves of Grass*, pp. 30 and 31.
is the hardest task in the world. We cannot look straight at abstract truths: "No man can see God face to face and live." 58

Emerson spoke of faith and truth in connection with the over-soul: "There is a soul at the centre of nature and over the will of every man, so that none of us can wrong the universe. . . . The whole course of things goes to teach us faith. We need only obey . . . . Place yourself in the middle of the stream of power and wisdom which animates all whom it floats, and you are without effort impelled to truth, to right and a perfect contentment." 59

"Nothing," Emerson wrote, "shall warp me from the belief that every man is a lover of truth." 60 Man is better than he seems; he always wants the truth no matter how painful, and will seek those who tell him the truth. 61 Like Emerson, Whitman believed that all men are lovers of truth. In the Preface to the first edition of Leaves of Grass he asserted that there was never "a being whose instinct hated the truth." 62 In "Great Are the Myths" he celebrated man's love of truth:

58"Intellect," Works, II, 331.
61Ibid., pp. 273, 275, and 276.
62Leaves of Grass, p. ix.
Great is the quality of truth in man, The quality of truth in man supports itself through all changes, It is inevitably in the man. ... He and it are in love, and never leave each other.

The truth in man is no dictum ... it is vital as eyesight, If there be any soul there is truth ... if there be man or woman there is truth ... . If there be physical or moral there is truth, If there be equilibrium or volition there is truth ... if there be things at all upon the earth there is truth.

O truth of the earth! O truth of things! I am determined to press the whole way toward you, Sound your voice! 63 I scale mountains or dive in the sea after you.

Emerson's belief that there is a soul at the center of things which will keep us from wrongdoing the universe -- that "the whole course of things goes to teach us faith." 64 implies a sort of faith which is fatalistic in method, however, different its findings may be. This fatalistic element is present, too, in Emerson's belief that we are screened from ideas until we are ready for them. This faith of Emerson's is surely a benevolent fatalism, a comforting determinism, quite the opposite of the usual sort. It is the most comforting of faiths.

Perhaps it was this same fatalistic quality which made Whitman call his own belief "the greatest of faiths and the least of faiths." 65 He believed that though "what is untried

63Ibid., p. 24.
64"Spiritual Laws," Works, II, 139.
65Leaves of Grass, p. 48.
and afterwards" is unknown, it cannot fail us. 66 His faith, his belief in man's love of truth was like Carlyle's, but forward-looking. However much pain and trouble there might be, everything seemed bound, in the end, to be right. In the very scheme of things Whitman saw assurance that all which men will sincerely believe in the future will be true, as old beliefs have been true in their day. He based his faith on present experience, and on the past.

History, to Emerson, as to Carlyle, is a record of the lives of men. "All literature writes the character of the wise man. . . . There is properly no history, only biography." 67 Emerson's belief was different from Carlyle's however, in that it conceded greatness, wisdom, to more men. Emerson believed in natural aristocracy, but he believed, too, in democracy, in Jeffersonian democracy. Whitman's Jacksonian belief in equality would seem to indicate that he more than agreed with Emerson that all history is in one man's experience, that history is to be understood through individual experience. 68

Emerson called history "a fable agreed upon." 69 Every man, he believed, has come through every period. 70 The history of

66 Ibid., p. 49.
67"History," Works, II, 7 and 10. See also p. 21 in the same essay, and "Intellect," Works, II, 334.
68"History," Works, II, 8 and 23.
the universe is symptomatic, and life is mnemonic . . . .
The genius of humanity is the right point of view of history. 71
This right point of view consists partly of ceasing to expect
completeness in any one man, of regarding each great man as
only an indication of the perfect possibility. 72

Ernest Marchand has written, in "Emerson and the Frontier,"
that Emerson's feelings about democracy and the natu-
ral goodness of man -- about equality -- are mixed, probably
due to his natural fastidiousness and his own aristocratic
tastes. 73 Marchand quoted a passage from Emerson's Journal
which would seem to indicate Emerson's lack of faith in the
common man: "Majorities, the argument of fools, the strength
of the weak." 74 Certainly one can hardly imagine Emerson's
writing, as Whitman did, that he would accept nothing which
all others could not have on the same terms, 75 or even that
he would take his hat off to no man. 76 Yet there is in his
doctrine of compensation the recognition of an equalizing
tendency, if not in man's nature, at least in his outward
goods and circumstances. "There is always some levelling
circumstance that puts down the overbearing, the strong, the

72 Ibid., pp. 32 and 34.
73 In American Literature, III (May, 1931), 149-174.
74 Emerson, Journals, VII, 146.
75 Leaves of Grass, p. 29.
76 Ibid., p. 61.
rich, the fortunate, substantially on the same ground with all others." 77 And, in speaking of the poet, Emerson says that every other man is as great, that the poet has merely a knack of expression, that each individual is superior in some small way. 78 Whitman, too, believed that the common man is equally as good as the poet. 79 All men, he said, are something valuable: "The interminable hordes of the ignorant and wicked are not nothing." 80

Both Emerson and Whitman emphasized self-reliance, by which they meant not reliance on the limited, finite self, but reliance on an inspired self, the self with access to the infinite soul. Their self-reliance has been called "God-reliance." It emphasized the over-soul. "What your heart thinks is great, is great," Emerson wrote. "The soul's emphasis is always right." 81 Emerson believed that one soul is the counterpoise of all, that each man should refuse what does not attract him. 82 Man must follow the counsel of his own bosom. 83 He asks only to be absolved to himself, nothing can bring him peace but himself. 84

77 "Compensation," Works, II, 98.
79 Preface to Leaves of Grass, p. v.
80 Leaves of Grass, p. 68.
83 "Heroism," Works, II, 262.
84 "Self-Reliance," Works, II, 74 and 90.
Whitman believed that one can resist anything better than his own diversity. As Emerson thought that one can hurt others by giving them charity, Whitman felt that each man must travel his road for himself, that no one can answer his questions, but that he must find his answers for himself. In the poem "To You," which was first published in 1856, he asserted:

I only am he who places over you no master, owner, better, God, beyond what waits intrinsically in yourself.

In The New Spirit, Havelock Ellis called this statement of Whitman's "the sublime apotheosis of Yankee self-reliance." It was an apotheosis of Emerson's belief, and in stating that he was the only one who offered man to himself on such terms, Whitman was forgetting Emerson. Emerson had had "quite other slaves to free than those negroes, to wit, imprisoned spirits, imprisoned thoughts." Emerson had taught that he who teaches us to rely on ourselves is dear. Seemingly, he had taught Whitman to rely on himself and to believe, as he believed, that all which one can give to a man without harm, without charity, is self-reliance.

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85 Leaves of Grass, p. 24.
87 Leaves of Grass, p. 52.
88 Complete Works, I, 285. Whitman had already written in "Song of Myself," "And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's-self is...."
89 On page 118.
Both Emerson and Whitman believed that a nation, as well as the individuals within it, should be self-reliant, independent. Like Whitman, Emerson lamented America's dependence on Europe. Rather unlike Whitman, he lamented, too, a man's dependence on friends.

Let us feel if we will the absolute insulation of man. We are sure that we have all in us. We go to Europe, or we pursue persons, or we read books, in the instinctive faith that these will reveal us to ourselves. Beggars all. The persons are such as we; and Europe, an old faded garment of dead persons; the books, their ghosts. Let us drop this idolatry. Let us give over this mendicancy.92

Whitman expressed again Emerson's wish for America's spiritual independence:

I say the idea and practice of all the present relics of imported feudal manners, the taking of hats off in any presence, and all sirring and Mr.-ing with all their vast entourage, and all that depends upon the principle they depend upon are foreign to These States and are to go the same road hence as the idea and practice of royalty have gone. . . . I hold it should be the glory and pride of America not to be like other lands, but different, after its own different spirit.93

In the conclusion to "The American Scholar," Emerson made his most definite statement about America's dependence on Europe. His opinion is summed up in the sentence: "We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe."94 Whitman wrote, in an early editorial: "We have long enough been frightened by the Phantom of the Past-- let us dare to know that we are out of leading strings.95

93 Whitman's Workshop, p. 55.
95 The Gathering of the Forces, I, 11. In an editorial
Both Emerson and Whitman suggested remedies for America's situation -- remedies which are alike, yet significantly different. Emerson placed responsibility on the individual; Whitman, on the race:

... if a single man plant himself indomitably on his instincts, and there abide, the huge world will come round to him. 96

Tyranny may always enter -- there is no charm no bar against it -- the only bar against it is a large and resolute breed of men. 97

To Whitman the presence of such a breed of men was this "simple, independent, proud, sane, unrich hardy manhood." 98

Though Emerson's feelings about equality and natural aristocracy seem to have been mixed, this emphasis was more upon the individual than on the mass. He based his hope more on the natural aristocrat than on the common man. He believed that "if the people should destroy class after class, until only two men were left, one of these would be the leader and would be involuntarily served and copied by the other." 99

In speaking of government, education, formalized religion--all the institutions and organizations of society -- both Emerson and Whitman stressed man, particularly the individual man. Having great faith in men, they had great hope for the future.

97 Whitman's Workshop, p. 58.
98 Ibid., p. 56. Date not definitely known.
99 "Manners," Works, III, 129. See also pages 130, 146, and 148 in the same essay.
of democratic governments. Emerson had called private character the antidote for the abuse of formal government. \textsuperscript{100} Whitman early stated his belief that the government of the United States -- or perhaps of the whole world, of "a nation of nations" -- would "be ruled mainly by individual character and conviction," and that "The recognized character of the citizen shall be so pervaded by the best qualities of law and power that law and power shall be superseded from this government and transferred to the citizen." \textsuperscript{101} He believed that the moral law of justice is as sure, as immutable, as omnipresent as the physical law of gravity:

The quality of justice is in the soul . . . . The consciousness of individuals is the test of justice. -- What is mean or cruel for an individual is so for a nation. \textsuperscript{102}

In "Great Are the Myths," Whitman repeated much this same idea about justice, the individual, and government:

Great is justice; Justice is not settled by legislation and laws . . . . it is in the soul, It cannot be varied by statutes any more than love or pride or the attraction of gravity can, It is immutable . . it does not depend on majorities . . . . majorities or what not come at last before the same passionless and exact tribunal. \textsuperscript{103}

Both Emerson and Whitman believed that the individual is responsible for society. The individual, Emerson had said, must be at one, or the group cannot be united. Union must be

\textsuperscript{100}"Politics," \textit{Works}, III, 215.

\textsuperscript{101}\textit{Uncollected Poetry and Prose}, II, 76. In a manuscript notebook for 1847.

\textsuperscript{102}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 75. In the same notebook.

\textsuperscript{103}\textit{Leaves of Grass}, p. 95.
All men, he believed, must be held responsible for the state of society; no one man willfully got it into its present predicament. 106 The evils of society are directly traceable to man's attitudes. "I am selfish, then there is slavery. . . . " 107 Society's distrust makes some of its members criminals, 106 noble dealing brings noble behavior. 106 Men are what you expect them to be; noble dealing brings noble behavior.

Like Emerson, Whitman had this faith in the unity of things. It was behind his "personals" and his spiritual individualism. It distinguished his beliefs from the super-individualistic practices of competitive American society which have been much criticized since his day. 106 The unity, the love, which both Emerson and Whitman recognized in nature and society kept them from forgetting mankind as a group, made to believe that society can be maintained without artificial restraints. . . .

"Love has not been sufficiently tried as a power long. . . ." 106 Love would put a new face on the weary old world in which we dwell as浪和 enemies too.
them emphasize the partial nature of the individual man. As Emerson said: One man alone is only a part; it takes the whole society to make the whole man. 112

In society, man must have government -- but government for him, not otherwise.

We thought our Union grand and our constitution grand;
I do not say they are not grand and good -- for they are,
I am this day just as much in love with them as you,
But I am eternally in love with you and with all my fellows upon the earth. 113

Politics, Emerson believed, rests on necessary foundations. When it ceases to serve man, it is weak and useless; "... the wise know that foolish legislation is a rope of sand which perishes in the twisting; that the State must follow and not lead the character and progress of the citizen. ..."). 114 Emerson said that the very landscape seemed to crave government, but he meant by government not an imposed force, but an aid: "mediation between want and supply." 115 Both Emerson and Whitman believed that "The world is governed too much." 116 In 1847 Whitman repeated the slogan of the day: "That government is best which governs least." 117

113 Leaves of Grass, p. 60.
115 "The Young American," I, 384.
116 "Nominalist and Realist," III, 255.
117 The Gathering of the Forces, I, 52.
Like Emerson, Whitman believed that morals cannot be enforced by law, that it is not the place of government to force men to live as those in power see fit. In an editorial written in 1846, he expressed his views forcefully:

Laws have very little to do with morals. Where the popular virtue is low, no legislation can make it any higher by statute.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Each individual, as far as his moral nature is concerned, is responsible to himself and his God only.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
... we would hunt immorality in its recesses in the individual heart, and grapple with it there--but not by law. 118

Like Emerson, Whitman considered temperance and abolition undue emphases on evils which could not, anyway, be legislated out of existence. 119 Both Emerson and Whitman were against the practice of slavery, because of their beliefs about independence and freedom. Presumably, their beliefs about the importance of mind and spirit made them opposed to excessive drinking, too; but they put no more faith in temperance than in abolition. Their conviction that each man is responsible for his own moral well-being made them distrust all laws to legislate men into goodness, all partial reforms. Emerson wrote of reforms: "The impulse is good, and the theory;

118Ibid., pp. 62, 63, and 64.
119Ibid., p. 68, 1847.
the practice is less beautiful.\textsuperscript{120} "He who aims at progress should aim at an infinite, not at a special benefit.\textsuperscript{121} He said to reformers: "Thy love afar is a spite at home."\textsuperscript{122}

On April 20, 1847, while he was editor of the Brooklyn \textit{Daily Eagle}, Whitman printed an editorial on "American Democracy" which contained a passage on slavery suggestive of Emerson's view, particularly as expressed in E. W. Emerson's note to the \textit{Ode inscribed to W. E. Channing}. Although Whitman was certainly not familiar with this note, it seems quite possible that he was familiar with Emerson's saying quoted in it: "I have quite other slaves to free than those negroes, to wit, imprisoned spirits, imprisoned thoughts.\textsuperscript{123} In 1847, Whitman said of England: "Thousands and millions of slaves exist in the confines of that kingdom...\textsuperscript{124} and by way of warning to America: "A quiet contented race sooner or later becomes a race of slaves -- and when so become, there are always among them \textit{still worse} slaves, bound

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{120} "Lecture on the Times," \textit{Works}, I, 276.
\item \textsuperscript{121} "The Method of Nature," \textit{Works}, I, 214.
\item \textsuperscript{122} "Self-Reliance," \textit{Works}, II, 51.
\item \textsuperscript{123} Emerson, \textit{Works}, IX, 428.
\item \textsuperscript{124} The \textit{Gathering of the Forces}, I, 43.
\end{itemize}
mentally, who argue that it is better so, than to rise and destroy the tyranny that galls them.\textsuperscript{125} On December 5, 1846, Whitman wrote about abolition much as he was later to write of all reforms, and as Emerson thought of them -- as undue stress on what Emerson called accidental or partial evils,\textsuperscript{126} as vain attempts to cure society's symptoms without understanding the extent and nature of its disease. He spoke with Emersonian fervor of the right of thinking: "Without it we might all become a nation of slaves!"\textsuperscript{127}

Apparently Whitman had not come, yet, in 1847, to Emerson's belief that the capitalists of the North were as truly guilty for slaveholding as the slave-owners of the South.\textsuperscript{128} But, by the time he wrote the "Anti-Slavery Notes" which Furness has printed in \textit{Walt Whitman's Workshop}, Whitman was speaking, as Emerson might have spoken, of "the uniform and inherent right of every man and woman to life and liberty."\textsuperscript{129} And he had come by this time to see slavery as a problem not for slaves alone but for the owners of slaves. He asked not only " -- what real Americans can be made out of slaves?"

\textsuperscript{125}ibid., p. 3.
\textsuperscript{126}"New England Reformers," \textit{Works}, III, 261 and 262.
\textsuperscript{127}\textit{The Gathering of the Forces}, I, 193.
\textsuperscript{128}ibid., p. 212.
\textsuperscript{129}Furness, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 76.
but also "What real American can be made out of the masters of slaves?" 130 Emerson expressed his concern about all those who belittled themselves by profiting from slavery:

I found by thee, O rushing Contoocook!  
And in thy valleys, Aglochcook!  
The jackals of the negro-holder.

The God who made New Hampshire  
Taunted the lofty land  
With little men?—
Small bat and wren  
House in the oak: -- 131

Both Emerson and Whitman, then, were concerned about slavery. They were concerned, too, about many other ills which laws and reforms attempt to correct, but which they thought could be corrected only by the individuals concerned. They did not consider it the purpose of government to legislate goodness, but to defend and enlarge the rights of the individual. Whitman wrote, in an early editorial:

The true office of government is simply to preserve the rights of each citizen from spoliation: when it attempts to go beyond this, it is intrusive and does more harm than good. 132

Emerson went further. He believed that the true purpose of government is educating the individual:

130Ibid., p. 74.
132Whitman's Workshop, I, 54.
... truly the only interest for the consideration of the state is persons... the highest end of government is the culture of men... if men can be educated, the institutions will share their improvement and the moral sentiment will write the law of the land. 133

Emerson lamented our lack of faith in education; he regretted, too, the skepticism of educated men, and the fact that modern education as he knew it lacked truth and nature. 134 Education should be a gathering to the individual mind of that which naturally belongs to it, 135 he believed; true learning is an unfolding; 136 the world is for man's education. 137 Emerson's faith in education was due to his faith in man, to his belief that "there are no common men," 138 that every man is as wise as a savant. 139 Believing in the sacredness of the human heart and mind, Emerson approved of community efforts toward universal education; he believed that they were for men, as the efforts of government should be; they indicated a revolution on the way. 140

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133 "Politics," Works, III, 204.
137 "History," Works, II, 8.
140 "The Young American," I, 384.
Whitman, too, was a staunch advocate of education. He asked, in an early editorial: ". . . what can be of higher consequence to a human being than his own mind, his temper, and his knowledge?" and he went on to stress the importance of caring for young students' moral well-being, as well as their physical health.  

He valued an honest soul as "far, far more desirable" even than learning; and he thought it not so difficult of attainment, after all, since he believed, as Emerson did, that man is naturally good. "And let no one suppose that it is so difficult a task to make the mind of a child moral and virtuous."  

On April 11, 1848, in a newspaper editorial, Whitman quoted a long passage from Lessing:  

'If God held in his right hand pure and absolute truth, and in his left only the desire to search after truth, I would tell him to keep pure truth for himself, as mortal eyes are too weak to look on it, and would ask him to give me only the desire to search after truth.' So should the youth speak to the professor, if the latter should presume to declare his opinions as the only possible truth, and denounce all others as absolutely and unqualifiedly false.  

Whitman, like Lessing, believed, not in giving people his truth, but in making them desire to seek their own,  

141 The Gathering of the Forces, I, 125 and 126.  
142 Ibid., pp. 128 and 129.  
143 Uncollected Poetry and Prose, I, 221.
which alone would serve them. He believed that "all truth and power are feeble to you except your own." 144

Emerson, too, would have agreed with Lessing’s statement about truth, if one may judge from his own statements about education, creeds, disciples, fixed religion. Like Lessing and like Whitman, Emerson felt that accepting beliefs already thought-out and codified would be accepting something less than truth, or at least truth no longer living. "God offers to every mind its choice between truth and repose," Emerson wrote in his essay, "Intellect." "Take which you please -- you can never have both." 145 Whitman and Emerson, like Lessing, chose truth. Like the lover of truth whom Emerson describes, they kept themselves "aloof from all moorings, and afloat." They abstained from dogmatism and submitted "to the inconvenience of suspense and imperfect opinion;" 146 Emerson wrote: "I can very confidently announce one or another law which throws itself into relief and form, but I am too young yet by some ages to compile a code." 147 He believed that "the theory of the world is a thing of shreds and patches. . . .

144 Ibid., II, 66, 67, and 76. In a manuscript notebook for 1847 or 1848.
146 Ibid., p. 342.
147 "Experience," Works, III, 83.
bitten world holds the bitter fast by his own teeth.
There he perishes: unconquered nature lives on and for-
gets him. 148 Emerson saw Plato as a biter of the world, caught and therefore certain some day to perish. Whit-
man was no more eager than Emerson to make a theory of the world. He wrote, in a manuscript notebook for 1847:

I will not be a great philosopher, and found any school, and build it with iron pillars, and gather the young men around me, and make them my dis-
ciples, that new superior churches and politics shall come.149

Whoever would be free, Emerson believed, would seek for truth, would not be bound by books, churches, and schools. Creeds are diseases of the intellect,150 ponderous and outmoded machinery.151 "Truth is always holy, holiness always wise."152 "The old is for slaves."153

"Dismiss whatever insults your own soul," Whitman wrote, in the preface to Leaves of Grass,154 echoing Emerson's belief that education is the accumulating of all that belongs to your soul.155 Even great poems, Whitman believed, are not final answers:

148 "Plato; or, the Philosopher," Works, IV, 77.
149 Uncollected Poetry and Prose, II, 66.
153 "Divinity School Address," Works, I, 144.
154 Preface to Leaves of Grass, p. vi.
155 See note 135, page 41 above.
A great poem is no finish to a man or woman but rather a beginning. Has any one fancied he could sit at last under some due authority and rest satisfied with explanations and realize and be content and full? To no such terminus does the greatest poet bring... he brings neither cessation or sheltered fatness and ease. The touch of him tells in action. Whom he takes he takes with firm sure grasp into live regions previously unattained... thenceforward is no rest... 156

Institutions, Emerson thought, are surely not final answers; the minute one rests on the formulated beliefs of a church, religion loses its essence.

Instead of that reliance which the soul suggests, on the eternity of truth and duty, men are misled into a reliance on institutions, which, the moment they cease to be the instantaneous creations of the devout sentiment, are worthless. 157

Whitman, too, believed that institutions are for man, as we have seen. Of religious institutions specifically, he wrote, in "A Song for Occupations":

We consider the bibles and religions divine....
I do not say they are not divine,
I say they have all grown out of you and may grow out of you still,
It is not they who give the life... it is you who give the life;
Leaves are not more shed from the trees or trees from the earth than they are shed out of you. 158

156 Preface to Leaves of Grass, p. xi.
158 Leaves of Grass, p. 60.
The head is more — the body and all things in nature are more "than churches or bibles or creeds," Whitman wrote, in "Song of Myself." 160 Logic and sermons never convince . . . 161

No friend of mine takes his ease in my chair; I have no chair, nor church nor philosophy. . . 161 Instead, he would "tramp a perpetual journey," he would move forward, he would search for truth rather than rest.

Emerson spoke of dead churches, dead theology, the "dead weight of a Sunday-school." 162 He believed that blind, unthinking conformity makes men wholly false: "Their every truth is not quite true." 163 Conformity, to Whitman, indicated weakness and fear. He preferred men "Wicked, rather than virtuous out of conformity of fear. . . ." 164 He thought that religious rites are holy only if they are truly believed by those who perform them: "Outward observances of real sanctitude, it is undeniable, are good, so far as they mirror the inward heart. But there is a sad prevalence of foolish notions in the world, about certain mere abstinences from trifles, or conformances to trifles, making a saint out

160 Ibid., pp. 29 and 30.
161 Ibid., p. 33.
162 Ibid., p. 51.
165 Leaves of Grass, p. 53.
of a man." 165 He scorned men who "--- allowing that their sanctimonious going through the mere forms of religion is religion --- yet serve the devil six days where they give one to God!" 166

In "Self-Reliance," Emerson called prayers diseases of the will, as he called creeds diseases of the intellect; he condemned false prayers -- begging and useless regrets. 167 But he believed thought devout and true prayer "a study of truth, -- a sally of the soul into the unfound infinite." 168 He lamented the formalist's prayers, which do not uplift, but smite and offend us. 169 He wished to do away, not with prayer, but only with the notions that everything we say while going through the outward form is true prayer, and that one must kneel to pray. Emerson believed, as Whitman wrote, "That the true adoration is likewise without words and without kneeling." 170

Whitman believed wholeheartedly in "true adoration." Paradoxically, the very depth of his belief explains his contempt of forms of adoration. He spoke with Emersonian contempt of formal prayer: "Shall I pray? Shall I venerate

165 The Gathering of the Fords.
166 Ibid., p. 67.
169 "Divinity School Address," Works, I, 137.
170 Leaves of Grass, p. 94.
and be ceremonious?" 171 "Beware of churches!" Whitman wrote, "Beware of priests! above all things the flights and sublime extasies of the soul cannot submit to the exact statements of any church, or any creed." 172 Yet Whitman wrote, a little later: "I do not despise you priests." 173 Again, his very belief makes him resent all limitations. One is reminded of Emerson's quandary concerning the priesthood, presented in "The Problem" in the following query: 

Why should the vest on him allure
Which I could not on me endure? 174

Both Whitman and Emerson believed the priest's truths. Whitman identified himself with all forms of worship, and believed them all; all gods, he thought, do the work of their day. 175 But he believed more than any creed; he found all formalized religion outmoded. Like Emerson, then, he could not abide being bound in the narrowness of sects. He thought that emphasis on differences is mistaken emphasis. He would agree with Emerson that exclusionists shut the door of heaven on themselves. 176

Both Emerson and Whitman had too much faith in man not to lament seeing him enslaved, even by the very institutions

171 Ibid., p. 25.
172 Whitman's Workshop, p. 41.
173 Leaves of Grass, p. 48.
175 Leaves of Grass, 48 and 45.
which he had founded. They had no patience with his tendency to remain bound by his beliefs even after he had ceased to believe them wholly. They would have man's mind and heart free to move forward. This was their complaint against religion and theology. They did not doubt the need of religion or scorn beliefs which differed from theirs -- far from it! They only refused to be bound themselves and regretted seeing others who chafed at formalized religion continue to be bound by the forms of belief. They denied creeds and theologies only as being partial, too little, much as Emerson denied personality to God.

I deny personality to God because it is too little, not too much. Life, personal life, is faint and cold to the energy of God. 177

Yet it has been observed, very justly, I believe, that in another sense, Emerson's God was the most anthropomorphic of Gods. 178 Emerson's god was more human than most, even as man to Emerson was more divine than he seemed to most men. The laws of the universe to Emerson and to Whitman are the same as the laws of society, so far as they correspond. If some natural laws remain unexplained, it would seem to be only because of man's limited capacity to understand. If miracles remain, Emerson and Whitman are glad; they are indications of the greatness of God, of some greater power outside of man.

177 Quoted in Bliss Perry's Emerson Today, on pages 129 and 130.
"God is, not was," Emerson insisted, in his "Divinity School Address." "He speaketh, not spake." Emerson saw indications of the present existence of God in everything around him — in man, in nature, in every object and event — all miracles. Whitman, too, saw God in man and nature:

I hear and behold God in every object, yet I understand God not in the least,
Nor do I understand who there can be more wonderful
than myself.

Why should I wish to see God better than this day?
I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four,
and each moment then,
In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my
own face in the glass;
I find letters from God dropped in the street, and
every one is signed by God's name,
And I leave them where they are, for I know that
others will punctually come forever and ever.

Finding indications of a living god in everything about him,
Whitman must have lamented, with Emerson, Christianity's tendency "to speak of revelation as somewhat long ago given and
done, as if God were dead."

The mistakes of Christianity, as Emerson saw them, were
few but serious — were all concerned with the place to which
Christianity has relegated man. Emerson felt that moral na-
ture is no longer explored, that new utterance of revelation
is denied, that Christianity has ceased being creative.

Christianity has emphasized "the personal, the positive, the
ritual." It comes out of memory, not out of the soul.

179 "Divinity School Address," Works, I, 144.
180 Leaves of Grass, p. 54.
181 "Divinity School Address," Works, I, 134.
182 Ibid., p. 134. 183 Ibid., p. 130. 184 Ibid., p. 141.
It belittles man; it monopolizes virtue and truth: it subordinates man to Christ.\textsuperscript{185} The remedy which Emerson suggests for the plight of Christianity is the same remedy which one imagines he would suggest for any of man's ills -- not a partial remedy, but a total one: soul.

\ldots "let the breath of new life be breathed by you through the forms already existing. For if once you are alive, you shall find they shall become plastic and new. The remedy to their deformity \textsuperscript{186} is first, soul, and second, soul, and evermore, soul.

Whitman, too, emphasized the soul. He would solve the question of a religion's usefulness, as he would the question of greatness in art, by the reaction of the soul:

The test of the goodness or truth of anything is the soul itself -- whatever does good to the soul, soothes, refreshes, cheers, inspires, consoles, \\&c, \&c -- that is so easy enough -- But doctrines, sermons, logic?? \textsuperscript{187}

Like Emerson Whitman saw the value of institutions, but he valued them only as they proved aids to man:

I know well enough the life is in my soul, not in the traditions, the phantoms -- but I know the traditions help me well -- how could I be developed even so far, and talk with decision today, beginning the study of these things without all these traditions? I know, too, that I am the master and overseer of all religions -- and you shall be -- not their slave.\textsuperscript{188}

There is a suggestion here of Whitman's often repeated belief that every religion is true in its time, but is only

\textsuperscript{185}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 131. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{186}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 151.

\textsuperscript{187}\textit{Whitman's Workshop}, p. 49. Date not definitely known.

\textsuperscript{188}\textit{Complete Writings}, IX, 194. Date not known; probably early fifties.
partial and soon becomes faded or outmoded. Whitman shared this belief with Emerson, though Emerson did not stress it; both authors must surely have been familiar with its expression in the writings of Carlyle. Whitman wrote, in an early prose note: "For all religions, all divine, are but temporary journeys subordinate to the eternal soul of the woman, the man supreme the decider of all."189 Whitman came early to the belief that religion itself is not any one creed or form, but "the whole universal heart of man."190

Emerson must have had Carlyle's and Whitman's idea in mind when he stated, in *Nature*, that "The multitude of false churches accredits the true religion."191 He must have meant by "false" what Whitman meant when he wrote that creeds and churches are bad only because they are outworn and meaningless, because they "appear but as empty shells." Whitman went on to say that "We dare not find fault with any of them, but perceive that they have done the work that was for them to do, and could not be done without them."192

"The true religion," as Emerson represents it in *Nature*, is the realization of God's presence in his creations, and harmony with Him and the world through sympathy with man and nature. In the essay "Character," Emerson speaks again of real religion:

192 *Whitman's Workshop*, p. 42.
Is there any religion but this, to know that wherever in the wide desert of being the holy sentiment we cherish has opened into a flower, it blooms for me, if none sees it, I see it; I am aware, if I alone, of the greatness of the fact. Whilst it blooms, I will keep sabbath or holy time, and suspend my gloom and my folly and jokes. 193

Emerson said, of stated philosophies in general, that one statement by no means forestalls a new attempt, that any "portraiture," "when considered by the soul, warps and shrinks away." 194 "Great believers," he said in his essay on Montaigne, "are always reckoned infidels, impracticable, fantastic, atheistic, and really men of no account." 195

In one of his best early statements concerning religion, Whitman spoke of these same "great believers" who transcend creeds; he called them "developed souls." The same passage reminds one forcefully of Whitman's emphasis on man above all things. It emphasizes Carlyle's belief that religion should be a reflection of man's culture and understanding, and as such should grow:

I say to you that all forms of religion ... are but mediums, temporary yet necessary, fitted to the lower mass ranges of the race ... and that the developed soul passes through one or all of them to the clear homogeneous atmosphere above them ... There is no false Religion -- Each one is divine. Each one means exactly the state of development of

195 "Montaigne; or, the Skeptic," Works, IV, 181.
the people -- they have arrived at that -- by and -by they will pass on farther -- The Christian Religion though the highest and most beautiful and advanced means the same and stands in the same position. 196

Of Christianity's statement of beliefs, of the Bible, Whitman was not yet quite sure when he wrote his early prose notes. About 1849, when he read in a magazine a suggestion to write the Bible in verse, he exclaimed: "Think of a writer going into the creative action of the Deity!" 197 Yet in 1856 he criticized the Bible for not having "that unquestionable self-proved identity that is necessary," 198 and stated positively that:

The religion of the Bible, or rather of the New Testament, is a beautiful advanced stage in the never-ending humanitarianism of the world -- but as the Bible admits of exhaustion like the rest and is now exhausted it may be left to its fate on these terms: As long as it stands it is worthy of standing; these are perhaps the true terms of all religions. 199

By the time he wrote "Song of Myself," Whitman definitely did not consider the Bible true by literal interpretation:

It is no little matter, this round and delicious globe, moving so exactly in its orbit forever and ever, without one jolt or the untruth of a single second; I do not think it was made in six days, nor in ten thousand years, nor ten decillions of years, Nor planned and built one thing after another, as an architect plans and builds a house.

196 Whitman's Workshop, p. 44.
197 Complete Writings, IX, 97. Whitman wrote his comment in the margin of the magazine, which was published in 1849.
198 Ibid., p. 100. Date not known.
199 Ibid., pp. 69 and 70.
I do not think seventy years is the time of a man or woman, 
Nor that seventy millions of years is the time of a man or woman, 
Nor that years will ever stop the existence of me or any one else. 200

Emerson lamented the literal interpretation by which the Bible has come to bind man's thinking -- to belittle man, to monopolize virtue and truth. He lamented the distortion of Christ's teachings. 201 With his faith in man and his emphasis on the soul, Emerson found Christ, the most religious of men, one of the greatest. 202 He regretted only the position of authority which men have given Christ, 203 and the use which has been made of his teachings.

Like Emerson, Whitman was a follower of Christ who did not consider the Bible a final statement of truth. In a mystical vision in "Song of Myself" Whitman speaks of Christ as his companion:

Walking the old hills of Judea with the beautiful gentle god by my side... 204

He addresses Him, in the throes of vicarious suffering in which he identifies himself with mankind:

O Christ! My fit is mastering me. 205

200 Leaves of Grass, p. 92.
201 "Divinity School Address," Works I, 128 and 129.
202 Ibid., p. 128.
204 Leaves of Grass, p. 37.
205 Ibid., p. 42.
Whitman, identifying himself with Christ, speaks of "my own crucifixion and bloody crowning." He, with many others, rises again from the grave:

The blossoms we wear in our hats are the growth of two thousand years.

In the passage in which Whitman accepted all worship as true for its day, he recognized Christ's divinity; he spoke of

Accepting the gospels, accepting him that was crucified, knowing assuredly that he is divine...

Like Emerson, then, Whitman thought of Christ as great, divine, but human. In arriving at this belief, he may have been influenced by Emerson, or perhaps by Elias Hicks, the Quaker preacher whom he is known to have admired, and whose belief about Christ approached that of Emerson.

Given Emerson's and Whitman's faith in man and their belief in the importance of the individual as opposed to institutions and the machinery of society, their concept of Christ seems the natural one. He is great because of his relationship to other men. Emerson believed of Christ that "Alone in all history he estimated the greatness of man." To Whitman, Christ was Man, a representative of the race; he was identified by suffering with all mankind.

206 Ibid., p. 43.
207 Ibid., p. 43.
208 Ibid., p. 48.
209 "Divinity School Address," Works, I, 128.
We have seen in this chapter that both Emerson and Whitman had almost unlimited faith in man. They believed that man is at the top of creation, is the greatest thing in the world. They believed in man's natural goodness, and in his inspiration. Thus they gave great importance to individual intellect and character. Emerson, and seemingly Whitman, too, thought that all history is represented in one man's experience, that the world is to be understood through the individual. Though Whitman emphasized equality and Emerson tended usually to favor natural aristocracy, both authors had deep faith in democracy. Both believed in freedom, for the individual and for the nation. In keeping with their ideas about intuition and the over-soul, both believed in a sort of self-reliance which has been called God-reliance.

They believed that the American nation, like its people, should be self-reliant. Like Emerson, Whitman lamented America's continued dependence on Europe, and urged the people of America to make their country free spiritually as well as politically. Though Emerson and Whitman stressed the importance of the individual, they remembered man's place in society, and acknowledged the partial nature of the single man. Both Whitman and Emerson believed that government should be for man, not otherwise. They thought that laws and reforms should not propose to legislate men into goodness, but that
morals are the problem of the individual. They believed that reforms are partial, and give undue attention to symptoms which are, after all, only indications of the ills of society. Both believed that the chief end of government has to do with individual rights. Whitman said that government should go no further than protecting man's rights; Emerson thought that it should do that, and more: that it should provide men with facilities for self-betterment. Both Emerson and Whitman lamented man's tendency to abide by the institutions which earlier men have founded, rather than to seek new truth. They believed that religions, like governments and all other institutions, should serve man, and should remain creative. Thus they often objected even to Christian dogma and theology, as being binding and fixed -- no longer wholly true. They believed that Christ, like all great men, is an indication of the potentiality of the race. As we shall see more clearly in connection with the laws of nature, both Emerson and Whitman believed that man is still progressing, and will continue to progress.
CHAPTER III

ART AND LITERATURE

In his essay "The Poet," Emerson described the ideal poet, the poet of America. He would be a perceiver of unity, a liberating god, a portrayer of his time and country. Emerson wrote, after his description:

I look in vain for the poet whom I describe. We do not with sufficient plainness or sufficient profoundness address ourselves to life, nor dare we chaunt our own tunes and social circumstances. . . . We have yet had no genius in America, with tyrannous eye, which knew the value of our incomparable materials, and saw, in the barbarism and materialism of the times, another carnival of the same gods whose pictures he so much admires in Homer; then in the Middle Age; then in Calvinism .... Our log-rolling, our stumps and their politics, our fisheries, our Negroes and Indians, our boats and our repudiations, the wrath of rogues and the pusillanimity of honest men, the northern trade, the southern planting, the western clearing, Oregon and Texas, are yet unsung. Yet America is a poem in our eyes: its ample geography dazzles, the imagination, and it will not wait long for metres.¹

It has since been said that Whitman fits Emerson's description, that he answered Emerson's call. He saw the value of American materials, and made America a poem. He was a joiner and a liberator. In writing his catalogues, Whitman may even have had in mind Emerson's statement: "bare lists of words are found suggestive to an imaginative and excited mind."²

²Ibid., pp. 17 and 18.
remarking, "Walt, you understand enough, why don't you let it out, then?" he may have remembered what Emerson had said of the artist's desire: "By God it is in me and must go forth of me." It seems almost as if Whitman had used Emerson's essay on poetry as a sort of rule book for his poetic practice. He was much more the poet whom Emerson described than Emerson was himself.

And, like Emerson, Whitman called for an American poet. His most specific call was written at least as early as 1856, possibly earlier:

    Could (shall) there not be a poet of America no less than they [Homer and Shakespeare] but different from, daring more than either of them? Stamping this age, and so all ages, in his poems? Feeding character with a strong clean meat? Riveting the passing incidents, sentiment, persons, tendencies, visible things, landscapes, voyages, politics, Manhattan Island, the Yankee, the Californian, all American features and leading facts in poems? Bequeathing the most precious of all works in literature to the future American woman and man?

In his early prose, Whitman had called for someone "whose utterance were like an old Hebrew prophet's, only substituting rapt literature instead of rapt religion," someone much like Emerson's American poet, someone who would cry out:

    . . . I come to call you to the knowledge of the Living God, in writings. Its own literature, to a nation, is the first of all things. Even its Religion appears only through its Literature, and as a

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3 Leaves of Grass, p. 31. See page 131 of this thesis.
5 Complete Writings, IX, 124.
part of it. Know ye, ye may have all other possessions, but without your own soul's literature, ye are but little better than trading, prosperous beasts. Aping but others, ye are but intelligent apes . . . . Far, far above all else in a nation, and making its men to move as gods, behold the bards, orators, and authors, born of the spirit and body of that nation. 6

In the preface to the first edition of Leaves of Grass, Whitman spoke several times of the ideal American poet; one passage sounds especially like Emerson:

The American poets are to enclose old and new for America is the race of races. Of them a bard is to be commensurate with a people . . . . His spirit corresponds to his country's spirit . . . . he incarnates its geography and natural life and rivers and lakes.

In "The American Scholar," Emerson had lamented America's literary dependence, and had urged that it was the duty of the scholar, of man thinking, to make the nation independent. 8 Whitman, too, lamented the bondage of American literary men, whom he called "Scintillations at best of other literary men and literary needs of other lands -- exiles here." 9 In 1847, Whitman wrote an editorial defending a man who had made a

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6 Whitman's Workshop, pp. 67 and 68. The date for this note, and for many of the other "Notes for Lectures" which Furness prints, is not definitely known. Furness does say, however, that one of Whitman's lectures was delivered as early as 1851, and that some of the ideas found in his lecture notes "later crystallized into some of the trenchant passages in Leaves of Grass." See pp. 28 and 32 in Furness's introductory chapter.

7 Leaves of Grass, p. iv.


9 Whitman's Workshop, p. 65. Date not given.
toast to America's literary independence and had been hooted. Whitman doubted the truth of the toast, however; he believed that America was independent only politically -- was still in intellectual bondage. "There is something very bitter," he wrote, "in the tacit adoption in our great democratic cities of these forms and laws imported from the royal capitals of Europe." "The English poet has reminiscences and continually extols them. The American poet has a future, and must extol it." Both Emerson and Whitman called, then, for an American poet who would write about his time and his country. As Whitman expressed it at the end of his Preface of 1855: "The proof of a poet is that his country absorbs him as affectionately as he absorbs it." Other "proofs," to both Emerson and Whitman, were the poet's love of life and nature, his ability to unlock man's chains, his interpretation of reality, his perception of unity.

Emerson identified the true poet with the true philosopher; he thought that their duty was to show the unity of things. He wrote, in his essay "History":

10 The Gathering of the Forces, II, 237 to 239.
11 Complete Writings, IX, 197.
12 Ibid., p. 90.
13 Leaves of Grass, p. xii.
To the poet, to the philosopher, to the saint, all things are friendly and sacred, all events profitable, all days holy, all men divine. For the eye is fastened on the life, and slights the circumstance. Every chemical substance, every plant, every animal in its growth, teaches the unity of cause, the variety of appearance. 14

Emerson's poet was to be a lover of nature and of the world. In "Woodnotes," he is described:

Lover of all things alive,
Wonderer at all he meets,
Wonderer chiefly at himself,
Who can tell him what he is?
Or how meet in human elf
Coming and past eternities? 15

Whitman called himself "a caresser of life." 16 In the preface to his first edition, he wrote: "The known universe has one complete lover and that is the greatest poet." 17

Whitman wrote of the great persons whom America needs -- both her poets and her other great men: "The heated, torn, distracted ages are to be compacted and made whole." 18 In the first part of his "Song of the Answerer," Whitman called the poet a "joiner," described his duty as perceiver of unity and translator of his perception:

14 "History," Works, II, 12.
15 "Woodnotes," Works, IX, 43 and 44.
16 Leaves of Grass, p. 20.
17 Ibid., p. vi.
18 Complete Writings, IX, 161.
Every existence has its idiom . . . every thing has an idiom and tongue;
he resolves all tongues into his own, and bestows it upon men . . . and any man translates . . .
and any man translates himself also;
one part does not counteract the other part . . .
he is the joiner . . . he sees how they join.19

The "great master" whom Whitman described in the preface to Leaves of Grass has as one of his indispensable character-
istics "the idea of political liberty."

Liberty takes the adherence of heroes wherever men and women exist . . . but never takes any adherence or welcome from the rest more than from poets. They are the voice and exposition of liberty.20

Emerson's poets, his "liberating gods," gave a liberty which was more than political. They freed man by making thought accessible:

Every thought is also a prison; every heaven is also a prison. Therefore we love the poet, the inventor, who in any form, whether in an ode or an action or in looks and behavior, has yielded us a new thought. He unlocks our chains and admits us to a new scene.21

Perhaps it is not a real difference at all for Whitman's poet to emphasize political freedom while Emerson's is concerned with liberating minds and hearts, for Whitman called political liberty "the animus of all liberty."22 Apparently he, too, aimed at a freedom even deeper and more lasting.

19 Leaves of Grass, p. 86.
20 Ibid., p. viii.
22 Preface to Leaves of Grass, p. xii.
Whitman stressed the equality of the poet and other men. Emerson spoke of equality, but he spoke also of the poet's superior understanding. The poet has only a "knack" of expression, Emerson wrote in "New England Reformers": "every man is superior in some small way." Yet in "The Post," Emerson referred to the "ulterior intellectual perception," with which the poet interprets symbols to man. Emerson believed that the poet's purpose is "to cheer, to raise, and to guide men by showing them facts amidst appearances. . . . He is the world's heart." As Whitman wrote, in the preface to *Leaves of Grass*: "folks expect of the poet to indicate more than the beauty and dignity which always attach to dumb real objects. . . . they expect him to indicate the path between reality and their souls." The poet's office is not to perceive beauty, Whitman went on to say; others do that as well as he. Evidently his duty is only in expression, in the interpretation of reality. In the second part of "Song of the Answerer," not included in the edition of 1855, but probably written about that year, Whitman expressed specifically his belief that the highest form of poet is one who inspires,

26 *Leaves of Grass*, p. v.
who gives you reality which you recognize as truly your own,
who shows you what you really are -- and how much more you
are than you had known.

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

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
The words of the true poems give you more than poems,
They give you to form for yourself poems, religions,
politics, war, peace, behavior, histories, essays,
daily life, and every thing else,
They balance ranks, colors, races, creeds, and the
sexes,
They do not seek beauty, they are sought,
Forever touching them or close upon them follows
beauty, longing, fain, love-sick.
They prepare for death, yet they are not the finish,
but rather the outset,
They bring none to his or her terminus to be content
and full,
Whom they take they take into space to behold the
birth of stars, to learn one of the meanings,
To launch off with absolute faith, to sweep through
the ceaseless rings and never be quiet again.27

Whitman's poet, like the poet in Emerson's "Sphinx," must
ever attempt to express in finite language infinite truths.
He is doomed, before he begins, to failure, or to only partial
success. With so high an aim, it seems natural that neither
Emerson nor Whitman expected more than partial, temporary suc-
cess for a poem -- for any work of art. Whitman jotted down
in his notebook a "test of a poem" which sounds very like

27Complete Writings, I, 204 and 205.
Emerson's -- "How far can it elevate, enlarge, purify, deepen and make happy the attributes of the body and soul of man."28

Emerson had written, of the great poet -- of any great artist: "The great poets are judged by the frame of mind which they induce. . . ."29 "Not he is great who can alter matter, but he who can alter my state of mind."30

The poet, the Sayer, Emerson called a sovereign among men, representative of all mankind, a complete man among partial man.

...[He] apprises us not of his wealth, but of the common wealth. The young man reveres men of genius, because, to speak truly, they are more himself than he is. They receive of the soul as he also receives, but they more.31

Gay Allen says that Whitman accepted Emerson's idea that the poet is representative and stands for the complete man.32 There is a difference, however, as we have seen. Whitman continually emphasized the equality of the poet with other men; though Emerson sometimes emphasized this equality and called the art of expression a mere knack, he emphasized too the sovereignty of the poet, his superior perception, and his high office. Here, as in his estimation of the common man in society, Emerson seems to have been rather undecided. Perhaps

28 Uncollected Poetry and Prose, II, 15.
29 Emerson, Works, IX, xi. From Emerson's preface to Parnassus.
31 "The Poet," Works, III, 7 and 5.
the similarities and the differences between his attitude and Whitman's are typified by the following quotations. Emerson wrote:

A scholar is the favorite of Heaven and earth, the excellency of his country, the happiest of men. 33

Whitman wrote of the poet as compared with other men:

The sailor and traveler . . . the anatomist chemist astronomer geologist phrenologist spiritualist mathematician historian and lexicographer are not poets, but they are the lawgivers of poets and their construction underlies the structure of every perfect poem. 34

Emerson thought of the poet, the scholar, the man of genius, as being different from other men in degree -- in degree of intellectual power, of inspiration, of over-soul. 35 He believed that:

All men, in the abstract, are just and good; what hinders them in the particular is the momentary predominance of the finite and individual over the general truth. The condition of our incarnation in a private self seems to be a perpetual tendency to prefer the private law, to obey the private impulse, to the exclusion of the law of universal being. The here is great by means of the predominance of the universal nature; he has only to open his mouth, and it speaks; he has only to be forced to act, and it acts. 36

Like Whitman, Emerson thought that genius should show us truth. It should "suffer no fiction to exist for us"; it

33"Literary Ethics," Works, I, 155.
34Preface to Leaves of Grass, P. vii.
35"Literary Ethics," Works, I, 158.
36Ibid., p. 185.
should "honor every truth by use." To be free to search for truth, genius must not be bound, but must be creative and original. Whitman wrote, in *Leaves of Grass*, that truth is provoked out of the soul. In "The Divinity School Address," Emerson stated much the same idea, in a passage which reminds one, too, of Whitman's quotation from Lessing:

- Truth is an intuition. It cannot be received at second hand. Truly speaking, it is not instruction, but provocation, that I can receive from another soul.

Both Emerson and Whitman emphasized the liberating power of genius, as we have seen; they stressed, also, the necessity of the great man's own freedom. Several passages from both authors' writings are similar to Whitman's praise of Emersonianism, "the giant that destroys itself." Emerson wrote, in "The American Scholar": "Not out of those on whom systems of education have exhausted their culture, comes the helpful giant to destroy the old or to build the new, but out of unhand-selled savage nature; out of terrible Druids and Berserkers come at last Alfred and Shakespeare."

In "Uses of Great Men," Emerson spoke of the greatest man as being one who could "abolish himself and all heroes, by letting in The element of reason . . . the power so great

37 "Goethe; or, the Writer," *Works*, IV, 290.
38 *Complete Writings*, I, 35, 70, and 102.
39 See note 143, page 42 above.
41 See note 29, page 12 above.
that the potentate is nothing."43 "The great poet," Emerson stated in "The Over-Soul," "makes us feel our own wealth, and then we think less of his compositions. His best communication to our mind is to teach us to despise all he has done.44

Whitman wrote, in "Song of Myself":

He most honors my style who learns under it to destroy the teacher.

I teach straying from me. . . . .45

Believing as they did in truth, in freedom, and in inspiration, Emerson and Whitman had little patience with followers, with literary disciples. "We hear," Emerson said, "that we may speak."46 Whitman heard Emerson that he might speak, and his speech was not slavish imitation; he listened, too, to the voice within.

As Emerson explained in "The American Scholar,"

The man has never lived that can feed us ever. The human mind cannot be enshrined in a person who shall set a barrier on any one side to this unbounded, unboundable empire. It is one central fire. . . . It is one light which beams out of a thousand stars. It is one soul which animates all men.47

The man of genius, especially, is animated by this central fire, this one light, this one soul. To him even more than to other men comes revelation, the birth of truth.48

45 Leaves of Grass, pp. 52 and 53.
47 Ibid., p. 108.
Emerson said that man's "health and greatness consist in his being the channel through which heaven flows to earth. . . ."

This would seem to be especially true of the man of genius, the complete man. In "The Problem," Emerson spoke of his own necessity for freedom, for an unbroken channel back to God. In "The Problem," too, he gave classic expression to his belief in the artist's inspiration:

Not from a vain or shallow thought
His awful Joyce young Phidias brought;
Never from lips of cunning fell
The thrilling Delphic oracle;
Out from the heart of nature rolled
The burdens of the Bible old;
The litanies of nations came,
Like the volcano's tongue of flame,
Up from the burning cave below, --
The canticles of love and woe;
The hand that rounded Peter's dome
And groined the aisles of Christian Rome
Wrought in a sad sincerity;
Himself from God he could not free;
He builded better than he knew; --
The conscious stone to beauty grew.

Presumably, the artist, the man of genius, having more of the universal soul than other men, being more truly inspired, more truly owns the world. Emerson thought of the poet as the lord of the world, the possessor of all. His genius, the highest sort of love, makes him perceive unity, makes him understand. And, as Whitman knew, understanding is true possession.

50 "The Problem," Works, IX, 6 and 7. See also volume II of the same works, pages 34, 38, 96, and 239.
51 "The Poet," Works, III, 42.
Of this broad and majestic universe, all in
the visible world, and much in the greater world
invisible, is owned by the Poet. He owns the solid
ground and tills it and reaps from every field and
harvests cotton and grain and clover. All the
woods and all the orchards—the corn ear and stalk
and tassel, the buckwheat its white tops and the
bees that hum there all day—the salt meadows

53

How like that second harvest which the fields bore to Emerson—
that harvest not material, not of grain or hay or straw!

One harvest from thy field
Homeward brought the oxen strong;
A second crop thine acres yield,
Which I gather in a song.54

How like Emerson's discussion, in Nature, of the poet's owner-
ship of the land!

There is a property in the horizon which no man
has but he whose eye can integrate all the parts,
that is, the poet. This is the best part of
these men's farms, yet to this their warranty-
deeds give no title.55

Of material possessions, possession of things, both Whit-
man and Emerson were contemptuous. Emerson wrote:

It is God's world and mine; yours as much as you
want, mine as much as I want.56

The heart and soul of all men being one, this
bitterness of His and Mine ceases. His is mine. I
am my brother and my brother is me. If I feel over-
shadowed and outdone by great neighbors, I can yet
love; I can still receive; and he that loveth maketh

53Complete Writings, IX, 108. See also page iv of the
preface to Leaves of Grass.
his own the grandeur he loves. Thereby I make the
discovery that my brother is my guardian, acting
for me with the friendliest designs, and the estate
I so admired and envied is my own. It is the nature
of the soul to appropriate all things. 57

In "Hamatraya," the earth laughs at men for thinking that
they own her:

Earth laughs in flowers, to see her boastful boys
Earth-proud, proud of the earth which is not theirs;
Who steer the plow, but cannot steer their feet
Clear of the grave. 58

The first of two similar passages in Whitman's "To Think of
Time" mentions, too, an ownership spiritual and more lasting:

I see one building the house that serves him a few
years . . . . or seventy or eighty years at most;
I see one building the house that serves him longer
than that.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Your farm and profits and crops . . . . to think
how engrossed you are;
To think there will still be farms and profits and
crops . . . yet for you of what avail? 59

In an early note, Whitman had written a similar passage about
physical ownership:

Can I duly suppose that I may attain to certain
possessions -- as houses or stocks or lands or
goods; and when I have paid the money and taken
the receipts and warranty deeds such property will
be mine to enter upon and enjoy? 60

Like Emerson, then, Whitman believed that true ownership
is not material but spiritual. He believed that selfish,

58 "Hamatraya," Works, IX, 35.
59 Leaves of Grass, pp. 66 and 67.
60 Complete Writings, IX, 153.
physical ownership causes the value of the thing owned to wither away and enslaves the owner to the material things owned. As Emerson had written in the Ode to Channing: "Things are in the saddle, and ride mankind."\(^{62}\)

Whitman stated in his early notes for lectures on religion that to own anything is "to incorporate it into yourself, as the primal god swallowed the five immortal offspring of Rhea, and accumulated to his life and knowledge and strength all that would have grown in them."\(^{63}\) In the sense in which Whitman spoke of the "fluid and swallowing soul," Emerson's poet, as well as Whitman's, "swallows the whole world, loves it, understands it, identifies himself with it. Then he accumulates to himself all the knowledge and strength of the world.

And this is the reward; that the ideal shall be real to thee, and the impression of the actual world shall fall like summer rain, copious, but not troublesome to thy invulnerable essence. Thou shalt have the whole land for thy park and manor, the sea for thy bath and navigation, without tax and without envy; the woods and rivers thou shalt own, and thou shalt possess that wherein others are only tenants and boarders. Thou true land-lord! sea lord! air-lord! \(^{64}\)

The idea of true, spiritual ownership is concerned with the question of reality, with Emerson's riddle of the Sphinx.

\(^{61}\)Whitman's Workshop, pp. 45 and 46.


\(^{63}\)Whitman's Workshop, p. 45.

\(^{64}\)"The Poet," Works, III, 42.
It is associated, too, with the spiritual law of prudence, the physical law of cause and effect. A grasping after material things, Emerson said specifically and Whitman certainly believed, is a low prudence. The poet must have a higher prudence: he must satisfy the soul; his test is time. "The prescient poet projects himself centuries ahead and judges performer or performance after the changes of time." The very greatest writers must long be misunderstood.

The poet has higher notions of prudence than most men have. The great man is not prudent in the popular sense. He is not prudent, Emerson believed, in the sense of taking precaution against harm. He sees that, by every precaution which you take against an evil, you put yourself into the power of that evil. He sees that the highest prudence is not in being careful, not in taking precautions.

In the preface to his first edition of Leaves of Grass, Whitman spoke of prudence as he was to speak again in "Song of Prudence," first published in 1856. The poet sees, Whitman said, that "the young man who composedly periled his life

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65"Literary Ethics," Works, I, 185.

66Preface to Leaves of Grass, xi. See also "Song of Prudence," first published in 1856, now available in Complete Writings, II, 146-149.


68Preface to Leaves of Grass, p. ix.

and lost it has done exceedingly well for himself, while the man who has not peril ed his life and retains it to old age in riches and ease has perhaps achieved nothing for himself worth mentioning. . . ." He sees that "what evil or good he does [leaps] onward and [waits] to meet him again." . . . He sees that that man is truly prudent "who in his spirit in any emergency whatever neither hurries nor avoids death." He is cautious in the highest sense, for "Caution seldom goes far enough." He sees that the highest prudence is not material:

The prudence of the mere wealth and respectability of the most esteemed life appears too faint for the eye to observe at all when little and large alike drop quietly aside at the thought of the prudence suitable for immortality. What is wisdom that fills the thinness of a year or seventy or eighty years to wisdom spaced out by ages and coming back at a certain time with strong reinforcements and rich presents. . . . Only the soul is of itself. . . . All else has reference to what ensues. All that a person does or thinks is of consequence. Not a move can a man or a woman make that affects him or her in a day or a month or any part of the direct lifetime or the hour of death but the same affects him or her onward afterward through the indirect lifetime. The indirect is always as great and real as the direct. The spirit receives from the body just as much as it gives to the body. Not one name of word or deed. . . . ever is or ever can be stamped on the programme but it is duly realized and returned, and that returned in further performances. . . . and they returned again. . . . all that a male or a female does that is vigorous and benevolent and

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70 Leaves of Grass, p. xi. See also "Song of Prudence," Complete Writings, II, 146-149.

71 Preface to Leaves of Grass, p. ix.
clean is so much sure profit to him or her in the unshakable order of the universe and through the whole scope of it forever. . . . The interest will come round . . all will come round.\textsuperscript{72}

Emerson had written of the American:

Let him learn a prudence of a higher strain. Let him learn that every thing in nature, even motes and feathers, go by law and not by luck, and that what he sows he reaps.\textsuperscript{73}

To Emerson, a scholar was a failure without this knowledge, this high prudence.\textsuperscript{74}

There is a sublime prudence which is the very highest that we know of man, which, believing in a vast future, -- sure of more to come than is yet seen, -- postpones always the present hour to the whole life; postpones talent to genius, and special results to character.

In this whole concept of the higher prudence of the poet, there is a consciousness that the infinite is greater than the finite, that spirit is greater than matter. There is an awareness, too, of the high purpose of the poet. Emerson believed that: "Poetry and prudence should be coincident. Poets should be lawgivers. . . ." They should show us the "coincidence between reason and the phenomena" of the world about us. They should give us beauty as a dowry.\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{72}Ibid., p. x.
\textsuperscript{73}"Prudence," \textit{Works}, II, 231.
\textsuperscript{74}Ibid., p. 233.
\textsuperscript{75}"Man the Reformer," \textit{Works}, I, 256.
\textsuperscript{76}"Prudence," \textit{Works}, II, 231.
Whitman stressed the same two duties: poets should indicate the path between reality and our souls, he said; they should "remove what stands in the way of perceiving the beauty and perfection of all things." Wherever snow falls or water flows or birds fly, wherever day and night meet in twilight, wherever the blue heaven is hung by clouds or sown with stars, wherever are forms with transparent boundaries, wherever are outlets into celestial space, wherever is danger, and awe, and love, — there is Beauty, plentiful as rain, shed for thee, and though thou shouldst walk the world over, thou shalt not be able to find a condition inopportune or ignoble.

He associated the poet's office of Sayer with the love of beauty. He called beauty the superior member of a trinity, and the poet, therefore, a sovereign. He said that the universe has three children, whom he called the Knower, the Doer, and the Sayer. These stand respectively for the love of truth, for the love of good, and for the love of beauty. Each is that which he is, essentially, so that he cannot be surmounted or analyzed, and each of these three has the power of the others latent in him and his own, patent.

The poet is the sayer, the namer, and represents beauty. He is a sovereign, and stands on the centre. For the world is not painted or adorned, but is from the beginning beautiful; and God has not made some beautiful things, but Beauty is the creator of the Universe.

In a speech entitled "Art and Artists," delivered before the Brooklyn Art Union in 1851, Whitman gave a very similar

77Preface to Leaves of Grass, p. v.
78Whitman's Workshop, p. 66.
80Ibid., pp. 6 and 7.
definition of the artist, a definition which Holloway considers strong evidence of Emerson's early influence on Whitman, especially since the style of the whole speech is quite similar to that of Emerson's "Divinity School Address" and his "American Scholar," and since several ideas expressed in the speech are almost identical with Emerson's. In his office of re-creator of beauty, Whitman's artist is like Emerson's poet, his scholar, his idealist — "To the artist, I say, has been given the command to go forth into all the world and preach the gospel of beauty." 81

In Emerson's essay, "The Transcendentalist," Transcendentalism is defined as "Idealism as it appears in 1842," 82 and idealists are called lovers of beauty. "In the eternal trinity of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty, each in its perfection including the three, [Idealists] prefer to make beauty the sign and head," 83 "We call the Beautiful the highest," Emerson added, on the next page, "because it appears to us the golden mean, escaping the dowdiness of the good and the heartlessness of the true."

81 Uncollected Poetry and Prose, I, 243.
83 Ibid., p. 354.
In "Nature," Emerson had spoken of three kinds of beauty: beauty of the senses; spiritual beauty, or the beauty of virtue; and beauty as it is viewed by the intellect. Not only Emerson's belief in the identity of the good, the true, and the beautiful, but also his phraseology, is suggested by a definition of great poetry from Whitman's early notes:

The best poetry is simply that which has the perfect beauty — beauty to the ear, beauty to the brain, beauty to the heart, beauty to the time and place. There cannot be a true poem unless it satisfies the various needs of beauty.

Must not two of these "various needs of beauty" be Emerson's goodness and truth? Is not "beauty to the brain" truth? and is not "beauty to the heart" goodness?

In the preface to Leaves of Grass, Whitman spoke again of "beauty to the heart": "Whatever satisfies the soul," he said, "is truth." In a passage from his speech on art and artists, he identified beauty and goodness. Heroism, he believed, is moral beauty —

I think of few heroic actions which cannot be traced to the artistic impulse. He who does great deeds, does them from his sensitiveness to moral beauty: Such men are not merely artists, they are artistic material.

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85 Complete Writings, IX, 98. An annotation in the margin of a magazine published in 1849.
86 Leaves of Grass, p. xi.
87 Uncollected Poetry and Prose, I, 246.
Like Emerson, then, Whitman identified goodness and truth with beauty. Like Emerson, he thought beauty the highest member of this trinity: he named the others beauty to the heart and beauty to the mind. Like Emerson, too, Whitman thought that beauty is an ultimate end. Emerson had written, in the last paragraph of *Nature*:

The world thus exists to the soul to satisfy the desire of beauty. This element I call an ultimate end. No reason can be asked or given why the soul seeks beauty.  

In the speech mentioned above, delivered before the Brooklyn Art Union in 1851, Whitman told a fable about an idle Persian who, when charged with failure to do his part in the world, replied that he was made to appreciate beauty, and in doing so was fulfilling his purpose as surely as was the rose, in being beautiful.  

This anecdote, Holloway remarks in a note, may not have come from Emerson, but it "reads like a prose 'Rhodora'."  

Tell them, dear, that if eyes were meant for seeing, Then Beauty is its own excuse for being.  

Whitman repeated this idea in "A Song for Occupations," when he asked:

Have you reckoned the landscape took substance and form that it might be painted in a picture?

89 "Uncollected Poetry and Prose*, I, 246.  
92 *Leaves of Grass*, p. 60.
The implication is that he believed no such thing, that nature was not created for art, that beauty is sufficient unto itself, without appreciation.

Although Emerson believed that beauty is ultimate, he believed, too, that "beauty in nature is not ultimate," but merely "the herald of inward and eternal beauty. . . ." 93 Of this inward, ultimate beauty, the beauty of art is only a partial, finite indication; but it is the most direct indication which man can make —

Nothing is quite beautiful alone; nothing but is more beautiful in the whole. A single object is only so far beautiful as it suggests this universal grace. The poet, the painter, the sculptor, the musician, the architect, seek each to concentrate this radiance of the world on one point, and each in his several work to satisfy the love of beauty which stimulates him to produce. Thus is Art a nature passed through the alchemic of man. Thus in art does Nature work through the will of a man filled with the beauty of her first works. 94

We have seen that Whitman, in his speech on art and artists, represented the re-creation of the beauty of nature as the office of the artist. His whole definition of the artist, Holloway points out in a footnote, sounds just like Emerson's, "the artist being substituted for the scholar without affecting the Emersonian nature-philosophy in the least." Like Emerson, Whitman believed that "Art is a nature passed through the alchemic of man."

94 Ibid.
The perfect man is the perfect artist, and it cannot be otherwise. For in the much that has been said of Nature and Art there is mostly the absurd error of considering the two as distinct.  

Both Emerson and Whitman, then, believed that art is a kind of secondary nature. They believed that art is organic, in several senses. It is organic, like nature, in being necessary, functional, creative, progressive; in growing out of its own laws; and in following laws as definite as those of nature. It is like nature in being the product of an inspired mind -- God working through man -- and in being a reflection of the mind of its creator. Like nature, too, it is only an inadequate, finite symbol of that which it attempts to express.

Emerson had said that the poet should see man's works, the factory village and the railway, as a part of nature. Whitman saw them thus; they were an important part of the America which he treated in his poems. Perhaps there is an indication of this attitude in an article entitled "Tear Down and Build Over Again," which Whitman published in 1845. By tearing down and rebuilding old buildings, he said, we would be "imitating the great copy of Nature, the mother of the only wise philosophy." Here is surely an indication that Whitman was already aware of a correspondence between the laws of art and the laws of nature.

95 Uncollected Poetry and Prose, I, 243.
97 Uncollected Poetry and Prose, I, 96.
In the preface to the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman spoke of poems like nature, following laws as definite. He said that:

to speak in literature with the perfect rectitude and insouciance of the movements of animals and the unimpeachableness of the sentiment of trees in the woods and grass by the roadside is the flawless triumph of art.

Not only should the laws of art correspond to the laws of nature, but the laws of any one work of art should spring from its own nature, and from its conception in the mind of its creator — as animals do and plants do. Emerson wrote, in "The Method of Nature," that "Genius is its own end, and draws its means and the style of its architecture from within...." In "The Poet," he wrote:

It is not metres, but a metre-making argument that makes a poem -- a thought so passionate and alive that like the spirit of a plant or an animal it has an architecture of its own and adorns nature with a new thing.

Whitman's similar belief enabled him to call all organic things poems, and to compare the growth of poems with the growth of things in nature. It was behind the conviction, which he shared with Emerson, that poetry must be original, rather than imitative. It was in keeping with his belief that ornaments in art must be functional, necessary.

102 Preface to *Leaves of Grass*, pp. iii, iv, and v.
104 Preface to *Leaves of Grass*, p. ix.
Emerson, too believed that art should be functional. In his essay on Shakespeare, in Representative Men, he had said that: "as soon as the statue was begun for itself, and with no reference to the temple or palace, the art began to decline . . . ." 105

Two other comments on sculpture, one from Emerson and one from Whitman, seem to be the best illustrations of their beliefs about functional art; they seem also to be good indications of Whitman's early knowledge of Emerson. Whitman's comment entitled "Sculpture," incomplete in itself, would complement perfectly Emerson's opinion of sculpture, as expressed in his essay on "Art." Perhaps Whitman jotted down his comment when he finished reading the following passage from Emerson:

Already history is old enough to witness the old age and disappearance of particular arts. The art of sculpture is long ago perished to any real effect. It was originally a useful art, a mode of writing, a savage's record of gratitude or devotion, and among a people possessed of a wonderful perception of form this childish carving was refined to the utmost splendor of effect. But it is the game of a rude and youthful people, and not the manly labor of a wise and spiritual nation. 106

"Then," Whitman wrote, referring to no time which he mentions, but quite possibly to the savage age which Emerson had described -- "Then sculpture was necessary --

105 "Shakespeare; or, the Poet," Works, IV, 194.
it was an eminent part of religion, it gave grand and beautiful forms to the gods — it appealed to the mind, in perfect harmony, with the climate, beliefs, governments, and was the needed expression of the people, the time and their aspirations.

It was a part of architecture -- the temple stood unfinished without statues, and so they were made with reference to the temple -- they were not made abstractly by themselves. 107

There is a lack of prudence in the dissociation of sculpture from the temple, of the part from the whole. The prudent artist would follow the laws of nature. In his essay on Shakespeare, Emerson compared the artist's method with the method of nature:

he is strong, as nature is strong, who lifts the land into mountain slopes without effort and by the same rule as she floats a bubble in the air, and likes as well to do one as the other. 108

Whitman associated the "health" of a work of art with its "native qualities":

Health does not tell any more in the body than it does in literature. Which is the poem or any book that is not diseased? (If perfect health appear in a poem, or any book, it propagates itself a great while.) Show health and native qualities and you are welcome to all the rest. 109

One is reminded of Coleridge's suggestion that Shakespeare was conscious of his genius, and was true to nature almost deliberately, that his art might be lasting.

107 Complete Writings, IX, 157.
108 "Shakspeare; or, the Poet," Works, IV, 213.
109 Complete Writings, IX, 158.
Emerson -- and probably Coleridge, too, actually -- believed quite the opposite. Emerson thought that great artists are unconscious of their greatness, that they do what they must. He believed that very little of what men have done in the past has really been "intention." "That which externally seemed will and immovableness was willingness and self-annihilation. Could Shakespeare give a theory of Shakespeare?" 111

Emerson believed that great art is organic because its creator is inspired, and that its lasting truth, which enables us to understand it after many years, is a manifestation of the over-soul and an indication of the identity of all minds. "There is some awe mixed with the joy of our surprise, when this poet, who lived in some past world, two or three hundred years ago, says that which lies close to my own soul, that which I also had well-nigh thought and said." 112

Emerson said that great art is inspired, that it presents an appearance like nature. 113 The best part of each writer's works, he believed, is "that which he does not know; that which flowed out of his constitution and not from his too-active invention." ... 114 He spoke of the thought which works

111 Ibid., p. 134.
through the hand of man. In "The Problem," which contains the line

He builded better than he knew,

Emerson also wrote,

The temples grew as grows the grass,

and

The passive Master lent his hand
To the vast soul that o'er him planned.

Emerson believed, then, that the artist creates his greatest art not by will but by inspiration, and that the greatest art is organic.

Whitman, more in sympathy with man's will, emphasized the importance of the human creator. He asserted that "The great poet submits only to himself." Yet in the next sentence he advised the poet to be like nature. Perhaps the seeming difference between reliance on man and reliance on God is the same difference which Havelock Ellis resolved when he called Whitman's emphasis on self "the divine apotheosis of Yankee self-reliance;" and explained that self-reliance is god-reli-

Whitman advised the poet:

Is nature rude, free, irregular? If nature be so, do you too be so. Do you suppose nature has nothing under those beautiful, terrible, irrational forms?

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118 Complete Writings, IX, 162.
Whitman may have been more willful in his creation of art than Emerson, more conscious of his imitation of nature, more consciously prudent. Like nature, he would make only "successive productions," only progressive forms—

Most poets finish single specimens of characters— I will never finish single specimens; I will shower them by exhaustless laws as Nature does, indicating not only themselves but successive productions out of themselves, later and fresher continually. 119

In "The American Scholar," Emerson had defined the theory of books as an absorption of the world into the soul of the scholar, and a rearrangement and reutterance of its facts. 120 A longer, rather similar statement from Nature sums up his views, and seemingly Whitman's, too, concerning man as a creator.

As a plant upon the earth, so a man rests upon the bosom of God; he is nourished by unfailing fountains, and draws at his need inexhaustible power. Who can set bounds to the possibilities of man? Once inhale the upper air, being admitted to behold the absolute natures of justice and truth, and we learn that man has access to the entire mind of the Creator, is himself a creator in the finite. 121

Emerson believed that art, like nature, is a reflection of the mind of its creator. He believed that one can know only so much as he has lived, and that the true scholar, therefore, "grudges every opportunity of action past by, as a loss

119 Ibid., p. 87.
121 "Nature," Works, I, 64.
of power," 122 He believed that the soul is felt in art, that the depth of an author's soul is reflected in his writing, 123 that "Precisely in proportion to the depth of mind, from which it ensued, so high does man's creation soar, so long does it sing." 124 In his essay on Goethe, Emerson wrote: "It makes a great difference to the force of any sentence whether there be a man behind it or no." 125 Emerson observed, of Plato, that he had no external biography, no lover, wife, or children of whom we know -- "He ground them into paint." 126 Emerson found Montaigne's sentences more a part of the man, "less written," than those of any author he had read: "Cut those words, and they would bleed; they are vascular and alive." 127 "The true poem," Emerson believed, "is the poet's mind; the true ship is the ship-builder. In the man, could we lay him open, we should see the reason for the least flourish and tendril of his work; as every spine and tint in the sea-shell pre-exists in the secreting organs of the fish." 128 "The man is only half himself, the other half is his expression." 129

122 Ibid., p. 95.
125 "Goethe; or, the Writer," Works, IV, 282.
126 "Plato; or, the Philosopher," Works, IV, 43.
127 "Montaigne; or, the Skeptic," Works, IV, 168.
All of these quotations about the artist's relationship to his creation suggest Whitman's well-known phrase concerning *Leaves of Grass*:

Camerado, this is no book,
Who touches this touches a man, ... 130

Though Whitman's lines were written too late for the purpose of this study, it is interesting to note that they are similar in phraseology, as well as in thought, to passages from Emerson's writing: In "Character," Emerson spoke of the refreshing devotion which simple people feel for their favorite books -- "as feeling that they have a stake in that book; who touches that, touches them, ..." 131

Emerson, and especially Whitman, spoke of the artist's identification, not with his art only, but with the people, the things, the happenings which are portrayed in that art. In his essay on Goethe, Emerson wrote:

In the writer's eyes, a man is the faculty of reporting, and the universe is the possibility of being reported. In conversation, in calamity, he finds new materials; as our German poet said, "Some god gave me the power to paint what I suffer." He draws his rents from rage and pain. 132

In one of the most beautiful passages in which Whitman identified himself with his subjects, he wrote:

130 "So Long!", *Complete Writings*, II, 289.
132 "Goethe; or, the Writer," *Works*, IV, 263.
All this I swallow and it tastes good . . . . I like it well, and it becomes mine, I am the man . . . . I suffered . . . . I was there. 133

In "The Poet," Emerson spoke of identification, of intuition, of understanding through having been what was seen:

This insight, which expresses itself by what is called Imagination, is a very high sort of seeing, which does not come by study, but by the intellect being where and what it sees; by sharing the path or circuit of things through forms, and so making them translucent to others. 134

In a passage from Whitman's notebook for 1847, Whitman drew again the parallel between the universal creator and the artist, and suggested the theory of his poetic practice of identification:

The soul or spirit transmits itself into all matter -- into rocks, and can live the life of a rock -- into the sea . . . . -- into the oak . . . .
A man only is interested in anything when he identifies himself with it -- he must himself be whirling and speeding through space like the planet Mercury -- he must be driving like a cloud -- he must shine like the sun -- he must be orbit and balanced in the air, like this earth -- he must crawl like the pismire . . . . 135

Emerson had written in "History" that "the roots of all things are in man" -- "There is nothing but is related to us, nothing that does not interest us . . . ." 136 In his earliest notebook, cited above, Whitman expressed his belief that all

135. *Uncollected Poetry and Prose*, II, 64.
things are fit subjects for poetry, and that the poet's duty is to translate the meaning of things to man.\textsuperscript{137} Hence the importance of experience, real and vicarious. Whitman believed, with Emerson, that to think or to write is partial, that only to be is complete.\textsuperscript{138} He believed that "The great poet absorbs the identity of others and the experience of others and they are definite in him or from him; but he presses them all through the powerful press of himself . . . . loads his own masterly identity."\textsuperscript{139} Thus Whitman sought to know all things, the subjects of poetry, through real and imagined experience, and to present reality to his readers by identifying himself with all that he had known.

The child in "There Was a Child Went Forth" became all that he saw.\textsuperscript{140} In "I Sing the Body Electric," Whitman became the child, the swimmer, the wrestler, the fireman.\textsuperscript{141} In "The Sleepers," he identified himself with other dreamers.\textsuperscript{142} In "Song of Myself," he warned: "You can do nothing and be nothing but what I will infold you."\textsuperscript{143} "I am there . . . ." he said: "I help. . . ."\textsuperscript{144} "In all people I see myself...."\textsuperscript{145}

\textsuperscript{137} Uncollected Poetry and Prose, II, 76 and 65.
\textsuperscript{139} Complete Writings, I, 120.
\textsuperscript{140} Leaves of Grass, p. 90 ff.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., p. 78.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., p. 71.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., p. 45.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., p. 18.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., p. 26.
Wherever the human heart beats...  
Storming, enjoying, planning, loving, cautioning,  
Back and filling, appearing and disappearing,  
I tread day and night such roads.  

Of events, he said; "These become mine and me every one...  
of people: "I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as  
the wise..."  

Emerson had not consciously used the method of identification in his writing; but, he, like Whitman, had recognized the necessity of the principle. In the essay "History," he had written:

A painter told me that nobody could draw a tree without in some sort becoming a tree; or draw a child by studying the outlines of its form merely,—but by watching for a time his motions and plays, the painter enters into his nature and can then draw him at will in every attitude.

Similarly, Emerson had not, like Whitman, given long lists of things and experiences as an attempt to present reality; but he, too had had as his purpose the presentation of reality, and had acknowledged the necessity of experience. Emerson believed that the scholar must not extricate himself from the world, or his emptiness will be exposed. Human life is his material. The scholar, above all men, should be a realist.

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146 Ibid., pp. 36 and 38.  
147 Ibid., p. 42.  
148 Ibid., p. 23.  
149 "History," Works, II, 16.  
Emerson's ideas about the scholar's medium are in keeping with his beliefs about his purpose. The writer must not overemphasize his means of expression, Emerson believed; he must not make a plaything of language. 151

There is a higher work for art than the arts. . . . Nothing less than the creation of man and nature is its end. A man should find in it an outlet for his whole energy. He may paint and carve only as long as he can do that. Art should exhilarate, and throw down the walls of circumstance on every side, awakening in the beholder the same sense of universal relation and power which the work evinced in the artist, and its highest effect is to make new artists. 152

Language should be not an end, but a means. It should present life. It should "throw down the walls of circumstance." Through it, ideally, the great poet "turns the world to glass, and shows us all things in their right series and procession." 153 But, in reality, his explanation is only partial, for language is inadequate. Both Emerson and Whitman believed, as we have seen, that to write is partial, that only to be is complete. Both believed, too, that language is partial, and cannot express completely life's infinite beauties.

Emerson called words "finite organs of the infinite mind." Continuing, he said:

They cannot cover the dimensions of what is in truth. They break, chop, and impoverish it. 154

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151 Ibid., p. 177.
... it is the fault of our rhetoric that we cannot strongly state one fact without seeming to belie some other. 155

In the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman referred several times to the inadequacy of speech. The first quotation is from a catalogue of "old forever new things," which he listed:

The paper I write on or you write on ... and every word we write... and every cross and twirl of the pen ... and the curious way we write what we think ... yet very faintly. ... 156

I pass so poorly with paper and types. ... I must pass with the contact of bodies and souls. 157

I lie abstracted and hear beautiful tales of things and the reasons of things, They are so beautiful I nudge myself to listen.

I cannot say what I hear. ... I cannot say it to myself. ... it is very wonderful. 158

It is evident from the examples presented in this chapter that in their beliefs concerning art and literature Emerson and Whitman are remarkably similar. Emerson called for an American poet who would portray his own time and country, who would show men the truth and free them from their chains, who would be a lover of the universe and a perceiver of unity. Whitman echoed Emerson's call and, in a large measure, fulfilled its demands in his own poetic practice. Both Emerson

156 *Leaves of Grass*, pp. 61 and 62.
and Whitman believed that the poet, like other men of genius, is a representative of all mankind -- that he is best able to interpret the world because he is more inspired than other men, has freer access to the universal soul. They believed that the deep understanding which the poet gains through his inspiration makes him the true owner of the world, for true ownership is love and understanding. They believed in a higher prudence than the common man's caution about material things. They believed that the man of genius looks to the future and sees that true prudence has to do with ideas and the sort of moral action which will withstand the test of time.

Both Emerson and Whitman identified goodness and truth with beauty, and believed that beauty in its highest form is an ultimate value. Both believed in the organic theory of art. Thus, to Whitman and to Emerson, man is a creator in the finite, as God is creator in the infinite; man is inspired, and creates art only as great as the soul within him. Art is a sort of secondary nature, filtered through the soul of the artist. It is bound not only by the artist's limitations, but also by the inadequacy of finite expression. Its purpose is to present beauty, and the greatest beauty is inexplicable. Its purpose is to translate infinite reality into finite terms. Perfect art is impossible, then, and each creation is doomed to only partial success; but art, like nature and society, is progressing. Its truth and beauty and goodness are as great as the artist's own, and it is so far lasting.
CHAPTER IV

NATURE AND REALITY

"Philosophically considered," Emerson wrote in the introduction to Nature, "the universe is composed of Nature and the Soul."¹ We have seen something of what he believed, and of what Whitman believed about the Soul — its presence in man, its working through man's creations. Except as concerns organic art, it remains to be seen how Emerson and Whitman regarded Nature.

There is a difference, perhaps, in their definitions. Emerson went on, in the introduction to Nature, to define his terms.

Strictly speaking, therefore, all that is separate from us, all which Philosophy distinguishes as the NOT ME, that is, both nature and art, all other men and my own body, must be ranked under this name, NATURE. . . . Nature, in the common sense, refers to essences unchanged by man; space, the air, the river, the leaf.² Art differs from Nature only in being a mixture of the human will with these essences unchanged by man. Man's body differs from other nature in being subject to the human will.

²Ibid., pp. 4 and 5.
The world proceeds from the same spirit as the body of man. It is a remoter and inferior incarnation of God, a projection of God in the unconscious. But it differs from the body in one important respect. It is not, like that, now subjected to the human will. Its serene order is inviolable by us. It is therefore, to us, the present expositor of the divine mind.

The difference between Emerson's beliefs and Whitman's, perhaps more apparent than real, is suggested here. Emerson thought man's body, though presumably superior to "the world" in being a projection of God in the conscious, inferior, too----in a way less divine -- because it is subject to the human will. Seemingly, Whitman opposed not man's body and nature, but whole man and nature, and, within man, body and soul. He seemed not to associate body with nature, but only with man. His emphasis on pride, freedom, and the individual seem in keeping with a notion that man's body, like his soul, is superior to nature in being possessed of free will. Whitman used always the common, not the philosophical definition of "Nature," He thought of the body as a part of the "ME" rather than as a part of "all which Philosophy distinguishes as the NOT ME." He found evidence of divinity in men more readily than in natural forms. Emerson saw divinity in the world around him; Whitman was made most conscious of God's presence by a glance, a touch, a word.

3Ibid., pp. 64 and 65.
Whitman exalted the body as an outward form of the soul; Emerson exalted the soul as seen in the physical beauty of nature, more than in the human form. This difference was, of course, concerned with their different treatments of sex, which spring, however, from very similar attitudes. Whitman no less than Emerson, perhaps even more than Emerson -- thought of sex as being spiritual. Gay Allen has suggested that Whitman spoke as he did of sex because he was a spokesman of nature, to whom nothing is indecent.\(^4\) Sex to Whitman was not only not indecent, however; it was beautiful as a physical symbol of spiritual union. In a way, Whitman's treatment of sex was an exaggerated illustration of Emerson's own belief about the correspondence of matter and spirit, of physical and spiritual laws, an illustration of Emerson's law of polarity.\(^5\) "The difference," Moore has written in his article on Whitman and Emerson, "is more one of temperament than of thought."\(^6\) If there is an important difference of thought, it would seem to concern not the two authors' beliefs about sex itself, but their beliefs about the divinity of man and nature.

One feels, for instance, that Whitman would not have agreed with the last sentence of the following quotation from Emerson, though he would have believed the first three:

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In the divine order, intellect is primary; nature, secondary; it is the memory of the mind. That which once existed in intellect as pure law, has now taken body as Nature. It existed already in the mind in solution; now it has been precipitated, and the bright sediment is the world... When man curses, nature still testifies to truth and love.7

Though Whitman came early to the conclusion that the mind of man is the only unbalanced thing in the world, he tended, at least in these early years, to blame the lack of balance in man's mind on "this wicked world" rather than on man himself.8

Like Emerson, Whitman believed that man is by nature good, that he comes into the world free from sin. Emerson had called the belief in natural depravity the last profligacy and profanation.9 Whitman wrote: "And let no one suppose that it is so difficult a task to make the mind of a child moral and virtuous."10

Whitman is perhaps unlike Emerson, however, in finding the reason for man's lack of balance in the world around him. Emerson attributed man's failure to his tendency to follow finite rather than infinite laws, his tendency to overvalue his individuality, to break away from nature.11 He believed that ferocity in nature "had its inlet by human crime, and must have its outlet by human suffering."12

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8 The Gathering of the Forces, I, 129.
10 The Gathering of the Forces, I, 129.
12 "Heroism," Works, II, 249.
Wordsworth saw that very nature which was given man to remind him of God was a factor, too, in his limitation. Both Whitman and Emerson, like Wordsworth, believed that man comes into the world not evil but good. Like Wordsworth, they believed that man is at first in harmony with nature, and that the virtuous man remains at one with his surroundings. In his manuscript notebook for 1847, Whitman said that what things "seem to the child they are" -- good, positive, true.

\[
\text{And the world is no joke,}^{14}
\text{Nor any part of it a sham.}^{14}
\]

Emerson wrote in _Nature_:

The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood. His intercourse with heaven and earth becomes part of his daily food.\(^{15}\)

The man need not be wise in number of facts, in acquired knowledge; in fact, the tendency seems to be for the learned man to lose true wisdom, the perception of unity --

The idiot, the Indian, the child and unschooled farmer's boy stand nearer to the light by which nature is to be read, than the dissector or the antiquary.\(^{16}\)

The dissector is wrong in tearing apart, the antiquary in overvaluing the past at the expense of the present.

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\(^{13}\)"Nature,"  _Works_, I, 22 and 35.

\(^{14}\)Uncollected _Poetry and Prose_, II, 70. Perhaps these lines should not be quoted as authoritative, since Holloway's brackets indicate that Whitman had marked the passage out, apparently displeased.

\(^{15}\)"Nature,"  _Works_, I, 8.

\(^{16}\)"History,"  _Works_, II, 41
Whitman, too, thought that a man must be in harmony with nature in order to have true understanding. The idea of the natural wisdom of the simple man is perhaps more at home in his writings than in Emerson's:

I swear I will never mention love or death inside a house,
And I swear I never will translate myself at all,
only to him or her who privately stays with me in the open air.

If you would understand me go to the heights or water-shore,
The nearest gnat is an explanation and a drop or a motion of waves a key.
The maul the ear and the handsaw second my words.

No shuttered room or school can commune with me,
But roughs and little children better than they. 17

If Emerson thought, as Wordsworth did, that finite nature is sometimes a limitation, a bad example for the soul of man, he nevertheless emphasized its positive influence. He called nature "the city of God," 18 "the organ through which the universal spirit speaks to the individual, and strives to lead back the individual to it." 19

Emerson believed that nature is moral, that it has healing powers, that its example will teach man goodness and truth and wisdom and the meaning of true richness. 20 Nature is the ally

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17 *Leaves of Grass*, p. 53.
of religion. It is a better teacher than books, because it is a more direct approach to the universal soul.

Whitman, like Emerson and like Wordsworth, thought of nature as a teacher, as an approach to divinity. He thought nature a greater teacher than books, much as Emerson did, because any time, any place, he could come more directly by an "autograph of God." But he came by his inspiration, his contact with the universal soul, even more readily through association with men and women:

There are plenty who do not own books, but all men and all women possess in fee simple the curbless and bottomless mine itself, whence books are but the dust and scraps. . . . What black and stupid hour is that, while the unspeakable something in man's eyes anywhere beams upon me, that I do not feel the hint and the extasy of the presence of God?

Like Emerson, however, Whitman found nature a teacher, a great teacher by example. She taught Emerson not to "fret and fume." He learned that idle days are not lost, that seen in the past they are meaningful. He learned that idleness is equally as good as action, that our real action, our important moments, are in contemplation. "The rich mind lies in the sun and sleeps," he wrote, "and is Nature. To think


22 "Woodnotes, II," Works, IX, 57; and "Monadnoc," Works, IX, 60.

23 Leaves of Grass, p. 54; see also p. 16.

24 Whitman's Workshop, p. 47.


is to act." Whitman loafed and invited his soul; he listened and "accrued."

I loaf and invite my soul,
I lean and loaf at my ease . . . observing a
spear of summer grass.28

I think I will do nothing for a long time but
listen,
And accrue what I hear to myself . . . and let
sounds contribute toward me.29

He learned contentment and self-sufficiency from the animals:

I think I could turn and live awhile with the animals. . . . they are so placid and self-
contained,
I stand and look at them sometimes half the
day long.

They do not sweat and whine about their condition,
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for
their sins,
They do not make me sick discussing their duty to
God,
Not one is dissatisfied. . . . not one is demented
with the mania of owning things,
Not one kneels to another nor to his kind that
lived thousands of years ago,
Not one is respectable or industrious over the whole
earth.30

In another passage about animals and about the purpose
and meaning of nature, there is a strong suggestion of Whit-
man's familiarity with a passage from Emerson. Emerson had
written, in "Nature," that, on days when nature is in harmony,

28 Leaves of Grass, p. 13.
29 Ibid., p. 31.
30 Ibid., p. 34.
"the cattle that lie on the ground seem to have great and tranquil thoughts." In a passage from his journal for October 30, 1841 -- a passage which Whitman could hardly have known, however, Emerson had expressed the same idea more explicitly: "the very cattle that lie on the ground seem to have great thoughts, and Egypt and India look from their eyes." Whitman wrote, in "Song of Myself":

Oxen that rattle the yoke or halt in the shade, what is it that you express in your eyes?  
It seems to me more than all the print I have read in my life.  

Whitman learned from nature that everything is meaningful. He learned, too, that everything is bound by law.

The wild gander leads his flock through the cool night,  
Ya-honk! he says, and sounds it down to me like an invitation;  
The pert may suppose it meaningless, but I listen closer,  
I find its purpose and place up there toward the November sky.  

The sharp-hoofed moose of the north, the cat on the housesill, the chickadee, the prairie-dog,  
The litter of the grunting sow as they tug at her teats,  
The brood of the turkeyhen, and she with her half-spread wings,  
I see in them and myself the same old law.  

33 Leaves of Grass, p. 20.
34 Ibid., pp. 20 and 21.
In "The American Scholar," Emerson had said that objects in nature follow laws which are also the laws of the human mind, that nature's laws have their counterparts in laws of the spirit. \textsuperscript{35} The laws of moral nature answer to those of matter as face to face in a glass. \ldots\ The axioms of physics translate the laws of ethics.\textsuperscript{36} Bliss Perry has quoted a similar passage from one of Emerson's unprinted notebooks, and has said that the attitude toward law which it sets forth is Emerson's characteristic attitude:

Socrates says "The laws below are sisters of the laws above." So really are the material elements of close affinity to the moral elements. But they are not their cousins, they are themselves. They are the same laws acting on superior and inferior planes. On the lower plane it is called Heat, on the higher Love. Whenever you enunciate a physical law, I hear in it a moral rule.\textsuperscript{37}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{36} "Nature," \textit{Works}, I, 32 and 33.
\textsuperscript{37} Perry, \textit{Emerson Today}, pp. 82 and 83. The other attitude which Perry has in mind is evident in the well-known lines which he quotes from Emerson's "Ode Inscribed to W. H. Channing":

\begin{quote}
There are two laws discrete,
Not reconciled, --
Law for man and law for thing; (\textit{Works}, IX, 78).
\end{quote}
\end{flushright}

In the course of an interesting discussion of Emerson's attitude toward law, Perry states his belief that Emerson made the distinction between "law for man" and "law for thing" "simply to protest against the materialism of pro-slavery politics." \textit{Emerson Today}, p. 82.
Sometime before 1855, Whitman wrote in a notebook his belief that the laws of nature are in reality laws of the soul: "The law of gravity is the law under which you make your house plumb but that is not what the law is specially made for."38 At least two other passages from Whitman's early prose draw a parallel between the laws of nature and the laws of society:

One good of knowing the great politics of nature is to imitate their rectitude and impartiality in all the politics of the state.

And again:

There are leading moral truths underlying politics, as invariable and reliable as the leading truths in geology, chemistry or mathematics. These truths are the foundation of American politics.40

Emerson believed it the business of the philosopher and the poet to establish law:

'The problem of philosophy,' according to Plato, 'is, for all that exists unconditionally, to find a ground unconditioned and absolute.' It proceeds on the faith that a law determines all phenomena, which being known, the phenomena can be predicted. That law, when in the mind, is an idea. Its beauty is infinite. The true philosopher and the true poet are one, and a beauty, which is truth, and a truth, which is beauty, is the aim of both.41

38Uncollected Poetry and Prose, II, 85.
39Complete Writings, IX, 138.
40Ibid., p. 144.
Like Emerson's philosopher and poet, the "great master" whom
Whitman described in his first preface perceived the importance
of law:

The great master has nothing to do with miracles.
He sees health for himself in being one of the
mass. . . . he sees the hiatus in singular emi-
nence. To the perfect shape comes common ground.
To be under the general law is great for that is
to correspond with it. The master knows that he
is unspeakably great and that all are unspeakably
great. . . . 42

There is a hint, here again, of Whitman's belief in equality --
this time the equality of supremes.

Emerson continued to emphasize the moral quality of na-
ture, of nature's laws, and therefore of lawgivers -- poets
and philosophers. The dawn of virtue on the heart he called
a sign that Law is sovereign over all. 43 "All things," he
said, "are moral. That soul which within us is a sentiment,
outside of us is a law." 44 It was moral insight, Emerson
thought, which placed Swedenborg among the lawgivers. 45
Men all believe in law, or the word "justice" would have
no meaning. 46

It was the moral side of their dual application, then,
which Emerson considered the more important side of laws. Of

42 Leaves of Grass, p. viii.
43 "Divinity School Address," Works, I, 125.
45 "Swedenborg; or, the Mystic," Works, IV, 124.
fact and idea, idea is the higher, as spirit is higher than matter. Emerson wrote in Nature:

We make fables to hide the baldness of the fact and conform it, as we say, to the higher law of the mind. But when the fact is seen under the light of an idea, the gaudy fable fades and shrivels. We behold the real higher law. To the wise, therefore, a fact is true poetry, and the most beautiful of fables. 47

Emerson went on to say that nature is fluid to the spirit, that a life conformed to pure idea will not be ruled by matter. "In "The American Scholar" he expressed his belief that the universe is fluid to goodness, to divinity; be trustful, brave, divine, he advised, and the world will do your bidding, will uphold your state of mind. 48

Whitman, too, believed that the "drift" of things — of the stars, of life, of the universe — is determined by something more sure than luck. He, too, believed that the spiritual aspect of laws is more important even than their physical aspect, that idea is superior to fact:

Have you reckoned the landscape substance and form that it might be painted in a picture? Or men and women that they might be written of, and songs sung? Or the attraction of gravity and the great laws and harmonious combinations and the fluids of the air as subjects for the savans? Or the brown land and the blue sea for maps and charts? Or the stars to be put in constellations and named fancy names? Or that the culture of seeds is for agricultural tables or agriculture itself? 49

49 Leaves of Grass, p. 61.
Perhaps all these physical facts are ultimate ends in themselves; perhaps they stand as models for spiritual ideas. Certain it is that Whitman saw in himself and in nature the same old law, permanent and unchanging —

Did you guess the celestial laws are yet to be worked over and rectified? 51

He saw in the behavior of laws a reason for his own pride:

I know I am august,
I do not trouble my spirit to vindicate itself or be understood,
I see that the elementary laws never apologize,
I reckon I behave no prouder than the level I plant my house by after all. 52

Whitman celebrated the greatness of law — perhaps of political law, but it, too, has its model in universal law —

Great is the law . . . . Great are the old few landmarks of the law . . . . they are the same in all times and shall not be disturbed. 53

In "Song of Myself," he had spoken of the purpose of all things in nature. A few pages farther on he wrote,

Do you guess I have some intricate purpose? Well I have . . . . for the April rain has, and the mica on the side of a rock has. 54

In the preface to his first edition of Leaves of Grass, Whitman made perhaps his most definite statement about physical laws, about science:

50 Ibid., p. 21.
51 Ibid., p. 28.
53 Ibid., p. 94.
54 Ibid., pp. 21 and 25.
The whole theory of the special and supernatural and all that was twined with it or educed out of it departs as a dream. What has ever happened.... what happens and whatever may or shall happen, the vital laws enclose all .... they are sufficient for any case and for all cases....

Just earlier, in the same preface, Whitman had written:

Exact science and its practical movements are no checks on the greatest poet but always his encouragement and support.... In the beauty of poems are the tuft and final applause of science.

In "Song of Myself," he stated more specifically his belief that the ideas of poetry are greater than the facts of science, that science should be a means and not an end:

Hurrah for positive science! ![Long!] live exact demonstration!
Fetch stonecrop and mix it with cedar and branches of lilac,
This is the lexicographer or chemist . . . . this made a grammar of the old cartouches,
These mariners put the ship through dangerous unknown seas,
This is the geologist, and this works with the scalpel, and this is a mathematician.

Gentlemen I receive you, and attach and clasp hands with you,
The facts are useful and real . . . . they are not my dwelling . . . . I enter by them to an area of the dwelling.

Emerson, too, had seen the correspondence between poetry and science, between moral and scientific laws. Like Whitman, he considered mere facts and details of little value --

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55 Ibid., pp. vii and viii. 56 Ibid., p. viii.
57 Ibid., p. 28.
58 See note 35, page 107 above.
I cannot greatly honor minuteness in details, so long as there is no hint to explain the relation between things and thoughts; no ray upon the metaphysics of conchology, of botany, of the arts, to show the relation of the forms of flowers, shells, animals, architecture, to the mind, and build science upon ideas. 59

He thought that science lacks humanity, that in the perception of truth it has only half-sight, since it forgets its purpose in attending to its methods. 60 He approached science from an ethical point of view, to see what it could teach of morals.

Of misused science, of pseudo-sciences, 61 Emerson was contemptuous. He lamented the emphasis on the physical which would make one live "in a sty of sensualism..."

But it is impossible that the creative power should exclude itself. Into every intelligence there is a door which is never closed, through which the creator passes. The intellect, seeker of absolute truth, or the heart, lover of absolute good, intervenes for our succor, and at one whisper of these high powers we awake from ineffectual struggles with this nightmare. We hurl it into its own hell, and cannot again contract ourselves to so base a state. 62

Emerson wrote of the poet, the idealist:

He unfixes the land and the sea, makes them revolve around the axis of his primary thought, and disposes them anew. Possessed himself by a heroic passion, he uses matter as symbols of it. The sensual man conforms thoughts to things; the poet conforms

59 Ibid., p. 67. See also page 28 in the same work.

60 Ibid., pp. 68 and 69.

61 It is interesting to note that whereas Whitman was quite interested in the pseudo-science of phrenology, Emerson spoke scathingly of "adapting my conversation to the shape of heads." "Experience," Works, III, 54.

things to his thoughts. The one esteems nature as rooted and fast; the other, as fluid, and impresses his being thereon. To him, the refractory world is ductile and flexible; he invests dust and stones with humanity, and makes them the words of the Reason. 63

Emerson, then, would have the poet be a translator of physical into moral laws; like Whitman, Emerson would have the poet indicate the path between reality and the soul of man. Some of his own most important moral teachings are the counterpart of natural laws, of scientific developments new in his day.

In "Emerson and Science," H. H. Clark has written that Emerson was "acquainted with all of . . . . the 'four great novel ideas' which were introduced into theoretical science in the nineteenth century . . . ." These ideas Clark enumerates as electro-magnetism, atomicity, conservation of energy, and evolution. He says of Emerson: "he was most interested in evolution."64 Emerson was least interested, perhaps, in atomicity, except as an indication of the reality of spirit, of the unreality of seeming-solid matter: "the new molecular philosophy," he wrote in "Experience," "shows astronomical interspaces betwixt atom and atom, shows that the world


is all outside; it has no inside."65 In the scientific theory of conservation of energy, Emerson found an indication of the continuation of spirit as well as matter, of immortality, of eternity here and now. From electro-magnetism, he took the idea of polarity, the physical law of the equality of opposites, their attraction for one another, and their close relationship. His own theories of polarity, of circles, and perhaps even of compensation, are moral ramifications of this law of matter. Emerson's beliefs about evolution -- found, too, in the writings of Whitman -- anticipated the Darwinian theory, were in keeping with the earlier theory of a chain of being which saw a definite purpose, certain progress, in the mutations of plant and animal forms. Emerson's beliefs about progress were based on his concept of evolution. His knowledge of science and his application of the laws of matter to the problems of the spirit -- particularly his beliefs about evolution and progress -- were in keeping with his whole philosophy, with his optimism. Emerson wrote, in Representative Men: "Modern science . . . generates a feeling of complacency and hope."66

Whitman, too, could have based his optimistic philosophy on his interpretation of science; his interpretation was essentially Emerson's. Though he made no early statement of

65 "Experience," Works, III, 63 and 64.
beliefs which is anything like as definite as Emerson's, he referred frequently in his early prose, and especially in the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, to scientific laws as bases of moral concepts. In a note from his early prose, he spoke of his belief that society, like nature, progresses from lower to higher forms --

> The two ideas of unity and progress. The great idea of humanity is progress -- onward! onward! backing and filling -- every step contested -- sometimes a long interregnum -- sometimes a retrogression -- but still, by degrees, a sure, resistless progress. All nations, all times, show more or less of this idea. . . .

The ideas of unity and progress, then, both Whitman and Emerson thought of as being moral laws which correspond to natural laws. The chain of being in nature becomes progress in society, in spirit. Polarity, the physical law of the attraction and identity of opposites, erases dualism and makes possible the perception of unity -- makes matter and spirit, fact and idea, evil and good -- merely two aspects of one whole. The two ideas are linked by Emerson's notion that we are progressing toward spirit, toward good. Gay Allen points out the connection between the chain of being idea and Whitman's concept of evil, since evil, being negative, is tending to be eliminated.

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67 *Complete Writings*, IX, 139.

Some of Emerson's best-known expressions of the idea of progress concern his visit to the Jardin des Plantes in Paris in 1833. According to his journals, it was here, before a case of specimens of animal and plant life, that the belief in progress, in a chain of being, struck him most forcefully. His son has written, in the biographical sketch which introduces the Centenary Edition of Emerson's works:

He recorded in his Journal and in his lectures before the Natural History Society, just after his return from Europe in 1833, the strange feelings of relationship that had been stirred in him by the sight of the animal forms graded from lowest to highest in the Jardin des Plantes Museum in Paris "and the upheaving principle of life everywhere incipient, in the very rock aping organized forms .... I am impressed with the singular conviction that not a form so grotesque, so savage, or so beautiful but is an expression of something in man, the observer. We feel that there is an occult relation between the very worm, the crawling scorpion and man. I am moved to strange sympathies, I say, I will listen to this invitation. I will be a Naturalist." 69

In Nature, Emerson referred again to his experience in the Jardin des Plantes:

In a cabinet of natural history, we become sensible of a certain occult recognition and sympathy in regard to the most unwieldy and eccentric forms of beast, fish, and insect. 70

In the motto which now appears at the beginning of Nature, first used in the second edition of 1849, Emerson had given poetic expression to the idea of progress, of a chain of being:

69 Emerson, Works, I, xxvii and xxviii.
A subtle chain of countless rings
The next unto the farthest brings;
The eye reads omens where it goes,
And speaks all languages the rose;
And, striving to be man, the worm
Mounts through all the spires of form. 71

Whitman's early notions about man's progress through all
the lower forms, his kinship with the plants and animals, is
probably best expressed in a well-known passage from "Song of
Myself":

I find I incorporate gneiss and coal and long-
threadeded moss and fruits and grains and es-
culenta roots,
And am stuccoed with quadrupeds and birds all over,
And have distanced what is behind me for good
reasons,
And call anything close again when I desire it. 72

Emerson had written, in "Plato; New Readings," a sen-
tence very like Whitman's assertion that he had distanced
what was behind him for good reasons: "The human being has
the saurian and the plant in his rear." He had gone on to
indicate that all lower forms are striving to be man, that
nature has waited patiently for man's arrival. 73 He be-
lieved that man is indicated in all the lower forms of na-
ture: "If we had eyes to see it, a bit of stone from the
city wall would certify us of the necessity that man must
exist. . . ." 74 In " Bacchus" he had given the idea its
classic expression:

71 Ibid., p. 1.
72 Leaves of Grass, p. 34.
73 "Plato; New Readings," Works, IV, 80 and 81.
And the poor grass shall plot and plan
What it will do when it is man.75

Emerson believed that the world is terminated in man, that
man is the universal housed in the individual, that he is the
end of nature.76

Whitman wrote, of a slave, in "I Sing the Body Electric":

Gentlemen look on this curious creature,
Whatever the bids of the bidders they cannot be
high enough for him,
For him the globe lay preparing quintillions of
years without one animal or plant,
For him the revolving cycles truly and steadily
rolled.77

In "Song of Myself" one finds Whitman's most famous expression
of man's place at the top of nature's scheme:

I am an some of things accomplished, and I an
encloser of things to be.

My feet strike an apex of the apices of the stairs,
On every step bunches of ages, and larger bunches
between the steps,
All below duly traveled -- and still I mount and
mount.
Rise after rise bow the phantoms behind me,
Afar down I see the huge first Nothing, the vapor
from the nostrils of death,
I know I was even there .... I waited unseen
and always,
And slept while God carried me through the leth-
argic mist,
And took my time .... and took no hurt from
the fetid carbon.
Long I was hugged close .... long and long.

75 "Bacchus," Works, IX, 126.
76 "The Method of Nature," Works, I, 205: and "The
Young American," Works, I, 391.
77 Leaves of Grass, p. 81.
Immense have been the preparations for me,
Faithful and friendly the arms that have helped me.

All forces have been steadily employed to complete
and delight me,
Now I stand on this spot with my soul. 78

The implication is that he will not remain, but will pass on.

Both Emerson and Whitman have several definite statements
of the idea which Whitman implied here. One of Emerson's best
expressions of the idea of progress is not quite direct, how-
ever; like the passage above from Whitman, it is only a strong
implication of continued progress —

Now we learn what patient periods must round them-
seves before the rock is formed; than before the
rock is broken, and the first lichen race has dis-
integrated the thinnest external plate into soil,
and opened the door for the remote Flora, Fauna,
Ceres, and Pomona to come in. How far off yet is
the trilobite! How far the quadruped! How incon-
ceivably remote is man! All duly arrive, and then
race after race of men. It is a long way from
granite to the oyster; farther yet to Plato and
the preaching of the immortality of the soul. Yet
all must come, as surely as the first atom has two
sides. 79

On the next page, Emerson spoke of forms in nature which grope
ever upward. In "The Young American," he made his best and
most definite statement of the principle which he called
"amelioration in nature, which alone permits and authorizes
amelioration in mankind":

78 ibid., p. 50.
The population of the world is a conditional population; these are not the best, but the best that could live in the existing state of soils, gases, animals and morals: the best that could yet live; there shall be a better, please God.  

Whitman, with his even greater emphasis than Emerson's on the individual man, spoke more definitely of man's coming divinity. Of all people, he said:

Have you outstript the rest? Are you the President? It is a trifle... they will more than arrive there every one, and still pass on.

He spoke of himself "waiting my time to be one of the supremes," much as Emerson's grass plotted and planned to become man. He spoke of "perpetual transfers and promotions."

In "To Think of Time," Whitman stated his belief that "we cannot be stopped at a given point," that we are surely progressing, though he knows not whither:

Pleasantly and well-suited I walk, Whither I walk I cannot define, but I know it is good, The whole universe indicates that it is good, The past and the present indicate that it is good.

In the poem later to be named "Faces," Whitman perhaps had the chain of being idea in mind:

The Lord advances and yet advances: Always the shadow in front... always the reached hand bringing up the laggards.

In "Great Are the Myths," he made perhaps his most definite early statement of the idea of continued progress:

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80 "The Young American," Works, I, 372 and 373.
81 Leaves of Grass, p. 27.
82 Ibid., p. 46.
83 Ibid., p. 54.
84 Ibid., p. 69.
85 Ibid., p. 84.
Great is the earth, and the way it became what it is.
Do you imagine it is stopped at this? .... and the increase abandoned?
Understand then that it goes as far onward from this as this is from the times when it lay in cowering waters and gases. 

Whitman believed that everything is progressing toward ultimate perfection. He thought of perfection as being a universal law, sure and continuous in its operation. 

Much as he emphasized the equality of people, he thought that all things in nature are equally perfect. 

He believed in perfection in imperfection:

How beautiful and perfect are the animals!
How perfect is my soul!
How perfect the earth, and the minutest thing upon it!

What is called good is perfect, and what is called sin is just as perfect;
The vegetables and minerals are all perfect... and the imponderable fluids are perfect;
Slowly and surely they have passed on to this, and surely they will yet pass on. 

Whitman's idea of perfection in imperfection is linked not only with the idea of a chain of being, but also with Emerson's law of compensation, and with both authors' concepts of unity. Whitman believed, as Emerson did, that for each hardship or blessing which life offers, there is a compensation:

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86 Ibid., p. 94.
87 Preface to Leaves of Grass, p. vi.
88 Leaves of Grass, pp. 20 and 34.
89 Ibid., p. 69.
0, Nature! impartial, and perfect in imperfection! Every precious gift to man is linked with a curse— and each pollution has some sparkle from heaven.90

Emerson had written, in a passage which links compensation with the idea of a high prudence:

Crime and punishment out of one stem. Punishment is a fruit that unsuspected ripens within the flower of the pleasure which concealed it. Cause and effect, means and ends, seed and fruit, cannot be severed; for the effect already blooms in the cause, the end preexists in the means, the fruit in the seed.91

Whitman's beliefs about perfection and about equality furnish a key to his concept of unity, his solution of the problem of dualism. Perhaps the following passage, from "Great Are the Myths," is the best statement of Whitman's consciousness of conflict between matter and spirit, evil and good:

Great is goodness; I do not know what it is any more than I know what health is .... but I know it is great.

Great is wickedness.... I find I often admire it just as much as I admire goodness. Do you call that a paradox? It certainly is a paradox.92

Whitman celebrated the soul and all that is not the soul. He was the poet of the body and the poet of the soul, the

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90 Uncollected Poetry and Prose, II, 69. In an undated notebook thought to have been written before 1855.


92 Leaves of Grass, p. 95.
poet of death as well as life; the poet of good and evil, virtue and vice, the material and the immaterial. He spoke of "opposite equals." 93

Emerson thought of opposites as being similar, parts of one whole. In his essay on "Circles" he wrote:

Aristotle and Plato are reckoned the respective heads of two schools. A wise man will see that Aristotle platonizes. By going one step farther back in thought, discordant opinions are reconciled by being seen to be two extremes of one principle, and we can never go so far back as to preclude a still higher vision. 94

In the poem "Uriel," Emerson had shown definitely how the law of circles dissolves dualism:

Line in nature is not found;  
Unit and universe are round:  
In vain produced, all rays return;  
Evil will bless, and ice will burn. 95

In "Brahma," Emerson represented the universal god as thinking, or saying:

Far or forgot to me is near;  
Shadow and sunlight are the same;  
The vanished gods to me appear;  
And one to me are shame and fame. 96

Emerson was conscious of numerous seeming contradictions, numerous pairs of opposites. But he saw the conflict between opposites erased by the application, to thought, of the scientific law of polarity, as well as by the law of circles.

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93 Ibid., pp. 26, 95, 27, 28, 38, and 14.
95 "Uriel," Works, IX, 14.
96 "Brahma," Works, IX, 195.
In "The Conservative," he said of the conflict between the tendencies of Conservatism and Innovation:

Such an irreconcilable antagonism of course must have a corresponding depth of seat in the human constitution. It is the opposition of Past and Future, of Memory and Hope, of the Understanding and the Reason. It is the primal antagonism, the appearance in trifles of the two poles of nature.  

In "The American Scholar," Emerson spoke of "fits of easy transmission and reflection" which "are the law of nature because they are the law of spirit."  

Emerson had said that love brings one into harmony with nature, and makes one see unity. It unites remote equals and seeming opposites. It is as much a demand of the spirit as perception; without it one cannot be a naturalist.  

Whitman called love "a kelson of the creation." One of the characteristics of his "great master" was "ensemble." His poet, like Emerson's, was a lover of the universe.  

As we have seen, both Emerson and Whitman believed that the poet is the true owner of the universe, because he understands it best. His love gives him the key to its true meaning. He sees it whole, not in parts. In "Threnody," Emerson

100 "Initial, Daemonic, and Celestial Love," Works, IX, 112.
102 Leaves of Grass, p. 16.
103 Preface to Leaves of Grass, p. viii.
104 Ibid., p. vi.
wrote:

... many-seeming life is one —

Wilt thou transform and make it none? 105

In "Each and All," he spoke of the necessity of seeing a thing in its place, rather than out of its natural surroundings. A part of the beauty which seems to belong to any object is, in reality, the beauty of its setting. When Emerson learned that lesson —

Again I saw, again I heard,
The rolling river, the morning bird;---
Beauty through my senses stole;
I yielded myself to the perfect whole. 106

Whitman, too, believed that anything in time or space is but a part. 107 Gay Allen has said that Whitman's emphasis on his own personality, his seeming particularization, was an attempt to show the unity of all creation, 108 Emerson's unity in variety.

As love is the key to the perception of unity, so it is the answer, too— as near an answer as can be made — to the riddle of the Sphinx, the search for true meaning, the question of true reality. Love is "the sense of the world," Emerson believed. Love is not blind, but sees through the universe. 109

In the poem "The Sphinx," and in the essay "History,"

105 "Threnody," Works, IX, 156.
106 "Each and All," Works, IX, 6.
107 Leaves of Grass, p. 51.
109 "Eros," Works, IX, 100; and "Initial, Daemonic, and Celestial Love," Works, IX, 111.
with which Whitman was perhaps more familiar, Emerson asked
the riddle of the sphinx. In "History" the answer suggested
is that idea is more real than fact, that man should not be
bound by matter. 110 It is in "The Sphinx" that the poet made
what seems to be as true an answer as could be made in finite
terms. His answer was love. 111

Like Emerson, Whitman believed that only through love
can one perceive unity, understand life, know reality. He
too asked the question of the Sphinx:

What is man anyhow? What am I? and what are you? 112
Whitman’s words were "words of a questioning, and to indi-
cate reality." 113 To him, the poet's purpose was to indicate
the path between reality and men’s souls; 114 he was the
answerer. 115

Like Emerson, Whitman found every object in nature an
explanation. Emerson had written, in "The American Scholar":

The near explains the far. The drop is a small
ocean. A man is related to all nature. 116

In the attempt to translate himself, Whitman had found that

110 "History," Works, II, 32.
112 Leaves of Grass, p. 25. 113 Ibid., p. 47.
114 Preface to Leaves of Grass, p. v.
115 Leaves of Grass, pp. 85 to 87.
The nearest gnat is an explanation and a drop or
the motion of waves a key.
The maul the oar and the handsaw second my words.\textsuperscript{117}

Whitman stated that "All truths wait in all things,"\textsuperscript{118} much
as Emerson had written:

The eye reads omens where it goes,
And speaks all languages the rose.... \textsuperscript{119}

Emerson had said that the universe is represented in an
atom;\textsuperscript{120} that in every event there is the world in miniature;\textsuperscript{121}
that nature is all one stuff, has one secret.\textsuperscript{122} Emerson's
Sphinx had promised men:

Who telleth one of my meanings
Is master of all I am. \textsuperscript{123}

Whitman believed that

... there is no object so soft but it makes a
hub for the wheeled universe.\textsuperscript{124}

Both Emerson and Whitman found indication of the infinite
in the finite, then -- found reason for wonder in the near,
the commonplace, Emerson believed that the ability to perceive the miraculous in the commonplace is a sure indication of wisdom. 125 He believed that miracle, properly understood, is "one with the blowing clover and the falling rain." 126

Whitman saw the miraculous in the common and the near—in thoughts and words, man's power of sight, a peach pit, a bean in its pod. 127 He found reason for wonder in man, especially. 128 In "Who Learns My Lesson Complete?" he taught that all things in nature are equally wonderful. 129 "We hear of miracles," Whitman wrote in one of his earliest notebooks, "— But what is there that is not a miracle?" 130 "The divinest blessings are the commonest bestowed everywhere and the most superbe beauties are the cheapest, the world over." 131 "... each foot out of countless octillions of the cubic leagues of space is crammed full of absolute or relative wonders...." 132 "There is more miracle in a wave; a rock, a tree, than we were attributing to the whole theology." 133

126 "Divinity School Address," Works, I, 129.
127 Leaves of Grass, p. 92; Uncollected Poetry and Prose, II, 80; Preface to Leaves of Grass, p. v; and Leaves of Grass, p. 54.
128 Ibid., pp. 92 and 93.
129 Uncollected Poetry and Prose, II, 80. The date of the notebook is not known, but it was probably written soon after Whitman's first notebook, which is dated 1847 and 1848.
130 Complete Writings, IX, 150.
131 Ibid., p. 192.
132 Ibid., p. 197.
Both Emerson and Whitman were thankful that mystery, that miracles remain. In "Experience," Emerson wrote:

Suffice it for the joy of the universe that we have not arrived at a wall, but at interminable oceans. 134 Whitman's early notes indicate that he was aware already of the need of mystery, of something to remind us of the presence of a greater power outside ourselves:

---With all the appalling grandeur of astronomy, if we could fix the line beyond which there was no material universe, our soul, I think, would pine away and begin its death sickness. 135

Yet both Emerson and Whitman believed that the answers found in things, the answers which can be expressed in words, are not wholly true. They are limited, finite, partial. We have seen that both authors regarded language as inadequate. Emerson said of finite language: "There is an intrinsic defect in the organ." 136 Though Whitman thought language great, he thought it less great than the truths it attempted to embody. About 1847 he wrote in his earliest preserved notebook:

Every soul has its own language. The reason why any truth which I tell is not apparent to you, is mostly because I fail of translating it from my language into a universal tongue? 137

In Leaves of Grass, he was to speak again of the shortcomings of language as a medium for the expression of universal truths:

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134 "Experience," Works, III, 73.
135 Whitman's Workshop, p. 50.
137 Uncollected Poetry and Prose, II, 65.
My voice goes after what my eyes cannot reach,
With the twirl of my tongue I encompass worlds
and volumes of worlds.
Speech is the twin of my vision.... it is unequal
to measure itself.

It provokes me forever,
It says sarcastically, Walt, you understand enough
.... why don't you let it out then?

Come now I will not be tentalized.... you conceive
too much of articulation. 128

Whitman said that he might tell what was in him, but he could
not. 139 He spoke of a word unsaid, without symbol, and as-
serted that he, too, was untranslatable. 140

Emerson had said in "The Sphinx" that infinite truths
cannot be stated truly in a finite language, out of the very
nature of things. Nature, the Sphinx, had told the poet:

Thou art the unanswered question;
Couldn't see thy proper eye,
Alway it asketh, asketh;
And each answer is a lie.
So take thy quest through nature,
It through thousand natures ply;
Ask on, thou clothed eternity;
Time is the false reply. 141

Emerson spoke of the "thousand voices" 142 of the Sphinx.

Whitman wrote before 1855:

Tongue of a million voices, tell us more?
Come, we listen with itchings of desire, to
hear your tale of the soul.--
Throb and wait, and lay our ears to the wall
as we may, we throb and wait for the god in vain.--
I am vast -- he seems to console us with a whisper-
ing undertone in lack of an answer. 143

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138 Leaves of Grass, p. 31
139 Ibid., 44
140 Ibid., p. 55.
142 Ibid., p. 25
143 Uncollected Poetry and Prose, II, 80.
For this huge harmony have you nothing to give us but one feeble note, and that a false one.\textsuperscript{144}

Like Emerson, then, Whitman found that the only whole, true perception of truths is intuitive. Truth comes to the man in harmony with nature and men, to the lover of life, not in words or in arguments, but in a mystic vision. Thus Whitman said to his soul:

Loafe with me on the grass.... loose the stop from your throat, Not words, not music or rhyme I want.... not custom or lecture, not even the best, Only the lull I like, the hum of your valved voice.\textsuperscript{145}

Emerson had spoken of the revelation of truth and had said that answers in words are delusive.\textsuperscript{146} He had called generalization a new influx of divinity.\textsuperscript{147} His whole doctrine of the over-soul was based on the conviction that man is inspired. His Sphinx had said that "each answer is a lie," and had spoken, not definitely, but "thorough a thousand voices."\textsuperscript{148}

Perhaps Whitman's very best early statement of these same ideas is the following passage from a manuscript notebook -- a passage which seems to contain the germ of the later poem, "A Noiseless Patient Spider":

\textsuperscript{144} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 85. This quotation and the one cited in note 145 are from two early notebooks, which, though undated, are known to have been written before 1855.

\textsuperscript{145} \textit{Leaves of Grass}, p. 15.

\textsuperscript{146} "The Over-Soul," \textit{Works}, II, 282 and 283.

\textsuperscript{147} "Circles," \textit{Works}, II, 309.

--- By curious indirections only can there be any statement of the spiritual world -- and they will all be foolish -- Have you noticed the [Worm] on a twig reaching out in the immense vacancy time and again, trying point after point? Not more helplessly does the tongue or the pen of man, essay out in the spiritual spheres, to state them. In the nature of things nothing less than the special world itself can know itself. 149

What, then, did Emerson's Sphinx indicate? What did Whitman learn from his soul?

149 *Whitman's Workshop*, p. 40.
CHAPTER V

NATURE AND REALITY-- CONTINUED

Whitman and Emerson seem to have learned, through intuitive revelation, not only that the world is unified beneath its outward diversity, but also that reality is of the good, the spiritual, the lasting, and is in the mind of man. They learned that matter is real only as a manifestation of spirit, that evil is only a necessary opposite of good, not real as an essence. They learned that man-made time, the concept of place, and the idea of death are all false. They learned that eternity is real, and that spirit is immortal.

In the first edition of Leaves of Grass, Whitman spoke of being the poet of the body as well as of the soul, and he seemed to find reality in matter, which appears real to the senses, as well as in idea, which is real to the mind. When Emerson wrote Nature, he, too, had seemed uncertain whether spirit is positive and matter negative, or whether they are both manifestations of one reality. He had come to the conclusion that nature is merely the symbol of the soul. In "Lecture on the Times," Emerson clearly meant by reality not matter but idea: he said that as the granite which lies deep
beneath the surface of the earth is covered with a thousand different forms,

So it is with the Life of our life, so close does that also hide. I read it in glad and weeping eyes; I read it in the pride and in the humility of people; it is recognized in every bargain and every complaisance. . . .

In "Plato," in a passage which suggests Whitman's style as well as his thought, Emerson spoke again of a reality which is in the mind:

I announce to man the Intellect. I announce the good of being interpenetrated by the mind that made nature. . . . I give you joy, 0 sons of men! that truth is altogether wholesome; that we have hope to search out what might be the very self of everything.

Emerson spoke of "the Life of our life," "the very self of everything"; Whitman referred to "it," to "something," to "a word unsaid," without symbol.

There is that in me . . . . I do not know what it is . . . . but I know it is in me.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Something it swings on more than the earth I swing on,
To it the creation is the friend whose embracing awakes me.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

It is not chaos or death . . . . it is form and union and plan . . . . it is eternal life. . . .
it is happiness.

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2"Plato; or, the Philosopher," Works, IV, 63. See Complete Writings, II, 287 and 288, the passage beginning: "I announce natural persons to arise."

3Leaves of Grass, p. 55. See also p. 24: "These are the thoughts..." etc.
Emerson's belief that matter is the symbol of spirit, and that reality is in the mind, is implicit in an idea which Whitman shared with Emerson: the idea that one can see only what is in him. It is expressed in several passages in Leaves of Grass. In one of them, Whitman spoke of something which is not a representative of value, but the value itself:

There is something that comes home to one now and perpetually,
It is not what is printed or preached or discussed.... it eludes discussion and print,
It is not to be put in a book... it is not in this book,
It is for you whoever you are... it is no farther from you than your hearing and sight are from you,
It is hinted by nearest and commonest and readiest.... it is not them, though it is endlessly provoked by them... What is there ready and near you now? 4

Whitman already believed, then, in 1855, that reality is not in changing forms, but that it lies behind them. If he seemed to emphasize matter, too, more than Emerson did, perhaps it is because of his ideas about equality. More probably it is because he attempted to present through his catalogues, through long lists of material things, that deeper undefinable reality which is not in matter, but which can hardly be spoken about except in terms of matter. It has been said that Whitman's catalogues give "the impression of an infinite abundance of pure reality." 5 It should be remembered

4Ibid., p. 59.

that Whitman's use of these long lists of material things may well have been suggested by Emerson's statement in "The Poet," that "Bare lists of words are found suggestive to an imagi-native and excited mind"\(^6\) --- suggestive of reality.

Perhaps the greatest difference in Whitman's and Emerson's concepts of reality is the slightly different emphasis which they place on evil. Holloway believes, however, that after Whitman came to see harmony behind the dualism of mind and matter, he arrived at Emerson's concept of an evil which is merely privative.\(^7\) In his early works, Whitman may have seemed to stress the equality of good and evil, the reality of evil. We have seen that he wrote in *Leaves of Grass* at least two passages celebrating evil ---

What is called good is perfect, and what is called sin is just as perfect;\(^8\)

Great is wickedness . . . . I find I often admire it just as much as I admire goodness: Do you call that a paradox? It certainly is a paradox.\(^9\)

Emerson's best-known statement concerning evil is probably the following from "The Divinity School Address":

Good is positive. Evil is merely privative, not absolute: it is like cold, which is the privation of heat. All evil is so much death or nonentity. Benevolence is absolute and real.\(^10\)

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\(^7\)Uncollected Poetry and Prose, I, p. lxxxiii in the editor's preface.

\(^8\)*Leaves of Grass*, p. 69. \(^9\)Ibid., p. 95

These quotations may seem at first to indicate that Whitman and Emerson held opposite views of the problem of good and evil, but they present only the most conspicuous aspects of the two author's beliefs. An examination of their other expressions concerning evil shows that the difference, if real at all, is largely a matter of emphasis.

Bliss Perry has said that Emerson's omission of any consideration of evil is unsatisfactory philosophically. It seems not quite accurate, however, to say that Emerson omitted any consideration of evil. Perhaps it would be accurate to apply to him what Allen has said of Whitman: "Far from actually denying evil, he denies only the ignoring of evil, and the categorizing of evil." Like Whitman, Emerson recognized the existence and the necessity of evil. He believed that good must have some edge to it, that there is an evil side to everything but virtue, that evil is a benefactor. He seemed to believe, with Swedenborg, that evil is good in the making. Like Goethe -- and like Hawthorne, too, with whom Perry contrasted him -- he believed that evil is to be found in one's own mind, that the essence of evil is pure intellect, applied. But though Emerson admitted the existence of evil,

11 Bliss Perry, Emerson Today, pp. 130 and 131.
14 "Swedenborg; or, the Mystic," Works, IV, 138.
15 "Goethe; or, the Writer," Works, IV, 277.
he thought it real only as a necessary opposite of good. Evil
is weak, he believed -- "The Devil is an ass." 16 What we call
sin in others is mere experiment in ourselves; sin is not real
subjectively. 17 Evil and pain are merely partial: they leave
the universe unhurt. Theological problems concerned with evil
are thus like social and political reforms, wrong in emphasizing
the little, the negative aspect of life. 18

"Benevolence is absolute and real," Emerson had said in
"The Divinity School Address." In his essay on Swedenborg he
echoed the same idea: "That pure malignity can exist is the
supreme proposition of unbelief. It is not to be entertained
by a rational agent; it is atheism; it is the last profana-
tion." 19

Whitman, too, had stated these ideas: he had had other
notions of sin than those presented in the well-known passage
above, in which he celebrated evil. He had come early to a
recognition of the truth of Emerson's belief that evil is a
necessary part of total good. In an editorial written in
1846, he defended the occasional violence of the workings of
democracy --

17"Experience," Works, II, 78 and 79.
19"Swedenborg; or, the Mystic," Works, IV, 138. See
also "New England Reformers," Works, III, 278.
We know, well enough, that the workings of Democracy are not always justifiable, in every trivial point. But the great winds that purify the air, and without which nature would flag into ruin — are they to be condemned because a tree is prostrated here and there, in their course? 20

In "To Think of Time," Whitman recognized a real difference between evil and good:

The vulgar and refined . . . what you call sin and what you call goodness . . to think how wide a difference;
To think the difference will still continue to others, yet we lie beyond the difference. 21

In "Song of Myself," he saw no cause for wonder in goodness, wondered only that evil could exist:

What behaved well in the past or behaves well today is not such a wonder,
The wonder is always and always how there can be a mean man or an infidel. 22

Yet Whitman spoke of being the poet of evil as well as the poet of goodness —

I am the poet of commonsense and of the demonstrable and of immortality;
And I am not the poet of goodness only . . . I do not decline to be the poet of wickedness also. 23

He spoke of "myself and my neighbors, refreshing and wicked and real. . . ." 24 In his earliest manuscript notebook he had said: "I am for sinners and the unlearned." 25 Unlike

21 Leaves of Grass, p. 67. 22 Ibid., p. 28.
23 Ibid., p. 27. 24 Ibid., p. 47.
25 Uncollected Poetry and Prose, II, 70. This reference and those in the next three notes are from a notebook written in 1847.
Emerson, Whitman believed, in 1847 or 1848, that "The universal and fluid soul impounds within itself not only all good characters and heroes, but the distorted characters, murderers, thieves." 26

What did he mean? Was his meaning radically different from Emerson's? Perhaps it was at the time, or perhaps Whitman was at first undecided about the reality of evil as an essence. All differences, real or only apparent, are canceled out by two quotations from Whitman's early manuscripts:

I am the poet of reality
I say the earth is not an echo
Nor man an apparition;
But that all the things seen are real,

I am the poet of sin,
For I do not believe in sin. 27

Wickedness is most likely the absence of freedom and health in the soul. 28

Here is the solution to the paradox, a restatement of what Emerson had said of evil in "Spiritual Laws":

Our philosophy is affirmative and readily accepts the testimony of negative facts, as every shadow points to the sun. 29

Emerson believed that benevolence is real, that "All things real are so by so much virtue as they contain." 30

Maximilian Beck has said, in "Whitman's Intuition of Reality," that Whitman believed that everything real is good. 31

26 Ibid., pp. 66 and 67. 27 Ibid., pp. 69 and 71.
28 Ibid., p. 65. 29 Ibid., p. 155.
31 Beck, Ethics, LIII (October, 1942), 20.
These concepts may seem antagonistic, but they are quite similar, really. Perhaps the only difference which they imply is parallel to the difference between Whitman's and Emerson's concepts of democracy. Perhaps, even in the field of metaphysics, Emerson had a natural tendency to favor the superior, the aristocratic: he agreed with Euripides that

Goodness and being in the gods are one . . . .32

and he had seemed almost to find the same thing true of men.

Beck calls Whitman's belief that everything real is good "a democratic metaphysics."33 Beck believed that, to Whitman, evil and ugliness, even, are good because they are real.

Whitman dealt frequently with what Beck calls "shocking subjects because reality is concentrated in pain, ugliness, bitterness, evil."34

Emerson spoke as Whitman himself was later to speak concerning reality. He said of Montaigne precisely what Beck has since said that Whitman believed about the value of pain and ugliness and evil: Montaigne "likes pain because it makes him feel himself and realize things; as we pinch ourselves to know that we are awake."35 Like Whitman, Emerson saw the value of "sharp edges of truth" —

32"Swedenborg; or, the Mystic," Works, IV, 138.
34Ibid., p. 22.
35"Montaigne; or, the Skeptic," Works, IV, 139.
There are moods in which we court suffering, in the hope that here at least we shall find reality, sharp peaks and edges of truth. 36

Emerson lamented -- as Whitman must have lamented, too, judging from his fondness for "shocking" subjects -- that even in suffering and grief we do not really know truth: "souls never touch their objects." 37

I grieve that grief can teach me nothing, nor carry me one step into real nature. The Indian who was laid under a curse that the wind should not blow on him, nor water flow to him, nor fire burn him, is a type of us all. The dearest events are summer-rain, and we the para coasts that shed every drop. Nothing is left us now but death. We look to that with a grim satisfaction, saying, There at least is reality that will not dodge us. 38

This is hardly Emerson's usual attitude toward death, or Whitman's, either; but Whitman, too, has said at least once that death is a welcome release, an escape into reality:

I feel cramped here in these coarse walls of flesh. The soul disdains its prison? 39

C mystery of Death, I pant for the time when I shall solve you.

Another passage concerned with death has been mentioned above, in the chapter on external evidence. It offers definite proof that Whitman was familiar with Emerson's writings by 1847, and it is valuable here as an indication that their views of reality are similar. In an editorial in the Brooklyn

37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., p. 49.
39 Uncollected Poetry and Prose, II, 89. In a notebook written between 1847 and 1855.
Daily Eagle, on December 15, 1847, Whitman quoted part of the first paragraph from "Spiritual Laws," "one of Ralph Waldo Emerson's inimitable lectures" -- a passage which he characterized as "striking, truthful, beautiful" ---

When the act of reflection takes place in the mind, when we look at ourselves in the light of thought, we discover that our life is embosomed in beauty. Behind us, as we go, all things assume pleasing forms, as clouds do afar off. Not only things familiar and stale, but even the tragic and terrible are lures of memory. The river bank, the weed at the water side, the old house, the foolish person, however neglected at the passing, have a grace in the past. Even the corpse that has lain in the chambers, has added a solemn ornament to the house. -- The soul will not know either deformity or pain.40

Here is a suggestion that Whitman's belief in the goodness of everything real was not only similar to Emerson's own belief, but may well have been a development of it.

We have seen that both Emerson and Whitman were conscious of antagonism between spirit and matter, soul and body. Three quotations, two from Whitman and one from Emerson's essay "Compensation," are similar not only in idea but in a figure of speech concerning the greed of the body. The first quotation from Whitman reminds one of the passage cited above in which he spoke of death as a welcome relief, of the spirit imprisoned by the body. We buy food for our bodies, he said, and starve our souls, which can only look on helplessly, can only haunt us and make us dimly aware of their presence and their mistreatment --

40 Quoted in The Gathering of the Forces, II, 270 and 271; from Emerson, Works, II, 131.
What is it then that balances itself upon my lips and wrestles as with the knuckles of God, for every bite, I put between them, and if my belly is victor, cannot even then be foiled, but follows the innocent food down my throat and turns it to fire and lead within me? -- And what is it but my soul that hisses like an angry snake Fool! will you stuff your greed and starve me? 41

In "Song of Myself" Whitman again spoke scathingly of the tendencies of materialism --

To feed the greed of the belly the brains liberally spooning. 42

In "Compensation" Emerson, too, had lamented man's tendency to care for material needs and to neglect the needs of the spirit:

The ingenuity of man has always been dedicated to the solution of one problem, -- how to detach the sensual sweet, the sensual bright, etc., from the moral sweet, the moral deep, the moral fair; that is, again, to contrive to cut clean off the upper surface so thin as to leave it bottomless; to get a one end, without an other end. The soul says, "Eat;" the body would feast. The soul says, "The man and woman shall be one flesh and one soul;" the body would join the flesh only. The soul says, "Have dominion over all things to the ends of virtue;" the body would have power over things to its own ends.... 43

Whitman was apparently puzzled, at first, by the seeming antagonism between matter and spirit. In the first edition of Leaves of Grass, he said that farms and profits and crops

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42 Leaves of Grass, p. 47.
43 "Compensation," Works, II, 103 and 104.
"are not phantasms." He spoke of
A word of reality . . . materialism first and last
imbueing.
But, on the same page, he qualified his emphasis on the mate-
rial --
I am less the reminder of property or qualities, and
more the reminder of life.45
In an early prose note on religion, Whitman had spoken of
having "strong suspicions that what we call the Present, Real-
ity, &c., with all its Corporeal shows, may be the illusion
for reasons & that even to this Identity of yours and mine,
the far more Permanent is yet unseen, yet to come. . . ."46
In "There Was a Child Went Forth," he expressed a serious
doubt in the reality of the visible world around him:
. . . . The sense of what is real . . . . the thought
if after all it should prove unreal,
The doubts of daytime and the doubts of nighttime...
the curious whether and how,
Whether that which is so is so . . . . Or is it all
flashes and specks?
Men and women crowding fast in the streets . . . if
they are not flashes and specks what are they?47
Emerson had expressed the same doubt in Nature. He had
said that discipline, the education of the mind and spirit,
might be more truly real than matter --

46 Whitman's Workshop, pp. 48 and 49. Date not known but
believed to be earlier than 1855.
47 Leaves of Grass, p. 91.
To this one end of Discipline, all parts of nature conspire. A noble doubt perpetually suggests itself, -- whether this end be not the Final Cause of the Universe and whether nature outwardly exists.48

Both Whitman and Emerson were sometimes puzzled, then, about the reality of matter, but they were usually sure that it was real, as an outward form of spirit. Even before 1855, Whitman had stated the belief which he was to retain and which was essentially Emerson's; he had said that spirit and matter are essentially one, that spirit is greater than matter, but that matter is necessary, since only through it can spirit make itself known.

There are in things two elements fused though antagonistic. One is that bodily element, which has in itself the quality of corruption and decease; the other is the element, the Soul, which goes on, I think, in unknown ways, enduring forever and ever.49

The effusion or corporation of the soul is always under the beautiful laws of physiology -- I guess the soul itself can never be anything but great and pure and immortal; but it makes itself visible only through matter . . . .50

Whitman thought that spirit is greater than matter, since matter is not lasting.51 Emerson had said that form is fashioned to will, that form is fleeting.52 In "History" he had written:

48 "Nature," Works, I, 47.
49 Whitman's Workshop, p. 49. Furness believes that this note was written before 1855.
50 Uncollected Poetry and Prose, II, 65.
51 Ibid., p. 67. Both this quotation and the one above are from Whitman's earliest notebook, dated 1847.
There seems to be a necessity in spirit to manifest itself in material forms; and day and night, river and storm, beast and bird, acid and alkali, pre-exist in necessary Ideas in the mind of God, and are what they are by virtue of preceding affections in the world of spirit. A Fact is the end or last issue of spirit. The visible creation is the terminus or the circumference of the invisible world. "Material objects," said a French philosopher, "are necessarily kinds of scoriæ of the substantial thoughts of the Creator, which must always preserve an exact relation to their first origin; in other words, visible nature must have a spiritual and moral side." 53

Emerson had said that "the world exists to the soul," that man "cannot live without a world."54 He had said, too, that

The sensual man conforms thoughts to things; the poet conforms things to his thoughts. The one esteems nature as rooted and fast; the other as fluid, and impresses his being therewith. 55

He believed that the idealist sees events as spirits. "He does not deny the sensuous facts; by no means; but he will not see that alone."56 The spirit is real;57 the idealist's "manner of looking at things transfers every object in nature from an independent and anomalous position without there, into the consciousness." 58 "Mind is the only reality, of which men and all other natures are better or worse reflectors.

54 "History," Works, II, 36.
Nature, literature, history, are only subjective phenomena.”

"Everything real is self-existent. Everything divine shares the self-existence of Deity. All that you call the world is the shadow of that substance which you are, the perpetual powers of thought, of those that are dependent and of those that are independent of your will. . . . I make my circumstances.”

"Every evil and every good thing is but a shadow which we cast.”

Emerson had written, in "Nature":

The world is emblematic. Parts of speech are metaphors, because the whole of nature is a metaphor of the human mind. The laws of moral nature answer to those of matter as face to face in a glass. . . .

In an early note on religion, Whitman used the same idea, and the same figure of speech --

The mirror that Nature holds and hides behind is deep and floating and ethereal and faithful. -- A man always sends and sees himself in it -- from himself he reflects the fashion of his gods and all his religions and politics and books and art and social and public institutions -- ignorance or knowledge -- kindness or cruelty -- grossness or refinement -- definitions or chaos -- each is unerring in the mirror of the mirror.

On July 24, 1846, Whitman wrote an essay on "Women" which contained a sentence suggestive of Emerson's belief in the identity of the subject and the object, man's ability to see

59 Ibid., p. 333.  
60 Ibid., p. 334.  
61 "Experience," Works, III, 76.  
63 Whitman's Workshop, pp. 50 and 51. Date not known; thought to be earlier than 1855.
only what he is: "To him who looks through a muddy wrinkled
glass the fairest objects seem deformed." 64

If a man saw evil, then, Whitman was sorry for him, for
the evil was in himself --

Were mankind murderous or jealous upon you my
brother or my sister?
I am sorry for you . . . . they are not murderous
or jealous upon me;
All has been gentle with me . . . . . I keep no
account with lamentation;
What have I to do with lamentation? 65

If a man is to see truth, Whitman thought, he must have
truth within him. We have seen that Whitman believed that
"The heart of man alone is the one unbalanced and restless
thing in the world." Immediately above that sentence, in an
early notebook, he had written:

    All truths lie waiting in all things . . . .
They unfold to you and emit themselves more fragrant than roses from living buds, whenever you
fetch the spring sunshine moistened with summer rain. -- But it must be in yourself. -- It shall
come from your soul. -- It shall be love. 66

Evil which is apparently positive and definite only seems
so to the unbalanced heart, the heart which lacks understanding and love.

Gay Allen sums up Whitman's belief, as it is expressed
in an early prose note: "The theme of the first paragraph is

64 The Gathering of the Forces, II, 86.
65 Leaves of Grass, pp. 49 and 50.
66 Uncollected Poetry and Prose, II, 80. In a notebook
which was written between 1847 and 1855, probably just after
1847.
that history is not in books, or religion in churches and
bibles, but that these are in the person who has an 'identi-
fied soul,' i.e., true reality is not in externals but in
the person or self whose soul is 'identified.' 67 Allen be-
lieves that the ideal poet of the 1855 preface, and the ideal
citizen of the Democratic Vistas, are such persons. So, it
would seem, is the idealized Whitman of "Song of Myself."
At the end of his most specific treatment of reality, Whitman
emphasized the reality of the human mind:

My words are words of a questioning, and to indi-
cate reality;
This printed and bound book . . . . but the printer
and printing-office boy?
The marriage estate and settlement . . . . but the
body and mind of the bridegroom? and those of
the bride?
The panorama of the sea . . . . but the sea itself?
The well-taken photographs . . . . but your wife
or friend close and solid in your arms?
The fleet of ships of the line and all the modern
improvements . . . . but the craft and pluck of
the admiral?
The dishes and fare and furniture . . . . but the
host and hostess, and the look out of their eyes?
The sky up there . . . . yet here or next door or
across the way?
The saints and sages in history . . . . but you
yourself?
Sermons and creeds and theology . . . . but the
human brain, and what is called reason, and
what is called love, and what is called life? 68

Man is real, then -- and the mind and soul of man.
Spirit is real, and matter is only its outward form. True
reality is in mind; so the world as each man sees it is a

68 Leaves of Grass, pp. 47 and 48.
reflection of so much of the universal mind and soul as is within him. One is brought back, the circle completed, to Whitman's belief that the world is for man, not otherwise, and to Emerson's doctrine of the over-soul. One is reminded, too, of a belief which Whitman and Emerson shared, the belief that the artist can create art only as great as the soul within him. The whole world which man sees is limited by the depth and beauty of his mind and soul. The unified soul sees unity; the beautiful sees beauty; the evil, evil.

If mind is the greatest reality, then time and space are not real, as death is not real. Time and space divisions are man-made, and are merely "to stand us a little in help," as we shall see. Not hours and places are real, but eternity; not death, but immortality. Like death, time and space are merely false answers to the riddle of the Sphinx. In Emerson's poem, "The Sphinx," the "universal dame" had said to man:

Ask on, thou clothed eternity;  
Time is the false reply. 69

The artist bridges time and space when he presents truth and beauty to men in later ages and in far-off lands. He speaks a universal language. In an early prose note for a projected "Poem of the universal likenesses of all men," Whitman wrote: "Though the times, climes, differ, men do not so much differ.

There is a universal language. What is heroic is universal among men. Liberty is -- justice is -- the hatred of meanness is -- etc."\(^{70}\) Emerson had said in *Nature* that Justice and Truth are absolute:

Whilst we behold unveiled the nature of Justice and Truth, we learn the difference between the absolute and the conditional or relative. We apprehend the absolute. As it were, for the first time, we exist. We become immortal, for we learn that time and space are relations of matter; that with a perception of truth or a virtuous will they have no affinity. \(^{71}\)

Earlier in the same essay, he had said essentially the same thing: "Time and Space relations vanish as laws are known."\(^{72}\)

Concerning space, Emerson lamented man's tendency to wander and to imitate, to travel in his mind. He considered dependence on other places and customs and times a lack of self-reliance. He thought that organic art is the art for a man or race which lives in the here and now, and to the future.\(^{73}\) He believed that a man need not expect to find by travel anything which he can not find at home.\(^{74}\) On March 10, 1848, Whitman wrote, in the Brooklyn *Daily Eagle*: "There is no actual need of a man's travelling around the globe in order to find out a few of the principles of human nature."\(^{75}\) In an

\(^{70}\) *Complete Writings*, IX, 190. Date not definitely known.


\(^{73}\) "Self-Reliance," *Works*, II, 82.

\(^{74}\) "Art,*" *Works*, II, 361.

\(^{75}\) *Uncollected Poetry and Prose*, I, 193. The value of this quotation is perhaps canceled out by the procedure which Whitman advises in lieu of traveling: go to a bar room, he says, and observe the people there.
early note, he had made a comment on travelling which was remarkably similar to Emerson's expressed opinion, though another possible source is evident.

"The knowingest people" he had met had doubtless been those who were best acquainted with themselves, and who, because of the richness within themselves, could see the beauty and wonder in little, near, commonplace things. Emerson's wisest acquaintances were just such people.

In "The Over-Soul," Emerson had said, of time: "thought reduces centuries and milleniums, and makes itself present through all ages." In the essay "History," he stated his belief that

When we understand the motive and the circumstance and the method under which these relics of ancient civilization were built, he continues, "they live again to the mind, or are now."

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76 *Complete Writings*, IX, 186. Date not definitely known.


Emerson believed that "We must be very suspicious of the deceptions of the element of time." In the final paragraph of Whitman's preparatory notes which Bucke has printed, Whitman defined man's relationship to time -- and surely, also, to governments, churches, all institutions, all man-made limitations of universal truths:

Remember that the clock and the hands of the clock, only tell the time -- they are not themselves the aggregated years. Which is greatest -- time, which baffles us, or its indexes, made of wood and brass, by a workman at ten dollars a week? Time itself knows no index, it is merely to stand us a little in help that we combine sets of springs and wheels and arbitrarily divide by hours and quarters -- and call this measuring time.

In Leaves of Grass, at the end of "A Song for Occupations," Whitman wrote:

Will you seek afar off? You surely come back at last,
In things best known to you finding the best or as good as the best,
In folks nearest to you finding also the sweetest and strongest and lovingest,
Happiness not in another place, but this place . . .
not for another hour, but this hour,
Man is the first you see or touch . . . . always in your friend or brother or nearest neighbor . . . .
Women in your mother or lover or wife, and all else thus far known giving place to men and women.

Whitman goes on, in the last stanza of the same poem, to confirm his belief that man is the embodiment of the true reality, the answer to the Sphinx's riddle: he says that when

80 Complete Writings, IX, 203. In a very early note, dating from the time before Leaves of Grass had been planned.
81 Leaves of Grass, pp. 63 and 64.
"the psalm sings instead of the singer," when man's creations
are as real and convincing as man himself, he will "make as
much of them" as he does of men and women.

Whitman believed, then, that eternity is in men and women, that eternity is here and now. Emerson had stated that same idea a few years earlier. In the essay "History," he had said, with Napoleon, that history is "a fable agreed upon," and had spoken of man's life as being "stuck round" with countries and enterprises and institutions.

I will not make more account of them. I believe in Eternity. I can find Greece, Asia, Italy, Spain, and the Islands, -- the genius and creative principle of each and of all eras, in my own mind. 83

In "Self-Reliance," Emerson had written:

Time and space are but physiological colors which the eye makes, but the soul is light: where it is, is day; where it was, is night; and history is an impertinence and an injury if it be anything more than a cheerful epithalamion or parable of my being and becoming. 84

The self-reliant man, the wise man, neither postpones nor remembers, but "lives with nature in the present, above time," in a present eternity.

Emerson believed, then, that "we must set up the strong present tense." 86 He lamented that "Life wastes itself whilst we are preparing to live." 87 In his "Lecture on the Times,"

82 Preface to Leaves of Grass, p. v.
86 "Experience," Works, III, 64.
87 "Prudence," Works, II, 240. See also "Days," Works, IX, 228.
he wrote: "Today is a king in disguise;" "The Times are the masquerade of the Eternities." 88 Emerson warned against the mistaken notion that the world is old and thought spent; 89 he believed that all ages are good. "This time, like all times, is a very good one, if we but know what to do with it." 90 Whitman, like Emerson, emphasized the present. In an early prose notebook, he wrote this advice to himself: "realize where you are at present located, the point you stand on that is now to you the centre of all. . . ." 91 In the early manuscript version of a stanza for "Song of Myself," he expressed the same respect for the present:

There never was any more inception than there is now
Nor any more youth or age
And will never be any more perfection
Nor any more heaven or hell 92

Whitman echoes Emerson's belief that the present age is as good as any other:

Great is today, and beautiful.
It is good to live in this age . . . . there never was any better. 93

This minute that comes to me over the past decillions,
There is no better than it and now

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
One time as good as another time . . . . here or henceforward it is all the same to me. 94

89 "Literary Ethics," Works, I, 173.
91 Complete Writings, IX, 56. Date not known.
92 Whitman's Workshop, p. 50. See also Leaves of Grass, p. 14. Date not known; believed to be earlier than 1855.
93 Leaves of Grass, p. 93.
94 Ibid., p. 28.
Is today nothing? Is the beginningless past nothing? If the future is nothing they are just as surely nothing. 95

Emerson and Whitman believed not only that the present is as great as any age, but also that present persons are as great as persons in the past, 96 that wise men are as wise now as ever before. 97 Or perhaps this belief is implicit in their belief about the present, since eternity is now, and is in man.

One of the very best quotations concerning both authors' beliefs about eternity is the following, from "Song of Myself." The next to the last stanza reminds one that Whitman believed that eternity is in man:

The clock indicates the moment ... but what does eternity indicate?

Eternity lies in bottomless reservoirs ... its buckets are rising forever and ever; They pour and they pour and they exhale away.

We have thus far exhausted trillions of winters and summers; There are trillions ahead, and trillions ahead of them.

Births have brought us richness and variety, And other births will bring us richness and variety.

I do not call one greater and one smaller, That which fills its period and place is equal to any. 98

Whitman wrote at least two other early prose notes upholding the importance of the present. They imply, however, that he

95 Ibid., p. 65.
97 Leaves of Grass, p. 93. 98 Ibid., p. 49.
thought the future even more important than the present, and thus suggest a possible difference from Emerson.

The Past and the Present are to be treated with perfect respect.

I do not condemn either the Past or the Present. Shall I denounce my own ancestry -- the very ground under my feet? that has been so long building. 99

Two sentences from the preface to Leaves of Grass also emphasize the future: "Past and present and future are not disjoined but joined. The greatest poet forms the consistence of what is to be from what has been and is."100

If Emerson seemed, in "Self-Reliance," to emphasize the importance of the present at the expense of the past and future, it was partly because he was showing one facet of a truth, as was his wont. In "Character," when Emerson spoke of a high prudence, as Whitman did in the sentences above from his preface, Emerson, too, thought the future more important than the present: "Those who live to the future must always appear selfish to those who live to the present."101

But surely the chief reason for Emerson's emphasis on the present was his concept of eternity, which he shared with Whitman. In "The Over-Soul," he had written:

The moment the doctrine of immortality is separately taught, man is already fallen. In the flowing of love, in the adoration of humility, there is no question of continuance. No inspired man

99 Complete Writings, IX, 192 and 193. Probably written in the early fifties.
100 Leaves of Grass, p. vi.
ever asks this question or condescends to these evidences. For the soul is true to itself, and the man in whom it is shed abroad cannot wander from the present, which is infinite, to a future which would be finite. 102

When Emerson wrote in "The American Scholar," "Give me insight into today, and you may have the antique and future worlds," 103 he was treating the past and future with what Whitman would have called perfect respect. The past has been great; the future will be great; but the present is great. The universe is represented in a moment, 104 and that moment, all of eternity which a man can know, is of course to every man, at the time of his knowledge of it, the present.

Whitman's unlimited confidence in the future was surely due to his satisfaction with the present --

I do not know what is untried and afterwards, But I know it is sure and alive and sufficient. 105

I know I have the best of time and space.

Like Emerson, Whitman found in present existence an assurance that time is unending. One of his best statements of this assurance is the completed version of a projected poem cited above, together with the stanza which precedes it in "Song of Myself":

102 "The Over-Soul," Works, II, 284.
105 Leaves of Grass, pp. 49 and 51.
I have heard what the talkers were talking . . . .
The talk of the beginning and the end,
But I do not talk of the beginning or the end.

There was never any more inception than there is now,
Nor any more youth or age than there is now;
And will never be any more perfection than there is
now,
Nor any more heaven or hell than there is now. 106

Whitman did not "talk of the beginning or the end." He
found in the present an indication of the continuance of all
things. In "The American Scholar," Emerson had written, of
nature:

There is never a beginning, there is never an end,
to the inexplicable continuity of this web of God,
but always circular power returning to itself. 107

In the first stanza of "Brahma," Emerson expressed his
belief that the universal spirit has no beginning and no end:

If the red slayer thinks he slays,
Or if the slain think he is slain,
They know not well the subtle ways
I keep, and pass, and turn again. 108

Death is not real, then, to Emerson or to Whitman, who wrote
in "To Think of Time":

Do you suspect death? If I were to suspect death
I should die now,
Do you think I could walk pleasantly and well-suited
toward annihilation?

I swear I see now that everything has an eternal
soul!
The trees have, rooted in the ground . . . . the
weeds of the sea have . . . . the animals,
I swear I think there is nothing but immortality!

That the exquisite scheme is for it, and the nebulous float is for it, and the cohering is for it, and all preparation is for it... and identify is for it... and life and death are for it. 109

Gay Allen has said that Whitman's philosophy of death and his poet's role of "caresser of life" are both based on a pantheistic belief in the transmigration of souls. 110 They would seem, rather, to be based on a belief that there exists in everything a soul, a part of the universal soul.

If the ending of Whitman's poem "The Sleepers" is interpreted as a fable of immortality, it is one of Whitman's best early expressions of the belief that death is only temporary, that one returns to life through death, again, and again.

I too pass from the night;
I stay awhile away O night, but I return to you again and love you:
Why should I be afraid to trust myself to you?
I am not afraid... I have been well brought forward by you;
I love the rich running day, but I do not desert her in whom I lay so long;
I know not how I came of you, and I know not where I go with you... but I know I came well and shall go well.

I will stop only a time with the night... and rise betimes.
I will duly pass the day O my mother and duly return to you;
Not you will yield forth the dawn again more surely than you will yield forth me again,
Not the womb yields the babe in its time more surely than I shall be yielded from you in my time. 111

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109 Leaves of Grass, pp. 69 and 70.

110 Allen, Whitman Handbook, p. 117.

111 Leaves of Grass, pp. 76 and 77.
In "Song of Myself," Whitman spoke many times of immortality. He called the grass "the beautiful uncut hair of graves," and said that "The smallest sprout shows there is really no death." On the same page, Whitman asserted that all people are immortal, and he knew it, though they did not. Later in the poem, he repeated the same idea:

I know I am deathless.

I laugh at what you call dissolution,
And I know the amplitude of time.\textsuperscript{113}

All of these quotations would seem to admit of the interpretation that Whitman believed in immortality only of soul, not of an identified soul. Most of them would admit, too, of Gay Allen's more literal interpretation -- of a belief in transmigration. One line,

Believing I shall come again upon the earth after five thousand years,

seems by itself to uphold Allen's view, but proves, when seen in context, to be a convincing argument against it --

My faith is the greatest of faiths and the least of faiths, Enclosing all worship ancient and modern, and all between ancient and modern, Believing I shall come again upon the earth after five thousand years, Waiting responses from oracles ... honoring the gods ... saluting the sun, Making a fetish of the first rock or stump. ...\textsuperscript{114}

\textsuperscript{112}Ibid., pp. 16 and 17.  \textsuperscript{113}Ibid., p. 26.  \textsuperscript{114}Ibid., p. 48.
Whitman went on to identify himself with the followers of many religions, ancient and modern. It would seem, then, that he believed in transmigration, but only as he believed in other early faiths -- in oracles and sacrifices and nature worship -- not literally. His assertion that identity is for immortality, his belief that men are born not to be diffused but to be identified, would seem to be further indications that he believed that the soul has no identity after death or before birth. This was Emerson's belief, as we shall see.

Whitman's whole concept of immortality is quite similar to Emerson's: it is concerned with a belief in an over-soul and in present eternity; and it implies a belief in the correspondence of the law of use in nature with a law of the spirit. In "The Young American" Emerson had written of nature:

She flung us out of her plenty, but we cannot shed a hair or a paring of a nail but instantly she snatches at the shred and appropriates it to the general stock.

In the essay "Nature" he had said that everything in nature serves, that everything must serve. In "Plato" he stated the belief which Whitman was to repeat in "This Compost": "decomposition is recomposition." He believed that all things continue, that nothing dies.

115 Ibid., pp. 70 and 88.
117 "Plato; New Readings," Works, IV, 82.
118 "Nominalist and Realist," Works, III, 242 and 244.
In "Song of Myself," in the passage quoted above in which the grass is called "the beautiful uncult hair of graves," 119 Whitman had hinted at Emerson's law of conservation of matter, which has its parallel in a law of spirit. Later in the same poem, he had stated explicitly the idea which was to be the whole theme of "This Compost," first published in 1856 -- the belief that trees and grass and all things that grow upon the earth have sprung from the "leavings of many deaths."

And as to you corpse I think you are good manure, but that does not offend me, I smell the white roses sweetscented and growing, I reach to the leafy lips . . . . I reach to the polished breasts of melons.

And as to you life, I reckon you are the leavings of many deaths, No doubt I have died myself ten thousand times before. 120

Whitman's stated beliefs about the correspondence of natural and spiritual laws, and about immortality, surely indicate that he believed, with Emerson, that spirit is immortal, as matter is lasting. In the conclusion to "Song of Myself," Whitman expressed his expectation of immortality:

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love, If you want me again look for me under your bootsoles.

You will hardly know who I am or what I mean, But I shall be good health to you nevertheless, And filter and fibre your blood.

119 Leaves of Grass, p. 16.
120 Ibid., p. 54.
Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,  
Missing me one place search another;
I stop some where waiting for you.

Whitman believed that, as his body would go back to the  
general fund of matter, be diffused, and become apparent  
again as grass and many other living things, so his spirit  
would again become a part of the universal spirit, and would  
be known to men in later ages as thought or idea.

Surely this is the only sense in which Whitman believed  
in what Gay Allen has called "pantheistic evolution, reincarnation, and transmigration" the sense in which Emerson, too, believed in immortality. Emerson had stated his  
belief in the essay "Nature":

And the knowledge that we traverse the whole scale  
of being, from the center to the poles of nature,  
and have some stake in every possibility, lends  
that subtle lustre to death, which philosophy and  
religion have too outwardly and literally striven  
to express in the popular doctrine of the immor-
tality of the soul. The reality is more excellent  
than the report. Here is no ruin, no discontinuity,  
no spent ball. The divine circulations never rest  
nor linger. Nature is the incarnation of a thought,  
and turns to a thought again, as ice becomes water  
and gas. The world is mind precipitated, and the  
volatile essence is forever escaping again into the  
state of free thought. Hence the virtue and pun-
gency of the influence on the mind of natural ob-
jects, whether inorganic or organized. Man im-
prisoned, man crystallized, man vegetative, speaks  
to man impersonated. That power which does not  
respect quantity, which makes the whole and the  
particle its equal channel, delegates its smile

121 Ibid., p. 56.
to the morning, and distils its essence into every drop of rain. Every moment instructs, and every object; for wisdom is infused into every form. It has been poured into us as blood; it convulsed us as pain; it slid into us as pleasure; it enveloped us in dull, melancholy days, or in days of cheerful labor; we did not guess its essence until after a long time."

Both this chapter and the preceding one have dealt with nature and reality. They have shown that Whitman believed, with Emerson, that nature is the symbol of the soul, that matter answers to spirit as face to face in a glass, that the axioms of physics translate the laws of ethics. Like Emerson, Whitman was interested in the scientific developments of his day, and thought of science as an ally of poetry. His beliefs about science are a determining factor in his optimism, since he saw in scientific developments great promise for the future. In the concept of a chain of being, in the theory of evolution, he found a promise of continued progress of soul as well as matter. In the scientific law of polarity he found a solution to the problem of dualism. Like Emerson, Whitman came to the belief that evil is only the necessary opposite of good, and is not real subjectively, or as an essence. He came to see opposites as parts of one whole, and to see a unifying thread of relationship beneath the variety of nature's forms, as Emerson had seen it when he stood before the cabinet of plant and animal life in the Jardin des Plantes in Paris.

Both Emerson and Whitman believed that the key to true understanding, to the perception of unity, is love. They believed that the answers to man’s questions about the meaning of life are to be known — not through learning, not in definite words — but through love, intuitively. They believed that all things in nature are miracles, that perfect understanding of any one object in nature would make one understand all. But they believed, too, that these finite symbols, like the poet’s symbolic medium, language, are only partial and incomplete. They believed that truth can be known completely only through a mystic vision, through intuition and inspiration.

Through intuition they learned to know that spirit and good are real, that true reality is of the mind. They learned that time and space and death are all unreal, are all false answers to the riddle of the Sphinx. Eternity is real, it is here and now, and it is in man — and immortality is real.

Both Whitman and Emerson believed that spirit, like matter, has no beginning and no end. They believed, not in a personal immortality, but in an unending continuance of soul. They believed that man is immortal in two senses: he lives in the infinite present, in a present eternity, and after his death his soul lives on as thought or idea.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Both external and internal evidence preclude any doubt that Whitman was familiar with Emerson's writings before 1855, when he published the first edition of Leaves of Grass. As early as 1847, Whitman had made a written reference to Emerson, praising Emerson's lectures and quoting a paragraph from "Spiritual Laws." Several other bits of external evidence indicate Whitman's knowledge of Emerson between 1847 and 1855, when Whitman sent Emerson a presentation copy of the first edition of Leaves of Grass. The fact that Whitman sent this copy indicates that he was aware of Emerson's importance as a literary man, and perhaps that he was aware, also, of his own indebtedness. Emerson's famous letter of response proves that Emerson found in Whitman's book the "incomparable" expression of ideas with which he was himself in sympathy. The enthusiasm of the letter suggests that Emerson recognized in Whitman a kindred spirit.

Whitman's publication of Emerson's letter, his own open letter of reply, his addressing Emerson as "master" -- all indicate that for a time, at least, he wanted his indebtedness to be known. If, for a while, he denied Emerson's influence, he denied all other possible sources of ideas as well; he gave himself instructions not to mention any author's name in his
writings, not to suggest any possible sources of his ideas. He wanted to be thought of as original, self-reliant, inspired -- all qualities which Emerson praised in "The Poet." It is perhaps ironical that from this very time, this very attitude, comes one of the strongest indications of Emerson's influence: Whitman's tribute to Emersonianism -- "it breeds the giant that destroys itself."

Both Whitman's final attitude -- "loyal, loyal" -- and his final eagerness that his personal association with Emerson be known, seem to be good indications that in his old age, as in his first years as a poet, Whitman was willing, even eager, to admit influence. The advice which he gave to Traubel -- to read Emerson's works as preparatory soil, and to help to a conclusion -- surely means that he had read them just that way, and that they helped him. Emerson's works could have helped Whitman to form almost all of his early beliefs.

Whitman could have learned from Emerson that man is a microcosm, that he represents the whole world. Not only man, but everything in nature, presents the world in miniature, is a key to the meaning of all things. Like man, all other things in nature partake of the universal soul, but man most fully. Only man can understand the world, for he alone of all things can identify himself with all, has been all things, contains everything else in the world within himself. He is at the top of the scale of being: he has journeyed upward
through all of nature's lower forms. As man alone can interpret the world, the poet, the man of genius, is best able to understand man; for he is more inspired than other men, contains more of the universal soul, has passed beyond most men's condition. By his superiority, he points to the future and to future development. Man, like all other things in nature and in the soul, is progressing toward the best.

Both Whitman and Emerson believed that mind is real, that thought and beauty and all things of the mind and soul transcend time and space. Since they believed that a man sees himself in the world around him, they believed that his own mind, his character, is of the utmost importance to him. They thought that it is the duty of the government to defend the integrity of the individual.

Both Emerson and Whitman believed that governments, schools, churches -- all institutions -- though necessary to progress, sometimes hold civilization back. They lamented man's tendency to abide by the truths which he has formulated, rather than going on to seek new truths. They believed that abolition and other reforms are mistaken in being partial, in seeking to remove the symptoms rather than the causes of society's ills. They believed that fixed religions, too, are partial, that any statement of the world is bound to be false in not being wholly true. They believed that Christ was the
greatest of men, but that his teachings have been misused, so that they have sometimes bound men rather than making them free.

They believed that all men are inspired, and that the artist, especially, must have an unbroken channel back to God. Having this intuition, this deep understanding, the artist can interpret the world to men. He is a liberator, an answerer, a joiner; he shows men the truth behind appearances. As Whitman said, his purpose is to indicate the path between reality and men's souls. The artist identifies himself with all mankind, and interprets men and the world. He truly owns the world because he loves it and understands it — perceives its unity.

Whitman believed with Emerson that even more than other men, the artist must be free -- free to follow his inspiration and to search for truth. He should not be bound by outward laws; he should not seek to make rules for art. The laws of a work of art should spring from its conception in the mind of the artist, as things in nature develop from an idea in the mind of the universal creator.

Both Whitman and Emerson believed, then, in organic art. They believed that art should be like nature in following laws which spring from its own conception -- laws as definite as nature's own. They believed that art should be functional, creative, developing. They believed that the artist is a creator in the finite, and that art is a sort of secondary nature
filtered through the soul of man and reflecting the beauty of that soul.

Both Emerson and Whitman identified goodness and truth with beauty. They called goodness "beauty to the heart," and truth "beauty to the mind." They thought of beauty as the highest member of this trinity. Both believed that beauty is absolute -- not the beauty of art or of nature, but an inward beauty, found in man's mind and soul. They believed that all the beauty which a man sees is a reflection of that inward, ultimate beauty, which art can only attempt to express.

In keeping with their conviction that inward beauty is absolute, and with their emphasis on the mind, both Emerson and Whitman believed that matter is real only as a manifestation of the soul, that nature is a symbol of the spirit. They believed that the laws of nature have their counterparts in laws of the spirit. They saw in the scientific discoveries of their day reason for belief that soul, like matter, progresses, and is indestructible. They saw indications of an underlying unity of spirit, a oneness of opposites, a solution to the problem of dualism.

They believed that all of man's questions could be answered by the perfect understanding of any object in nature; that all things, properly understood, are miracles, and carry within themselves the key to the miracle of the world. But objects, like language, are symbols, and fail of conveying their meanings by being finite, limited. As man's stated
creeds are untrue in being partial, so his attempts to answer the universal riddle are untrue, too. Both Emerson and Whitman believed that love is almost a true answer, that the answer is to be known only through the intuitive understanding which springs from love.

Both believed in the mystic vision in which man sees the world whole, and his questions are answered — not in words but through inspiration — through becoming one with the infinite soul. Through inspiration they had learned the infinite truths which they attempted to express to man through the finite medium of their art. They learned that mind is the true reality; that spirit is real, and matter is its symbol; that evil is only the necessary opposite of good. They learned that time and space and death are false, are only apparent. They learned that eternity and immortality are real.

The ideas of inspiration, of unity beneath seeming diversity, of the unreality of time and space, and of the illusory appearance of evil are beliefs common to all mystics. Since Whitman could have found these mystical beliefs in the writings of many thinkers, and since he could have arrived at them intuitively, it is perhaps impossible really to prove that he learned them from Emerson. There can be no doubt, however, that these fundamental ideas, like almost all of Whitman's other early beliefs, could have been derived from Emerson's writings if Whitman had lacked the power of originating his
own ideas, and if he had had no other source. Both Moore and Goshes have considered it impossible that Whitman should have arrived at these ideas as suddenly as he did without some strong outside influence. External evidence indicates that Emerson's writings are the most probable source of this influence, that Whitman was familiar with Emerson's writing at least as early as 1847, and that, in his old age as in his first years as a poet, Whitman was aware of his debt to Emerson. All evidences indicate that we should honor the statements which Whitman made about the case before he suffered his stroke and there was reason to doubt him. We should take at face value his acknowledgment that Emerson's writings helped him to find himself --

I was simmering, simmering, simmering. Emerson brought me to a boil.
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