WALT WHITMAN, POET OF THE BODY: STYLISTICS OF (Dis)EMBODIMENT

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis proposes a unified theory for reading and interpreting *Leaves of Grass* (1891-92), by American poet Walt Whitman (1819-1892). This theory proceeds from the premises that spiritual themes are foundational for the poems, and that Whitman's chief poetic aim is to lead readers toward a spiritual understanding of human experience. This theory proposes that the material and spiritual realms coexist and interact continuously, and that human comprehension of an organized, coherent cosmic scheme is possible within the framework of material, temporal life, thanks to the innate divinity of the human being.

This project employs linguistic pragmatic theories to examine the subjectivity of Whitman's speaker's consciousness in terms of how it situates and represents itself, and how it relates to the real and conceptual worlds around it. I analyse cohesion (M.A.K. Halliday) and flow of consciousness (Wallace Chafe) in Whitman's poetry to illustrate that he deliberately employs stylistics of disembodiment and de-situation to shift the focus of his poetry away from the material world, toward the spiritual realm.

This analysis is broken into themed segments: 1) the speaker and his conception of his self (poems analysed include "Song of Myself" and "Starting from Paumanok"); 2) the speaker's interpersonal relationships (poems analysed include "I Sing the Body Electric," "The Sleepers," and "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand"); and 3) the speaker's interaction with his nation and cosmos (poems analysed include "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," and "A Noiseless Patient Spider").
These poems reveal a speaker with privileged conceptual access to the spiritual realm, which he interprets for readers, hoping this will spark them to develop their own cosmic awareness. The speaker redefines elements of the material world, like the body and its desires, or political life in a democracy, illustrating that these have spiritual significance; they forge connections between souls. Consequently, these spiritual connections valorize mundane pursuits. Moreover, this process of redefinition, or translation, charges his often eroticized discourse with spirituality, rendering it appropriate as public, national discourse for the United States in the latter half of the nineteenth-century.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ................................................................. ii

Table of Contents ......................................................... iv

List of Abbreviations ....................................................... vi

Acknowledgments .......................................................... vii

Chapter I – Introduction ................................................... 1

1.1 A divided self ......................................................... 1

1.2 Cultural context ...................................................... 5

1.3 Critical context ....................................................... 21

1.4 Methodology ........................................................ 28

1.5 Key theses .......................................................... 44

Chapter II – The Speaker ................................................... 46

2.1 Starting points: "Starting from Paumanok" and "Song of Myself" .... 46

2.2 Disembodied translation ........................................... 53

2.3 The divine speaker and the spiritual project ...................... 71

Chapter III – Interpersonal Relationships ............................... 82

3.1 (Dis)embodied bodies in contact .................................. 82

3.2 Placelessness and the platonic erotic: "The Sleepers" and "I Sing the Body
Electric" .................................................................. 86

3.3 From Eros to Socrates to Whitman's speaker: the function of the poet in
"Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand" ....................... 105

Chapter IV – The Speaker, the Nation, the Cosmos .................... 122
All poems by Walt Whitman cited in this thesis are from the W.W. Norton & Co. edition of *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*, edited by Michael Moon (2002). Throughout this thesis, Whitman passages are cited by title abbreviation and line numbers. Abbreviations and their corresponding titles, as well as page numbers from the Norton *Leaves of Grass*, are listed below. All other texts cited are by author and page number.

**BE**  "I Sing the Body Electric" (81-87)

**CBF** "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" (135-140)

**NPS** "A Noiseless Patient Spider" (377)

**SL**  "So Long!" (422-424)

**SM** "Song of Myself" (26-78)

**SP**  "Starting from Paumanok" (15-25)

**TS**  "The Sleepers" (356-664)

**WHH** "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand" (99-100)

**WLL** "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" (276-283)
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CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the inspiration and methodology for this analysis of Walt Whitman's stylistics in *Leaves of Grass*. In addition, it offers a review of recent criticism of Whitman's oeuvre significant to this study, and a brief overview of events in the poet's life significant to his worldview and poetic project.

1.1 A DIVIDED SELF

When I visited Walt Whitman's tomb in Harleigh Cemetery in Camden, NJ in April 2005, the lilacs were already in bloom. A small monument to the poet before his grave bears a memorial inscription and some of the final lines of perhaps his most famous poem, "Song of Myself":

WALT WHITMAN

MAY 31, 1819—MARCH 26, 1892

AUTHOR OF LEAVES OF GRASS,

THE MOST EXTRAORDINARY PIECE OF WIT AND WISDOM

THAT AMERICA HAS YET CONTRIBUTED.

HIS LIFE WAS AN AFFIRMATION OF FREEDOM,

HIS POETRY WAS A CELEBRATION OF LIFE,

AND HIS PHILOSOPHY WAS A PREPARATION FOR DEATH.
I DEPART AS AIR, I SHAKE MY WHITE LOCKS
AT THE RUNAWAY SUN,
I EFFUSE MY FLESH IN EDDIES, AND DRIFT IT
IN LACY JAGS.

I BEQUEATH MYSELF TO THE DIRT TO GROW
FROM THE GRASS I LOVE,
IF YOU WANT ME AGAIN LOOK FOR ME UNDER
YOUR BOOT-SOLES.

How ironic and appropriate that on the threshold of his grave he should contradict himself. We will never find Whitman beneath our boot-soles. The poet is buried in a granite mausoleum, his casket closed into a cement vault. The last thing his body will ever do is return to the earth to nourish the grass—"the beautiful uncut hair of graves" (SM 110). Indeed, his flesh has drifted nowhere but into dust sealed in cement. Yet this seems appropriate, as Whitman also asks in "Song of Myself," "Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself; / (I am large, I contain multitudes)" (1324-6). The issue is more complex than a case of simple contradictions between what Whitman wrote and what he did, or between what his intention was and what the facts of the matter are. Certainly we cannot say that the Whitman buried in a tomb is the character Walt who bequeatheth himself to the dirt, and who is the speaker throughout Leaves of Grass. It is well acknowledged by critics that we cannot hold Whitman to his verse; indeed,
throughout his life, he is known to have repeatedly made a distinction between himself as a person and the speaker of his poems, as autobiographical as his verse may seem. Moreover, critics generally concur that the revisions to *Leaves of Grass* over its nine publications throughout Whitman's lifetime serve in many ways not only literary or poetic ends, but also to distance the character Walt from the author Whitman. In *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography*, David S. Reynolds offers an example of this process in the placement of images in the *Leaves of Grass* text. Reynolds points out that Whitman used images reflecting his aging appearance in successive editions printed throughout his lifetime. However, with the 1881 edition, the image that originally appeared in the first 1855 edition makes a return, preceding "Song of Myself." Reynolds suggests that the daguerreotype of a young Whitman in workingman's clothes identifies the poem's celebration of personality with the youthful self-acclaiming bard, not the elderly poet known to neighbours and friends. Reynolds argues that this is an attempt on Whitman's part to separate his poetry, and especially his speaker Walt, from the reality of his own life and personality (*Walt Whitman's America* 535).

While we should expect a distinction between author and speaker, the contradictions that emerge between Whitman's attitudes and those represented in his poetry are also carried over into the identity of Walt, the speaker. As noted earlier, in "Song of Myself" he readily admits that he too contradicts himself. Certainly, the contradictions of *Leaves of Grass* urge further investigation, but in this study of Whitman, contradiction serves simply as a place to begin; it is the tip of a much larger iceberg of related themes. I will focus on two interconnected contradictions. The first of these contradictions relates to the corporeality of the speaker, Walt. In "Song of Myself,"
he claims, "I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul" (422). Some critics have noted that Whitman gives as much, if not more attention to an unorthodox, but not controversial, portrayal of the cosmic soul and spiritual relations, as he does to the body and interpersonal relations. Meanwhile, a great many studies consider Whitman's speaker's embodiment and his interactions with other bodies portrayed in the poems. Whitman was several times censured for obscenity, and in many circles his book was banned shortly after its publication. Whitman's liberal attitudes toward the body and sexuality caught the attention of his generation and earned him a great deal of negative publicity; these attitudes still intrigue critics today. However, only a few critics have noted the fluidity with which Whitman treats interacting bodies. In this study, I will examine the fluid language used to develop both the body and soul—language that fundamentally reveals the speaker as a disembodied entity, physically separated from others and from his own corporeality. The second contradiction I will explore relates to the location of the speaker. Whitman set out to bring a true American voice to a fledgling American literature, and his efforts earned him a legacy as the American bard, singer of the songs of democracy. The cultural work Whitman's poetry has performed in America is undeniable. Thanks to his writing, he is seen as the iconic American everyman—he is one of the rough workingmen, he is self-defined, and an active citizen participating in a democracy, in touch with the people and territories of his nation.

In an era of triple-barreled literary eminences who uttered their names in Jovian trochees and dactyls—William Cullen Bryant, John Greenleaf Whittier, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James
Russell Lowell—Walter Whitman had chosen to follow the populist examples of Andy Jackson, Kit Carson, and Davy Crockett. (Kaplan 200)

Whitman called himself simply Walt. Because of his connection to the United States and its people, we expect Whitman's language to situate his speaker within the identifiable landscape of the United States and probably within a fairly specific demographic; however, a close analysis reveals he eludes localization.

I would suggest that both of these contradictions—Whitman as the poet of disembodiment, and Whitman dislocated from his native America—gesture toward the underlying significance of spiritual themes in his poetry. Whitman does not celebrate the body, but transforms it into a divine and thus suitable vehicle for the activity of the soul. He does not specifically situate himself among the nineteenth-century American people or within the national landscape, but rather merges with an eternal cosmic life cycle to illustrate that worldly appearances give way to enduring spiritual reality. The quest to understand this spiritual reality is fundamental to active citizenship in a democracy. Moreover, the poetic act of carrying a spiritual message to a material, earthly world is fundamentally connected to disembodiment and dislocation, as the poet must situate himself between these two realms to bridge this gap.

1.2 CULTURAL CONTEXT

Born in 1819, Walt Whitman lived for just under three-quarters of a turbulent century in a nation experiencing every dimension of growth. The United States spent the nineteenth century expanding its territory to the south and west, pushing the frontier right
Chapter I

across the continent. Meanwhile, immigrants from around the world flooded into the eastern port cities, especially New York. Born in the farming country of Long Island and raised there and in Brooklyn, Whitman witnessed at first-hand the growth of his nation. His father worked for some time as a carpenter—a reasonably reliable profession in this era of overwhelming population expansion. The Whitman family's move from Long Island to Brooklyn was also a symptom of growing industrialization, and was typical of the migration of families from the countryside into the city where secure work was plentiful and did not rely on the seasons. However, his childhood in the countryside left an indelible mark on Whitman's imagination, evident in the imagery of *Leaves of Grass*. Country life, the seashore, and grassy fields all emerge as embodiments of an ideal life in touch with the natural world.

Whitman was educated in Sunday school and in the new public school system, and by age 11, he was working as an office boy for a law firm. The following year, he began working as a newspaper apprentice and was set on a path toward journalism. When his family returned to Long Island in 1833, a fourteen-year-old Whitman remained to work in Brooklyn. As a budding journalist, Whitman was exposed to all of the art New York had to offer as a growing cultural centre. Whitman adopted the prevalent notion of the time that the United States had no art or literature of its own, and needed to stop importing European (especially British) works in favour of developing American arts (Kaplan 100). As a typesetter, Whitman witnessed the inadequacy of copyright laws, as works by Dickens and others were regularly reprinted in American newspapers with no royalties paid to their authors (Kaplan 98-9).
In 1836, when fire destroyed the newspaper neighbourhood Whitman worked in, he returned to his family in Long Island and took up teaching in country schools. Although he claimed he hated the experience, it was clearly a formative one for his poetic ideology. He was genuinely interested in teaching. Rather than employing the state-approved rote method, Whitman taught through Socratic questioning and tried to engage his students, without resorting to corporal punishment, which was then common in the classroom (Kaplan 81-3; Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America* 63). Whitman's role in the classroom, as a questioning guide along a path toward understanding, reappears in his poetry as an underlying theme. He is "the teacher of athletes / [...] He most honors my style who learns under it to destroy the teacher" (SM 1234-6);

But each man and each woman of you I lead upon a knoll,
My left hand hooking you round the waist,
My right hand pointing to landscapes of continents and the public road.

Not I, not any one else can travel that road for you,
You must travel it for yourself. (SM 1207-11)

Until 1841, Whitman alternated between teaching in schools and journalism, including running his own newspaper for a time. This stay on Long Island reinforced the memories and activities of his youth—swimming, sailing, riding through the countryside, and generally enjoying the delights of nature.
Encouraged by his parents, as a child and young adult Whitman heard several religious leaders speak, including renowned Quaker preacher Elias Hicks. One of the major appeals of the American colonies was that, having been founded by Pilgrim and Puritan religious dissenters searching for a safe place to worship, they maintained a policy of religious tolerance throughout their development, even after the Revolutionary War and the writing of the Constitution. By Whitman's time, dissent within established religious groups often led to the formation of new sects:

The Shakers, the Mormons, the Oneidan perfectionists, Phoebe Palmer's perfectionist Methodists, the Seventh-Day Adventists, the spiritualists, and the Harmonialists all sprang up between the Revolution and the Civil War, with Christian Science and New Thought coming later. (Reynolds, Walt Whitman's America 256)

This multiplicity of sects all struggled to convert the masses, creating a wave of evangelism known as the Second Great Awakening. Evangelical leaders organized great camp meetings where hundreds would be converted, with many claiming to have seen or heard Christ in visions. Religious fervour was pervasive in public life. Even without attending any meetings, Whitman witnessed, and to some extent participated in a multiplicity of faiths. This certainly encouraged his openness toward all faiths as legitimate vehicles for personal spiritual development.

My faith is the greatest of faiths and the least of faiths,
Enclosing 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 fetich of the first rock or stump, powowing with sticks in the circle of obis,
Helping the llama or brahmin as he trims the lamps of the idols,
Dancing yet through the streets in a phallic procession, rapt and austere in the woods a gymnosophist,
Drinking mead from the skull-cap, to Shastas and Vedas admirant, minding the Koran,
Walking the teokallis, spotted with gore from the stone and knife, beating the serpent-skin drum,
Accepting the Gospels, accepting him that was crucified, knowing assuredly that he is divine. (SM 1097-1106)

In 1841, Whitman returned to the city, working in Brooklyn and Manhattan, and embarking upon a rich period of his development. He lived in boarding-houses and worked at a variety of newspapers, moving up from the pressroom to covering social, cultural and especially political events. He even gave several speeches on behalf of candidates in local elections, and in support of a variety of local political concerns. On several occasions he was fired from newspaper jobs because his political views did not please his editors. At this time in New York, political questions were settled as often by
street wars and riots than by debating and policy-making (Kaplan 103, 110; Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America* 103-6, 140). Meanwhile, Whitman also began writing and publishing fiction, including a novel, *Franklin Evans; or The Inebriate, A Tale of the Times*, and in 1842 saw Emerson speak, delivering his lecture, "The Poet," among others. Whitman later suggested this was a signpost directing him toward his eventual vocation. However, throughout the 1840s, Whitman was flaneur, or loafer, a man of fashion wandering about the markets and harbours in a city known for its great contradictions: wealth and power alongside child prostitutes, pigs, and wild dogs in the streets; the city had a new reservoir and modern waterworks, as well as overcrowded slums and frequent, devastating fires.

New York, as Whitman knew it then, was itself a "model," of the nation reduced, of personality and the mental life enlarged, and of the sunshine places and dark patches, the lawless energies and contrarieties in each. In the city he explored democracy, and in democracy he explored himself and the raw experience that went into *Leaves of Grass*. (Kaplan 113)

A nation so contradictory must come to a crisis point, and in 1846, the beginnings of this crisis began to form in the resolution of the Mexico War, when the new states annexed as a result of the U.S. military success were declared slavery-free. Effectively, this opened the debate that would last for the next fifteen years, before dissolving into civil war in 1861. Though not an abolitionist, Whitman was a Free Soiler—that is, he believed the existence of slavery undermined the value of free white labour, and thus
opposed it. Nevertheless, in 1848, when Whitman was invited to New Orleans to open a
daily newspaper on contract, the *Crescent*, he made the journey south with his brother
Jeff. This was the first of his travels in the United States, and the only trip he made prior
to publishing the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* in 1855. In New Orleans, Whitman
witnessed at first hand the southern way of life; slavery and the slave trade, as well as
theatres, gaming houses, and brothels. Although his stay was short, he and Jeff returning
to New York later the same year, Whitman took with him new insight into the South.

Between 1848 and the publication of *Leaves of Grass* in 1855, Whitman
undertook a rich program of self-education and began making notes for his eventual
poetry. It appears that Whitman took an interest in a wide variety of scientific and artistic
subjects, sometimes for journalistic purposes—theatre and opera reviews for instance—and sometimes for personal reasons. While he continued to pursue political journalism,
attending speeches, debates and anti-slavery rallies, he also became a major figure on the
arts scene, reviewing theatrical and musical performances, and many books. He
developed a passion for theatre and opera, as well as an appreciation for distinctly
American art and artists. Moreover, for all that *Leaves of Grass* is praised as sourceless,
or as following no model, Whitman clearly drew upon his readings of this period, which
included Rousseau, Longfellow, Bryant, Shakespeare, Pope, Horace, the Bible, Mary
Queen of Scots, Columbus, Plato, Alcibiades, Ruskin, George Sand, Frances Wright,
Coleridge, Carlyle, and Emerson, among many others (Kaplan 169-72; Reynolds, *Walt
Whitman's America* 236). Throughout this period, Whitman also turned his interest from
primarily Protestant religion to the unconventional spiritualism and pseudoscience
circulated across the nation by both serious scholars and the likes of P.T. Barnum.
Whitman took more than a passing interest in Egyptology, visiting the collections of New York scholars regularly. Kaplan suggests this study of great civilizations of the past gave Whitman a sense of the place of nations in the grand scheme of world history, but it certainly also exposed him to spiritual traditions other than the predominant Judeo-Christian models of his time. Whitman also began to study phrenology, the "science" of reading bumps on the skull as indications of the size and shape of the brain, with corresponding character traits assigned to different portions of the brain. Whitman had the bumps on his head read on July 16, 1849.

Altogether wrongheaded, as 'scientific' as Dante's cosmography and as chimerical as perpetual motion, phrenology nevertheless served Whitman well: it supplied him with a structure of belief, the underpinnings of a personal mythology. He found a way of reasoning from a limited present to the poet he was to become. It scarcely matters that he drew the right conclusions from the wrong data. (Kaplan 153)

Whitman also took an interest in animal magnetism, a theory that everything in existence, alive and dead, was "all part of a network of sending and receiving stations relaying an invisible electric fluid" (Kaplan 150). Means of transmission included physical contact, hypnosis, arcane passing and other physical and occult practices. The theory of animal magnetism allowed for communication with the dead, and the observance of occult phenomena—thus it supported many other unconventional spiritual movements:
Mesmerism, which began as hypnotic mind-control and developed into a system of healing, popularized the terminology of animal magnetism that lay behind [Whitman's] images of electricity and fluid energy. Spiritualism, which purported to prove immortality through contact with spirits, influenced his ideas about death and the soul. Swedenborgianism, in the antiecclesiastical form that made it popular among many Americans at mid-century, contributed to his notions of spiritual essences and sensuous mysticism. Harmonialism, an umbrella term referring to a broad religious outlook expounded most famously by Andrew Jackson Davis, drew together these and other movements to posit an eternal interchange between mind and matter. (Reynolds, Walt Whitman's America 259)

These ideas and practices, incredible and credible alike, worked their way into Whitman's life and his poetry. "He bathed and swam daily, studied texts on water cure, diet, physique, exercise, longevity, personal magnetism, eugenics, sexology, heredity" (Kaplan 151); he wrote of influx and efflux, the body's electricity, the magnetic soul, immortality, and the individual as cosmos.

Whitman's interests were encouraged by his pursuits throughout this period, which balanced between journalism, a family construction business, and two attempts to make a career of general knowledge. The first of these, in 1849, saw Whitman open a storefront and prepare a series of lectures that were never delivered. He took to visiting family members in Long Island and writing narratives about country life there for city newspapers. Whitman then took to construction, where his work was limited to
overseeing finances, contractors and suppliers, while his father and brothers George and Andrew did the building. This allowed his family to live rent-free in the homes they built until they were sold. Whitman's second attempt at a career in general knowledge was supported by this practice, as he opened a store and job-printing office on the ground floor of one of his family's houses, living upstairs. Between 1849 and 1852, he sold phrenological items, stationery, toys and books—many of which he read before they were sold.

In 1853, the United States was formally recognized as a world power with the World's Fair, hosted at New York's Crystal Palace. The new iron and glass building displayed the latest in technology: steam and electric engines, bridge elements, printing presses, guns, gold bars, furniture, lenses, lifeboats, and a significant art collection. Whitman saw the building and its contents as evidence of modern America (Kaplan 181).

It is unclear exactly when Whitman decided that he would write a book of poetry, and unclear when he began making notes. He presents his vocation as the result of a moment of sexual/spiritual poetic inspiration:

I mind how once we [the speaker and his soul] lay such a transparent summer morning,

How you settled your head athwart my hips and gently turn'd over upon me,

And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your tongue to my bare-stript heart,

And reach'd till you felt my beard, and reach'd till you held my feet.
Chapter I

Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge that pass all
the argument of the earth,
And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,
And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,
And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the women my
sisters and lovers,
And that a kelson of the creation is love. (SM 87-95)

One biographer, Justin Kaplan, suggests Whitman did experience a poetic vision that
took over and inspired the poet, from which he later awoke in wonder, and which
periodically recurred as "flashes of illumination or ecstasy" triggered by "the sea, music,
the grass, the green world of summer" (Kaplan 190). Nevertheless, Kaplan notes the
sustained preparation that went into the making of Leaves of Grass. Some of Whitman's
notes for the poems may be from as early as 1847. It is clear from his notes, scribbled in
daybooks alongside bills, names and addresses, that his poetry was not simply inspired,
but theorized in advance. His intention was to present something not seen before:

"Make no quotations and no references to other writers," Whitman
instructed himself when he was composing Leaves of Grass. "Take no
illustrations whatsoever from the ancients or classics ... nor from the royal
and aristocratic institutions and forms of Europe. Make no mention or
allusion to them whatever, except as they relate to the new, present
things—to our country—to American character or interests.” (qtd. in Kaplan 169)¹

Kaplan notes a contrast between Whitman's epic of happiness and the ancients who frequently focused on war, pain and suffering. Nevertheless, many scholars have identified the roots of *Leaves of Grass* in the structure of epic, elegy and lyric poetry, as well as in the rhythms of preaching and Biblical verse. The title *Leaves of Grass* was registered May 15, 1855, and the first print run of 795 copies (200 in green cloth binding, 595 in cheaper binding) was available July 4, 1855, Independence Day. The original text included Whitman's picture, but his name only appeared in the copyright notice, which was often registered to representatives of authors. The only connection between the picture, copyright, and poetry was in the then untitled "Song of Myself," when the speaker's soul talks to "Walt." Unfortunately, following frequent periods of illness, Whitman's father died only days after *Leaves of Grass* appeared in print.

By the time *Leaves of Grass* had been published, Whitman saw himself as a poet. Although the book had sold only a few copies, and although he had to work full-time as a journalist to support himself, Whitman identified with the artistic and bohemian communities of New York, looking there for recognition and acceptance. Whitman made himself a regular at Pfaff's Restaurant, a favourite haunt of the artists, abolitionists and feminists of the bohemian community. At Pfaff's and in his daily journalism, Whitman became even more a student of the common person. *Leaves of Grass* remained Whitman's main project, as he revised his poems and added more, releasing a second

edition in 1856, complete with reviews (most by himself), and a third edition in 1860. The 1860 edition, however, marked a completion of the intent of the book. With the addition of "Starting from Paumanok" at the beginning and "So Long!" at the end of the work, Whitman established the life-cycle metaphor he had been working toward. Moreover, this edition cut out the preface from 1855 and the letters and reviews from 1856, leaving the poetry to stand alone and speak for itself. This was the last full edition of *Leaves of Grass* printed before the Civil War erupted, forcing America to reconsider itself as a nation and its place in the world.

In the period leading up to the war, many social problems grew increasingly aggravated. In the first half of the nineteenth century:

Politically and socially, America was in some ways close to chaos. The old party system shattered, and a new one struggled to establish itself on the basis of a confusing array of splinter groups. Corruption in high places was rampant. Although a broad middle class was developing, the gap between the rich and the poor was wider than ever before. Immigrants arrived in unprecedented numbers, changing the nation's ethnic makeup and fanning antiforeign sentiment. Urban death rates soared. America's largest city, New York, could boast of its economic and cultural centrality, but it was also crowded, filthy and infested by rowdy gangs and roving prostitutes—not to mention the ever-present swine on the streets. (Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America* 306)
Throughout the nineteenth century, the democracy of the United States was confronted with multiplying social, ethnic, cultural and economic stratifications; the Civil War represents the crisis point of the nation's effort to feel out the limits of its democratic system, despite this increasing complexity. The rebellion in the American south began April 12, 1861, and by July 21, the Civil War had officially begun. Whitman was an ardent Union supporter, though too old to enlist. However, his brother George signed up for military service and travelled to Washington. In September 1861, the Whitman family learned that George had been injured, and Walt raced to Washington looking for him. Although George had received only a cut to the cheek, after ascertaining his brother's good health, Whitman decided to stay in Washington for a few weeks—his visit lasted several years.

During the war, Whitman volunteered as a Soldier's Missionary in the army hospitals. He visited injured and dying soldiers from both sides of the battle lines, bringing them candy, oranges, and jokes, writing letters home for them, sometimes advising their parents of their deaths. While his fellow delegates from the Christian Commission handed out religious tracts, Whitman gave comfort, and was well-loved for it (Kaplan 276-81). He met a great number of young soldiers, and developed intimate bonds with some of them; indeed, it is to this period that most scholars look for evidence of Whitman's early homosexual attachments. Whether brotherly or romantic, the love Whitman gave to these soldiers was often returned with devotion while they remained in hospital; however, many died, others returned home, began families, and eventually stopped writing to their affectionate nurse. For Whitman, deep feelings of love became intrinsically connected to death and loss, a connection articulated repeatedly throughout
Leaves of Grass (Kaplan 282-7). Certainly, the hospitals were not a pleasant place for relationships: led by Surgeons General trained in the War of 1812 and poorly trained doctors and nurses, medical care was antiquated; open latrines, dirty surgical tools and little to no hand-washing contributed to infections and a resulting surge of amputations—Whitman describes in a notebook the piles of limbs outside the hospital tents, bloody, grey and rotting.

Whitman wrote throughout the war, completing his collection of war poetry, Drum Taps, in 1863 (it was published only in 1865, and stopped in mid-printing to add some new poems, including "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd"), and supporting himself through journalism and work as a copyist. After a bout of illness, hospital fatigue, and an eight-month trip home to New York, Whitman returned to Washington and secured a government clerkship in 1865 in the Office of Indian Affairs of the Interior Department, shortly before the war ended. In this position Whitman actually met some of the Indian delegates, to whom he would routinely introduce himself as the poet-chief and share his vision of common humanity (Kaplan 298).

In hindsight, Whitman argued that Leaves of Grass could only have become what it was by the end of his lifetime because of the Civil War. He saw the Civil War as the proof of America, the crisis through which the nation fought for its ideals of freedom and equality, for the value of the labour of the common working man. It was certainly also a manifestation of the social struggle to mediate relations between white Americans, Natives, Blacks and the thousands of immigrants in the United States.

Whitman remained in Washington until 1873. By this time he was a popular figure, caricatured in newspapers, sometimes asked to read at convocations. However, in
January 1873, Whitman had the first of several paralytic strokes. His friends in Washington nursed him back to health and mobility, just in time for him to travel to his brother George's home in Camden, NJ, to be with his mother in the final days of her life. Of his family members, she had been the closest to him, and he was devastated by her loss. He lived in Camden for the rest of his life, suffering a second stroke in 1875. Despite his increasingly limited mobility, Whitman enjoyed the American centennial celebrations in Philadelphia throughout 1876, and to mark the occasion, released a centennial edition of *Leaves of Grass*, complete with new poetry. It had very successful sales, thanks to a bit of promotional genius and an intercontinental literary war of his own design. He sent clippings of an anonymous article, written by himself, denouncing the reception his poems had had since 1855, and cataloguing all the injuries of the nation against their author. He announced Whitman to be poor, and then added a few promotional lines for his centennial edition. He sent clippings to all his friends on both sides of the Atlantic, and when the American press discovered his English fans planned to form a committee to recruit subscribers for the volume, the battle lines were drawn. The result of many heated articles sent back and forth across the Atlantic was that Whitman's poetry was finally discussed on its own merits, rather than in connection with what Whitman was wearing in his photographs or whom he had offended.

Whitman finally travelled across his beloved America to Colorado in 1879, and declared it better than he had imagined. He also delivered the first of his annual Lincoln lectures that year in New York. The following year saw him travelling to Canada to visit his friend Dr. Richard Maurice Bucke, and to tour the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River regions. In 1881, he made a trip to Boston to oversee the printing of the 1881-82
Leaves of Grass. In the final decade of his life, Whitman continued to write, working on Specimen Days, a prose book of reflections on his life and his century. He eventually moved to his own house on Mickle Street in Camden, where he remained until his death, March 26, 1892.

1.3 CRITICAL CONTEXT

The first known review of Leaves of Grass appeared in the New York Tribune on July 23, 1855, just over two weeks after the volume's first release. Since then, Leaves of Grass has enjoyed abundant praise, derogation and scholarly criticism. It is impossible to catalogue all threads of the arguments surrounding Whitman. Thanks to his diverse and interconnected themes, his poetry necessarily lends itself to some dominant topics of discussion, but scholars have approached these topics, and others, from a huge variety of critical perspectives.

Whitman scholarship began in the 1860s, with the first of several hagiographic biographical studies written during the poet's lifetime by his supporters. To these he gave not only his endorsement, but also his assistance. Two aspects of biographical studies continue to dominate Whitman studies today. On one hand, scholars consider Whitman's relation to his social and historical context. These cultural studies, like David S. Reynolds's Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography (1995), approach many of the themes taken up in Whitman's poetry, considering the influence of his life and times on his views and writings on democracy, race, religion, love, death, individuality, gender, and sexuality, among others. This has also evolved into a number of thematic studies on each of these topics. For instance, Betsy Erkkila considers Whitman as a political poet
Chapter I

from a variety of vantage points, illustrating the necessity of homoeroticism in Whitman's politics, considering shifts in his political views before and after the Civil War, and portraying Whitman as a challenger of the cultural norms of his era. Meanwhile, in several articles M. Wynn Thomas and Alan Trachtenberg have each examined the connections between Whitman's belief in the value of the working person and his Free Soil and antislavery attitudes, as well as the manifestations of themes of labour politics in his poetry. Trachtenberg has also considered Whitman's relation to cities and crowds in his poetry, a theme Walter Grünzweig develops further in his work on Whitman as an advocate of normalism, which Grünzweig defines as a manifestation of the will of the majority. Other critics, like Robert K. Martin and Mark Doty, consider Whitman as a champion of a gay lifestyle, or alternatively as an unwittingly gay proponent of a nation united in brotherhood. Mark Maslan also examines Whitman's sexuality as a stimulus for poetic inspiration, insisting this is a form of possession, resulting in the subversion of the individual self.

The other aspect of biographical studies includes texts like Justin Kaplan's *Walt Whitman: A Life* (1980), which tend to feature a twin focus on the development of Whitman the man and on the evolution of *Leaves of Grass*, his book. Frequently, these biographies offer interpretations of Whitman's writing through the lens of significant events and experiences in his life. Early considerations of the connections between Whitman's life and writings opened the door for more textually oriented criticism, including formalist, structuralist, poststructuralist, anthropological and linguistic studies. Many of these approaches emerge in the thematic studies mentioned above. Finally, recent examinations of Whitman's reception and influence, like Ed Folsom's *Whitman*
East & West: New Contexts for Reading Walt Whitman (2002) and Kenneth M. Price's To Walt Whitman, America (2004), continue to accumulate, illustrating Whitman's position as a major author in world literature.

Because of the prominence of the biographical origins of much Whitman criticism, a great deal of this body of scholarship works to connect Whitman to his time and culture, often situating Whitman and/or his speaker with respect to particular events, places and bodies. However, a recent turn in criticism takes a similar approach to my own, in that it examines the ways in which Whitman disconnects his voice from the nineteenth-century United States he claims to speak for. For instance, Folsom points out that Whitman draws a distinction between America and the United States, treating America as an idea not connected by any necessary ties to the territory of the United States—the poet of America, therefore, is not necessarily the poet of the United States as a political system and territory ("What a Filthy Presidentiad!" 108-11). Also, as Marianne Noble suggests, contrary to a popular understanding of Whitman's intimate poetic interaction with other bodies, his speaker has no "genuine human contact" and thus remains distanced from the bodies and intimate relations he so scandalously—for 1855—describes. While these scholars use traditional methods of literary analysis, I will analyse Whitman's stylistics, applying some tools of linguistic pragmatics, which will allow me to explore the characteristics, whether embodied or not, of Whitman's voice. Therefore, three aspects of Whitman scholarship are most significant for this study: stylistic examinations of Leaves of Grass, anthropological investigations of religious themes in Whitman's poetry, and to a lesser extent, deconstructive analyses of Whitman's writings.
Considering Whitman's influence in changing the look and sound of American poetry, there are still remarkably few extensive studies of Whitman's style. Three works stand out as particularly relevant to this study because of their concern with Whitman's use of language. C. Carroll Hollis considers oratorical characteristics in Whitman's poetry in his book, *Language and Style in "Leaves of Grass"* (1983). He traces the oratorical origins of *Leaves of Grass* to the style of lectures Whitman wrote notes for, beginning in 1848, but never completed or delivered. Hollis's examination of oratory, speech-act theory, negation and metonymy in relation to *Leaves of Grass* focuses on the early editions of the text, which are developmentally closest to the undelivered lectures. Hollis aims to identify and characterize these elements of Whitman's style, and does not offer any intensive interpretation of the reasons Whitman employs them. This is typical, as stylistic analyses tend to be very focused in scope, as they elaborate only a few aspects of a text, often making a demonstration of the text's characteristics rather than offering an interpretation of the text's meaning.

James Perrin Warren, on the other hand, tries not to distinguish between theory and practice, seeing them as opposing ends of a continuum. He reads *Leaves of Grass* as an attempt to put a nineteenth-century person on record, as Whitman once suggested in a conversation with his long-time friend Horace Traubel. Warren insists that we cannot understand the text as exclusively an aesthetically-oriented literary performance, nor can we discount Whitman's extensive use of figurative language in placing a person on record. Warren's book, *Walt Whitman's Language Experiment* (1990), traces the development of Whitman's theory of language through six editions of *Leaves of Grass*, illustrating that the distinction between person and literature is not absolute. He
characterizes his discussion as a deconstructive reading, though not one that argues for a decentred poetic self, and contextualizes it within the framework of Whitman's interest in linguistics.

Meanwhile, Tenney Nathanson does argue for a decentred poetic self. He offers a deconstructive reading of the performative language Whitman employs, examining the power of the poet's voice to both create the presence of the poet, and to deliberately draw attention to its own means of production, thus underlining the poet's actual absence and elusiveness. In *Whitman's Presence: Body, Voice, and Writing in Leaves of Grass* (1992), he argues the poet takes a stance at the centre of the universe his poems create, diffusing himself until the centre is everywhere. Moreover, Nathanson insists that Whitman, uncomfortable with the impossibility of transfiguring himself fully into his *Leaves*, attempts to disavow the existence of the book, insisting it is the embodiment of a man. Nathanson considers elements of Whitman's language and style involved in producing, sustaining, or countering power relations connected to the poet's construction of his identity. These include Whitman's naming in catalogues and lists, his cosmic myth-making, presence and autonomy in relation to contemporaneous social forms, the relation he portrays between body and voice, and his contrasting attempts to reveal an agglomerative identity and a private individuality. Ultimately, Nathanson argues that Whitman is not working toward a political message in *Leaves of Grass*, but toward his own exceptional status at the centre of the text. However, Nathanson sometimes attributes a lack of awareness to Walt Whitman, suggesting that in his poetry an economy of voice and writing, of presence and absence, emerges to generate the illusion of the productive power of the text. He argues Whitman inadvertently also reveals the linguistic defects
that make it clear this power is illusory; the key defect being the gap between sign and referent. Yet on several occasions Whitman very deliberately calls attention to this gap, often refusing to name those objects or ideas whose power exceeds the constraints of an arbitrary sign, illustrating not only a conscious awareness of this linguistic gap, but also the willingness to use it to his advantage. Nothing is inadvertent.

These stylistic analyses aim to identify characteristics of the speaker's voice, but only some attempt to attribute motivation to their findings. While I am not immediately concerned with his poetry's motivations or origins, I am interested in the effect of Whitman's stylistic choices on a reader interpreting the text. I believe the disembodiment and dislocation of his speaker to be fundamentally connected to the spiritual realm, in Whitman's cosmos; hence, it is necessary to also consider investigations of his spiritual themes. Many of these seek to identify Whitman's connections to world religions, including the dominant Christian factions of nineteenth-century America. One such work is *The Ecstatic Whitman: Literary Shamanism & the Crisis of the Union* (1986) by George Hutchinson, which integrates the significant interdisciplinary and cross-cultural perspectives on Whitman's writing of the thirty previous years by considering the poet as shaman. For Hutchinson, shamanism provides an excellent model for the ecstatic performance of Whitman's prophetic poetry, and reconciles the poet's religious orientation, visionary idealism, and psychology with the building cultural crisis of the early and mid-nineteenth century. He outlines the characteristics of shamanism and illustrates their emergence in Whitman's early fiction and throughout his poetry, and he describes the revitalizing role the poet-shaman aimed to play in reinforcing or reorienting the symbolic systems of his culture in its time of crisis.
Chapter I

Meanwhile, in *Minor Prophecy: Walt Whitman's New American Religion* (1989), David Kuebrich examines the spiritual message underlying *Leaves of Grass*, understood as a single unified work, not a collection of distinct poems. Kuebrich contextualizes this within an understanding of the era, its spiritual and political beliefs, and its millennial anticipations. Whitman is considered as a self-proclaimed prophet on a mission to invent a new religion for a young nation. However, Kuebrich calls him a minor prophet because his prophecy does not play out as he expected. America does not become united by his new, natural civic religion, by bonds of brotherly affection; nevertheless, his work continues to have an inspirational influence on many readers. Whether as shaman or prophet, Whitman clearly employs structures of thought and representation aligned with familiar spiritual forms. I would suggest that a study of Whitman's spiritual themes using a linguistic approach to style could shed a great deal of a new light on both Whitman's practices as a poet and on his development of a coherent, unified theology and worldview. Although Whitman uses the term "religion" in his poetry, I hesitate to use it in this study. The sense Whitman gives it in his poetry seems far broader than the doctrinal and sectarian connotations most often associated with organized religion. Moreover, his theory of democracy, which he extends to all aspects of life, precludes the hierarchies of organized religions. For this reason as well, I hesitate to call Whitman's speaker a priest, preacher, prophet or even shaman. As I will argue, Whitman understood the mysteries of the spiritual realm to be accessible to all individuals.

Finally, because two of the three stylistic studies taken into account here are aligned with a deconstructive approach, it is helpful to consider deconstruction as a critical standpoint as well. One of the most interesting texts using this critical approach is
Disseminating Whitman: Revision and Corporeality in Leaves of Grass (1991) by Michael Moon. He deconstructs the first four editions of Leaves of Grass, charting the revisions to the book as a whole on what he calls the "macro" level. Moon is particularly interested in Whitman's modes of representing embodiment, and the ways in which he attempts to eliminate the distinction between sexual transgression and the act of writing. He suggests Whitman deliberately calls attention to the constructedness of bodily experience, thus revealing the political nature of embodiment. Whitman's revisions, therefore, relate to a need to re-present the (male) body in light of its changing political role(s) before, during, and after the Civil War. Like Nathanson, Moon sees a contradiction in the text: Whitman asserts repeatedly that he provides loving physical presence through his book but is aware of the frustrating, incontrovertible conditions of writing and embodiment that render it impossible to do more than provide metonymic substitutions. However, again I am not convinced Whitman was frustrated by this. Rather, I would suggest his stylistics reveal he does not want to be embodied and avoids being tied to the material world. Moon suggests the loving presence works to demonstrate politics of embodiment, but I think it also leads us to the spiritual message inherent in the work. Together, these three approaches point toward a coherent, unified understanding of Whitman's overarching goal—to guide his readers toward a more enlightened, democratic understanding of the cosmos.

1.4 Methodology

I believe that for Whitman, poetry is a fundamentally spiritual act. As Hutchinson suggests of shamanism and the ecstatic moment of prophetic inspiration, I would extend
Chapter I

to the poetic act the role of bridging the gap between the material and spiritual worlds, of
carrying messages from one to the other. Because this is his task, Whitman must situate
his speaker between these worlds—he can afford no distinguishable ties to the material
world of nineteenth-century America, nor can he be so abstract that he gives us no clue as
to his identity, location, or era. A disembodied speaker is fundamental to this project; he
remains identifiable, but not situated. The messages he carries from the spiritual realm—
his understanding of the cosmos, and of the role of the individual human within it—rely
on his ability to stay in this in-between or placeless state, and to convey the abstract
understanding to which he is privileged in a way ordinary readers can understand. Thus,
in this study, I will consider the speaker's activities of self-location and of what Whitman
calls "translation."

The poems analysed in each of the following three chapters have been selected for
the relationships they portray. All of these chapters consider the agency and activities of
the speaker in these relationships. Chapter II considers the speaker as individual and
considers his portrayal of himself in space and time. Chapter III examines the
interpersonal relationships between the speaker and the individuals around him, whom he
represents in his poetry. Finally, Chapter IV looks at social relationships; that is, the
relationships between the individual speaker and his city, nation, and cosmos. Because
Whitman's poetry is exclusively centred on the first-person voice of the speaker, the
examination of social relationships cannot include the interaction of different
demographics with each other; these exchanges are only reflected through the speaker's
individual point of view. In each of these chapters, I will examine the effects of the
speaker's "translations" in the poems at hand. This work of translation is often a process
Chapter I

of metaphoric and metonymic redefinition, which can be understood through an analysis of the patterns of linguistic cohesion Whitman creates; in the simplest terms, the manner in which Whitman uses specific word associations to add meaning(s) to the definition of a word or concept. In this way, Whitman can be understood as a teacher, building upon an individual reader's understanding of a word or concept until it represents far more each time it appears than it has in previous uses in his text. The speaker's location also becomes important in this context, for the character of his discourse is necessarily shaped in part by the position from which the speaker addresses his audience. I will examine how each of the poems considered illustrates the speaker's indications of self-location, both through linguistic disembodiment and through imagery of border zones and placelessness. Finally, in each of the next three chapters I will demonstrate how these elements of Whitman's style are employed specifically to promote his spiritual goals: to situate himself in the liminal space between the spiritual and material realms; to translate the material world into cosmic order; and to lead readers to an understanding of the divinity of nature and of the individual human being. Lastly, Chapter V gestures toward some of the implications of this underlying coherence in Whitman's language and poetry, in terms of both personal and political themes.

To analyse Whitman's style and its relation to spiritual themes in his poetry, this study employs some tools of linguistic pragmatics. It is important to understand the difference between the study of style and of linguistics, and how they relate to each other. Linguistic pragmatics and the study of stylistics both proceed from the understanding that language is a system of meaning-making and meaning-communication. Both understand that this system employs arbitrary signs to produce meaning. Stylistics examines the
characteristics of a body of written, verbal, or signed language and the effect the language producer aims to communicate to the language receiver. Stylistic analysis identifies patterns of usage and attempts to arrive at principles to explain the particular choices made by language producers, often with regard to the meaning produced by their text. The style of any one work may be typical of a particular genre, of a particular author, or of a particular period or movement in literary history. It may be a product of cultural beliefs, specific literary influences, or an underlying motivation on the part of an author; it can be a combination of any or many of these influences. A stylistic analysis of a text can include wide-ranging observations about language that extend from the organization and structure of the text as a whole to the mode, tense, punctuation, rhyme, metre of individual sentences or lines, as well as observations about literary devices like metaphor or alliteration, among others.

On the other hand, linguistic pragmatics looks specifically at the use of language; it considers how words are variously considered, selected, contextualized, ordered, communicated, and understood—in short, how the use of language creates context and makes meaning. The words in a discourse create context through their relation to each other, in relation to the implied or stated position, presuppositions, and prior knowledge of the language producer (speaker/writer) and of the language receiver (audience), and in relation to the ties that bind each utterance or sentence to others within a larger discourse. As such, linguistic pragmatics offers tools that can be used in stylistic analysis, for the investigation of patterns of usage all along the continuum between the grammatical (language structure) and lexical (content) ends of the language spectrum.
Thus, when analysed linguistically or stylistically, a text reveals new insights about its structure, content, theme, narrator, worldview, and audience, among others—about how the text operates to produce meaning—but also about the structure and functions of the language system employed to produce meaningful discourse. My aim is to reveal new insights about the meaning of the text, not the system itself. Using these tools, it becomes possible to trace the subjectivity of the speaker in terms of how he situates and represents himself—the context he creates through his language use—as well as how he relates to the real and conceptual worlds around him. I will illustrate how at the level of language, Whitman refuses to align his speaker with any specific place or body for any enduring length of time. Rather, in linguistically situating himself between places, bodies and moments, he mirrors imagery of the ecstatic prophetic moment of his poet-speaker, thereby infusing his writing with spiritual structures at all levels of composition.

Stylistic and linguistic analytical tools are available for use in any corpus of writing. The structure of our language and the sometimes unconscious reasons we employ any one word or structure over another are manifested in all bodies of writing. However, in considering Whitman's work, the use of these tools is particularly justified, for there is a higher than average likelihood that many of the choices Whitman made in writing are not only conscious decisions, but carefully considered. As evidence, I offer a series of interconnected biographical facts: between 1857 and 1859 Whitman studied historical linguistics with William Swinton. It is a commonly held belief among Whitman scholars that although his work went unacknowledged, Whitman collaborated in the writing of Swinton's linguistic treatise, *Rambles Among Words*, published in 1859. Moreover, Whitman prepared notes for a public lecture on language, which was
eventually apparently set aside because it was a distraction from his main poetic purpose. However, I would argue that this interest in language is manifested, indeed practiced, in *Leaves of Grass*. Anyone who has so much as glanced at a manuscript copy of Whitman's notes for his poetry can attest to the extensive revisions to which he subjected his text. Often we find him changing phrasing, adding or subtracting lines; just as often, we find him changing "and" to "or," or vice-versa, or eliminating these conjunctions entirely, adding or eliminating definite and indefinite articles, and making the small changes that change not the meaning of the words around them, but of how they communicate together.

Although my analysis will not consider the revisions to his text over the decades in which it was published and republished, I will focus on some of the very small words that have a significant influence on the speaker's representation of himself and his interactions with his world. In this study, I will engage with Wallace Chafe's theory of the flow and displacement of consciousness in writing, as described in his book *Discourse, Consciousness, and Time* (1994), and with M.A.K. Halliday's theory of cohesion in discourse, as outlined in his text, *Introduction to Functional Grammar* (2004). These theoretical approaches shed light on how a narrative consciousness uses language to represent itself to others, and to define and interact with its audience, and on how each sentence connects with the others in a discourse to make meaning. Moreover, these approaches unite the consciousness of the speaker and the ways in which that speaker can remain de-situated, yet still be understood, and convey tones of intimacy, sincerity, confidence, or even alienation to his audience.
In *Discourse, Consciousness, and Time*, Wallace Chafe notes that human beings are conscious of their own conscious experience. This makes it possible to characterize the conscious experience as either extroverted or introverted. One way to understand these characterizations is to consider the extroverted consciousness as active in a person endowed with physical senses interacting with an environment or experiencing an event, while the introverted consciousness is active in a mind remembering or imagining the experiences had by the extroverted self. Either or both of these aspects of consciousness can be involved in the production of language. "Consciousness enters into the production of language in two ways: it provides the ideas that are represented, but it is also responsible for representing them. On that basis, we can speak of a *represented* consciousness and a *representing* consciousness" (Chafe 198). Conscious experience, whether extroverted or introverted, can be linked in a variety of ways to the represented and representing consciousnesses of language production. The interaction of the two aspects of conscious experience, and their awareness of being involved in a process of representation, can thus produce a variety of kinds of discourse—each of which allows a listener or reader to situate a speaker in relation to his audience and to the events and thoughts he represents.

Chafe asks his readers to think about the ways in which a speaker's dual consciousness can use language to represent itself to others. He diagrams several modes of representation in language relevant to this study, and illustrates how they emerge from conscious experience. In conversation, we most often find the immediate and displaced modes, which I will briefly outline to provide context for three other modes that are more closely related to Whitman's writing in *Leaves of Grass*. In the immediate mode, an
extroverted conscious experience—the perception, evaluation, or activity of an environment—is immediately represented in language. An example: an individual writing with a pen says to another searching for a pen in every pocket, "Here, I'm done with it." In speech, the immediate mode necessarily involves the presence of both speaker and audience, known as copresence. It is in the present tense, with the representing (speaking) consciousness expressing the represented consciousness's ongoing experiences. In the sample phrase I have provided, the individual with the pen speaks, representing his represented self as being finished using his pen. In the immediate mode, the introverted consciousness is not significant for language production because it is not needed to remember past events or imagine future events. One could argue that while the extroverted consciousness perceives, interacts with, and evaluates the environment, the introverted consciousness in the immediate mode is active in reflecting on these impressions and in deciding what to vocalize as language, but there is no significant displacement between introverted and extroverted conscious experience in these situations.

Introverted conscious experience emerges in the displaced mode. This mode is concerned with relating events and experiences not occurring in the present environment around a speaker. A past or anticipated extroverted conscious experience is remembered or imagined by an introverted awareness, which then represents this experience in language. For instance, an individual recounts the activities of the previous evening: "I was in the garden last night and saw a racoon digging in the rose beds;" or an individual describes a planned holiday: "We're travelling to the coast tomorrow and we're going to stay with my aunt for a few days, because she thinks we're both worn out and need a rest.
before we go back to work." In both of these examples, the extroverted consciousness is interacting with its environment in a distinct time and place separate from the present-moment, speaking, introverted consciousness, demonstrating a spatiotemporal displacement. However, in the second example, the speaker also demonstrates a displacement of self, an ability to be aware of events and states originating in someone else's consciousness. In both of these examples the extroverted consciousness provides the locus for a point of view; nevertheless, both the represented and representing consciousnesses remain attached to the introverted conscious experience. Here, ideas to communicate emerge through introverted reflection, and are represented by the introverted consciousness as well.

Speakers readily shift between these two modes in conversation, adding texture to the experiences they communicate, and providing insight into their thought processes and evolving ideas. Moreover, building on these two basic conversational modes, a language producer can shift to other modes in both speaking and writing. Some of these are particularly relevant for this discussion of Whitman's poetry because he uses a written medium, and also because he adapts conversational modes for text in unconventional ways. I shall outline three other modes Chafe discusses below: the historical present, displaced immediacy, and language without a represented consciousness.

In simple terms, the historical present is the recounting of past events as though they are happening in the present moment. It conveys a sense of immediacy because when it is used in conversation, the speaker is presenting a memory as though he is reliving it as he speaks. Thus, Chafe associates its use with climactic moments of narrative. For instance, a speaker recounts to a co-worker an event that occurred a week
earlier: "So I come into the kitchen and find the dog rooting through the trash, and it's all over the floor." At the point of the telling, the speaker is not at home, the trash has been cleaned, and the dog has most likely been chastised, and yet because of the speaker's strong internal response to finding this mess, he or she chooses to represent it in the present tense. This kind of manipulation of spatiotemporal representation creates an interesting split consciousness. Because the anecdote is recounted in the present tense, there is a link between the representing consciousness and both the extroverted and introverted conscious experiences, unfolding in different times and places. Meanwhile, it is only the introverted consciousness that is represented, because what is actually being conveyed is only a memory. From this, it is clear to see how flexible consciousness can be. Evidently, not only are humans aware of our conscious experience, but we can also project it into other locations and times, occasionally splitting it so that it is in two places at once, or so that it goes missing altogether.

Chafe explains that in all writing, different structures of consciousness emerge because the self that is producing language is not present with the reader. He explains that this creates displacement of self, and suggests that written fiction employs the mode of displaced immediacy particularly effectively. Chafe notes that in the displaced immediacy of written first-person fiction:

The representing consciousness [...] is that of the fictional narrator at the time of narrating, but the represented consciousness is a different one. Although it belongs to the same self as the representing consciousness, it is separated in space and time. The separation is possible because the
desituatedness of writing weakens, as it were, the hold of the representing consciousness. In conversations the language emerging from the mouth of the speaker expresses what is passing through the consciousness of that person then and there. A situated representing consciousness maintains a tight grip on the represented consciousness. But when writing removes copresence and interaction, the hold is weakened and the represented consciousness is free to migrate to a different time and place. (Chafe 226-7)

Thus Chafe associates the represented consciousness with the extroverted experience of interacting with the world, while the representing consciousness is associated only with the introverted experience of remembering or imagining the events recounted, and articulating them in writing. While Chafe associates this introverted representing consciousness with a fictional narrator, consistent with the interpretation of the speaker in literary studies, he also notes that the representing consciousness reveals some indications of the author's consideration for the reader as well. Chafe points out that in fiction, items, events, and people that would seem evident to the speaker, either because of background knowledge or because they are copresent with the self of the speaker, are often presented in a way that makes them more accessible to a reader unfamiliar with the speaker's environment. This is the invisible hand of the author, rendering the fiction he or she creates a little more inviting for a reader who does not share this imaginary world.

Finally, in written fiction, Chafe also identifies a mode of language without a represented consciousness. He associates this mode specifically with an omnipresent
and/or omniscient narrator. In these kinds of narrative, the all-knowing narrator can be anywhere and everywhere at once—there is no evident extroverted represented consciousness in contact with any one part of its environment, and there is no evident introverted representing consciousness because it would have none of its own experiences to reflect upon and represent in language. Thus, Chafe describes this mode as having only an unacknowledged representing consciousness with direct access to all aspects of the environment; thus this consciousness is able to convey all aspects of introverted and extroverted experience in language.

These modes of consciousness can be identified through three grammatical indicators that reveal the relationship between the extroverted, introverted, represented and representing aspects of consciousness. These three grammatical indicators are deixis, tense and person. Deictic adverbs of space and time express the relation of the extroverted conscious experience to the represented consciousness. Words like here, now, and today illustrate that the extroverted represented consciousness is proximal and united with the representing consciousness, while words like there and then reveal a distal relationship where the extroverted conscious experience is distinct from the represented consciousness. Meanwhile, tense marks a relationship between an extroverted consciousness and the representing consciousness. In the immediate mode they are united in present tense; in displaced mode, extroverted and representing consciousnesses operate in different timeframes, whether past or anticipated future. Finally, the person of the speaker marks the direct or indirect relation of the self of the extroverted conscious experience with the self of the representing consciousness. First-person narration indicates an equivalence of these selves, second-person relates the self of the extroverted
consciousness to the listener or reader, and third-person indicates the self of extroverted consciousness is neither the representing self nor the reader. In combination, these three indicators can be used to situate different aspects of conscious experience and their manifestation in language, according to the different modes of representation Chafe identifies.

Also important to this study of Whitman's poetry is textual cohesion. In *Introduction to Functional Grammar*, M.A.K. Halliday explains that "it is important to be able to think of text dynamically, as an ongoing process of meaning" (524). He illustrates how, in producing text, a speaker or writer makes a series of grammatical and lexical choices that help maintain the meaning of a discourse as it flows along its intended course. Indeed, this system of cohesion, as Halliday calls it, allows the meaning of text to transcend the level of the clause and extend to the discourse as a whole. As a system, cohesion functions only within a text, through the connections between clauses and references of words and ideas to each other throughout the discourse. Cohesion is not applicable to deictic terms that make reference to the situation surrounding the speaker and his audience, including the speaker and audience themselves—"The first and second persons *I* and *you* naturally retain this deictic sense; their meaning is defined in the act of speaking" (Halliday 551). Hence the connection between cohesion analysis and consciousness: while cohesion can identify links of continuity within a text, spoken or written, Chafe's analysis of consciousness flows has yielded a means of situating the speaker, even in written text. Halliday identifies four ways in which these links of continuity are forged in a text: conjunction, reference, ellipsis, and lexical cohesion.
As a cohesive element, conjunction includes both familiar grammatical conjunction words (and, or, but, among others), and expressions of continuity (well, oh, and others). Conjunctions mark the relationships between clauses, and word by word they can be divided into many different functions in establishing the interaction at work between clauses. For instance, in the previous sentence, "and" serves as an additive marker, indicating that additional information is being presented to extend what is meant by the clause before.

Unlike conjunction, which works to bind clauses together, reference creates cohesion between elements of a discourse. A chain of reference is created in a text when something or someone is repeatedly referred to, and this chain is indicative of the speaker's judgement of the audience's ability to identify the referent within the flow of the discourse. Three types of reference are common: personal (proper names, him, her, he, she, etc.), demonstrative (this, that, those, these, it, etc.), and comparative (such, other, more, fewer, etc.). To be understood as cohesive, these references must refer to other elements of the text, but they can gesture forwards (cataphoric) toward references to follow, or backward (anaphoric), toward those which have already been mentioned. They can also gesture outside of the text (exophoric), to the environment of the discourse. For instance, I have italicized one of the many reference items in this paragraph, "they" (above), which refers back to mentions of references throughout this chain, which begins on the previous page, but is picked up again in the first line of this paragraph. Referring to this keyboard in front of me would be an exophoric reference, and not cohesive; however, all future references to "it," or "the keyboard" become anaphoric, as this item has now been committed to text.
Halliday argues that ellipsis and substitution are two manifestations of the same idea: we can leave out parts of a grammatical structure, or replace them with substitutes, when our interlocutors can presume them from the prior course of discussion. The use of ellipsis is an indication of continuity in discourse. For instance, if a co-worker asks me, "May I borrow a red pen?" I could respond, "No," or, "I don't have one." The first response is an example of ellipsis, with the clause, "you can't borrow a red pen," left out. In the second response, "one" is a substitute for "a red pen."

Conjunction, reference, and ellipsis are all cohesive elements on the grammatical level. Lexical cohesion operates on the level of lexis alone—it is not influenced by grammar, but solely through the association of words to each other. Lexical cohesion operates on multiple levels because words are related to each other in a variety of ways, and can create cohesive ties across large spans of text. The most direct relations between lexical items are repetition and synonymy. An example: "The audience clapped loudly. The clapping was thunderous." Here we see a repetition of the activity of clapping, in two different forms, and we see synonymy between loudly and thunderous. Halliday notes that antonymy can function in the same ways as synonymy to create cohesion. At one remove from repetition and synonymy, we find hyponymy and meronymy. Halliday explains, "The general sense of hyponymy is 'be a kind of', as in 'fruit is a kind of food'" (575), while meronyms are "a part of," as in "flowers and fountains are co-meronyms of garden" (576). Halliday points out that there is no clear line between hyponymy and meronymy, and they operate most clearly with reference to a specified lexical item. "Forward, half-back, back are 'kinds' of players but 'parts' of a team. [...] But since either relationship is a source of lexical cohesion it is not necessary to insist on deciding
between them" (Halliday 576). Lastly, collocation is the tendency of certain words to appear together more or less regularly. Halliday gives the examples of snow and white, and cold and ice, but notes that snow and cold do not have as strong a collocational bond. However, within a given body of text, collocational expectations on the part of a reader may change because of the nature of the text, or through prior experience with specific collocational patterns established therein. So for instance, a reader may perceive a stronger collocational bond between sugar and teaspoon, tablespoon or cup, when reading a recipe book, rather than a more general collocational bond between sugar and sweet. Similarly, an author can establish collocational patterns in poetry or fiction. Thus, in some ways an analysis of lexical collocation can be understood as an examination of how a writer teaches us to read their work.

Because these four types of cohesion—conjunction, reference, ellipsis, and lexical cohesion—operate using different lexicogrammatical units, they complement each other and work together to create cohesion throughout a discourse. That is not to say that they cannot be analysed separately. Indeed, in this study, I will be most concerned with conjunctions and lexical cohesion, specifically with the ways Whitman uses collocation to establish certain metaphors as enduring symbols.

Finally, I should mention that this study will use the text of the 1892 edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Many scholars have argued against the 1892 edition, insisting that in his later years Whitman's poetic powers were waning, while others suggest his extensive revisions do not work in favour of the poetry by the time of the last revision, but serve rather to hide his homosexual impulses. However, I am suggesting that we must take Whitman's interest in linguistics seriously and remember that his revisions gesture toward
a profound consciousness of the language he employs throughout *Leaves of Grass*. If I am correct in suggesting that his chief aim in *Leaves of Grass* throughout its history of publication was and continued to be the transmission of a spiritual message to its readers, and that Whitman's repeated revisions may have been undertaken with a theory of language in mind, the language of the last revision (which is perhaps only the last because of his inability to continue revising after death) should reflect the most refined form of this message, and should approach stylistic and linguistic consistency throughout. While it is not the project of my thesis to determine the level of consistency in his technique, I believe his language is consistent and does allow for a unified reading of the text. Moreover, Whitman also encourages readers to prefer this text, as it was the last to be published under his direction during his lifetime, and he includes a statement favouring the last edition as the best and intending it to supersede all previous editions.

1.5 Key theses

I will end this chapter by briefly reiterating some of the key themes and theses to be discussed in the chapters to come. My central argument is that the speaker remains disembodied throughout *Leaves of Grass*, positioning himself between the physical and spiritual realms to better interpret their interrelationship for his readers. Whitman's speaker seeks to illustrate his own divine nature as a model for his readers, in the anticipation that they too will discover their divine selves.

Chapter II will illustrate how Whitman's speaker portrays himself as a divine being, in contact with spiritual and physical realms, translating the physical into the spiritual and explaining the spiritual in terms of the physical. This speaker is necessarily
Chapter I

de-situated and disembodied, as his self is neither completely in the physical realm, nor the spiritual.

Chapter III shall examine the speaker's translation of bodily interactions into spiritual exchanges, rendering everyday human activity divine. The poems considered in this chapter have long been discussed as some of the most striking portrayals of hetero- and homoeroticism, yet this analysis will show how the speaker remains disembodied, largely precluding the possibility of bodily interaction. Finally, this chapter also introduces the homoerotic symbol of calamus grass and reinterprets it as a fundamentally spiritual icon for the poet.

Chapter IV will consider how the poet-speaker applies his spiritual understanding of the cosmos to his relationship with his society and nation. In this chapter, I will discuss several manifestations of the liminality of the disembodied speaker in social and political contexts, illustrating that the spiritual aims of Leaves of Grass are not limited to the personal level, but extended to social, democratic life as a whole.

Finally, Chapter V will discuss some of the implications of this reading of Whitman's project as fundamentally spiritual. I will make some suggestions as to how spirituality and democracy interact as major themes in Leaves of Grass, and draw some conclusions regarding the importance of these themes in understanding the rhetoric of spirituality and politics active in the United States, both in Whitman's time and today.
CHAPTER II - THE SPEAKER

This chapter characterizes the speaker of *Leaves of Grass*. It focuses on the development of the speaker's subjectivity, tracing the characteristic tendencies of this speaker's consciousness, especially as they connect to his awareness of his own desituation and disembodiment. Key themes analysed in this chapter include the stylistic traits of the verse that serve to characterize the speaker as an interpreter or translator, moderating between the spiritual and material worlds for his readers. "Song of Myself" and "Starting from Paumanok" have been selected as the two poems for analysis, as both function to introduce the speaker of *Leaves of Grass* and Whitman's poetic project as a whole. My argument in this chapter is that Whitman's speaker must disembody himself to position himself between the physical and spiritual realms and interpret them for his readers; moreover, his privileged access to spiritual understanding allows the speaker to represent himself as a divine entity, capable of creative activity and able to show others (readers) the path toward their own divinity.

2.1 STARTING POINTS: "STARTING FROM PAUMANOK" AND "SONG OF MYSELF"

"Starting from Paumanok" and "Song of Myself" are ideal poems with which to begin my analysis of *Leaves of Grass* because each poem has served as an introduction, or starting point, to the volume over the course of its many republications. Moreover, the chief rhetorical aim of each poem is to introduce; the very titles give readers an indication of their content. "Starting from Paumanok," which was the introductory poem in the 1860 *Leaves of Grass* (the poem was originally titled "Proto-Leaf"), engages a concept of
Chapter II

origins, and thematically discusses Whitman's poetic project as a whole, as it unfolds from his declared point of origin. Meanwhile, "Song of Myself" was the lead poem in the 1855 edition, and provides a thorough introduction to the speaker of Leaves of Grass, as well as to his major themes. Thus, the style of each poem is especially appropriate for demonstrating the elements of consciousness and of cohesion that contribute to the speaker's disembodiment, and to an understanding of his poetic efforts as an interpretation of the spiritual realm for his readers.

"Starting from Paumanok" identifies several of the themes and motifs taken up throughout Leaves of Grass, including the themes of Love, Democracy, and Religion, describing a poetic "programme of chants" (39) to be undertaken. In the poem, the speaker introduces himself and his project, and finally identifies his audience. The poem takes its title from the Native American name for Long Island, NY, Whitman's birthplace; moreover, this birthplace provides a starting point from which the poem's speaker sets out to encompass all of America. The speaker arguably does so by portraying himself as an American everyman, a person who could be from anywhere, to whom all Americans can relate. In singing his own song, as an American everyman, he sings the song of every American. Critics have noted that as an introduction, "Starting from Paumanok" does not simply introduce what is to follow, but also serves as an example of it, exemplifying the treatment of themes as they are announced. Meanwhile, "Song of Myself" has probably attracted more attention and criticism than any other Whitman poem. Originally untitled, it formed the bulk of the first edition of Leaves of Grass in 1855. In this poem, some scholars find the Poet of Democracy, while others are convinced of his homosexuality through his advocacy of Amativeness. "Some see Whitman as the poet of nature and the
body. Others consider him the poet of religion and the soul. Still others take both
tendencies into account by coining phrases like 'inverted mysticism' to describe his
outlook" (Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America* 235). While interpretations are wide-
ranging, critics tend to agree that the poem describes a developmental process, recording
the birth of the poetic self in an ordinary man and describing his journey into the world.
However, I am suggesting that both "Starting from Paumanok" and "Song of Myself"
place a key emphasis on spiritual themes, developing the speaker as a creative,
disembodied entity who demonstrates characteristics typically attributed to divinity.
Moreover, in "Song of Myself" especially, he takes on a role of translator, interpreting
the spiritual world for his readers. "Starting from Paumanok" and "Song of Myself" make
their spiritual themes more or less explicit.

In "Starting from Paumanok," the spiritual theme seems to be of critical
importance, as the speaker announces in his "programme of chants" (39), "I will not make
a poem nor the least part of a poem but has reference to the soul, / Because having look'd
at the objects of the universe, I find there is no one nor any particle of one but has
reference to the soul" (175-176). The pervasiveness of the soul in the universe, as
Whitman understands it, is reflected in his subjugation of his artistic and political themes
to "the greatness of Religion" (SP 133). In section eight of the poem, Walt calls out to a
generic young man, asking of his occupations, whether "literature, science, art, amours? /
These ostensible realities, politics, points? / [...] ambition or business whatever it may
be?" (SP 115-117). He is quick to note in the next verse that these activities "swiftly
subside, burnt up for religion's sake, / For not all matter is fuel to heat, impalpable flame,
the essential life of the earth, / Any more than such are to religion" (SP 119-121). This
representation of religion consuming all worldly concerns bespeaks its pre-eminence in
Whitman's thought. Although Whitman devotes much attention to promoting himself as a
new poet, a voice for America, and to championing democracy throughout *Leaves of
Grass*, the importance allocated to spirituality here suggests that this is indeed the
overarching theme of the work as a whole. At this juncture, it is important to recall that
what Whitman means by "religion" has been shaped by influences as disparate as Elias
Hicks's evangelical preaching of Quakerism's Inner Light, the Deism of the French
Revolution as related by Tom Paine (a revered figure in the Whitman family household
throughout Walt's youth), the Transcendental philosophizing of speakers like Ralph
Waldo Emerson, and the mysticism of Emmanuel Swedenborg. All of these fall under
Whitman's term "religion," though none is doctrinally compatible with the others. Indeed,
as the speaker indicates, "My faith is the greatest of faiths and the least of faiths,
Enclosing worship ancient and modern and all between ancient and modern" (SM 1097-
8)—this amassing of religions within his faith system suggests that what Whitman means
when he uses the term "religion" is actually broader that what it implies; thus, I prefer the
term "spirituality."

Indeed, as he promised in "Starting from Paumanok," even the least parts of his
poems make reference to the soul (175). Spirituality is implicit to "Song of Myself,"
where as early as section two, the speaker introduces the language of air, incorporating
images of houses of perfumes, the atmosphere, "The smoke of my own breath," and "My
respiration and inspiration" (22, 24). These symbols have often been interpreted as
indicative of the ethereal nature—that is, both insubstantial and otherworldly—of the
speaker's message. The various air-images appeal to a concept in Swedenborgian thought
that is related to spiritual essence. Popular in Whitman's time, the Swedenborgians believed "the 'divine breath,' also called the 'influx' or 'afflatus,' was taken in from the spiritual atmosphere through the lungs, which in turn emanated an 'efflux' of its own into the atmosphere" (Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America* 267). Thus, "The smoke of my own breath," gives Whitman's speaker a divine voice—"the smoke" being his poetry. Meanwhile, this divine quality attached to "respiration and inspiration" is also identified as belonging to, or as a part of the speaker through the possessive determiner "my." Moreover, it draws one of the first ties between the inspiration (breathing in) of spiritually charged air and the (creative) inspiration made manifest in poetry. Here the parallel between activity in the spiritual realm and the creative act of poetry is forged. As in "Starting from Paumanok," it seems the spiritual project underlies all of "Song of Myself."

While "Starting from Paumanok" and "Song of Myself" were no longer the introductory titles by the time the 1891-92 edition of *Leaves of Grass* was published, they make early appearances in the volume and continue to serve an important role as points of access to the speaker and his themes, and to the volume as a whole. Indeed, from the brief analysis of each poem above, it is evident that they establish spirituality as a dominant theme early on in *Leaves of Grass*. However, they are also interesting points of access to the speaker—who is fundamentally the point of origin of the entire volume. It is with him that the themes of the poems originate because he is the speaking subject, the perspective of consciousness from which experience is recounted.

The connection between starting points—or points of access, whether to a volume of text, to a specific discourse, or to a speaker's consciousness—and subjects can be
traced back to the level of language. In Chapter I, language was described as a system of meaning-making and meaning-communication. To make and communicate meaning, language tends to build upon a starting point of prior knowledge shared by a speaker and his or her audience. With regard to topics of discussion, this prior knowledge can be established on the basis of a shared environment between speaker and listener, on the basis of common knowledge (those things a speaker expects everyone to know about the world, and most people to know about their common experience in a given age and place), on the basis of prior events shared between speaker and listener, and which the speaker expects his listeners to remember, or on the basis of information established earlier in an ongoing discourse. However, the requirement of shared prior knowledge on which to build new information is also extended to the purely grammatical level. Chafe explains that the functional role of starting point is grammaticized in subjecthood (84). This means that the grammatical subject serves as the common ground acknowledged by interlocutors, to which new information can be attached. To some extent, we as listeners or readers rely on the subject for linguistic and cognitive guidance in whatever discourse emerges from it. The grammatical subject can emerge from prior thought and discourse, or from the environment, as given or accessible information for both speaker and listener (97 per cent of the time, according to Chafe). By given, we mean the information is already currently active within the discourse. Accessible information is semiaactive, existing in the peripheral consciousness of the listener or reader, either because it was mentioned earlier in the discourse, or is associated with ideas currently in discussion, or in conversational cases, it may be an element of the environment of the conversation. New information is that of which we are not aware until it is introduced. For instance, if I
tell a friend, "I adopted a dog yesterday," the subject "I" is given or accessible from the context of the conversation. The new information regarding dog adoption is attached to the subject and is comprehensible because the listener knows who "I" is. If I were instead to tell my friend, "Marsha adopted a dog yesterday," when the listener does not know Marsha, he would have questions—Who is Marsha? Why are you telling me this? Why should I care? The information would be infelicitously communicated because it did not have an acceptable starting point.

While Chafe notes that subjecthood is not an expression of topichood (84), the grammatical subject is important because it exercises some limitations on discourse topics. For instance, in connection with the subject, "my cat," listeners expect cat-like activities: eating, drinking, sleeping, hunting, getting sick, having fights, having kittens, coughing up hairballs, and so on. One would not expect a speaker to recount to a friend, "My cat painted a masterpiece"—a cat painting seems nonsensical (though cat art is currently trendy). The information attached to "my cat" in this statement is completely unexpected and silly because it is relatively unlikely to be a topic of conversation in connection with this particular subject. In this way, the grammatical subject both guides listeners through information and its activation, and also limits the possibilities—or probabilities—for the topical progression of the discourse.

On a discourse level, the speaking subject or representing consciousness which recounts experience shares the grammatical subject's function as a starting point for discourse. This is because the emphasis on activity levels in discussing given, accessible, and new information in a discourse is decided by the representing consciousness, and is based on the speaker's evaluation of the listener's place in the conversation (or written
Chapter II

discourse), background knowledge, and information activity levels. Thus, a speaking subject determines starting points of new threads of discourse, and also serves as a guide through the new information it presents. In conversation, the status of subjecthood can alternate between two or more parties, but in writing the speaking subject is often limited to one narrative voice and perspective directing the discourse and guiding a reader. The speaking subject also somewhat limits the topics of discourse, although this limitation has to do with the narrating consciousness's knowledge base, interests, or common ground with a listener, as well as prior discourse. Similarly, as already noted, the starting point of a volume of text—"Starting from Paumanok" and "Song of Myself" in the case of Leaves of Grass—provides a groundwork for further development of information themes and outlines limits to the discourse at hand. Clearly, starting points are at work on all levels of language and discourse to provide a basis for building new information.

Whitman's speaker is unlike any other. As a point of access, he remains remarkably indefinable. The next section will consider how Whitman uses language to disembody his speaker, and how in preventing readers from situating him, the speaker is able to introduce readers to new spiritual understanding.

2.2 DISEMBODIED TRANSLATION

Whitman's speaker is a powerful first-person narrator, full of contradictions, in many ways fundamentally disembodied and un-locatable, and loaded with creative

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1 There are some readily available exceptions, for instance, William Faulkner's As I Lay Dying. Each chapter is narrated from the first-person perspective of a different character. Thus, a series of voices work to guide readers in very distinct ways, and a different set of reader expectations accompanies the narratives of each speaker.
agency. His project is one of translation. A close reading of a mere three lines provides some evidence for all of these claims: "I will make the poems of materials, for I think they are to be the most spiritual poems, / And I will make the poems of my body and of mortality, / For I think I shall then supply myself with the poems of my soul and of immortality" (SP 71-3). The speaker claims to make poems of materials, of the body and of mortality, and that these will somehow transform into poems of spirituality, the soul and immortality. This establishes a rhetorical opposition, or contradiction, between one term and its counterpart. In the case of mortality and immortality in particular, we note the use of antonymy to support the cohesive structure of these lines, lending more rhetorical support to the supposition that material and spiritual, and body and soul, are oppositional in their significance. The speaker's reiterated emphasis on his role in making these poems suggests that it is also his agency that transforms or translates the worldly into the spiritual. Finally, in these lines Chafe's indicators of the flow of consciousness (deixis, tense and person) can be used to establish that Whitman is using the displaced mode—the represented and representing consciousnesses are united within the introverted conscious experience, imagining an eventual extroverted (embodied) experience spatiotemporally displaced from the (disembodied) narrating self. In the following analysis of "Starting from Paumanok" and "Song of Myself," I will demonstrate how the speaker consciously refuses to situate himself within a place, body or time.

"Starting from Paumanok" begins with the speaker identifying his birthplace and his beginning-place, Paumanok (a Native American name for Long Island that was already archaic in Whitman's lifetime). As a place of origin, Paumanok has shaped the
poet-speaker—there he is "well-begotten, and rais'd by a perfect mother" (SP 2). It is an excellent choice to begin—it establishes him as an American-born man familiar with the geography of his home, with some degree of respect for his family and his nation's history. Most of Whitman's intended audience members (Americans) are likely to be able to relate to the speaker at this point, thanks to their similar attitudes toward their homeland; thus, the speaker provides common ground between himself and readers, offering a point from which he can introduce his poetic project that is nevertheless exclusive enough to appeal to a particular audience, namely, Americans. However, the speaker leads his reader rapidly away from this starting point:

Starting from fish-shape Paumanok where I was born,
Well-begotten, and rais'd by a perfect mother,
After roaming many lands, lover of populous pavements,
Dweller in Mannahatta my city, or on southern savannas,
Or a soldier camp'd or carrying my knapsack and gun, or a miner in California,
Or rude in my home in Dakota's woods, my diet meat, my drink from the spring,
Or withdrawn to muse and meditate in some deep recess,
Far from the clank of crowds intervals passing rapt and happy,

[...]

Solitary, singing in the West, I strike up for a New World. (SP 1-8, 14)
In the first eight lines of "Starting from Paumanok," the speaker identifies an island, a city, and two additional states by name, and associates himself both with crowds through "populous pavements," and with solitude, "far from the clank of crowds." At first glance, his presence seems to hop across the United States, stopping in urban and rural landscapes, and in undefined locations, like "some deep recess," somewhere, as well as in particular locations, such as "the spring" in Dakota's woods. One must ask: has he got a specific spring in mind? Or is this an instance of the generic "the," the definite article that accompanies terms assumed to be in everyone's mental encyclopedia of common knowledge, like "the phone book" or "the bus"? Even if this is not the case, the term "spring" lexically collocates with both "woods" and "drink," meaning that readers are likely to accept the definite article for "spring" because of the cohesive context that leads us to expect a spring to drink from in the woods.

After we watch Walt skip across the American landscape, readers get their first glimpse of where the speaker is and what he is doing in the last line of the section: "Solitary, singing in the West, I strike up for a New World" (SP 14). Here Chafe's tools of tense and person point to a representing consciousness united with the self of the extroverted conscious experience. It seems like this could be a glimpse of a speaker in the present, proximal moment of the immediate mode, as though he were in the room speaking to us, the readers. However, other elements in this line suggest this is not the case. The speaker's description of himself as "Solitary, singing in the West," makes it seem as though the present-tense, "I strike up," is a staged moment. Are we "in the West" with the speaker, listening to his song? If that is the case, why does he tell us he is solitary, and in the West? A parallel situation would be riding in a car with someone who
tells us, "Here I am, a lone driver in the car," even though the person is obviously the
only driver and we, as listeners, obviously do not need to be told, as we are also in the
car. The conditions of copresence that underlie the immediate mode insist that
interlocutors are sharing the same environment—there should be no need to tell us he is
alone, nor that he is in the West. On the other hand, because the speaker does give us this
additional information with this ambiguous place-reference, "in the West," we can
suspect that his represented consciousness is in fact separated from the extroverted
representing consciousness, and that this is an introverted representation where the
speaker imagines himself striking up in the West. He shares this imaginative act with his
readers as though it is presently taking place. The final possibility is that this is a
convoluted form of displaced immediacy, where the speaker is trying to make up for the
inherent displacement of writing by disguising an introverted representing consciousness
with the present tense and trying to ignore that he can't quite pull his whole body
(extroverted experience) along with him, to incarnating himself physically in the presence
of his reader. Although the mode of expression remains unclear, it is evident that the
speaker is working hard in unconventional ways to try to create timeless conditions of
shared common ground (here I am with my reader "in the West") on which to build
linguistic copresence with an unknown and unreachable reader. Nevertheless, the location
of his consciousness remains too vague to situate, especially after it has hopped around
the United States. We must accept that he is in the West, and sings for "a New World." It
is important to note that he does not sing for "the New World," which in a nineteenth-
century context, might still associate "the West" with the United States or Canada.
Rather, the use of the indefinite article prohibits any definite location. However, it could
certainly be argued that this encourages the singing of America as an idea, rather than as a place, a notion Ed Folsom suggests in his article, "What a Filthy Presidentiad!"

This first passage of "Starting from Paumanok" also introduces ambiguity as to the speaker's identity. He describes his prior experiences, portraying his represented consciousness (a past, extroverted self) as a soldier, miner and traveller, before identifying his new present role as the poet-singer for a New World. This ambiguity is further complicated by his use of the conjunction "or," which, according to Halliday, signals an alternative. Imagine this same passage with "and"—it would read like a list of the places he's been and the jobs he's had. However, the use of "or" suggests these roles and locations are all equivalent and alternative to each other. In some ways, this is not problematic, as he can well imagine himself in "Mannahatta my city" or in "my home in Dakota's woods," as "a soldier," or "a miner"—each of these locations and identities could be as much his and his experience as the next. However, the use of "or" also allows the poet-speaker to avoid situating either his represented or representing consciousness in any of these places or identities as he shifts from one alternative to the next. Indeed, the only place we are certain he has been is his present non-specific location, "in the West," and the only identity we can be sure is his, is that of singer.

The speaker bears a similar relationship to his body in "Song of Myself," where the opening lines again identify his questionable embodiment: "I celebrate myself, and sing myself, / And what I assume you shall assume, / For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you" (1-3). Critics like Jorge Salessi, José Quiroga, and Jorge Luis Borges agree that the imagery of atoms in these lines marks the beginning of the disintegration of the speaker's body, as the speaker's self becomes a "democratic nobody"
and a "desired (no)body" (Salessi and Quiroga 124, 130). However, these lines also introduce readers to a key aspect of Whitman's philosophy, the notion of the connection of all things through shared atoms. Here, the speaker uses the immediate mode, directly addressing readers as though we are there in front of him. The speaker sets out his expectations for the remainder of this song and celebration: that the reader will join him, not specifically in the celebrating or the singing, but in the assumptions he makes, by virtue of a shared atomic nature that can be logically understood but remains intangible, as atoms are too small to be perceived individually. Again, in placing emphasis on shared atoms, the poet-speaker is striving to establish common ground, even physical copresence, with a reader whom he knows may be separated from him by two blocks in Brooklyn or by two centuries in any part of the world. He implicitly recognizes literature's posterity and strives to overcome whatever gaps may exist between his moment of celebratory writing and his eventual readers, attempting to force the deictic laws to bend to his vision. However, Whitman is operating here between the realms of the embodied (he shares our atoms) and the disembodied (we can neither see nor hear his atoms, nor distinguish them from atoms belonging to other matter). Thus, his choice of imagery for representing his embodiment for the reader, at moments like this in the immediate mode, counters the notion of embodiment itself. For instance, consider the final lines of the poem:

I depart as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,

I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags.
I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.

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.

Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
Missing me one place search another,
I stop somewhere waiting for you. (SM 1337-1346)

In this staging of the death of the speaker, the disintegration of his body becomes explicit. He becomes airy, he effuses, he drifts, he transforms into dirt. Although each line begins with the speaking and grammatical subject making an assertion, the content of these lines describes the spiritual diffusion of the speaker into the elements of nature. In some ways, this is contrary to the reader's expectation that a repeated emphasis on the unity of speaking and grammatical subjects in the immediate proximal moment would serve to create a strong grammatical and topical starting point, reinforcing common ground and shared experience between the speaker and reader. If we understand this common ground and shared experience as situated in the material world, we must conclude that the poet is being elusive. However, I believe it is important to recognize the liminal quality of the speaker's embodiment. The moment of his departure has been immanent throughout the poem, as the atoms-and-air imagery that returns here was present at the beginning of the
poem, already gesturing toward his eventual dissipation. In attempting to create the conditions of copresence with the materials of energy and air, Whitman's speaker deliberately embodies himself in the most elusive of all material forms. He is neither matter, nor spirit, but something, somewhere in between. Hence, we have the spectacular final line of this poem: "I stop somewhere waiting for you." (SM 1346) In the first-person present tense, this would be a true instance of the immediate mode, where an extroverted represented and representing consciousness is in direct interaction with its environment and interlocutors; except rather than using a proximal deictic adverb, Whitman employs "somewhere." Not only is his represented consciousness not in the proximal immediate moment, "here," but it is not even "there," or "just ahead," in a location known to the interlocutors. Rather, it is "somewhere," as though either the speaker himself has no idea where his represented consciousness is at that present moment, or as though he definitively does not want his reader to know where his represented consciousness is at that present moment. This sort of representation of consciousness remains unclassified by Wallace Chafe. The closest parallel he can offer is language without a represented consciousness, but this is typically in the third-person and employs an unacknowledged consciousness as omniscient narrator. Yet Whitman's speaker remains a consistently acknowledged (even egotistical) consciousness, constantly promoting himself as a deictic centre, and as a subject. We will return to this idea in the third section of this chapter, as this formation of a new kind of consciousness is tremendously significant in understanding Whitman's expression of the divine.
In addition to distancing himself from a specific body or location, the speaker of *Leaves of Grass* also takes an ambiguous temporal stance. In "Starting from Paumanok," he establishes his relationship to the past, to a literary and intellectual heritage. He writes:

Dead poets, philosophers, priests,
Martyrs, artists, inventors, governments long since,
Language-shapers on other shores,
Nations once powerful, now reduced, withdrawn, or desolate,
I dare not proceed till I respectfully credit what you have left wafted hither,
I have perused it, own it is admirable, (moving awhile among it,)
Think nothing can ever be greater, nothing can ever deserve more than it deserves,
Regarding it all intently a long while, then dismissing it,
I stand in my place with my own day here. (SP 54-62)

Just when readers think the speaker has paid his respects to the past, to the great ancient nations now reduced, and is about to tell us when he is speaking from, he demolishes his relationship to the past in the line that follows, insisting, "Regarding it all intently a long while, then dismissing it" (SP 61). Moreover, the representing consciousness again shifts to the indefinable present with a spectacular instance of a sudden shift into the true immediate mode: "I stand in my place with my own day here" (SP 62). One might argue that the representing consciousness works in this way to establish the represented
consciousness in the eternal present moment—his own day is always here—but consciousness certainly forges no permanent ties with any single present or past moment; none that we can identify, and none that we can measure from.

Whitman's speaker is deliberate in his elusiveness. He consciously and intentionally collapses space and time, leaping through both continuously. He acknowledges his distortion of the normal progress of time: "I will thread a thread through my poems that time and events are compact" (SP 170); a few lines later he refuses to privilege any one moment over others: "I will not sing with reference to a day, but with reference to all days" (SP 174). He also openly acknowledges his elusive stance toward his readers: "For your life adhere to me / (I may have to be persuaded many times before I consent to give myself really to you, but what of that?)" (SP 231-232). The speaker first invites readers along, but never promises that we will catch up with him. Instead, we must stick to the path he sets out for us, following in the hopes of catching a glimpse of him somewhere ahead. The speaker functions as a guide, always leading the way—perhaps we can hear his voice, and we can envision what he calls to our attention, but we can never catch hold of him. Of course, as we shall explore in part three of this chapter, his purpose is not to let us catch up; rather, he insists: "You are also asking me questions and I hear you, / I answer that I cannot answer, you must find out for yourself" (SM 1223-4). Our glimpses of Walt leave us trying to "adhere" with only "echoes" of his songs, and "hints" (SP 266) that serve to pique the reader's curiosity about the places he will lead us throughout the rest of the volume, and to urge readers on in their attempts to locate him. As we shall see, in the process of following his path, he hopes his reader will "travel it for yourself" (SM 1211). It is surprising that the speaker should choose to
dismember himself, and to refuse to allow a reader to locate him in space or time. It runs
counter to any instinctual notion of what it might mean to be the American Bard, or the
Poet of Democracy. One would think Whitman would choose to situate himself distinctly
within the United States, and that he would portray his speaker as an embodied American
citizen. But this is not the case, and it is no coincidence or mistake. Whitman's speaker is
deliberately elusive to serve both spiritual and political ends, as we shall examine later in
this chapter and in the chapters to come.

Moreover, Whitman's disembodiment is fundamental to his poetic project. The
key to understanding how it functions is not to situate the poet, but to understand how he
situates himself between places: just as he jumped from occupation to occupation, from
place to place, and so often splits his consciousness between one location and another, he
uses imagery in similar ways. While we will explore this at greater length in Chapters III
and IV, I would simply like to note here that traditional Whitman scholarship has
identified a more or less straightforward connection between the spiritual world and the
sea, the night, and the stars, and the material world and the earth and daily human
occupations. Of course, there is significant overlapping between land and sea when it
comes to offering metaphors for the spiritual world, as Whitman is constantly working to
reveal the spiritual world hidden just beneath the surface of the material realm. Moments
of poetic inspiration, and of spiritual understanding, are consistently recounted as
occurring in liminal spaces, border zones that are in some ways placeless places. In these
locations, the spiritual and material realms merge, facilitating communication between
the two. David Kuebrich has observed that the seashore and any bathing in smaller bodies
of water are consistently associated with spiritual insight and poetic inspiration.
Meanwhile, George Hutchinson has associated this positioning of the poet-self between realms as a parallel to the shaman's function of transcending the earthly world to establish a link of communication with the spirits when he enters a trance-state. An example of this crossing over between realms occurs as early as section two of "Song of Myself," where the speaker offers an image of himself absorbing the spiritual afflatus of the atmosphere, discussed earlier as a spiritual medium:

The atmosphere is not a perfume, it has no taste of the distillation, it is odorless,

It is for my mouth forever, I am in love with it,

I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked,

I am mad for it to be in contact with me. (17-20)

Here the speaker strips down, baptizing his body in the atmosphere. And yet, he offers readers a more traditional setting for this baptism: a "bank by the wood," calling to mind a stream or river, water-mediums traditionally used in baptism. Moreover, the baptism occurs in a border zone, by the implied water's edge. The speaker also asks readers to join him in these liminal spaces to more fully understand him: "If you would understand me go to the heights or water-shore, / The nearest gnat is an explanation, and a drop or motion of waves a key, / The maul, the oar, the hand-saw, second my words" (SM 1252-3). In this location, the crossover between realms becomes explicit. In Whitman's poetry spiritual insights can be found in the sea especially, but also in nature; thus "The nearest gnat is an explanation, and a drop or motion of waves a key." However, the water-shore
provides the site for the merger between the spiritual and material realms, and here spiritual insights can also be found in, "The maul, the oar, the hand-saw." From this privileged position that enables access to both spiritual and material realities, these man-made objects can now be interpreted as lending support to the speaker's spiritual conclusions.

In addition, Whitman's speaker is also best situated to interpret the spiritual world for his readers, thanks to his vantage point between the worldly and spiritual realms. "For Whitman the physical is the path to the metaphysical ('path' not in the sense that the metaphysical is located elsewhere, but in the sense that the metaphysical is a radically different way of experiencing the physical)" (Irwin 865). Whitman illustrates this "radically different way of experiencing the physical" through a process he calls translation: "The pleasures of heaven are with me and the pains of hell are with me, / The first I graft and increase upon myself, the latter I translate into a new tongue" (SM 423-424). That is to say, he embraces what seems good, but transforms what seems bad through a process of continuous redefinition. For instance, Whitman writes, "Has any one supposed it lucky to be born? / I hasten to inform him or her it is just as lucky to die, and I know it" (SM 131-2). Death of course, is not something the average person eagerly seeks out, and so Whitman must redefine it to illustrate that it is not as bad as we might think. In "Song of Myself" he approaches this from two directions. Kuebrich notes that on the one hand, Whitman views the sea as mother, as a divine womb, and as an embodiment of the spiritual realm, but that Whitman also, at times, portrays the sea as deadly, as taking lives that she has given. Kuebrich argues that Whitman does not see a reason to fear death in this; rather, because the sea is the divine mother, Whitman
envisions death as a ship setting sail on this spiritual ocean, heading for new adventures. Kuebrich concludes that for Whitman, death is a comfort, not a terror. Indeed, from a lexical perspective, words connected to the sea, the soul, and death appear often enough together to forge a collocational bond throughout Whitman's poetry. On the other hand, Whitman seeks to illustrate that death is but an illusion in an endless cycle of renewable life. He does this by first associating death with grass: "And now it [the grass] seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of graves" (SM 110). Next he proceeds to analyse the symbolic implications of the fact that grass grows over the graves of men, women, and children alike:

What do you think has become of the young and old men?
And what do you think has become of the women and children?

They are alive and well somewhere,
The smallest sprout shows there is really no death,
And if ever there was it led forward life, and does not wait at the end to arrest it,
And ceas'd the moment life appear'd.

All goes onward and outward, nothing collapses,
And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier. (SM 123-30)
Thus, death becomes a positive experience, a return to the spiritual realm and a transformation, but not an ending, and not something to fear. Death is redefined as the doorway to a closer contact with the spiritual realm, and thereby, to new forms of life. However, it is especially important to note that death is not the only term being translated in this passage. Grass undergoes a process of redefinition here and throughout *Leaves of Grass*. Indeed, it is the most consistently redefined symbol; each time grass is mentioned in "Song of Myself" it is identified through a different metaphor. Grass has been read as having multiple meanings by nearly every critic. *Leaves of Grass* is the title of Whitman's volume: from the title we can speculate that the leaves are his sheets of poetry, and this is confirmed when, in "Here the Frailest Leaves of Me," he identifies his leaves as poems. In "Song of Myself," grass begins as a site where the speaker can loaf with his soul, but in section six alone (a mere 131 lines), it is redefined eight times. First it is "the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff woven" (SM 101), representative of a hopeful individual personality. Next, "it is the handkerchief of the Lord, / A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropt" (SM 102-103); perhaps it is a manifestation of the divine power at work in the world, perhaps simply the maker's signature. It becomes the "babe of the vegetation" (SM 105), suggesting it is in the process of development. Also, it is a "uniform hieroglyphic" (SM 106) that sprouts among all races, among all nations, and among all classes; hence it is a symbol of equality between all people. But through its symbolism of equality and its accrual of meanings, grass also connotes democracy. Having already mentioned that it is the flag of the poet's hopeful disposition, the grass becomes symbolic of the individual and the many—each blade is part of a much larger lawn. When the speaker tells us it grows "among black folks as among white, / Kanuck,
Tuckahoe, Congressman, Cuff" (SM 108-9), the only identity mentioned that is not associated with a racial group or a group of people from a particular origin is the Congressman. Through this implication of America's political system, grass—already individual and equality—takes on the added meaning of democracy. Next it becomes the "uncut hair of graves" (SM 110), and a symbol of death. The seventh redefinition is more of an alignment between the grass growing from graves and the poet's perception of "so many uttering tongues, / And I perceive they do not come from the roofs of mouths for nothing" (SM 119-20). The speaker contextualizes this by saying, "I wish I could translate the hints about the dead young men and women, / And the hints about old men and mothers, and the offspring taken soon out of their laps" (SM 121-2), which suggests that the tongues of the dead (leaves of grass) are giving hints about themselves, and about death, and that these are meaningful utterances that we must interpret. Finally, the "smallest sprout shows there is really no death" (SM 126) as grass becomes symbolic of an eternal life cycle, one which Whitman's speaker joins, incidentally, at the end of "Song of Myself," when he bequeaths himself to the dirt "to grow from the grass I love" (1339). Later in the poem, the grass is also "no less than the journey-work of the stars" (SM 663), suggesting a relationship between grass and stars, which Whitman reveres as a sort of spiritual light or truth, revealed only in darkness. The implication is that grass offers similar spiritual truth. The constant redefinition of the grass maintains a consistent metaphorical structure, and the meaning of grass is continuously added to until it means everything. Thus Leaves of Grass becomes the title for Whitman's volume, which is no longer a simple volume of poetry, but a record of his understanding of the functioning of the entire cosmos, set down in words. Grass is the symbol that ties all others together:
These are really the thoughts of all men in all ages and lands, they are not original with me,
If they are not yours as much as mine they are nothing, or next to nothing,
If they are not the riddle and the untying of the riddle they are nothing,
If they are not just as close as they are distant they are nothing.

This is the grass that grows wherever the land is and the water is,
This is the common air that bathes the globe. (SM 355-360)

The final two lines of this passage illustrate that human thoughts are as common as grass and air. However, the process of continuous redefinition creates lexical cohesion between things and what they are translated into. While the lexical collocations between grass and poems, individuality, God's autograph, development, equality, democracy, death, meaningful utterance, eternal life, and spiritual truth are not as strong in our minds as those which turn up together more regularly in all language (like grass and green), they do exist, and we do begin to expect them as we read through Leaves of Grass. So when we arrive at, "This is the grass that grows wherever the land is and the water is" (SM 359), we do not simply think of the thoughts of humans, but also of individuality, equality, and democracy, of the soul, God, death, and eternal life, and of the expression of the entire cosmos in one volume of poems. Moreover, the next line returns us to the atoms-and-air imagery of the start of "Song of Myself." The common spiritual air makes divine breath of human thoughts and their expression, and the grass now also becomes
symbolic of the smallest, most pervasive elements of the natural world, like the atoms, which always represents the saturation of the natural world with evidence of the divine order. Through his process of translation, Whitman is teaching us to read his words, metaphors, and symbols and derive meaning that is exponentially greater than any dictionary can offer. He is teaching us to see the world in these terms and find out for ourselves the spiritual significance of the material world.

2.3 THE DIVINE SPEAKER AND THE SPIRITUAL PROJECT

Throughout "Starting from Paumanok" and "Song of Myself," the speaker appears and disappears in both spatial and temporal dimensions. We have seen how he achieves this—how, constantly keeping the reader at bay, he functions as a haunting guide, always one step ahead, always urging readers forward. But this commitment to disembodiment seems to contradict some of his chief aims; he presents a full programme for his chants in these poems, offering the suggestion that he is the poet of America, of democracy, and of comrades, among other claims. One would think his narrative voice should not be impossible to situate, that poems on themes so definitively aligned with America would feature a speaker tied much more closely to his nation. On the other hand, the speaker's disembodiment is fundamentally connected to the poetic act: border zones between the physical and spiritual worlds serve as sites for spiritual insight and poetic inspiration. The speaker's elusiveness at all levels of language is deliberate, and is necessary for him to maintain this dislocation and disembodiment. In refusing to situate himself, the speaker is able to translate between the material and spiritual worlds. In doing so, the poet clearly holds a privileged role—he mediates between these realms for his readers, for those who
cannot accomplish this themselves. But this privileging of his own voice seems to run counter to the democratic themes he claims to promote. In this section of this chapter, I hope to resolve some of these contradictions, illustrating how Whitman's understanding of spirituality and of the poet's role in communicating it are inherently linked to democratic ideals.

The reconciliation of spirituality and of the poet's privileged vision with the ideals of democracy is possible only because Whitman portrays the human as inherently divine. However, he cannot simply rely on telling his readers they too are divine; his speaker must serve as a model, and he must work to lead readers along the path of his own self-realization in order that they can recognize their own potential godhood, and in doing so, gain access to the privileged vision of spiritual and material realms. Thus, Whitman begins with his speaker as a model of a human creative divinity. He announces, "I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own, / And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own" (SM 92-93). Here he suggests his human hand has the yet unrealized potential power of God the creator. Moreover, his spirit is already on an equal footing with God's. This reorients the traditional trinity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, establishing the Human in the fourth position of a holy quadrupole. This surpasses the concept of Imago Dei, that humans were created in the "image of God," for it asserts a fundamental equality between God and Human. Indeed, I am not the first scholar to remark upon Whitman's lines, "I believe in you my soul, the other I am must not abase itself to you, / And you must not be abased to the other" (SM 82-3), that his odd use of "I am" recalls the biblical usage: "And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you"
(Exodus 3:14). Not only does the speaker imply in these lines that humans are dignified enough to not subjugate themselves before God, but in referring to God as "the other I am," he suggests he is also "I am," and also divine. Of course, in the religious context of Whitman's America, this is an unheard of formulation. It transcends the Transcendental notions of the natural nobility of man, it outshines the Quaker understanding of the guiding inner light, and it utterly rejects the emphasis of Calvinist doctrine on the inherent sinfulness of man. David Kuebrich argues that Whitman strives to create a new religion in *Leaves of Grass*:

> Whitman modernized [traditional religious elements] by adapting them to the theories of evolutionary science and contemporary American political and religious thought. By integrating these traditional elements with modern culture, Whitman arrived at a vision in which the evolution of nature and the instinctual and emotional longings of humanity are seen as manifestations of an immanent divinity in its upward ascent toward reunion with its transcendent source, and the course of history is viewed as a movement toward the universal redemption of humankind. *(Minor Prophecy 8-9)*

The speaker is not content to merely understand the divine order of the cosmos. Rather, he is on the path toward human redemption, toward the realization of human god-hood, insisting, "The day getting ready for me when I shall do as much good as the best, and be as prodigious; / By my life-lumps! becoming already a creator" (SM 1051-1052). The
speaker's divinity becomes complete when he becomes a creator himself. This passage offers insight into what humans can create that renders them as divine as God, as it operates on three interpretive levels. Physically, "life-lumps" is a colloquialism for semen, referring to procreative ability, which is also the ability to create life. On an intellectual level, the speaker creates his poetry. Finally, on a metaphysical level, Walt creates his own cosmos, his new realms of consciousness, by perceiving the existing material world in new ways through his cohesive redefinitions. He merges the physical, intellectual and metaphysical aspects of his creativity to render himself both potentially and already inherently divine. He is only potentially divine because he casts this prediction in the future "I shall do as much good as the best," but also situates this transformation into divinity in the present when he says he is "becoming already a creator," where already gestures to the present moment. Moreover, throughout his poetry, Whitman periodically slips into the omniscient and omnipresent mode Chafe refers to as language without a represented consciousness. This is where a narrative is reported to a reader by an unacknowledged consciousness that does not appear to be on the scene it portrays, but which is aware of all that is happening, has happened, or will happened, in the scene described and elsewhere. Thus, Chafe notes that this mode normally uses the third person, can be in any tense, and includes no deictic indicators. Many of Whitman's catalogues fit this description. One could argue that he works from generic recollections of his own experiences, generalizing them and rendering them as types of humanity. For instance, in section fifteen of "Song of Myself" he describes:

The lunatic is carried at last to the asylum a confirm'd case,
(He will never sleep any more as he did in the cot in his mother's bedroom;)

The jour printer with gray head and gaunt jaws works at his case,

He turns his quid of tobacco while his eyes blurr with the manuscript;

The malform'd limbs are tied to the surgeon's table,

What is removed drops horribly in a pail;

The quadroon girl is sold at the auction-stand, the drunkard nods by the bar-room stove. (273-9)

Whitman biographies typically point to his close relationship with his mentally handicapped brother Eddy, noting that he was eventually institutionalized. In his work as a printer, Whitman would probably have encountered at least one gray-haired, tobacco-chewing typesetter. Throughout his work in the hospitals during the war, Whitman described the frequent horrific amputations. In his travels to New Orleans prior to the war, he saw at first-hand the auctioning of black slaves. Finally, having in some ways begun as a temperance writer, it is safe to assume Whitman also witnessed the ordeals of alcoholism. Yet although these may be types of people, familiar to the author through his own life experience, this passage goes beyond simply cataloguing them. The speaker does not tell us he knows of all these human types—he simply tells us what each is doing, in the present tense, as though he narrates all that passes in the city in one moment, as it happens. But this narrator is also truly omniscient—later in the same section he tells us things that Whitman does not know from his life experience:
Off on the lakes the pike-fisher watches and waits by the hole in the frozen surface,
The stumps stand thick round the clearing, the squatter strikes deep with his axe,
Flatboatmen make fast towards dusk near the cotton-wood or pecan-trees,
Coon-seekers go through the regions of the Red river or through those drain'd by the Tennessee, or through those of the Arkansas,
Torches shine in the dark that hangs on the Chattahooche or Altamahaw,
Patriarchs sit at supper with sons and grandsons and great-grandsons around them,
In walls of adobie, in canvas tents, rest hunters and trappers after their day's sport,
The city sleeps and the country sleeps,
The living sleep for their time, the dead sleep for their time,
The old husband sleeps by his wife and the young husband sleeps by his wife,
And these tend inward to me, and I tend outward to them,
And such as it is to be of these more or less I am,
And of these one and all I weave the song of myself. (SM 317-29)

The speaker is omniscient and omnipresent, and sees all that passes across his nation, seemingly at any given moment. The omniscient narrator has traditionally been described as a narrator with God-like vision and understanding. But here, the speaker makes a very
sudden shift in his apparently third-person narration, inserting himself in the immediate mode at the root of this all-seeing perception, making it clear that although his openly acknowledged consciousness cannot be situated, it is ever-present and ever-watching, and is responsible for voicing these things he somehow observes and knows. In brief, he aligns his voice explicitly with the omniscient and omnipresent characteristics commonly associated with God, thus confirming his divine role on a linguistic level.

However, when we consider what the speaker is able to achieve from his privileged position, it becomes clear that his aim is not simply to glorify himself, but to invite readers to open their eyes to their own divinity, and their own ability to interpret between the spiritual and material worlds, as the speaker does. In section two of "Song of Myself," the speaker invites his readers:

Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems,
You shall possess the good of the earth and sun, (there are millions of suns left,)
You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the spectres in books,
You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,
You shall listen to all sides and filter them from your self. (33-37)

The speaker uses the temporal reference, "this day and night," to create a sense of copresence and convey the immediacy of his request: readers should stop what he
supposes they have been doing—relying on history, "the eyes of the dead," on ideology, "the spectres in books," and on teachers (including himself), for answers about the things around them. Instead, readers should begin learning to perceive the world through our own eyes. What the speaker proposes here is, in some ways, a break with what he considers antiquated ways of understanding the world. This deixis of this direct address to the reader creates a gap: the "I" and "you" of this discourse involve the speaker and reader directly and make them impossible to situate temporally or spatially. The speaker's command to "stop" places an emphasis on the reader's present moment, "this day and night," which seems to be shared by the speaker, as he insists we stop with him. Moreover, the repeated use of the grammatical subject "you" in these lines, in contrast with the primarily first-person perspective of the previous line, places a heavy emphasis on this passage as marking a new starting point for the grammatical-reader-subject, consistent with the beginning of the process proposed. Grammatically, this passage marks a turning point, where the speaker leaves off talking about himself and his vision, and places the reader at the centre of this imaginative process, able to "listen to all sides and filter them from your self." According to Chafe, the use of the second person pronoun aligns the self of the representing consciousness with the extroverted self of the reader—he begins to represent our anticipated experiences. Thus, even as the reader is invited on this journey, Whitman has already made the grammatical shift of pronoun to mark the new starting point (our experiences). This new starting point indicates that the process of shifting to a reader-centred model has already begun grammatically, if not lexically and cognitively. Of course, the expectation is that at the end of the process, the reader will also be ready to sing poetic chants and take on the qualities of divine breath.
The process begins with the letting go of the traditional lenses through which we interpret the world, its history, ideology, or the philosophies of individual teachers. As noted earlier of "Starting from Paumanok," the speaker believes we can learn from the past, but that we must ultimately release it and rely on the truths before our own eyes. Moreover, if we consider an earlier observation in this chapter, that for Whitman "the metaphysical is a radically different way of experiencing the physical" (Irwin 865), it is evident that the speaker is urging readers to look for these spiritual truths in the physical world. The speaker's conception of perfection within the cosmic order allows him to equate all elements of the natural order. Similar to his translation of death and evil into more positive forms, he translates the mundane into the divine:

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars,
And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and the egg of the wren,
And the tree-toad is a chef-d'oeuvre for the highest,
And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors of heaven,
And the narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn all machinery,
And the cow crunching with depress'd head surpasses any statue,
And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels. (SM 663-669)

The miraculous becomes the common denominator in the speaker's evaluation of the universe. He begins with the familiar, linking everyday sights to the perfect work of
divine creation. Through a synecdochical process of equating a small part of the natural order to the whole of the natural world, these small elements accumulate as embodiments of divine will. Moreover, the repeated "And the" in each line constitutes one example of Whitman's frequent use of syntactic parallelism, which like the cohesive conjunction "or," allows him to develop a system of alternatives or substitutions. The tree-toad and mouse become interchangeable, illustrating the underlying implication that any part of the natural world could be substituted for any other part, all having equal claim to the perfection of the whole. As I observed earlier in my discussion of the speaker's metaphorical redefinition of certain symbols in *Leaves of Grass*, the lexical role cohesion plays influences the reader's cognitive ability to understand the structure of the universe as Whitman portrays it. In understanding how any part can become symbolic of the whole, it becomes easier to work backward from the conclusion that nature is the product of the divine creation to the understanding that every individual aspect of nature has an equal and interchangeable importance in the scheme of the cosmos. The individual person—any individual person—is also able to claim central importance in the scheme of the cosmos, because Whitman has rendered it inherently democratic through the cohesive patterns of development he employs.

To return to section two of the poem, Walt's initial purpose was to teach readers to see the world through their own eyes and experience, setting them on a path toward the discovery of their own divine natures, toward their own ability to create, and thus toward the "origin of all poems" (SM 33). The speaker's end objective is to "fetch you whoever you are flush with myself" (SM 1085). But to catch up with our guide, readers must surpass the teacher: "I am the teacher of athletes, / He that by me spreads a wider breast
than my own proves the width of my own, / He most honors my style who learns under it
to destroy the teacher" (SM 1234-1236). For readers, the process ends with our projected
initiation into divinity—a result deemed within the reach of every individual who chooses
to pursue it. Like the democracy of the United States, spiritual development is also
inherently egalitarian. The speaker asks, "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"
(SM 431-2). While any citizen can become the president, the speaker insists that every
citizen can learn to see the world through their own eyes, developing the spiritual and
divine aspects of themselves. In the end, he envisions us all returning to the democratic
equality of the cosmos through death. He provides the example of this merger with an
eternal cosmic life cycle when he stages his own death at the end of "Song of Myself."
However, his transformation into dirt and new life in grass allows the speaker to fade out
of the equation, translated into different forms, giving the reader room and responsibility
to explore his own divine self.
CHAPTER III – INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Having drawn some conclusions in Chapter II about the speaker as a quasi-divine leader, urging readers toward a realization of their own divinity, this chapter considers his relationship to other individuals, including both the other characters he encounters within the text of *Leaves of Grass*, and the extra-textual relationship he frames between himself and the reader. The poems analysed here, "The Sleepers," "I Sing the Body Electric," and "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand," all portray intimate contact and relations between the speaker and his many lovers. I will examine these instances of bodily love and contact, which have made some of these poems (in)famous over the years. Key themes considered in this chapter include the speaker's identification of his self with others, the continuing disembodiment of the speaker, the role physical relations play in the development of the soul, and how the stylistics of disembodiment in this verse serves to balance the carnal with the spiritual. My argument in this chapter is that each of these poems approaches carnality as a platonic tool in learning to love deeply, not necessarily physically. Whitman uses the platonic model to demonstrate that the body is an avenue to the soul, and to translate love between bodies into divine love between souls.

3.1 (Dis)embodied Bodies in Contact

In the *Criterion* of November 10, 1855—five months after the publication of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*—Rufus W. Griswold wrote of the volume of poetry, "There was a time when licentiousness laughed at reproval; now it writes essays and delivers
lectures. Once it shunned the light; now it courts attention, writes books showing how
grand and pure it is, and prophesies from its lecherous lips its own ultimate triumph" (24). There was some controversy to the reception of Leaves of Grass, and while Ralph Waldo Emerson greeted Whitman "at the beginning of a great career" (Emerson 637), Griswold's comments are characteristic of the negative criticism the work received. Certainly it was not unwarranted. In an age of gender-specific conduct manuals, long sleeves and skirts, and high collars, Whitman's verse broke not only poetic conventions of rhyme and metre, but also social and moral conventions related to the discussion of sex and the body. For instance, Whitman writes of prostitutes and onanists, and even describes the sexual act: "Ebb stung by the flow and flow stung by the ebb, love-flesh swelling and deliciously aching, / Limitless limpid jets of love hot and enormous, quivering jelly of love, white-blow and delirious juice, / Bridegroom night of love working surely and softly into the prostrate dawn" (BE 59-61). Such passages shocked his audience in a time when:

In the name of health and public order the body was banished from polite society, and its external shape and structure was denied. By 1855, when Whitman presented himself coatless and bare-necked, his pelvis thrust forward, in his Leaves of Grass frontispiece, men of fashion were dressed from head to toe like black tubes. Women of fashion looked like tea cosies, jam pots, and other gently rounded objects of manufacture. Their breasts, buttocks and legs were hidden by nearly one hundred yards of gown, petticoat and underclothing. (Kaplan 147)
Within this historical context, Whitman's recognition and championing of this erotic attraction of flesh for flesh was a challenge to the recognized social order. Rather than upholding the view that sexuality was inherently evil, Whitman openly discusses sexuality and its personal, social, and political functions. Not surprisingly, Whitman's poetry is now a favourite subject among psychoanalytic critics and queer theorists. Moreover, biographers are in general agreement that Whitman was most likely of homosexual orientation (though no definitive proof has yet been found of sexual encounters between Whitman and other men). Critical discussion of his highly eroticized, often homoerotic poems, some of which are examined in this chapter, often leans toward a very personal discussion of the biographical correspondences between the poet and his speaker.

The poems analysed in this chapter have all been selected for their representations of the speaker interacting with other acknowledged bodies, and for their frank discussion of the body and bodily interactions. Despite the conventions of polite society of Whitman's time, these interactions are often eroticized and frequently involve bodies in varying states of undress. The three poems selected, "The Sleepers," "I Sing the Body Electric," and "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand," have been interpreted in recent years as expressive of different kinds of politically motivated sexual interactions. "The Sleepers" and "I Sing the Body Electric" have frequently been discussed in terms of their egalitarian portrayals of the human body. Meanwhile, as part of the Calamus cluster, "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand" has been described as a poem that exemplifies Whitman's coyness about his homosexuality.
These generalizations about readings of these poems in relation to notions about bodies may seem counterintuitive, following Chapter II, which focused on the disembodiment of the speaker. Indeed, several critics have remarked on the elusiveness of the speaker, and have struggled to reconcile this with traditional understandings of interacting bodies. In this chapter, I will attempt this reconciliation through my own analysis of consciousness and cohesion within the framework of Whitman's larger spiritual project. Although the eroticization of the body varies in terms of the kinds of interactions portrayed, I will argue in the remainder of this chapter that all of these eroticized interactions work toward the spiritualization of the body and its identification with the soul, and toward the spiritualization of love. This progression begins with the speaker, who continues to de-situate and disembody himself through his use of imagery and displacement of consciousness; by avoiding being situated in the physical, material world, the speaker presumes to guarantee his corresponding continuing access to the spiritual realm. His elusiveness in turn must play into the interpretation of interacting bodies as moving between the carnal and spiritual realms. These translations—body into soul and carnal love into spiritual love—follow a development similar to that described by Plato in *The Symposium*. However, this process of translation is best understood through the speaker's use of cohesive elements to build spiritual meaning upon the foundations of the physical world. Finally, I will examine how, in these poems, the unconventional uses of immediacy and ideas regarding audience design place the onus upon the reader to adopt or abandon the project of spiritual development.
3.2 PLACELESSNESS AND THE PLATONIC EROTIC: "THE SLEEPERS" AND "I SING THE BODY ELECTRIC"

In this section, I will turn my attention to the speaker's relationship to other individuals, specifically to the other characters he encounters within the text of *Leaves of Grass*. These relationships are portrayed in "The Sleepers" and "I Sing the Body Electric." "The Sleepers" is a profound observation of the common humanity between all classes, races, and nations—Whitman brings these together in a shared sleep and dream sequence in the darkness of a motherly night. The poem links sexuality, the mediation between the individual and the nation, and the mystical experience of death and rebirth in sleep and waking. The crossover between waking and sleeping, between the physical world and the spiritual world, and how the speaker situates himself within both, are of key interest in this analysis, especially with regard to how this influences our understanding of the other two of the poem's aspects; sexuality, and the mediation between individual and nation. Meanwhile, "I Sing the Body Electric" has been identified as a poem that works with and around doubts about the sanctity of the body, doubts that stem from the Christian belief in a corrupted body that, through its desires, passions, and urges, also corrupts the soul. Huck Gutman has considered the process, in this poem, by which Whitman asks readers to think about the body and its perfection, its sexuality and its place in a political and cosmological scheme. Ultimately, he concludes that the poem's ulterior motive is to render all bodies electric and attractive, and to legitimate the poet's homoerotic desires (Gutman 296-8).

In these poems, the intimate contact and love between the speaker and his many lovers is paradoxically characterized primarily by the continuing disembodiment of the
speaker. This leads me to believe that the love between the speaker and the other figures he encounters in his poems does not satisfy any physical need, nor does it satisfy an emotional need, as the elusive speaker sometimes moves rapidly between lovers, or away from them entirely. Rather, like the spirit Eros in Plato's *Symposium*, the erotic serves a philosophical or spiritual end for Whitman's speaker. Once again in these poems we find the speaker difficult to locate. He continues to shift locations frequently, sometimes shifting between genders and bodies, rendering his very identity unstable. This is because, as Bradley J. Stiles points out, Whitman situates identity within the body—individuation is accomplished through the physical body, which is formed from a solution of spirit. Stiles also notes, "The identity we gain by our body goes through a birth, death, and regeneration that seem to spiritualize the material world" (Stiles 35), which suggests that identity can never firmly be fixed except in the body, and that it is otherwise a more fluid concept. Moreover, in "The Sleepers" and "I Sing the Body Electric," Whitman continues to use imagery that makes the situation of the poet between locations, or in generalized spiritual sites, even more explicit than it was in "Starting from Paumanok" or "Song of Myself."

A brief survey of the mentions of characters engaged in any kind of love act or intimate physical contact, or of those acts themselves, reveals that in both "The Sleepers" and "I Sing the Body Electric," all of the sites for this kind of contact are locations which most Whitman scholars typically identify as connected to the spiritual realm, or which they associate, in the case of activities, with these sites or the other spiritual activities that take place in them. For instance, of the onanists with their "sick-gray faces," the speaker insists, "The night pervades them and infolds them" (TS 8-10), as it does "The married
couple [who] sleep calmly in their bed, he with his palm on the hip of the wife, and she
with her palm on the hip of the husband" (TS 11). The night and its darkness are
acknowledged by many scholars as spiritualized by Whitman, a time and condition when
the secrets of the cosmos—planets and stars—are revealed, having been hidden by
daylight. In many of Whitman's poems, darkness is also associated with a heightened
acuity of hearing, lending increased importance to the voice and to poetic song. Thus, the
speaker indicates, "Now I pierce the darkness, new beings appear, / The earth recedes
from me into the night, / I saw that it was beautiful, and I see that what is not the earth is
beautiful" (TS 26-8). The darkness reveals the beauty hidden by the day, both on earth—
the material world—and beyond the earth—the spiritual world. However, this passage
also marks the movement away from the material world and into the realm of the
imagination, for in the next lines, the speaker reveals, "I go from bedside to bedside, I
sleep close with the other sleepers each in turn, / I dream in my dream all the dreams of
the other dreamers, / And I become the other dreamers" (TS 29-31). This is significant, as
the visions of bodies that follow, and the accounts of their interactions, emerge from the
speaker's dream-state. If anything, the interactions of "The Sleepers" are a contact of
imaginations, not of bodies.

Indeed, in "The Sleepers" and in "I Sing the Body Electric," both the speaker and
the bodies he describes are rendered immaterial through their spiritualization, as opposed
to material and earthbound. This often takes place through association with the sea.

Whitman adapts the structure of aquatic symbolism to fit diverse thematic
contexts and he invests it with a number of related meanings. However,
Chapter III

despite this surface multiplicity, an analysis of the essential form and import of this symbolism reveals it to be consistent with the usage of aquatic symbolism in various religious systems: the waters are associated with purification and renewal and with a spiritual matrix or divinity that precedes the creation and takes it back to itself. An awareness of the transhistorical structure and meaning of aquatic symbolism can serve a heuristic purpose in interpreting Whitman's usage; however, it is always necessary to supplement an archetypal reading with the specific nuances of Whitman's text. (Kuebrich, "Sea, The" 622)

Like the river in many Christian sects, the sea can baptize the body, washing corruption from it and from the soul. For Whitman, the sea also symbolizes the divine solution from which all souls emerge when they are granted identity through embodiment, as noted earlier. Contact with water, especially the sea, becomes a means to symbolically access the spiritual realm, and the shoreline thus comes to represent a point of transition between the material and spiritual worlds. This is evident in many of Whitman's poems, where the shoreline becomes a site of enlightenment. For instance, in "Song of Myself," the speaker explains his sense of integration into the cosmic scheme: "Sea of the brine of life and of unshovell'd yet always-ready graves, / Howler and scooper of storms, capricious and dainty sea, / I am integral with you, I too am of one phase and of all phases" (456-8). The sea is powerful; it both gives and takes life, but remains at the symbolic core of the cosmos. But aquatic symbolism has other functions as well. For instance, sea imagery allows the speaker and other bodies to become fluid, like the water:
I have perceiv'd that to be with those I like is enough,
To stop in company with the rest at evening is enough,
To be surrounded by beautiful, curious, breathing, laughing flesh is enough,
To pass among them or touch any one, or rest my arm ever so lightly round his or her neck for a moment, what is this then?
I do not ask any more delight, I swim in it as in a sea. (BE 45-8)

In these lines the speaker illustrates companionship as a proximity to the flesh or bodies of others, characterizing the flesh with noble qualities: natural beauty, intellectual merit, life, joy—these are the qualities those of his era, particularly the transcendental thinkers, would have connected to the miraculous nature of God's creation. These are not the worldly qualities that, for most other sects in the nineteenth century, aligned the body with corruption, making it the sign for the corrupted human soul. Like an animal, the body needed feeding, and craved a mate; it was base in its instincts and needed clothing to hide the original sin. Here the speaker imagines passing among bodies, coming into contact with some of them. However, this contact is once again an imaginative act on the part of the speaker. He does not commit to touching any one body—the conjunction "or" again supplies alternative after alternative; he will "pass among" bodies, not necessarily in contact, or he will "touch any one," or he will momentarily rest his arm upon a male or a female neck (BE 47). He fails to commit to one or another possibility, revealing his apparent promiscuity as mere illusion. Moreover, this elusive contact takes place
primarily in the speaker's imagination. Although it is unclear whether the mode he is using is displaced or displaced immediacy, it is evident that this is a remembered or imagined memory from his use of the present-perfect-tense in "I have perceiv'd" (BE 45). His extroverted consciousness—the part of him that does the contacting and touching—is somewhat displaced from the introverted consciousness that produces language. His perception originated in the past, and though he may still believe it valid, it is reflective in nature. At best, he offers us a series of true, though vague memories of times spent with others, yet the uncertainty of the alternatives he offers reveals that this memory is more likely an imagined state than a specific recollection. However, the speaker shifts to the immediate mode as he perceives or remembers the delight of this imaginative contact, the pleasure of touch. The experience of it is not imagined as a base desire, but as a pleasure that washes over the speaker like the sea in a baptism of sorts; the imaginative contact fulfils a desire more spiritual than carnal. The transformation of the body into a purified spiritual vessel has been the speaker's aim since the start of "I Sing the Body Electric," where he reveals that his task is to "discorrupt" physical bodies, "and charge them full with the charge of the soul" (4). The origin of the body's corruption remains unclear; we cannot know whether the speaker believes the body is corrupt because it is of the post-lapsarian material world, or whether the body has acquired corruption as it passes through the material world, interpreting and understanding it in a limited way, unconcerned with the life of the soul. In either case, the speaker attempts to "discorrupt" the body not only by associating bodily interaction with spiritualized sites, but also by avoiding any actual bodily contact by imagining the bodies concerned and by maintaining the disembodiment of his own voice.
Once again, the disembodiment of the speaker is conscious and deliberate. He describes himself in "The Sleepers;" "I am the ever-laughing—it is new moon and twilight, / I see the hiding of douceurs, I see nimble ghosts whichever way I look, / Cache and cache again deep in the ground and sea, and where it is neither ground nor sea" (33-5). The speaker here is playful and elusive—he passes through the darkness of twilight and new moon, the position of the lunar cycle opposite the full moon and characterized chiefly by the moon's absence from the sky. Despite the darkness, his superhuman vision allows him to see the hiding of douceurs—a borrowed French term for sweets or bribes—and to see ghosts, not the shapes of people's bodies but their very spirits. This combination of darkness, vision, and spirits suggests there is something otherworldly to the sweets or delights being hidden here. Moreover, the speaker explains that they are hidden in the ground and in the sea, "and where it is neither ground nor sea" (TS 35). If neither ground nor sea, perhaps air? This would place these hidden delights in the realm of the spiritually charged atmosphere explored in Chapter II. Or, "neither ground nor sea" could refer to the shoreline or swamp, places where the sands and waters merge, border zones where the spiritual realm comes in contact with the physical world. It seems likely that these douceurs are the hidden delights of a spiritual world, hidden in both material and spiritual realms, tucked away in the in-between places for the poet to discover, to see even in complete darkness. Indeed, in this poem about sleepers, it seems that dreams and the unconscious experience are another way into an understanding of the spiritual world. Hutchinson has suggested that in this poem the speaker merges his consciousness with other sleepers and moves into a trance-like state that brings him in contact with the spiritual world.
The fluidity of the speaker's consciousness, his movements through placeless locations, and his tendency toward disembodiment are complicated by his ambiguous relationship toward his own agency, especially with regard to his interactions with other bodies. Until now, we have considered the speaker as an authoritative agent in his own song. He is the author of many actions, and as such, takes responsibility for them: he is the producer of his song, he is the seer and interpreter of the spiritual and material worlds. He has cast himself as a guide, a teacher, a leader, and urges readers forward along their own paths. However, when he comes to describing interactions of bodies, especially in sexual contact, his agency tends to disappear fairly consistently. Indeed, in some of the most vivid, sexually charged passages, all agency is erased from the poetry. For instance:

This is the female form,
A divine nimbus exhales from it from head to foot,
It attracts with fierce undeniable attraction,
I am drawn by its breath as if I were no more than a helpless vapor, all falls aside but myself and it,
Books, art, religion, time, the visible and solid earth, and what was expected of heaven or fear'd of hell, are now consumed,
Mad filaments, ungovernable shoots play out of it, the response likewise ungovernable,
Hair, bosom, hips, bend of legs, negligent falling hands all diffused, mine too diffused,
Ebb stung by the flow and flow stung by the ebb, love-flesh swelling and deliciously aching,
Limitless limpid jets of love hot and enormous, quivering jelly of love, white-blow and delirious juice,
Bridegroom night of love working surely and softly into the prostrate dawn,
Undulating into the willing and yielding day,
Lost in the cleave of the clasping and sweet-flesh'd day. (BE 52-63)

I cite the entire passage here because it makes evident the topic—the attraction of the speaker to the form of woman—as well as the gradual elimination of the speaker's agency. It is significant that he writes of "the female form," an abstract concept, not any one woman or lover in particular. He also spiritualizes this attraction through the collocation of the draw, or magnetic pull of woman with breath and vapour—familiar spiritual air imagery. At first, he admits he is at the centre of this action—he is drawn, he is pulled into an immediate contact, not with the female form or body, but with the attraction of it, where all else falls aside. Gradually, he retreats from responsibility for actions occurring, especially in the final lines of the passage. Readers lose all pronouns; hair, bosom, hips, legs, and hands no longer belong to anyone, they are "diffused," a word that regularly appears throughout *Leaves of Grass* to indicate the breakdown of matter, whether its separation from the spiritual solution of the universe, or from other matter. Consider for instance, the lines, "It is not to diffuse you that you were born of your mother and father, it is to identify you" ("To Think of Time" 72); or "Nature and
Man shall be disjoin'd and diffused no more" ("Passage to India" 114). Both of these examples use "diffuse" in such a way that it distinguishes one material element from another. Thus, the last indication of any sense of self presented to the reader is when the speaker refers to his body parts, "mine," as also diffused; they are scattered, separate from him. After this point, there are no indicators of agency—an anonymous ebb and flow interact, phallic love-flesh swells and aches without any indication of to whom it may belong, jets, jelly, and juice of love appear from no obvious source. While we might assume the speaker participates in this sexual act, he quickly shakes us off his trail. Rather, as it takes place during a "Bridegroom night of love," the night itself becomes the agent, the party responsible for "working surely and softly into the prostrate dawn" (BE 61). Thus, the exchange is naturalized, involving the interaction of cosmic elements, night and day, not people, and certainly not the speaker. This is, of course, a metaphor for the poet's activity in these poems: just as the (spiritual) night works love and its spirituality into the (material) day, the poet's discussion of the body and sexuality works to spiritualize aspects of the human self that had been considered exclusively physical and therefore base. Michael Moon has also persuasively argued of a similar passage, section eleven from "Song of Myself" (the "Twenty-Ninth Bather"), that the removal of any pronouns or indicators of agency allowed Whitman to publish his sexually explicit, censorable poetry. This removal of indications of agency renders the action indefinable and therefore just barely permissible for public consumption. Moreover, Moon also suggests that the removal of indicators of agency renders the speaker's identity fluid, allowing it to shift between bodies. Both of these claims can be applied just as easily to this passage from "I Sing the Body Electric." The explicit sexual act is tempered by the
lack of agency, and thus of bodies, and it does seem that the speaker's body is diffused into the very night and day of which he speaks.

The fluidity of identity Moon remarks upon is also manifested in other ways, as when the speaker takes on the identities of others, either by appropriating their work or their bodies. For instance, in section two of "I Sing the Body Electric," Whitman catalogues the beauties of the bodies of people engaged in their daily activities; swimmers, rowers, wrestlers, men marching, women soothing children, and so on. The speaker takes on these identities as he takes on their activities: "I loosen myself, pass freely, am at the mother's breast with the little child, / Swim with the swimmers, wrestle with wrestlers, march in line with the firemen" (BE 31-2). It seems as though the speaker merely joins the groups he speaks of, the firemen and wrestlers, for example, by taking up the activities that occupy the people in these groups. However, his loosened self, at the mother's breast with the child, reveals a more profound identification with individuals through their occupations. The intimacy of contact with the mother suggests that the speaker is not simply taking on the child's activity of nursing in order to better understand or relate to the group "children," but rather, the speaker merges with the child, not appropriating the child's identity for himself, but allowing the child to direct his own fluid, loosened self. The same can be said of the swimmers, wrestlers, and firemen; when the speaker merges his identity with them, he sees the world as they do, rather than imposing his vision upon them.

In a similar fashion, Whitman's speaker merges his identity with other characters in his poems by becoming them, adopting their points of view. He shifts easily between bodies and identities, changing social position, gender, and age. For instance, he writes:
I am she who adorn'd herself and folded her hair expectantly,
My truant lover has come, and it is dark.

Double yourself and receive me darkness,
Receive me and my lover too, he will not let me go without him.

I roll myself upon you as upon a bed, I resign myself to the dusk.

[...] 
Darkness, you are gentler than my lover, his flesh was sweaty and panting,
I feel the hot moisture yet that he left me.

[...] 
Be careful darkness! already what was it touch'd me?
I thought my lover had gone, else darkness and he are one,
I hear the heart-beat, I follow, I fade away. (TS 46-59)

Here the speaker takes on the body and identity of a woman. The first line introduces this transformation, complementing the present tense, "I am she" with her history as a woman awaiting her lover. Once again, the love act takes place in an envelope of (spiritual) darkness, and there is a slippage between the lover and the darkness itself as lover. Initially, the woman invites the darkness to enfold her and her lover, and in darkness the human coitus takes place, followed by the gentler love of the darkness. By the end, feeling a touch, the speaker as woman can no longer determine whether her lover and the
darkness are distinct entities, or whether they have merged body and spirit to become one. The heart-beat reassures her that the human body is still there, though now endowed with the spiritual nature of the darkness, and she follows its sound. The end of the line, "I fade away," marks the end of this section of the poem, and the end of the speaker's time with this identity; he moves away from embodiment and toward other identities.

Thus far, I have characterized the general tendency of Whitman's speaker toward disembodiment, dislocation and unstable identities as manifestations of an attempt to spiritualize the human body. However, while these rhetorical moves on the speaker's part accumulate to give readers a general sense of the inherently spiritual nature of the body and of bodily interactions, a brief consideration of the underlying structure of these rhetorical moves reveals the consistency and coherence of Whitman's worldview regarding the place of the physical within a plan of spiritual development. However, when Whitman describes the feminine figure, we may be reminded of Griswold's criticism, that in Whitman's poetry licentiousness shows "how grand and pure it is, and prophesies from its lecherous lips its own ultimate triumph" (24). For instance, when Whitman writes, "Womanhood, and all that is a woman, and the man that comes from woman, / The womb, the teats, nipples, breast-milk, tears, laughter, weeping, love-looks, love-perturbations and risings" (BE 151-2), he is certainly not interested in the hundreds of yards of fabric normally hiding that body from public eyes, nor is he interested in the common denial of the existence of female sexuality outside of reproductive functions. But Whitman provides reasoning for his frank discussion of the body: "And if the body does not do fully as much as the soul? / And if the body were not the soul, what is the soul?" (BE 7-8). There is more at stake here than social mores; rather, Whitman is
making yet another attempt here to link body and soul, to set them upon equivalent grounds and move his readers from a celebration of the body to a celebration of the divinity of the human being, both body and soul. Although Whitman's treatment of the erotic, his championing of the body and its pleasures, may have shocked nineteenth-century Americans, it is not unprecedented in the western canon.

Because it has a parallel structure to Whitman's development of the function of the erotic in his poems, Plato's Symposium can be used as an interpretive framework for the poetry. Moreover, Whitman's exposure to platonic thought is likely to have contributed to his thought on this development, as it is manifested in other areas of his biography, like his approach to teaching, discussed in Chapter I. The dialogue recounts how Socrates and his friends met for a drinking party and each made a speech in praise of Eros, the god of love. According to the argument Socrates presents, framed through a reported conversation between himself and Diotima, his guide in love, Eros is neither a god nor a human, but is a spirit who serves to interpret and carry messages between the gods and humans, much like the poet who interprets the physical and spiritual realms for his readers by positioning himself between them. Socrates specifies that the object of love is reproduction, "Because reproduction is the closest mortals can come to being permanently alive and immortal. If what we agreed earlier is right, that the object of love is to have the good always, it follows from this argument that the object of love must be immortality as well" (Symposium 44, 206e-207a). According to Socrates, the philosophical mind also seeks to become immortal by reproducing itself. He explains that this is why wise men take younger male lovers; the erotic becomes a tool for education, a reason to spend time together, in contact and in conversation. Thus, Eros works on a
physical level to urge the undeveloped mind to the contemplation of the Form of Beauty, where a young learner should begin with the physical love of one mentor, and:

[S]hould go from one to two and from two to all beautiful bodies, and from beautiful bodies to beautiful practices, and from practices to beautiful forms of learning. From forms of learning, he should end up at that form of learning which is of nothing other than that beauty itself, so that he can complete the process of learning what beauty really is. (Symposium 49, 211b-c)

We can see this progression at work when Whitman's speaker describes a well-loved farmer, "the father of five sons, / And in them the fathers of sons, and in them the fathers of sons" (BE 33-4), who is loved by all, including his children, "with personal love" (BE 40). The speaker begins here with the notions of reproduction and immortality, but goes on to spiritualize the physical aspect of love. He indicates the natural attraction of all to the farmer: "You would wish long and long to be with him, you would wish to sit by him in the boat that you and he might touch each other" (BE 44). Here the farmer is someone we want to touch, someone like the wise man Plato describes who passes understanding on to his younger lovers. However, it is no accident that we find this farmer in his boat. Earlier in this chapter, and in Chapter II, I discussed the symbolism of land and water in Whitman's poetry, identifying the water as a fundamentally spiritual medium. Although the man in this passage is described as a farmer, hunter, and fisher, the place Whitman chooses to situate him at last is in a boat on the water—in a vessel
(like the body) made for travelling in the waters of the spiritual realm. The lexical association between the touch we might share with this wise farmer and the sea journey we embark upon with him make it clear that what we stand to gain from this touch is the development of our soul. We have already considered several other instances of the collocation between bodily contact and the sea earlier in this chapter. This collocation appears again in the very next section of the poem, when the speaker discusses the nature of touching others: "To pass among them or touch any one, or rest my arm ever so lightly round his or her neck for a moment, what is this then? / I do not ask any more delight, I swim in it as in a sea" (BE 47-8). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, bodies and the delight of physical contact are spiritualized through this mention of swimming and the sea, activities mentioned elsewhere in Whitman's poetry in connection with the immersion of the soul in the water, a sort of developmental baptism and purification, and also on occasion, as in "The Sleepers," in connection with the passage to death (70-89), that great new adventure for the soul. What is important to note here, is that just as Socrates recommends a progression from loving one beautiful body to loving many beautiful bodies, Whitman moves from the love of the wise old farmer to passing through a crowd of loving bodies, caressing each briefly but affectionately. At this juncture, it is significant to turn back to the key themes of each of these poems, to illustrate the leap from loving many bodies to loving an ideal of beauty, as Socrates encourages in The Symposium. In brief, in "The Sleepers," although Whitman's speaker engages with individuals, he does so only imaginatively, not physically. Despite the uses of the immediate and the historical present modes of language throughout the poem, the "The Sleepers" portrays a world of dreams and imagination, not one of waking life and actual
physical contact. And despite the occasions of individual love and contact in "I Sing the Body Electric," the speaker is primarily drawn to the female form and to the male form—not to specific bodies but to the idea of these bodies. As mentioned in Chapter I, Whitman had studied Plato in the years prior to turning to poetry, thus it is not coincidental that the familiar language of Platonic "Forms" emerges here. What is important to remember about this Platonic progression is that the final step, the appreciation of the Form of Beauty, is accompanied by abstinence from physical love. Therefore, contrary to popular readings that see Whitman's speaker as engaged in physical passions, these observations lead us toward an understanding of these poems as representing an erotic passion that becomes increasingly disconnected from the interaction of physical bodies. Moreover, as I shall illustrate in the following section, Whitman portrays his speaker as an incarnation of the archetypes of Eros and Socrates, both elusive lover and elusive teacher, urging readers toward an appreciation of the Form of Beauty.

Whitman's speaker transforms things indecent into things divine by equating the body with the soul, and the physical world with the spiritual realm. This is particularly evident in passages like, "And if the body were not the soul, what is the soul?" (BE 8). Moreover, holiness is also conferred upon the body through the association of physical interactions with spiritual mediums like the night, the air and the water. Through these, the body is spiritualized and washed of its base carnality:

The soul is always beautiful, it appears more or it appears less, it comes or it lags behind,
It comes from its embower'd garden and looks pleasantly on itself and
encloses the world,

Perfect and clean the genitals previously jetting, and perfect and clean the
womb cohering,
The head well-grown proportion'd and plumb, and the bowels and joints
proportion'd and plumb. (TS 150-3)

We see here an Adamic vision of the world, with the soul emerging from a garden
(Eden), and looking upon the physical body (genitals, womb, head, bowels, joints) as
perfect and clean, in a prelapsarian vision of the privileged human place in the cosmic
scheme. However, this passage also reveals key characteristics of the relationship
portrayed by Whitman's speaker, between the physical and spiritual realms, namely that
they are one and the same. The passage is once again in the third-person omniscient
mode, an instance of what Chafe would consider language without a representing
consciousness, and while the speaker does not use the first-person to make explicit that
these impressions belong to his all-knowing consciousness, it is evident that he must
either perceive this for himself or infer it through some understanding of the nature of the
soul. Despite the apparent absence of a representing consciousness, the evidence suggests
it cannot be completely eliminated from language production. Beyond the omniscient
reporting of events, someone must be responsible for the insight and depth of perception
conveyed here. Unlike objective third-person omniscient observation, these value
judgments are not impartial and must proceed from some unacknowledged, but
nevertheless present source. The soul he describes is beautiful, like the Platonic Form of
Beauty discussed here. Moreover, it is elusive; it appears more or less, it comes or lags behind. Once again, the use of the conjunction "or" highlights that these are options available to the soul, and that it need not be committed to either. Of course, this means that the soul may be visible, physical, and present just as often as it may be invisible, ethereal, and intangible—states more commonly associated with the Christian notion of the soul. As noted in Chapter II, the speaker shares this elusiveness with the soul; this can be seen as strengthening our understanding of the speaker as having access to a spiritual realm. Finally, it is important to note that the speaker describes the soul as looking on itself, and then he names the aspects of itself which it perceives: the genitals, womb, head, bowels, and joints. Here the soul recognizes itself as the body, but not simply the heart, mind, or strength, commonly privileged as noble human attributes. Rather, the soul finds its way into the genitals and bowels of the human body—otherwise considered its least dignified aspects. However, a conceptual association might reveal that the soul is in both the human reproductive processes (genitals and womb bringing forth life), and in the human intellect (the well-grown head). This reading places humans in their righteous (plumb) place (proportioned) in the cosmic scheme. For Whitman's speaker, the soul cannot be separated from the body, but coexists with it constantly, each complementing the other. As in Platonic philosophy, the world of Forms is not one which we must await at the end of a long journey, like Heaven comes after earth in Christianity; rather, it is a world that is ever present and only requires us to look at it in the correct way. The same is true here of the soul and its relationship to the body, and of the relationship between the physical and spiritual worlds. They are ever-present, and obvious to the discerning eye.
3.3 FROM EROS TO SOCRATES TO WHITMAN'S SPEAKER: THE FUNCTION OF THE POET IN "WHOEVER YOU ARE HOLDING ME NOW IN HAND"

For Whitman's speaker, as in Platonic philosophy, the majority of people will not simply arrive at an understanding of the reality and activity of the spiritual world and of the soul in their everyday lives—they require instruction. With this, we come to the function of the poet. Just as Eros is neither god nor human, but a messenger spirit carrying and interpreting messages between gods and humans, and just as Socrates argues that an older, wiser male lover leads his younger lovers to understand the progression from physical love of an individual body to an intellectual and spiritual love for the Form of Beauty, the poet leads his reader from his representations of physical love to a spiritual understanding of the bonds between humans and the cosmos. Whitman's speaker most clearly articulates this function in "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand," where he stages a physical interaction with his audience, rather than portraying himself interacting with other bodies, as in "The Sleepers" and "I Sing the Body Electric." In this staged interaction with his reader, Whitman's speaker takes on the role of the older, wiser lover, leading the readers on toward understanding, mirroring both the relationship Socrates has with his younger lover, Alcibiades, and the function Socrates ascribes to Eros in communicating the messages of the gods to humans. However, "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand" is a poem of warning where the speaker commands readers to release him unless we are fully prepared for the consequences of following him. Many critics read this warning as indicative of Whitman's fears regarding the discovery of his homosexuality, perhaps including the fear of admitting it to himself. Meanwhile, other critics have identified as a key theme the problem of distinguishing the
real from mere appearances, as manifested in day-to-day living, in interpersonal relationships, and in the identity of the individual. This is closer to my own view that the warning relates to the challenges of following the speaker as he attempts to teach us to interpret the spiritual world for ourselves.

To best understand the parallels between Whitman's connection to his reader and the platonic-erotic relationships in *The Symposium*, one must identify some of the characteristics of this lover/instructor who becomes intimately involved with his student and leads him to higher understanding of the cosmos and his own soul. This lover/instructor is both aware of his protégé's reality, the physical world of appearances, and another reality his student cannot see; in Plato, this is the intelligible world of Forms, and in Whitman, it is the spiritual realm. The lover/instructor is able to relate to his protégé, but fully places the burden of learning upon the student—he can serve as an instructor, but only insofar as the student is willing to take on the burden of learning. Moreover, as noted in Chapter II, the task of the instructor is twofold: on one hand, the instructor interprets or translates the intelligible/spiritual world to help his student, who is caught in the physical world of appearances, to see beyond these confines; and on the other, the instructor remains in many ways elusive, constantly a step ahead of his student, leading him onward. The remainder of this chapter will focus on each of these characteristics, identifying how each is represented in Plato's *Symposium*, and illustrating how it is manifested in "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand."

In his speech in *The Symposium*, Socrates describes Eros, one of the many spirits, which, "Being intermediate between [gods and humans] fill the gap between them, and enable the universe to form an interconnected whole" (*Symposium* 39, 202e). Socrates
also takes on this characteristic himself, for as Alcibiades tells the others at the symposium, Socrates has been known to stand all day and night in contemplation, neither eating, nor sleeping (Symposium 60, 220c-d). In these moments, Socrates is clearly neither fully part of the physical world, as he ignores the progress of time and his own physical needs, nor is he entirely in the intelligible world, as he remains physically fixed in one place. Like Eros, Socrates can access both realms. Whitman's speaker also takes on this ability. Like Eros, who is neither god nor human, and Socrates, who is neither committed to the world of appearances, nor entirely to the intelligible world, the speaker neither exists entirely within the spiritual nor the physical realm. All three of these characters move between realities, mediating each for the other, as Hutchinson argues is the task of the shaman. Whitman's speaker strategically situates himself between undefined locations, in defined border zones, or specifically between symbols for the physical and spiritual worlds. Some of the ways in which the speaker refuses to situate himself were discussed in Chapter II, and we find him using similar methods in "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand." In the immediate mode of speaking, the poem is a first-person, present-tense warning to the reader to consider carefully the impulse to seek the speaker out. Once again, the speaker cannot be situated through place references, as he complements a series of defined place references that are all alternatives to each other with deictic indicators referring to his own undefined time and location—the proximal moment we share with him. After commanding his readers to "release me now" (WHH 11), and warning them of his aversion to the indoors, he encourages, "But just possibly with you on a high hill, first watching lest any person for miles around approach unawares, / Or possibly with you sailing at sea, or on the beach of the sea or
some quiet island, / Here to put your lips upon mine I permit you" (WHH 17-9). Not only
do these lines illustrate the linguistic indicators suggesting that this is meant to be
understood as a shared present tense for both speaker and audience, but they also capture
the speaker's unwillingness to commit to any location or course of action. The locations
he names are separated by the conjunction "or," indicating that any one can be substituted
in for another, while the deictic "here" could indicate, in conjunction with "or," any one
of these locations, as the speaker's consciousness shifts between them, or simply his
undefined present location. The speaker's commitment to his audience is also tempered
by the qualifying adverb, "possibly." However, the speaker's refusal to commit to a
location is accompanied by a progression in imagery from a rejection of indoor spaces to
"just possibly" alone on a hill, or even more favourably, "possibly" on the sea or by the
seashore. This is a clear progression from the sort of site the speaker would consider as
fully part of the physical world of appearances, and therefore unacceptable for forging
bonds between himself and his audience, toward a site infused with spirituality, where
this intimate contact becomes possible. As in the interactions of bodies in "The Sleepers"
and "I Sing the Body Electric," the speaker ensures that his interaction with his audience
takes place in a spiritualized venue, produced in part by these pragmatic indicators.

To some extent, spirituality is also the overriding theme of the Calamus cluster of
poems, of which "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand" is a part. This section of
Leaves of Grass takes its name from a type of grass common in marshy areas. Growing in
clusters, the long spear-shaped leaves are quite tall, while the root has often been
identified as a phallic symbol by critics, because of its shape. However, if the grass is a
uniform hieroglyphic, as suggested in "Song of Myself," this cluster of Leaves of Grass is
surely connected intimately with the definitions Whitman offers for the meaning of the grass. Indeed, the theme of death and the eternity of the soul is picked up again in this section ("the hair of graves" that "shows there is really no death") (SM 110, 126), as is democracy ("sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow zones") (SM 107). In "These I Singing in Spring," Whitman gives the calamus root a particular meaning as "the token of comrades" (20) to be reserved and given "only to them that love as I myself am capable of loving" (28). While this might seem to confirm the homoerotic themes of this cluster of poems, it certainly also has other important meanings tied into it. In fact, this grass shares the significant traits of the seashore as a site of crossover between the material and spiritual realms. In the marsh, as at the seashore, the water and land merge—each flows into the other, creating a zone of blending between the two mediums. The calamus grass takes root in this in-between place, much like the poet, who consistently sings from border zones between the spiritual and material realms, or, as we have seen, from indefinable locations. While one meaning of the leaves of grass, discussed in Chapter II, was as a representation of the individuals within a communal democracy, it becomes more likely here that this particular kind of grass, mediating between water and land, is symbolic of the poet, mediating between the spiritual and physical worlds. Retaining our understanding of calamus grass as a homoerotic symbol, in this context it ultimately becomes an illustration of the spiritual nature of the love between men that binds this democracy together. The focus on these bonds of love should connote the fundamental community and spiritual underpinnings of a healthy democracy, and this was certainly what Plato was encouraging when he discussed the lover-learner relationship throughout The Symposium. It is within this context that we must consider the poems in the Calamus
cluster, including "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand." Overlooking this context has led many critics toward implausible and often inconsistent understandings of these poems and of the character of the cluster as a whole.

For instance, "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand" has often been interpreted as one of the poems that problematizes Whitman's recognition of his homosexuality. The poem is included in the Calamus cluster, described by Whitman as a cluster of poems devoted to adhesiveness, the deep emotional bonds between men. While the Calamus poems are often discussed in terms their underlying homoeroticism, other critics have noted that the nineteenth century had a very different understanding of bonding in male relationships. In reading "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand" and other Calamus poems, we must remember that because the sphere of public male friendship rarely extended to women, it is likely that when Whitman refers to "comrades" (WHH 20-1), he means "men." We can understand this in either of two ways. Either Whitman was a homosexual and we read his comrades as his love interests, or Whitman could not conceive of having women as intimate friends because of the social constraints of his era. In nineteenth-century America, men and women could court, and once married, they were expected to have a reasonably orderly domestic existence together, which could range from a deep friendship and love for one another to an emotionless or even hateful domestic partnership. From a twenty-first-century perspective, we could conceive of adhesiveness as including women, or indeed describing relationships between women, though Whitman would probably have experienced some hesitation at this notion. If we remember that by advocating adhesiveness, Whitman aimed to claim for men the intimacy women typically shared in the nineteenth century (Kaplan 234), it
seems increasingly likely that what Whitman describes in this poem and in the rest of the 
Calamus cluster is not an attempt to "come out" as Robert K. Martin suggests, but rather 
the profound intimacy of friends, the camaraderie on which the accord and unity of a 
nation could be built—another reason for Whitman to portray this love between men, as 
women were not yet voters in the United States. This is not to say that Whitman was not 
gay—in fact, I would agree with most critics that homoeroticism is explicit throughout 
the Calamus cluster. However, I believe that throughout the Calamus poems, 
homoeroticism serves a distinctively political and spiritual function, and it cannot be 
interpreted simply as an end in itself. The speaker's invitation to his readers is, therefore, 
spiritually and politically charged, rather than of an exclusively personal nature.

Although the speaker refuses to be located, because of his underlying political and 
spiritual goals, the speaker cannot be so impossible to find that his audience gives up. 
Thus, while he guarantees that the contact between himself and his audience will be of a 
spiritual nature, he also provides a physical route toward this contact. Whitman's speaker 
must be able to relate to the world his audience understands to be "real," much like Eros 
is able to communicate with both gods and humans, and Socrates is able to build his 
dialogues upon the existing understanding of his listeners. Indeed, this is fundamental to 
the Platonic conceptualization of the interaction between teacher and learner. For 
instance, Eros and other spirits "serve as the medium for divination, for priestly expertise 
in sacrifice, ritual and spells, and for all prophecy and sorcery" (Symposium 39, 202e-
203a). This is because, like the shaman, Eros is a messenger spirit who carries messages 
back and forth between realms, between gods and humans. Moreover, Eros's aim is to 
bring forth beauty in body and mind (Symposium 43, 206b). Similarly, in Plato's
Republic, which in many ways describes the fundamentals of his system of reasoning, Socrates argues in the "Allegory of the Cave" that once an individual has ascended from the cave and realized the extent of the real world beyond mere shadows upon a wall, he must return to the cave to help others out of it (234). In the same way, Whitman's speaker provides a point of access for his audience through the portrayal of his self—the representing and represented aspects of his consciousness—as alive, active, and interactive, despite being confined to an inanimate book. The very title, "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand," calls a reader's attention to the book-object before us in three distinct ways. First, "whoever you are" makes it clear that the speaker's attention is on us as readers—we are unknown to him, but he is certain that we exist, and that when we encounter this we will recognize ourselves as the intended audience for this writing. Next, "now" points the reader to the moment of reading, rather than the speaker's moment of writing in the 1850s. The deictic indicator, "now," and the use of the present tense throughout the poem work to align the moment of utterance with the moment of reading, despite the historical gap between the two. "Release me now before troubling yourself any further, let go your hand from my shoulders" (WHH 11), suggests the speaker, implying the reader—and the reader's present moment—in the speaker's moment of utterance. Finally, the third way the title calls readers' attention to the book before us is through the reference to the speaker, "holding me [...] in hand," which proposes a slippage between the speaker's identity and the book-object. We realize the speaker is not immediately before us, and that "in hand" we hold a book-object. Yet this suggests that he is identifiable and embodied through this object that we can hold and carry with us. This notion is repeated at several intervals throughout the poem, as when the speaker
urges, "Put me down and depart on your way" (WHH 12), "Or if you will, thrusting me beneath your clothing, / Where I may feel the throbs of your heart or rest upon your hip, / Carry me when you go forth over land or sea" (WHH 22-4). Robert K. Martin reads Whitman's invitation to thrust his book "beneath your clothing" as a rejection of his former idealism in favour of the bodily, but I believe this would be a turn toward inconsistency that is contrary to the purpose of the work as a whole. In fact, Whitman was known to pride himself for being "a shade under six feet tall and weighing about 180 pounds" (Kaplan 152). Because of this, the invitation to thrust him beneath our clothing and carry him forth implies awareness on the speaker's part that this would be physically impossible for most people, if this were a reference to Whitman's actual body. We can conclude this is not the man we are thrusting beneath our clothing, to carry over land and sea. Clearly, he intends to incarnate himself in a roughly 400-page text. However, it is important to note that even in this form, he stages his own agency. The primary grammatical subject throughout the poem is the "you" of the reader; the speaker describes the reader's agency in this relationship, which I will return to in a moment. But he also interjects his own agency at certain key points, as in the passage above. "Thrusting me beneath your clothing," and "Carry me forth" both use the objective pronoun "me" to refer to the speaker/book-object as experiencer, yet between these phrases, we find "Where I may feel the throbs of your heart or rest upon your hip," suggesting that even incarnated into an inanimate book-object, the speaker retains agency; he characterizes himself as able to feel, think, and act through the embodied form of the book-object. Although this does create an ideal platform on which to stage intimate contact between speaker and reader, a means to embody bodilessness and to render the disembodied
identitylessness of the speaker identifiable to the reader, many critics have argued that this is a failed attempt. Scholars like Robert K. Martin and Tenney Nathanson view the elusiveness of the speaker as a failure to truly manifest himself in the text, or they consider the book-object as a mere crutch for a weak suggestion of co-presence. However, I believe this staging of presence deliberately serves to make obvious the absence of the author, and the elusiveness of the speaker. Indeed, the speaker confirms that he will not be recognized: "For these leaves and me you will not understand, / They will elude you at first and still more afterward, I will elude you also" (WHH 28-9). This staging of identifiability and embodiment also serves to render the message universal, by actually preserving the identitylessness and disembodiment of the speaker; it both provides the reader with a physical point of contact with this identity—the book-object—and through obvious disparity between book-object and consciousness, makes real the disembodiment of the speaker, and thus his potential to assume any identity and convey a universal message.

Although the lover/instructor in Plato and Whitman is willing and able to relate to his protégé's level of understanding, the burden of learning is placed entirely upon the student. This is evident in Plato's description of the ideal republican school system in The Republic. Although all children were to be admitted to Plato's ideal vision of a school, only those consistently demonstrating high potential throughout their adolescence would be permitted to carry on to higher levels of education and of government. It remains the student's responsibility to fulfill his or her potential in such a system, regardless of what kind of career this might lead to (Republic 103-7). Moreover, this onus is also clear in Socrates's attitudes in the dialogues—when one member of the discussion fails to
comprehend and merely wanders off, Socrates consistently remains focused on the students who are still attending the lesson. It is also evident in the shifts in agency in "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand," which place the burden of following the speaker squarely on the shoulders of the reader. The poem is one of caution, wherein the speaker takes on the task of warning the reader, but asks that the reader take an active role in making a decision in light of this warning. Thus, there exists a balance of agency in this poem that shifts between speaker and reader. As discussed in the previous paragraph, the poem's title line places the focus of attention upon the reader. However, the speaker quickly asserts his agency, offering the first of his cautions: "I give you fair warning before you attempt me further, / I am not what you supposed, but far different" (WHH 3-4). In these lines, it is also apparent that the speaker is making certain assumptions regarding the reader's course of action, namely, that the reader is struggling to grasp the speaker's meaning. Next, rather than outright affirming, "I am looking for followers and lovers," he places the burden upon his reader to take agency by volunteering, asking, "Who is he that would become my follower? / Who would sign himself a candidate for my affections?" (WHH 5-6). Throughout the poem, the speaker aligns his representing consciousness with both the present and anticipated experiences of the reader, through the use of the second person: "You would have to give up all else" (WHH 8), for otherwise, and perhaps even so, "These leaves and me you will not understand" (WHH 28), "Already you see I have escaped you" (WHH 31). Again, the speaker is making assumptions about the reader's state of mind, specifically, with regard to whether the reader is managing to follow the meaning of his discourse. Ultimately, however, the speaker leaves it to the reader to take initiative and struggle with his
message. In fact, the speaker reserves his own agency for permitting or eluding the agency of the reader. While he suggests he may "permit you" (WHH 19) to kiss him, he also eludes the reader through passive resistance: "I lie as one dumb, a gawk, or unborn, or dead" (WHH 16), "I silently sleep" (WHH 26), and finally, he concludes, "I have escaped you" (WHH 31). This may be the result of his resistance, or of the student's failure to grasp his meaning, or both. In any case, the onus remains upon the reader to struggle to follow what Whitman's speaker is getting at through his hints, or what he means when he discourages the not completely willing student, insisting, "For all is useless without that which you may guess at many times and not hit, that which I hinted at; / Therefore release me and depart on your way" (WHH 37-8).

But what is it that the speaker hints at and hopes his reader will be able to identify through much study and devotion? These hints are certainly in the text at hand, and indeed, we have considered some of them already in our exploration of lexical collocation in Chapter II. The act of translation Whitman's speaker engages in is one of the chief functions ascribed to Eros in his relations between gods and humans: he "interpret[s] and carr[ies] messages from humans to gods and from gods to humans" (Symposium 39, 202e). In a similar way, Socrates is also engaged in a process of translation, redefining common terms in dialogue, in an attempt to probe their deeper meanings. For instance, in The Symposium, Socrates helps the participants to redefine their understanding of love by posing question after question about the spirit Eros, and thus moving from a simplistic understanding of love as a beautiful, wonderful, powerful experience, to a more complex notion of lack and resulting desire (Symposium 33-43, 198e-206b) However, the multiplicity of the speaker's meanings again emerges in
"Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand." Earlier, I examined the lines where the speaker asks, "Who is he that would become my follower? / Who would sign himself a candidate for my affections?" (WHH 5-6), and I would like to look at these once again. The pairing of these two terms, "follower" and "candidate for [...] affections," suggests to me the student/lover relationship described by Plato and suggested throughout my reading of Whitman's poetry. However, many critics, like Robert K. Martin, have chosen to ignore the "follower" and instead focus only on the "candidate for [...] affections," which leads them inevitably to conclude that Whitman's chief aim in this poem, and indeed in the Calamus cluster, is to hint at his homosexuality and identify similarly-oriented individuals. Clearly, this is a limited vision of his project, as not only does the relationship between speaker and reader portrayed here mirror the lover/instructor relationship in Plato, but the language Whitman uses is also highly suggestive of a path of spiritual learning and development, which, as Socrates makes clear repeatedly throughout his dialogues and through his martyrdom for his principles, can sometimes be a difficult and lonely pursuit (and thus worthy of such a poem of warning). A few lines in particular point to a consistency of the underlying spiritual theme throughout this poem:

The way is suspicious, the result uncertain, perhaps destructive,
You would have to give up all else, I alone would expect to be your sole
and exclusive standard,
Your novitiate would even then be long and exhausting,
The whole past theory of your life and all conformity to the lives around
you would have to be abandon'd. (WHH 7-10)
Three words stand out in this passage, if only for their rarity: "standard" appears three times in *Leaves of Grass*, "novitiate" appears only here, and "conformity" appears on a mere four occasions. Moreover, all three of these terms are notable for their flexible meanings. For instance, "standard" has a variety of meanings as a noun, from a standard measure by which weights or lengths can be calibrated, to a flag standard bearing the insignia of a government or an army and carried forth into battle. In general terms, it is "An authoritative or recognized exemplar of correctness, perfection, or some definite degree of any quality" ("Standard"). Either Whitman's speaker is insisting that he remain the only symbol held up as emblematic of his cause, or he is arguing that he is the person by whom others should judge their own quality. These meanings are certainly latent within this line and add depth to the intended meaning; however, another meaning seems more relevant here, given the emphasis placed on the identification of the speaker with the book-object, discussed earlier. Standards are also "The books or documents accepted by a church as the authoritative statement of its creed" ("Standard"). The entry notes indicate that this meaning for the word came into use in the 1840s and continued to appear throughout the nineteenth-century (it remains in use today), and that although it usually appears in the plural, it occasionally appears in the singular in reference to a specific doctrinal standard. Hence in this instance, the singular is appropriately used, as the speaker's is the only creed he intends for his reader to follow. Meanwhile, rather than use other favoured terms, like "journey-work" or "apprenticeship," Whitman's speaker refers to the reader's learning period as a "novitiate," which is properly, "The probationary period undertaken by a novice before taking religious vows" ("Novitiate").
If these hints are not becoming obvious enough, there is one more. "Conformity to the lives around you" could be an alternative phrasing for "living life the same way everyone else does," especially given the contrastive context established in the first part of the line, "The whole past theory of your life," which calls to mind a deliberate development of a personal life philosophy, not simply the mimicking of others. Of course, "Conformity" also has a specialized meaning: "Conformity in worship, adherence to the form of religion legally established or publicly recognized" ("Conformity"). Thus conformity to the lives of others may easily refer to the simplistic acceptance of their belief system. Despite these layers of meaning pointing to the spiritual theme of the poem, which to the best of my knowledge, has not been discussed by scholars, many will probably object that none of this in any way qualifies the homoerotic impulse of "the comrade's long-dwelling kiss" (WHH 20). However, it is essential to remember that the preferred site for this kiss is on the beach, the site where the spiritual and physical realms merge. By this physical contact, the speaker is able to lead the reader/lover toward the spirituality of the sea. Moreover, "comrade" is not entirely without spiritual connotations of its own; in "Song of Myself" we encounter God described as "The great Camerado" (1200) by the speaker, "camerado" being an archaic form of "comrade," and appropriately so, as God must certainly be deemed first among spiritual lovers. Finally, the emphasis upon learning is reiterated toward the end of the poem, when the speaker warns, "But these leaves conning, you con at peril" (WHH 27). To con is not only to know, but also to study or learn, and especially to commit to memory by repetition. Clearly, Whitman's speaker is insisting here that to be able to recite his poetry is not enough—readers must invest more of themselves into his meaning than simply learning his words by rote. As he insists, "it
is not for what I have put into it that I have written this book, / Nor is it by reading it you will acquire it" (WHH 32-3). Rather, the reader must take the glimpses of the spiritual realm offered and set out to understand it for themselves—it is not accessible through this book, but Whitman's speaker clearly intends to begin his audience along their path.

In summary, much like Eros and Socrates, Whitman's speaker remains elusive. Eros and Socrates are both caught between realms and can neither completely belong to one or the other. Similarly, Whitman's speaker has his feet in both the spiritual and physical worlds, like the calamus grass in the marsh. Moreover, at no point does Whitman's speaker consent to give himself fully to his audience—he asserts his avoidance: "I will certainly elude you" (WHH 29), "I have escaped from you" (WHH 31), "Nor will the candidates for my love [...] prove victorious" (WHH 35); "Therefore release me and depart on your way" (WHH 38). Indeed, the speaker will certainly continue to elude his followers, and continue to lead them on, just as Socrates does to his young lovers. Because "He most honors my style who learns under it to destroy the teacher" (SM 1236), readers can only expect to become worthy of the speaker's affections when we no longer have need of them. Moreover, the speaker's relationship to his audience in "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand" provides added support for my previous argument about his relationship to other characters portrayed in "The Sleepers" and "I Sing the Body Electric." We see the relationship here is focused on spiritual instruction, with physical contact emerging only as a first step along this route, supporting the notion that his connection to other characters is also about appreciation of spiritual beauty and an imaginative connection between all souls. Because of its spiritual significance, Whitman approaches the body without fear and uses the erotic to support
the notion of the divine individual as a being with united body and soul. However, this individualism is also important to the theme of democracy implicit in much of Whitman's poetry. One of Plato's symposium members, Pausanias, critiques the Persian tyranny, noting, "No doubt, it doesn't suit their government that their subjects should have big ideas or develop strong friendships and personal bonds, which are promoted by all these activities, especially by love" (Symposium 14, 182b-c). As in Plato, in Whitman's poetry, eroticism is important not only for its educational influence, but also for its encouragement of sharing ideas and of forging significant community bonds, practices inherent to effective democratic government. Indeed, in Chapter IV, I will examine the speaker's relationship to this community and to his cosmos.
In the past two chapters, I have examined the speaker's portrayal of himself, and I have probed his physical and spiritual relationships to the individuals with whom he interacts. I have noted that the speaker disconnects himself from any specific location through linguistic and imagistic disembodiment, and I have concluded that the eroticised interactions between bodies that he portrays are oriented toward the development of the soul. But many questions remain: what role does the spirituality I have been describing play in public life? How does it influence political life? This chapter will explore the relationship of the speaker to his world. The poems selected for analysis, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," and "A Noiseless Patient Spider," each illustrate different aspects of this relationship. They portray the speaker's place as an individual poet in a nation of individuals, as a citizen in a democratic republic, and as a soul confronting the cosmos. In these poems, the poet of democracy weaves together his spiritual bond with other individuals (including his audience) and his role as a spiritual singer with a conception of his place in public life that integrates the political, democratic individualism of the United States with a parallel idea of the individual soul as a functioning being in a cosmic pattern.

4.1 The Speaker and His World

"Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" are both poems that depict the speaker's place in his nation. In "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," he portrays himself amidst the crowds—an individual among individuals—on the deck of
the ferry crossing the East River between Manhattan and Brooklyn; meanwhile, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" is an elegy to President Lincoln and thus implicitly portrays the speaker's understanding of his place and role with respect to his deceased president, and to his nation.

"Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" captures routine daily experience as it is rendered timeless through a natural analogy to an archetypal version of itself, the mythological echoes of the river, the boat, the flow of tides, and the ferry crossing. Most scholars approach the poem as a discussion of the flow and changes of time, and of the unity and coherence of the universal "scheme" across time (CBF 7). Critics with philosophical leanings tend to interpret it as giving ordinary human beings a kind of transcendence—certainly this is one of the reasons Henry David Thoreau proclaimed it one of Whitman's best poems, along with "Song of Myself." Meanwhile, those scholars with a more psychological orientation to their criticism tend to disagree as to how much it reveals about the troubled psychological state of the speaker—his doubts and fear of intimacy—and as to whether the poem expresses a progression toward or a regression away from any resolution. Both aspects of criticism of this poem play into my own understanding of the speaker as suggesting the transcendent nature of the human individual, and of his need to remain disembodied and de-situated in order to convey this message.

In contrast, the elegy, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," was written in the weeks after President Lincoln's death. Many critics have noted that while Lincoln's death is the occasion for the poem, death itself is its subject. Neither Lincoln nor the fact of his assassination is ever mentioned, and the president is only referred to on a symbolic level, represented at least in part by the star. Indeed, criticism of the poem has focused on
its style, structure, symbols—the hermit thrush, the star, and the lilac—and on its resolution, where the poet walks with "the thought of death" and "the knowledge of death," two distinct companions, in remembrance of the dead. Given Whitman's lifelong emphasis on being a new American voice, it is not surprising that while the poem follows the general pattern of elegy from grief to consolation and includes many traditional elegiac elements, its progression is unconventional, and it winds back on itself a few times before arriving at this resolution. Despite its avoidance of any specific reference to the president, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" also manages to indirectly explore the relationship between poet and political leader. Moreover, like "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," this poem also suggests the transcendent nature of the human being, and addresses questions of the flow of time and the permanence of death.

While some readings of "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" do gesture indirectly toward the spiritual foundations of the United States democracy, most do not consider how the poet achieves the expression of his dual consciousness; his awareness of the material, daily world, and his awareness of the spiritual world underlying it. R.W. French mentions that the thrush is a symbol for the poet in "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," and that the thrush emerges from the swamp, one of the spiritualized locations where water and earth meet, allowing the poet access to both the spiritual and material realms they respectively represent (772). However, while the sailing of the ferry from Manhattan to Brooklyn in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" is sometimes recognized as a spiritualized voyage, many of the other indications of the fundamentally spiritual nature of the poem's message are often overlooked. Each in its own way, these poems suggest that the eternal spiritual realm—
what Christians might call the Kingdom of God—coexists continuously with the material world and temporal flow of daily life. The poet is able to perceive this thanks to his privileged position between these realms, and he aims to communicate this reality to his readers. He achieves this communication by continuing to displace his voice, to use imagery of transience and placelessness, and to construct metaphors by compounding meanings. By these means, the speaker is able to equate the place of the individual in a democracy with the place of the soul in the cosmos, and to interpret between these two realms, illustrating their connections and thereby demonstrating the significance of worldly activities to the coexisting spiritual life of the nation and its individual citizens.

4.2 A POET SUSPENDED: "CROSSING BROOKLYN FERRY"

My analysis of this process begins with "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," which recounts the speaker's reflections on the passage across the river and on the world around him. This is an unusual poem to consider as the speaker is understood to be specifically located—an infrequent occurrence in Whitman's poetry. The ferry was a feature of the historical New York landscape, running across the East River between Manhattan and Brooklyn prior to the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge. The speaker carefully negotiates this location, in many ways implying his presence in a specific place and time, and in many ways refusing to commit himself to it. Apart from the reference to the ferry in the title, the speaker's address to the waters, "Flood-tide below me" (CBF 1), in the poem's first line seems to indicate that he is on board. However, he never overtly confirms this—there is no mention of him standing on the deck, or seeing or greeting the captain. In fact, the evidence once again points to his unwillingness to be situated. Three
interlinked characteristics of the speaker's discourse point to this conclusion: what he perceives, his emphasis on the experiences of others, and the related split between the experiences of his represented and representing consciousnesses.

Based on the description in the first two lines, of the water below and the clouds and sun in the sky above, readers might expect the speaker to continue to describe what he sees. However, following a brief acknowledgment that he sees crowds and ferry-boats, the speaker shifts immediately to a different mode of perception. What he sees is:

The impalpable sustenance of me from all things at all hours of the day,
The simple, compact, well-join'd scheme, myself disintegrated, every one disintegrated yet part of the scheme,
The similitudes of the past and those of the future,
The glories strung like beads on my smallest sights and hearings, on the walk in the street and the passage over the river,
The current rushing so swiftly and swimming with me far away. (CBF 6-10)

This is not the imagery of the material world around the speaker—although the street and river are worldly objects, the speaker's focus is on the glories he perceives in these, his smallest sights and hearings; the street and river themselves are clearly less important by comparison with his more significant observation of the cosmic scheme of the past, present and future. Thus, this seems to be the "impalpable," "disintegrated" imagery of the speaker's meditations, mentioned in line five. However, the absence of verbs and
deictic indicators makes the speaker impossible to situate with reference to this passage. The mention of "current" may imply the passage of the ferry, but the immediate use of "swimming" brings to mind the accumulated imagery of swimming and bathing that appears throughout *Leaves of Grass* in conjunction with the passage toward a more spiritually aware consciousness.

Moreover, the speaker's focus shifts quickly from his own location above the water and below the sky to, "The others that are to follow me, the ties between me and them" (CBF 11). The speaker does not indicate whether his followers will step onto the ferry behind him, if that is indeed where he is situated, or whether they will simply live in the years following his own lifetime:

Others will enter the gates of the ferry and cross from shore to shore,

Others will watch the run of the flood-tide,

Others will see the shipping of Manhattan north and west, and the heights of Brooklyn to the south and east,

Others will see the islands large and small;

Fifty years hence, others will see them as they cross, the sun half an hour high,

A hundred years hence, or ever so many hundred years hence, others will see them,

Will enjoy the sunset, the pouring-in of the flood-tide, the falling-back to the sea of the ebb-tide. (CBF 13-9)
It is important to note that although the speaker does specify that others will ride the ferry, he does not give any indication that he is on board in his present moment of speaking—in no way does he say they will take the ferry crossing, "as I do now." The repeated use of "others," although it carries though from the "others that will follow" of the previous lines, also insistently emphasizes the opposition between the speaker's self and the others outside of himself. Thus, in contrast to the previous verse, where the speaker described his meditations, the worldly sights do not seem to belong to him, but only to those others who are yet to come. His vision has already transcended theirs, and he no longer sees the material world in terms of its sights and sounds, in terms of its land (shore, islands) and commerce (shipping). The emphasis on the temporal aspect of others to follow is supported by his reiterated mentions of time frames with respect to his own present moment: "fifty years hence, [...] a hundred years hence, or ever so many years hence." Once again, while the sights of the others, years hence, may rest upon the material world, their vision is also subsumed by the cosmic insight the speaker has already achieved. By the end of the verse, the others years hence are watching "the sunset, the pouring-in of the flood-tide, the falling-back to the sea of the ebb-tide." Their focus is shifting from the material world to the spiritual world the speaker perceives.

The notion that the speaker's consciousness has moved beyond simple sensory perceptions of the material world is also supported by his navigation between aspects of his consciousness, between his past memories and imagined future, and the apparent present. His memories include the sights and sounds of Manhattan and Brooklyn and the transit from one to the other. He incorporates a straightforward use of the displaced mode in recounting these memories. Throughout section three, the speaker explains that he
"saw" and "look'd" at the ships, storehouses, docks, foundries, and houses—his representing consciousness recounts the remembered experiences of his extroverted represented consciousness from a different, unspecified time and place. This use of the displaced mode of recollection is also aligned with the experiences of others. He explains that he too has seen all of these sights, presumably as the readers, the "others that will follow," are seeing them now. Yet the vision of his present moment is difficult to situate. He addresses his readers, "I am with you, you men and women of a generation, or ever so many generations hence" (CBF 21). Through the word "hence," he juxtaposes his present moment of writing with the reader's present moment of reading, acknowledging they are different, yet asserting they are the same through his claim "I am with you." He proposes to be both in his present moment of writing and in the reader's present moment of reading, despite the inherent opposition between them. The speaker remains impossible to situate in light of his insistence that time, place, and distance avail not, and when he returns to the immediate mode in section four, readers are given another classic example of the speaker's elusiveness:

"These and all else were to me the same as they are to you,
I loved well those cities, loved well the stately and rapid river,
The men and women I saw were all near to me,
Others the same—others who look back on me because I look'd forward to them,
(The time will come, though I stop here to-day and to-night.) (CBF 49-53)
In this passage the speaker shifts between deictic indicators of proximity and distance, between past memories and the reader's present moment, between a conjecture for the future, "the time will come," and the displaced, immediate mode, "I stop here to-day and to-night." In combination with the suggestion that his perception has transcended simple worldly appearances, and his alignment of sensory understanding of the world with others yet to come, this distinctive split between his remembered experience and undefined present only confirms the impossibility of situating the poem's speaker. What remains clear is that from this undefined position, the speaker has access to both his remembered understanding of the material world, and to a corresponding contemplation of the spiritual world.

In Chapter III, I examined the beach and the marsh as spiritual sites, where the spiritual medium of water merges with the material medium of land. Like boats, ferries were, for Whitman, a means of accessing the spiritual medium. Indeed, ferry voyages always call to mind the archetypal ferry across the river Styx in the underworld, the one-way journey from the land of the living to the afterlife. For Whitman, the ferry existed in both realms; it allowed riders to access the material and spiritual realms simultaneously. More importantly, in the case of the Brooklyn Ferry, the transit across water—the spiritual voyage between shores—is potentially a part of the daily commute. Several elements in the poem point to the ferry as a point of access. Indeed, the poem begins with the line, "Flood-tide below me! I see you face to face! / Clouds of the west—sun there half an hour high—I see you also face to face" (CBF 1-2). From the start, the speaker is carried upon the flood of spiritual waters, surrounded by the clouds of the spiritual atmosphere, and confronted by the symbolic centre of the cosmic scheme, the sun. The
speaker expresses his recognition and understanding of these symbolic elements of the spiritual world through his claim to see them "face to face," which implies the same kind of personal confidence and understanding that, in business relationships for instance, only emerges in face-to-face meetings and that simply cannot be achieved through mediated contact like teleconferencing or e-mail. In the next verse, the speaker juxtaposes his deep understanding of the spiritual realm with his fundamental curiosity regarding the material world—the costumed crowds on the ferry-boats. The description of the crowds as "attired in the usual costumes" (CBF 3) is especially significant, for "attire" has a strong collocational bond with "costume" and Whitman certainly did not need to reiterate the notion of dress and disguise. With only minor changes to the line, the alternatives include, "Crowds of men and women in the usual attire/costumes," and "Crowds of men and women attired/costumed as usual." The use of both terms in one line is a reinforcement of this nexus of connected ideas, and as Halliday points out, repeated allusions to lexically cohesive items within a short period over a discourse makes the motif discussed memorable (Halliday 535-6). Thus, the reinforced mention of "costumes" prepares the reader for a discussion of the underlying reality that is different from its appearance, or costume. Moreover, this sets the tone for the next sections of the poem, discussed earlier in terms of the speaker's displacement throughout, where he juxtaposes his meditations upon the spiritual realm that exists outside of time with the appearances of the world he has seen around him.

The speaker represents some traditional attitudes toward the world of appearances in section six of the poem, which explores his memories of his connection to the material world. Christians have long represented the world of appearances as leading an individual
toward temptation and evil, a view the speaker acknowledges as his own "dark patches" (CBF 65). He recounts his lies, lusts, anger, and indulgences in the world of flesh. However, the end of the section brings a shift that carries through to the end of the poem to not only resolve this rather negative view of the world, but also to posit a significant claim regarding the spirituality of the material world. This shift begins when the speaker explains he has:

Lived the same life with the rest, the same old laughing, gnawing,
   sleeping,
Play'd the part that still looks back on the actor or actress,
The same old role, the role that is what we make it, as great as we like,
Or as small as we like, or both great and small. (CBF 82-5)

By openly acknowledging that he plays a role in the material world, and that he perceives the role he has played as he moves through the world of appearances, the speaker implicitly suggests that there is something beyond appearances that readers must take into account. As he notes, the role each person plays in life is only what he or she makes of it, meaning that some may choose to make more of it than others.

Before following up this new lead, the speaker has another classic episode of elusiveness as he claims to draw near the reader. He achieves this in section seven, where he shifts between the present tense and certainty, "Closer yet I approach you" (CBF 86), and recounting his planning in the past tense, "I laid in my stores in advance, / I consider'd long and seriously of you before you were born" (CBF 87-8), only to arrive at
present tense hypothesis: "Who knows, for all the distance, but I am as good as looking at you now, for all you cannot see me?" (CBF 91). Clearly, he is unwilling to commit to a sense of proximity with the reader. He calls attention to the distance between him and us, his readers, even though he earlier insisted "distance avails not" (CBF 56), he fails to affirm that he is watching, but is only doing something as good as watching, and reminds us that we cannot see him.

Nevertheless, the speaker is evidently approaching his audience in progressive steps. In section eight, he provides his translation of the evils and temptations identified in section six:

Ah, what can ever be more stately and admirable to me than mast-hemm'd Manhattan?

River and sunset and scallop-edg'd waves of flood-tide?

The sea-gulls oscillating their bodies, the hay-boat in the twilight, and the belated lighter?

What gods can exceed these that clasp me by the hand, and with voices I love call me promptly and loudly by my nighest name as I approach?

What is more subtle than this which ties me to the woman or man that looks in my face?

Which fuses me into you now, and pours my meaning into you?

We understand then do we not?

What I promis'd without mentioning it, have you not accepted?
Chapter IV

What the study could not teach—what the preaching could not accomplish

is accomplish'd, is it not? (CBF 92-100)

"Mast-hemm'd Manhattan" is no longer simply a centre of trade and commerce, it is associated implicitly with the river, waves, and flood, all reiterations of the spiritual waters around the island, but also with the sunset, the transition from day to the spirituality of the darkness, discussed in Chapter III. The lusty bodies that pressed against the speaker are now "gods," whose touch is no longer an eroticized grasp but a hand clasped in true affection. Moreover, just as the speaker encountered the flood-tide, the clouds, and the sun "face to face" in the first lines of his poem, he explains that the people around him now look "in my face." This repeated expression, only slightly altered, suggests that an undeniable understanding has been reached, allowing the speaker, across distance and time, to suddenly come into full intellectual and spiritual contact with his reader, where he was elusive earlier. This look of understanding, he says, "fuses me into you now, and pours my meaning into you," and in the next verse, he insists that an understanding has been reached that is beyond the realm of study and preaching. The ferry-voyage, then, is a transit that allows the speaker to see the spiritualized world permeating the material world. In case the reader has not grasped this understanding, the discovery is celebrated throughout section nine, which ends with a clear articulation of the point:

Appearances, now or henceforth, indicate what you are,

You necessary film, continue to envelop the soul,
Chapter IV

About my body for me, and your body for you, be hung out divinest aromas,

Thrive, cities—bring your freight, bring your shows, ample and sufficient rivers,

Expand, being than which none else is perhaps more spiritual,

Keep your places, objects than which none else is more lasting.

You have waited, you always wait, you dumb, beautiful ministers,

We receive you with free sense at last, and are insatiate hence-forward,

Not you any more shall be able to foil us, or withhold yourselves from us,

We use you, and do not cast you aside—we plant you permanently within us,

We fathom you not—we love you—there is perfection in you also,

You furnish your parts toward eternity,

Great or small, you furnish your parts toward the soul. (CBF 120-32)

Understood properly, appearances are the key to perceiving the "glories strung like beads" (CBF 9) across the most common sights of daily life. The ferry crossing provides travellers access to the spiritual world by freeing their senses, allowing travellers to see appearances as "ministers" silently pointing to the spiritual world innate within themselves. Thus, the poem describes a process of achieving spiritual vision through a worldly point of access. The physical transit from one point to another, the positioning of the speaker and the others he sees upon the spiritualized waters in-between shores, the
motionless motion of the ferry rider as he "stand[s] and lean[s] on the rail, yet hurr[ies] with the swift current" (CBF 25), each contribute to shifting the ferry rider's perspective from the world he or she is immersed in to the timelessness of that world, to its enduring qualities, and thus to its eternal spiritual life. Through this shift in perspective, appearances become valuable and the material world is valorized; no longer is the material world a source of temptation and deceit. The moment of vision granted to the ferry-rider persists and endures, developing into a perception of the material world that can comprehend some of the many other points of access to the spiritual realm discussed throughout this thesis; for instance, the grass as an indication of the individual, of democracy and common humanity, and of the eternal cycle by which life is continuously renewed, or the body and its sexuality as an indication of the human need for connection, or the seashore and swamp as sites where the boundary between land and water, between material and spiritual, becomes merged and unclear. No longer can the individual with this privileged perception consider the material world as one of temptations; permeating his or her understanding of this world is the visible perfection of the spiritual realm in plain sight.

However, the speaker's discovery of the inherent perfection of the material world, and of its ability to lead us toward the spiritual world, has some dramatic implications for our understanding of our world and our place in it. Unlike the archetypal ferry that runs a one-way trip for passengers between life and the afterlife, Whitman's passengers "cross from shore to shore" (CBF 4), apparently in both directions. On the water, ferry travellers can find an interlude where the material world gives way to the fundamentally spiritual existence that permeates it. Indeed, the speaker looks into the water early in the poem and
his own divinity becomes immediately apparent to him; he recalls seeing "the fine centrifugal spokes of light round the shape of my head in the sunlit water" (CBF 33). This vision of his own halo affirms the conclusion reached in Chapter II, that the speaker sees both himself and all other humans as divine. Indeed, he later invites all ferry travellers, present and future, to observe the same: "Diverge, fine spokes of light, from the shape of my head, or any one's head, in the sunlit water!" (CBF 116).

This understanding of the divinity of the individual also relates to the place of the nation within the cosmic scheme. Indeed, to revise the Christian notion of the Kingdom of God, the speaker's nation becomes the republic of the many individual gods inhabiting it. To return to some of the lines considered earlier in this chapter, the spirituality that exists on an individual level re-emerges, on a second consideration, on a political level. The speaker remembers the ship masts in the harbour bearing "the flags of all nations" (CBF 43), suggesting that the city, or at least the harbour around it, is a synecdochical figure for the place of America in the political world—it has ties to other nations, and is host to these nations; it is the land to which others come. Thus, the speaker invites the future of the cities and the nation: "Thrive, cities—bring your freight, bring your shows, ample and sufficient rivers" (CBF 123). In this line, it is unclear whether the invitation to "bring your freight, bring your shows" is addressed to the cities or to the rivers, or whether the cities are invited to bring their freight, shows, and rivers. In either case, the cities, freight, and shows become linked to rivers, tying them all to the spiritual realm. Thus, although cities, their commerce, and their activities belong to the world of appearances, they also provide a link to the underlying spiritual world. It does not take an extraordinary leap of the imagination to understand the city's spirituality as extending to
the nation. The speaker establishes this connection with his question: "Ah, what can ever be more stately and admirable to me than mast-hemm'd Manhattan? / River and sunset and scallop-edg'd waves of flood-tide?" (CBF 92-3). The word "stately" means both majestic and pertaining to the state, and of course, the proximity of these references to the city, the state, and the imagery of the waves and tide once again bind both city and state to the eternal spiritual realm. In this way, the speaker works to ensure that the development of spiritual perception charted throughout this poem is oriented toward understanding the divinity of individuals and the divine nature of the democratic republic they have created.

4.3 The Spiritual Democratic Merger: "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd"

Like "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" also explores the opportunities for crossover between the material and spiritual realms. Two key historical facts are essential to keep in mind with respect to this poem's composition: it was written at the end of a four-year Civil War that struggled, in part, toward an ideal of national identity, and it was written on the occasion of the death of the national leader, President Lincoln, and purports to memorialize him. Therefore, before the reader can even engage with the text of the elegy itself, the circumstances of the poem's composition have already necessarily evoked a set of ideas and ideals related to democratic nationhood, and the average citizen's ability to recognize and elect effective republican leadership. Thus, unlike "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," the emphasis in "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" is not on developing the mode of perception
required to understand the congruities between the material and spiritual realms, but on comprehending the place of the individual within his or her nation, and the inherently spiritual nature of the democratic nation itself.

Many critics have observed the representational elegizing of Lincoln through the poem's symbolism. The general concurrence is that the star represents Lincoln, the thrush represents the poet, and the lilacs represent consolation found in the natural world rather than in a blind belief in a Christian vision of the eternal afterlife. Others have focused on the portrayal of Whitman's sense of kinship with Lincoln, whom he described in his other writings as manly, pure, hearty, and tender, and thus in many ways like himself. This personal affection for the president is conveyed in the poem, and has in turn attracted the attention of critics who read this as yet another one of Whitman's homoerotic texts.

Critical attention has also focused on the role and presence of death in the poem, and the speaker's sudden, intuitive discovery of the thought of death and the sacred knowledge of death, which R.W. French describes as a "complete comprehension of death itself and its place in the universal order" (772), and which he attributes to Whitman's experiences as a nurse in the Civil War hospitals. However, I wish to focus on the poem's slippery issues of identity and agency, which allow Whitman to use Lincoln's death and memorial to explore the individual's relationship to the state, as well as the spiritual bonds at work in this relationship.

The poem features a complex structure that interweaves the three chief symbols, developing their meaning further each time they reappear. It begins with a powerful articulation of the mourning experience, cast in epic and prophetic terms: "When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd, / And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the
night, / I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring" (WLL 1-3). Here the lilacs and great star are used as time markers for mourning—appropriately, one occurs yearly, while the other is an astronomical phenomenon that may occur once in a lifetime. Mourning takes on a paradoxical duality, as the speaker mourns on one occasion, but also integrates a yearly cycle of mourning. The speaker then presents his three key symbols, the star, the lilac, and the thrush. Although each of these symbols is significant to this analysis, I will focus primarily on the poet and his representation in the form of the thrush, as well as his relationship to the president, seen in both the passing coffin and the drooping star.

The solitary thrush is first introduced in section four, singing in seclusion in the swamp. Much like the poet and calamus grass, the thrush makes its home in a site of merger between land and water. His is the "Song of the bleeding throat, / Death's outlet song of life, (for well dear brother I know, / If thou wast not granted to sing thou would'st surely die)" (WLL 23-5). The poet and the thrush both present the dichotomy of life and death, for like sound and silence, neither can exist without the other. This begins to set up the resolution of the poem—that death is a necessary part of the life cycle—a theme that is brought back and developed several times throughout the poem. Indeed section five evolves this idea in a different way, juxtaposing the spring landscape and the imagery of new, young life, of fresh sprouting grass, with the passing coffin, presumably carrying Lincoln's body. Indeed, after the president's body lay in state in Washington, the coffin made a marathon 1,600-mile journey from the Capitol, beginning April 21 and ending with its interment in Springfield, Illinois on May 4, 1865. The speaker recounts this journey in section six, and the nation's observance of its passage, "With the pomp of the
inloop'd flags and the cities draped in black, / With the show of the States themselves as of crape-veil'd women standing" (WLL 35-6). The States and cities, attired in black, are a mirror of their people; indeed, for Whitman, as for his speaker, the nation was no more nor any less than its people—the people who run for office, the people who vote and elect representatives, the people who carry on the daily business of commerce and trade, the people who drive the omnibuses and sail the ferries, the carpenters and farmers, earning an honest living. In this section, then, we see two aspects of the heart of the nation; the people who form the nation, and their honouring of the dead president whom they elected, and who had led them through the trials of civil war to unification.

Section six ends with the speaker giving a sprig of the perennial lilac to the passing coffin, suggesting this gesture might somehow signify eternal life through translation into other forms, as with many of the other symbols of growth following death throughout *Leaves of Grass*. However, it is in section seven that the full implications of the lilac's perenniality are explored, and in which the speaker blurs the distinction between the two aspects of the nation—the people and their president. He addresses the president's coffin:

(Nor for you, for one alone,

Blossoms and branches green to coffins all I bring,

For fresh as the morning, thus would I chant a song for you O sane and sacred death.

All over bouquets of roses,
O death, I cover you over with roses and early lilies,
But mostly and now the lilac that blooms the first,
Copious I break, I break the sprigs from the bushes,
With loaded arms I come, pouring for you,
For you and the coffins all of you O death.) (WLL 46-54)

The "blossoms and branches" the speaker brings are not only for the coffin of the fallen president, but for all coffins, for all the nation's dead, and for all those yet to die in the natural course of their lives. By this time, immediately following the end of the Civil War, the nation's death toll had touched its entire people. To return to the epic and cyclical nature of the poem's first lines, it is evident that the cycle of mourning does not belong to the speaker alone, but to all those affected by the war's losses, and in this context, the nation's mourning is truly epic in proportion. For these dead, the speaker brings symbols of continuing life, "fresh as the morning" in the face of death. Roses and lilies are both perennial, as are lilacs, which are among the earliest to bloom in spring. Lilacs, then, are the first sign that life is persistent; it can and will continue after the war, after the war's deaths, after the death of the national leader. Having risen from among the people, the president is a representative of the people, who observe his death, as when the star "droop'd from the sky low down as if to my side, (while the other stars all look'd on)" (SL 59), but who will endure and persist despite the loss of their leader, and despite their many personal losses.

In the face of this national loss, both of the president and of many citizens, the poet articulates his task and role as one of mourning on behalf of the nation, and of
Chapter IV

bringing the nation to healing. This is developed throughout sections nine and ten of the poem, where the speaker returns to the singing thrush, and then describes his own role as solitary singer:

O how shall I warble myself for the dead one there I loved?
And how shall I deck my song for the large sweet soul that has gone?
And what shall my perfume be for the grave of him I love?

Sea-winds blown from east and west,
Blown from the Eastern sea and blown from the Western sea, till there on the prairies meeting,
These and with these and the breath of my chant,
I'll perfume the grave of him I love. (WLL 71-7)

If there is one section in "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" that compresses the most dynamic meaning, it is section ten. Its integration of meanings is made possible through the poem's carefully constructed cohesive ties, both internally, and to other poems and meanings in *Leaves of Grass*. Through repetition, the speaker draws a distinct analogy between his own poetic song, his warbling, and the "warbling" hermit thrush (WLL 19). This seems natural following the introduction of the bird in section four as inhabiting the material-spiritual borderland of the swamp, as the poet moves between the world of appearances and the truth of the soul. The poet's role is to sing for the fallen leader; his song is a gift, a "perfume" for "the grave of him I love." However, it is also a
gift for the nation's dead. His song emerges on the sea winds from both oceans flanking the United States, to bathe the entire nation in their fluid and atmospheric spiritual balm, converging on the prairies—likely a reference to Lincoln's burial site in Illinois, but also the logical meeting point for winds travelling toward each other from both seas. Throughout this analysis, the sea and the atmosphere have been discussed as metaphorical access points to the spiritual realm, constructed at length through many consistent lexical ties. Emerging from these charged spiritual origins, the breath of the speaker's chant parallels the "perfume strong" (WLL 14) of the lilacs on the coffin. In cohesively binding these symbols together through this repetition, both symbols take on additional meaning; the lilac's perfume now hints at a spiritual meaning, while the speaker's song integrates the cycle of renewal of the "perennial" lilac (WLL 5). Thus, the song of the thrush and the song of the speaker are equated, the perfume of the lilac and the perfume of the speaker's chant are equated, and the president (one among the nation's people) and the land are equated; this song becomes a chant of spiritual healing and of renewal in the face of death, intended for the nation, and for all of the people who form the nation.

Following this, the speaker's contemplation of appropriate images to adorn the president's tomb, in section eleven, only works to affirm and strengthen the bond between president and landscape. The poet's proposed images reflect both the wild land and the cities of the American landscape. The sunset shines across this landscape, and the nation's people are "homeward returning" (WLL 88) at the end of the workday, not pitching tents in the battlefield. This is the Lincoln's legacy; a united nation at peace, budding in the springtime with the "fresh sweet herbage underfoot"—the "uniform hieroglyphic," or
universal signifier of the grass, "Sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow zones" (SM 106-7). The nation is preparing to flower into its full potential; more importantly, the life of the nation and its people continues, even thrives, despite the influence of death. Finally, in section twelve, the speaker integrates his own identity (and thus the thrush's identity as well), with the president, the people, and the land:

Lo, body and soul—this land,
My own Manhattan with spires, and the sparkling and hurrying tides, and the ships,
The varied and ample land, the South and the North in the light, Ohio's shores and flashing Missouri,
And ever the far-spreading prairies cover'd with grass and corn. (WLL 89-92)

Though the speaker does not lay claim to the entirety of the States, he integrates his identity implicitly into this nexus of already linked identities. He juxtaposes his vision of body and soul with the sight of the land, as though the land itself is a manifestation of the souls of those who inhabit it; then he proceeds to include his own soul by specifying his own land, Manhattan—the only city mentioned by name. His identity becomes merged with that of the nation's people, with the president, and with the nation's landscape. This dynamic merging would not be possible if not for the speaker's consistent disembodiment and displacement, which I have explored throughout this project. The speaker's identity has become so consistently fluid that when he proposes to merge with the entire nation,
all of its people, and its president simultaneously, integrating his role as translator of the spiritual realm, his role as guide and teacher, his role as celebrator of the president, the nation, its people, and of death, the reader can accept the dichotomy of the concurrent utter loss of the speaker's identity and the translation of this identity into one that encompasses all of these elements. Indeed, this is the process to which the rest of the poem devotes explanation.

In section fourteen, the speaker's contemplation of daily life leads him to realize that humanity is bound in common by death, much as it is by sleep in "The Sleepers." Death appears as a cloud that falls upon all people, including the speaker. With the appearance of this cloud in his vision, the speaker learns death's "thought, and the sacred knowledge of death" (WLL 119). As three companions, they travel to the swamp where the thrush sings the carol of death. The beginning of the carol itself, however, is immediately preceded by the speaker's remark, "the voice of my spirit tallied the song of the bird" (WLL 134), rendering it impossible to determine whether the song that follows belongs to the thrush or the poet, or both. Is this song the poet's translation of the thrush's song? Or, is it his own voice, singing with that of the thrush? In fact, he and the bird become interchangeable. Indeed, the end of the song is concluded with a reinforcement of this ambiguity: "To the tally of my soul, / Loud and strong kept up the gray-brown bird, / With pure deliberate notes spreading filling the night" (WLL 163-5). In the first reference, the speaker's soul tallies, or keeps up with the bird; in the second, the leadership is reversed. In these lines it seems the duet of death is sung by both, that neither has ownership of the song, but they share it between them.
While I will not discuss the song itself at great length, it is, in brief, a praise of death as a soothing release from life, an integration and merging of the individual soul and identity with death itself, a purely spiritual medium: "I joyously sing the dead, / Lost in the loving floating ocean of thee, / Laved in the flood of thy bliss O death" (WLL 148-50). In these lines, the individual souls of the dead become like droplets of water in the oceans of the soul. This is "the float, forever held in solution" (62) from which individual souls emerge in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry." Until they are embodied, none are identifiable, and all are in utter bliss, in immediate contact with all other souls. Indeed, this image of spiritual merger parallels the merger of identities developed throughout this poem. Thus, the poem itself is an articulation and representation of death, of the entwined spiritual remnants left when the physical realm is abandoned. I would suggest that while the comprehension of the place of death in the eternal cycle of death and renewal corresponds with the thought of death, the sacred knowledge of death is discovered here; while death corresponds with a loss of identity, it also corresponds with an adoption of universal identity, the full integration and assimilation of the individual soul with the cosmic soul-force of the universe. Death ultimately permits the unfettered merger of the individual into the oceans of soul. This theme is revived in "A Noiseless Patient Spider."

4.4 THE COSMIC POET CONFRONTING HIS COSMOS: "A NOISELESS PATIENT SPIDER"

While "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" consider the speaker's place in his nation, "A Noiseless Patient Spider" examines the place of the individual soul in the cosmic scheme. Like "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," "A Noiseless Patient Spider" also features central characters
other than the speaker's self, which is expressed in the first person. Moreover, these characters, the spider and the speaker's soul, are also implicitly linked to the self of the speaker. The spider may not seem like a figure appropriate as a symbol for the poet, yet like the calamus grass and the thrush, the spider also embodies some aspect of the poet's function. The calamus grass, itself a leaf like the poet's incarnation of himself in his leaves of poetry, stands like the poet in the merger of earth and water, material and spiritual. The thrush emerges from this border zone, the marsh, and sings songs only some will understand, songs that address the spiritual and material, and the transition and connections between the two. Both of these symbols address characteristics and aspects of the poet and his poetry that are readily grasped. The leaves are the poems written down, the songs are the poems proclaimed to all, and the situation of both symbols is in a place of earthly and spiritual merger. Meanwhile, the spider is noiseless, on a promontory, exploring the empty space around itself. These do not seem like traits of the poet, and there are none of the typical markers of the poetic function to interpret the spiritual and material worlds—no water, no air, no border zones. However, the speaker's comparison of the spider to his own soul in the second verse should be an important clue that the two are in fact significantly connected. The spider is an atypical symbol for the poet because Whitman is examining here a slightly different aspect of the poet's function. In symbols for the poet considered throughout this thesis, the chief roles of the poet were translator and guide, interpreting the spiritual world for those who cannot see it, and starting the willing along the path toward their own enlightenment. The speaker in these poems is confident that his audience is with him, he addresses us as though we are doing our best to follow and to learn. He leads us on, sometimes seductively, other times with
great enthusiasm. In contrast, the spider reveals a poet struggling to find his audience. The addressee in "A Noiseless Patient Spider" is the speaker's soul, not his readers. He finds the spider throwing out filaments in search of a connection, in search of something in reach. In the same way, he sees and addresses his soul:

And you O my soul where you stand,
Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space,
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres to connect them,
Till the bridge you will need be form'd, till the ductile anchor hold,
Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my soul. (NPS 6-10)

Like the spider, the speaker's soul is detached, separated from the world by these "measureless oceans of space," and like the spider, the speaker's soul is patiently trying to bridge this gap. But what are these threads the poet's soul flings, and where does he hope they will catch? Both the spider and the speaker's threads are gossamer—flimsy, light, and carried by the breeze—and ductile anchors—malleable, but weighty and steadfast. Moreover, the speaker's soul is also described as "surrounded"—is it surrounded by space, or is it surrounded by other drops in the ocean, other souls in the spiritual medium? The word "oceans," with its cumulative spiritualized meaning, constructed by cohesive ties throughout *Leaves of Grass*, should immediately alert the reader that this is not simply an expression indicating the vastness of space. The language Whitman selected
for this second part of the poem was carefully chosen for its duality. A soul that is
surrounded but detached struggles to make connections that are fragile and flexible, but
which also have solid foundations and the ability to endure. The duality of these terms
certainly lends itself to understanding the poet as an individual soul struggling to reach
the souls around it through his poetry; ephemeral songs, not vocalized, but captured
silently in writing, like the noiseless spider producing its lines; poems recorded in lines of
pen and pencil, in spidery handwriting on flimsy, light leaves of paper; poems holding
enduring meanings flexible enough to cross time and space, to reach into the souls of
individuals separated by vast spatial and temporal distances and take anchor there.
Careful readers might object that the speaker specifically states his soul is "seeking the
spheres to connect them," but this is another instance of dual meaning. Certainly, the
speaker's soul is on a quest to chart the nature and structure of the cosmos, and to
understand his own place in it. However, the spheres, the worlds, he seeks can also be
understood once again as the realms of human experience—the material and earthly, and
the spiritual oceans of space.

This interpretation of the poem is a product of reading and understanding it in the
way Whitman teaches us to read his work throughout *Leaves of Grass*, that is, to interpret
it through the cumulative meaning of the web of cohesive ties attached to specific,
significant words—the hieroglyphs that are the key, or code, to their own interpretation.
This method of reading reveals the layers of meaning constructed by the poet to interact
with each other and to act upon the reader. For instance, we have established that the
spider stands for the poet's soul, in search of connection. However, by the same
relationship, the soul of the poet can represent the spider. In establishing the spider as a
symbol for the soul, it takes on all of the divine properties of the soul, and reflects the perfection of the soul's divinity and its rightful place in the cosmic scheme. By extension, the spider might represent the divinity of any soul. This hearkens back to the interchangeability of parts of the cosmos discussed in Chapter II, as each part has a claim to the natural perfection of the whole. Similarly, the poet's soul adopts the spider's behaviour in searching for connection. Thus, this metaphor reveals the essential loneliness of the individual human experience, as each of us searches for connections with other souls surrounding us. The specificity of the word "connection" is important, as it reinforces the theme of Chapter III, the struggle of the individual to connect with others, sometimes undertaken through physical contact, but always oriented toward the development of an intellectual or spiritual bond. Again, the importance of bodily contact is implicitly subsumed by the essential human need for profound connection. Moreover, given the connections previously drawn between the spiritual function of the soul and the democratic function of the individual, in the analysis of "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," the relationship of spider and soul to the cosmos certainly also has some material-world implications. Democratic government, as philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau explained in *Du Contrat Social* (1762), relies on the general will of the populace. Certainly, to form any conception of the general will, individual members of a democracy must understand their individual wills with respect to the individual wills of the people around them. To understand one's place in this kind of social system requires an awareness of other individuals and a bond with them through participation in the state and its government. In short, it requires the individual to partake in the patient practice of the spider—to build bridges, forge connections, and take part in
weaving and maintaining webs of ideology. It requires understanding between individuals and political parties. It requires a fundamental identification with others on the basic levels at which we are all the same. For Whitman, this takes place on the spiritual level, where all souls are equally valid, righteous, and divine in their respective places in the cosmic scheme.

In addition to considering the place of the poet in his nation and the spiritual foundations of democracy, the three poems analysed in this chapter address multiple dichotomies in the human experience. These include the pairing of the material and spiritual realms, of life and death, sound and silence, and individual identity and merger. All of these pairings are implicitly linked throughout "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," and "A Noiseless Patient Spider." They ultimately point to the fundamental isolation of the individual, and its search for connection on all levels of its existence: in Chapter III we explored personal connections, and in this chapter we considered social and political union through democracy, as well as the soul's fundamental quest for connection, with its ultimate resolution in death.
Chapter V – Conclusion

This chapter considers the end of *Leaves of Grass*, through the final poem, "So Long!" As the last poem in *Leaves of Grass*, it provides a summary of the speaker's themes, and his final parting thoughts. This chapter also provides a summary of this thesis, and proposes a unified theory for reading and understanding the volume of poetry as fundamentally concerned with spirituality. This chapter also provides a summary of the chief conclusions of this thesis regarding the stylistic characterization of the speaker, the speaker's overarching cosmological understanding of his body and soul, the material and spiritual world, and life and the afterlife. Moreover, this chapter strives to situate this project as part of a larger investigation into Whitman's stylistics and rhetoric as a national poet.

5.1 Parting Words: "So Long!"

In the final edition published under his supervision, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* began with a cluster of poems called *Inscriptions*, followed by "Starting from Paumanok" and "Song of Myself;" and ended, as it had since 1860, with "So Long!" For Whitman, the expression "so long" was a characteristically American way of saying goodbye, and the poem represented the end of a cycle that began with dedications, a portrayal of the speaker's birth and starting out, and a portrayal of his rebirth as a poet. The poem, "So Long!" ends this cycle by staging the poet's death. Between this beginning and the end, we have considered the speaker's presentation of himself, his interactions with the individuals around him and with his audience, and the parallel relationship he has with
his nation and his cosmos. In the final poem, the speaker announces what is to come, portrays himself planting the seeds for this future, and finally enacts his death.

Critics have considered the poem in terms of its relationship to the war, with reference to the eugenics movement gaining popularity in the nineteenth century, and with respect to the poem's vivid, onanistic sexuality. Some critics, like Hutchinson, have read "So Long!" as a poem that stages the final union between the poet, his book, and the reader (134-5), while others insist that this union is ultimately denied. Burton Hatlen, for instance, points out that the speaker's "language reveals that this union can come only through and in language, so that the fusion of person and book ends by generating a new and endless indeterminacy" ("So Long!" (1860)" 649). My interpretation reaches a similar conclusion.

The poem begins with a section devoted to announcements, where the speaker declares the things to come. He anticipates that America will do "what was promis'd" (SL 4) and become fully spiritual in nature. This eventual transformation will be achieved "When through these States walk a hundred millions of superb persons, / When the rest part away for superb persons and contribute to them" (SL 5-6). This is an instance of millennialism, which Kuebrich explains as the anticipation of an endpoint of development and growth, when the nation reaches perfection (Minor Prophecy 34). However, this seems to contradict the notion, explored in Chapter IV, that the essential spirituality of the perfect cosmic scheme is already fully manifested. Readers must bear in mind that the full fruition of the American nation relies on the spiritual development of its people. As the speaker notes in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," our experience of life depends on how we choose to play our daily role, "the same old role, the role that is what
we make it, as great as we like, / Or as small as we like, or both great and small" (84-5). Certainly, the evidence suggested to Whitman that most people were not ready for his poetry. He was persecuted for obscenity, fired from his clerkship in the Indian Office in 1865 after notes for his poetry were found in his desk, he had a difficult time finding publishers willing to take on *Leaves of Grass*, for, once printed, the volumes were difficult to sell, with many booksellers refusing to carry a text deemed obscene. The reviews of the book in newspapers were often just as unfriendly, calling attention to the book's discussion of the body and largely ignoring the linked and corresponding discussion of the soul. America could only do "what was promis'd" when people were socially prepared to accept his text, explore his meanings, and interpret it as a coherent whole. Thus, there is no less perfection in the nation itself, or in its people, at any given time. Rather, the question is whether or not each individual is prepared to accept him or herself as a whole, and to accept his or her own divinity, and whether a critical mass can be reached to shift social opinion about the human self.

Whitman's vision remains one for the future. A glance at television advertising reveals that most people remain unhappy with themselves. While the body and sex may be much more liberated in this era of discarded social mores, they have become spiritual voids. The struggle persists to be fitter, sexier, healthier, more financially successful, more personally successful, and more psychologically successful. The spiritual self-acceptance Whitman encourages is discussed in terms of one's inner child, inner animal, or karma, primarily in self-help books. Very few can affirm a spiritual consciousness that is not in opposition to the activities of society; the buying, selling, bargaining economy of
objects, values, and people. Few could truthfully say, "I am, I live, I love, I see, I connect," with all the meaning Whitman's speaker gives to these activities.

The logical conclusion is that the speaker's announcement pertains to a time when readers will understand him. This understanding will involve a necessary acknowledgement of the place of the world of appearances within the spiritual realm, of the reader's own divinity, and the divinity of all human beings around him or her. These are themes are appropriately summarized in this final poem, and it is remarkable to note the emphasis the speaker places on the identity and unity of the States. This may have much to do with the Union goals in the war, but certainly also reflects the distinctiveness and unity of the American idea—that a nation should be governed by its people. The poet writes, "I announce that the identity of these States is a single identity only, / I announce the Union more and more compact, indissoluble, / I announce splendors and majesties to make all the previous politics of the earth insignificant" (SL 19-21). The notion that "The identity of these states is a single identity only" presents another example of the slipperiness between individual and nation observed in "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd." While this can express the unification of the States, which was certainly a concern at the time of the poem's first publication in 1860, under the shadow of the impending Civil War, it can also express the notion that America takes its identity from the American individuals who form the nation. Together, their common ideas and ideals—and presumably their shared sense of divinity, as "superb persons"—form a unified nation and a single identity. These are the superb persons for whom, says the speaker, "I have sung the body and the soul, war and peace have I sung, and the songs of life and death, / And the songs of birth, and shown that there are many births" (SL 10-1).
This announcement of his themes, along with, "I announce adhesiveness" (SL 22), "I announce the justification of candor and the justification of pride" (SL 18), and "I announce the great individual, fluid as Nature, chaste, affectionate, compassionate, fully arm'd" (SL 25), recapitulates the chief aims and objectives of *Leaves of Grass*. Throughout the text, the speaker has developed the idea of a natural, full-bodied, American person, able to see beyond the world of appearances to the underlying spiritual realm, able to integrate body and soul, the tribulations of history, and the cycle of life and death into a comprehensive cosmic worldview. This person, for which the speaker provides himself as a model—"I have offer'd my style to every one" (SL 12)—is candid and bold, righteously proud, and connected with his fellow human beings through common bonds of affection, understanding, and spirituality. A nation of such individuals constitutes the "splendors and majesties to make all the previous politics of the earth insignificant" (SL 21). These individuals pass through the cycle of life to eventually "lightly and joyfully meet [their] translation" (SL 27), just as the speaker anticipates his end, and the end of his poems, with the expectation of being translated into other forms in other spheres.

The middle section of the poem, where the speaker is confronted by his own death, describes his final efforts to get his message across. In a highly eroticized passage, he recounts how he establishes his message as one to be transmitted well into the future:

Screaming electric, the atmosphere using,

At random glancing, each as I notice absorbing,

Swiftly on, but a little while alighting,
Curious envelop'd messages delivering,
Sparkles hot, seed ethereal down in the dirt dropping,
Myself unknowing, my commission obeying, to question it never daring,
To ages and ages yet the growth of the seed leaving,
To troops out of the war arising, they the tasks I have set promulging,

[...]
So I pass, a little time vocal, visible, contrary,
Afterward a melodious echo, passionately bent for, (death making me really undying,)
The best of me then when no longer visible, for toward that I have been incessantly preparing. (SL 36-48)

The electricity in the first line calls to mind the body (electric), while the atmosphere calls to mind the soul. In a line powerfully suggestive of the masturbatory act, according to most critics, his messages are portrayed as hot "seed ethereal down in the dirt dropping." Indeed, Burton Hatlen questions whether this masturbatory act is onanistic and fruitless, or whether it brings the dirt into life ("So Long!" (1860)" 648-9). Certainly, by this point in the text, the alignment of his underlying messages with sexuality, or "to ages and ages yet the [spiritual] growth of the [ethereal] seed leaving," through the bodily, should not be surprising to readers. We are left to imagine these seeds sprouting into leaves of grass, and more precisely, into the leaves of his poetry. These lines are a uniting of his major purpose and major metaphors: the procreative act of spreading an idea is cast in terms both bodily and spiritual, and committed to the ages through the
allusion to the universal signifier, the grass. Moreover, the speaker specifies that he leaves the growth of these seeds to "troops out of the war arising." This can be read as a reference to the Americans living in the Union, following the Civil War, implying the relevance of his themes to the American democracy of the future. However, it could also be a simple reference to the army of his followers. In either case, the speaker indicates that these troops are responsible for promulging the tasks he has set. "Promulging" is a very specific word, as it has a dual meaning of both publishing (a book) and teaching publicly (a creed, doctrine, or opinion). By this the speaker aims to ensure the continued republication of his volume of leaves, and also to ensure that his creed continues to be taught well beyond his own anticipated end. Thus can he transform into a melodious echo, to resonate forever in the hearts and minds of those who listen. Indeed, the best of him is his disembodied, spiritual self, which he can only truly give through his words when his physical body has ceased to exits.

However, this is not truly his end, for he readily admits he will endure through his message forever, through its transmission, republication, and teaching, and also through his death, his translation into other forms. This brings us to the final portion of the poem. Having portrayed his final effort to plant the seeds for a fundamentally spiritual democracy, the poet abandons his songs, becomes disembodied and momentarily grants his reader a final instance of elusive contact:

Camerado, this is no book,

Who touches this touches a man,

(Is it night? are we here together alone?)
It is I you hold and who holds you,
I spring from the pages into your arms—decease calls me forth.

O how your fingers drowse me,
Your breath falls around me like dew, your pulse lulls the tympan of my ears,
I feel immerged from head to foot,
Delicious, enough. (SL 53-61)

The yet uninitiated "comrade," or reader, of "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand" is here replaced by the term Whitman applies with reference to God in "Song of Myself." This is of course appropriate, as by this time, the reader is no longer unaware of the spiritual implications of Whitman's poetry. If the speaker's seeds have begun to sprout, the reader is likely conscious of his or her own spiritual growth at this point in the reading. The speaker again affirms that his book is not merely words alone, but an incarnation of himself. He describes his contact with his reader in the moment of his decease, the end of his poem. As one dead, he becomes disembodied and can spring from the pages; also, when he finishes speaking, his words can spring forth from the pages to live in the imagination and memory of his readers. He also describes the influence of the reader upon him, which can be interpreted as a spiritual experience, or as a reader turning pages of the book. In either case, the reader's touch is specifically connected to the fluid imagery of spiritual waters once again. Drowse is a term Whitman employed regularly in connection with the sea, though in itself it is indicative of the place between sleep and
waking, the sort of trance of the shaman as he crosses the boundaries between the material and spiritual realms. In addition, breath is transformed into "dew," and the speaker describes himself as "immersed," implying both immersion and merger, as in the holy bath of the reader's breath, perhaps as he or she reads the poem aloud. Nevertheless, just as quickly, the speaker then abandons the reader. This shift is logical if we recall the sacred knowledge of death discovered in "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd." Death is an opportunity for merger not permitted by embodiment, but is not lasting—the speaker quickly loses his identity in the ocean of soul.

An unknown sphere more real than I dream'd, more direct, darts
awakening rays about me, So long!
Remember my words, I may again return,
I love you, I depart from materials,
I am as one disembodied, triumphant, dead. (SL 68-71)

Both the living and the dying often express a wish to be remembered as individuals, but rarely are we asked, as we attend the deathbed of a dear, departing friend, for instance, to remember his or her words alone. This recalls the speaker's earlier emphasis on his message, the seeds of which he has so carefully planted throughout Leaves of Grass. In the final two lines, the speaker again confirms the motifs I have traced throughout this thesis. He indicates his departure from materials alone, not from the spiritual realm. He may be leaving the world of appearances, but he continues on in unknown spheres of the cosmic scheme. As well, he departs from his material incarnation in the form of his book,
the reading being finished. Moreover, he almost confirms his disembodiment in the final line, "I am as one disembodied, triumphant, dead." Through the use of "as," he is able to escape committing even to his own disembodiment and death. Readers are left at the end of their journey with the speaker's poems echoing about in their minds, with a sense of contact and understanding with the speaker, with a sense of their own divinity, and with no idea where the speaker is situated. In our imaginations, he may be alive and well, incarnated in his book, or he may be translated into other forms. What remains most important is that he, and his message, live and thrive in the reader's memory, gradually transforming the reader through his words.

5.2 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

I began this project by calling to attention the apparent contradiction between the poet of the body and the poet of the soul, between the American bard and his disembodied, de-situated speaker. The chief claim of my thesis is that this contradiction is a key indication of the foundational importance of spirituality to Whitman's poetic project. This is manifested in four chief forms throughout Whitman's poetry. First, the poet is involved in a process of translation. This is the consistent and directed revision and elaboration of meaning in language to produce a structure of meaning and metaphor that exceeds simple denotation and conventional connotations. Next, the poet seeks to disembody and de-situate his voice. He achieves this through a careful representation of his consciousness, often using non-specific linguistic positioning indicators, or the immediate mode of discourse, which suggests a physically impossible copresence with his audience. Third, when the speaker makes reference to his specific physical or
temporal placement, he consistently chooses to represent himself in liminal spaces. Frequently, these spaces are between defined physical locations, or they are at symbolic sites of merger between the physical, material world of appearances and the ethereal, spiritual world of cosmic awareness. In combination, the disembodiment and symbolic positioning of the speaker allow him access to the spiritual realm, which he translates for his readers in an effort to connect with them intellectually and spiritually, and to encourage them to develop their own spiritual vision. Finally, through his death, dissipation, and merger with the essential spiritual nature of the cosmos, the poet achieves the connection he seeks throughout his volume of poetry.

The exploration of these strategies has led to the development of a unified theory for the interpretation of *Leaves of Grass*. The proposal of a unified theory of interpretation seeks to reconcile some of the contradictions mentioned. This theory proceeds from the dual premise that spiritual themes are essential to the nature of *Leaves of Grass*, and that Whitman's chief objective in writing poetry is to lead his readers toward a spiritual understanding of their human experience. It is founded on the belief that the material and spiritual realms coexist and interact continuously, and that human comprehension of an organized, coherent cosmic scheme is possible within the framework of material, temporal life. This theory proposes the innate divinity of the human as a whole being, comprised of both body and soul, and insists upon the human ability to recognize its own transcendent nature. The ability to conceive of one's own divinity and place in the cosmic whole is one that can be developed through a shift in one's perception of the world of appearances. The poet consistently portrays this paradigm shift as coming upon him in a moment of enlightenment, though the
circumstances may vary. However, the circumstances are always linked to physical or
metaphysical sites of crossover between the material and spiritual realms. Through his
poetry, the speaker strives to interpret his access to the spiritual realm for his readers,
evidently in the hope that this will spark some sympathetic aspect of their perception and
understanding of the world, leading them to develop their own cosmic awareness.

In the process of examining these general premises of Whitman's project as a
whole, I have also drawn many conclusions regarding specific poems. Although I have
only included a sampling of Whitman's poetry and focused my selections around only a
few of his chief themes, I believe it is an effective demonstration of the potential to
consider all of his poetry in light of its underlying spiritual themes. I organized my
selections into three main segments, the speaker and his conception of his self, the
speaker's interpersonal relationships, and the speaker's interaction with his nation and
cosmos.

In the first chapter, I provided an account of some of the key events in Whitman's
life that contributed both to his developing worldview and to shaping the themes we
encounter in his poetry. I also provided a summary of major currents in Whitman
criticism and situated my own research with respect to three approaches to Whitman's
writings: the stylistic approach (Hollis, Nathanson, Warren), the anthropological
approach, concerned particularly with spirituality (Hutchinson, Kuebrich), and the
deconstructive approach (Moon). Finally, I provided an overview of my methodology,
which incorporates an analysis of cohesion (M.A.K. Halliday) and flow of consciousness
(Wallace Chafe) in Whitman's poetry.
My analysis began in Chapter II, where I strove to offer a comprehensive exploration of the speaker's origins, his growth as a poet, his understanding of himself, and of his aims in his poetic project. I illustrated that the speaker can be characterized primarily by his disembodiment and de-situation. This is an essential trait that enables him to translate the spiritual realm for his readers, whose realm of perception is limited to the material world. I established that the chief aim of the speaker's chants is to set the reader upon his or her own path toward enlightenment, toward the realization of his or her divine nature.

In Chapters III and IV, I explored some of the ways in which the speaker perceives and articulates the connections between the spiritual and material worlds. More particularly, I considered the speaker's representation of the spiritual world through interpersonal relationships in the third chapter, and through social and cosmological interactions in the fourth. The exploration of these relationships reveals a great deal about the speaker's understanding of the place of the physical, material world of appearances in an individual's daily life as well as his or her spiritual life. He translates mundane activities, viewing them through the lens of their corresponding spiritual significance, and arrives at a vision of the human experience as one that is simultaneously deeply meaningful, and also very lonely. Thus, he explores human contact and political systems as manifestations of the need to connect with other souls; a need only ultimately satisfied through death and the merger of the individual soul with the en masse. This is finally achieved in the final poem, "So Long!" considered earlier in this chapter.
5.3 FURTHER RESEARCH

This thesis is a major step forward in the investigation of the public voice and national rhetorical consciousness fundamental to Whitman's poetry. Whitman's speaker's championing of individualism is a challenge to his authenticity and authority as an everyman-figure and national poet. This leads to important questions regarding the qualities of a national voice, some of which I've addressed throughout this thesis.

For instance, my consideration of Whitman's portrayal of the body and soul illustrates the poet's belief that man becomes divine even through his earthly interactions. In rendering even "The scent of these arm-pits aroma finer than prayer" (SM 515), Whitman transforms his eroticized corporeal discourse into a spiritual one more acceptable to the sensibilities of his nation and era as public expression. Thus, while this supports the understanding of Whitman as a poet of the divine, it also contributes to our understanding of Whitman as a democratic poet, expressive of a national voice.

While Whitman's poetry emerges from a tradition of oratory and public performance and is linked to his great public themes of democracy and nation-building, his stylistics of a public national consciousness continues to be relevant in the context of today's American oratory. Many questions in this regard remain unanswered. How do voices in public arenas inspire national confidence? What constitutes an authentic national voice today? Where does the poet's voice fit in the public discourse of the modern age? What is the place of religion, or spirituality, in national public discourse?

Many readers and critics prefer to take a secular approach to considering Whitman. This is logical, given the increasing secularization of western society. But it is important to remember that a religious aspect to life was important in the nineteenth
century, and as much as some may wish to ignore it, religion continues to perform important cultural work, both in the United States and in the global community. Evidence exists in the news media around us: in the United States, the debate over high schools teaching theories of creation or evolution, or both and others, caused brief but notable stirs in the popular media in 2004 and 2005. Moreover, although the world conflicts in which the U.S. has participated in recent years have been presented as political or humanitarian causes, it is clear that many of them are aligned with not only economic interests, but also with ideologies closely associated to specific religious worldviews.

Indeed, the convergence between religion and politics is longstanding in the United States. Religious historian James H. Hutson points out that the American Revolutionary War was strongly supported by the clergy at the time. He believes that had they not presented the war as part of God's design, it would never have been successful. Moreover, he suggests the clergy supported the cause because they were the educated class, in touch with the European political theory of the time, and therefore, the first to be alarmed by the taxation of the colonies—the chief political issue underlying the war. He explains that they related current events to the Bible and charged a political cause with biblical righteousness:

Clergymen were, of course, the real virtuosi in putting political events into a biblical context. By continually comparing George III and his ministers to such familiar—and hateful—biblical figures as Rehoboam and Pharaoh's taskmasters, they personalized and intensified the quarrel with Britain for their listeners. As the final rupture with the mother country
approached, preachers of all denominations painted the lurid picture of Britain as the Beast in Revelations 13 who would annihilate the children of God. The conflict was now presented from the pulpits as a cosmic battle between good and evil in which no Christian could be neutral. The man in the pew must put on his gospel armor and take the field against his foe.

(Hutson 42)

This rhetoric is by no means unfamiliar to Americans today. U.S. President George W. Bush applied it in his 2002 State of the Union Address. With reference to the countries out of which the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States originated, Bush declared, "States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world." Later in his speech, he also affirmed, "I know we can overcome evil with greater good," and "Those of us who have lived through these challenging times have been changed by them. We've come to know truths that we will never question: evil is real, and it must be opposed" (Bush). While I do not aim to undermine the American concern with terrorism, many astute observers agree that the conflicts currently underway in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the tensions between the United States and many of the countries that form this "axis of evil" are of a primarily political nature. Nevertheless, this portrayal of this conflict and tension in terms of the battle between good and evil has definitive biblical resonances. The political "War on Terror," from the start, has been infused with religious rhetoric. Thus, the present moment seems opportune to reconsider the connections between the individual, the democratic polity, and the spiritual ideology Whitman conveys in his poetry.


French, R.W. "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd' (1865)." LeMaster and Kummings 770-73.


Hatlen, Burton. "'Sleepers, The' (1855)." LeMaster and Kummings 643-6.


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Reynolds, David S. "To Heal a Nation." Whitman 845-49.


