CHAPTER-V

SELF ALIENATION

For Whitman alienation means a sense of loss of universality whereby man alienates himself from his inner nature and reaches the extremity of discord with himself—the disparity between man's actual condition and essential nature and the objectification of spirit. It, thus, implies a loss of unity with the social substance as well as the emergence of an awareness or feeling of the otherness of something.

Whitman seeks to define alienation as it is manifest in the life of man. He feels there is with him very "little or nothing"1 of his "real life".2 There are only "a few hints a few diffused faint clews and indirections."3 In Song of Myself, Whitman says:

Alone far in the wilds and mountains I hunt
Wandering amazed at my own lightness and glee

He is "enamoured of growing out-door."5 He says:

I am cut by bitter and angry hail, I lose my breath.6

1. Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p. 9
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 31
5. Ibid., p. 34
6. Ibid., p. 47
His own "Being",\(^1\) is a "puzzle of puzzles"\(^2\) to him. He feels unnerved:

\begin{quote}
I am given up by traitors,
I talk wildly, I have lost my wits, I and nobody else am the greatest traitor,
I went myself first to the headland, my own hands carried me there.\(^3\)
\end{quote}

The poet's use of catalogues is important from the point of view that it reveals his basic concept of life. The catalogues were outgrowths of the poet's democratic spirit. No single person is the subject of Whitman's song, or can be; the individual suggests a group, and the group a multitude, each unit of which is as interesting as every other unit, and possesses equal claims to recognition. Hence the recurring tendency of his poems to become catalogues of persons and things. There exists an important relationship between the catalogues and Whitman's unity through diversity, a relationship pursued more precisely by critics in this century.

Whitman's catalogues express his transcendentalism. The catalogues also control the reader's involvement in the poet's movement from the singular to the cosmic. An examination of the catalogues in *Song of Myself* shows that the catalogues are written in such ways as to manipulate reader's involvement.

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2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 48
'Song of Myself' is a history of the poet's movement from loafing\(^1\) individual to active spirit. But the poet's movement is parallel-
ed by the reader's movement from assuming\(^2\) to resuming\(^3\), and
the poet controls both movements in the poem with the help of
catalogues.

Whitman's poetry, from one point of view, is the working
out of the function of the poet as a liberating god who can show
the innate spiritual connections among all physical things. As
it is dislocation and detachment from the life of God that makes
things ugly, the poet, who re-attaches things to nature and the
Whole re-attaching even artificial things and violation of
nature, to nature, by a deeper insight – disposes very easily
of the most disagreeable facts. Inspite of the poet's act of
re-attaching, the poet is in a passive role. The weakness of
the will begins when the individual would be something of him-
self, death of egotism was prerequisite to participating in the
Over-Soul. The idea is found also in Nature:

Knowing the perfect fitness and equanimity of things
while they discuss I am silent, and go bathe and admire
myself.

Welcome is every organ and attribute of me,
and of any man hearty and clean,
Not an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile
and none shall be less familiar than the rest.\(^4\)

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2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p.26
Whitman himself, in the preface to the 1855 edition, speaks of the United States as the greatest poem and of himself as a seer. If Whitman is viewed as a passive seer, his catalogues are easily explained: they would be his way of calling the roll for the nation; the greatest poem, and the function of the poet would be to describe rather than to order. Whitman regarded art pragmatically, that is, as properly the expression of something beyond itself — call it vision, truth, or what you will; they were, in short, not trying to write poems but nature; and they were therefore convinced that the secret of design in art rested rather in the ability to perceive the natural order than in imposing an aesthetic order upon their perceptions.1 At the beginning of the poem, the poet is relaxed and inactive. "'I loafe and invite my soul, /I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.'"2 The poem's first major catalogue appears in section two after the poet has expressed a desire to dissipate into the atmosphere. "'I am mad for it to be in contact with me',"3 the poet attempts to unite aspects of his own physiognomy with aspects of nature: "'The sound of the belch'd words of my voice loos'd to the eddies of the wind:',"4 and "'The feeling of health, the full-moon trill, the song of me rising from bed and meeting the sun.'"5 This union between

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2. Ibid., p. 24
3. Ibid., p. 25
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
the poet and nature reappears in later catalogues, "'I find I incorporate gneiss, coal, long-threaded moss, fruits, grains, esculent roots,/And am stucco'd with quadrupeds and birds all over.'" The poet announces his passive role in section twenty when he writes, "'To me the converging objects of the universe perpetually flow,/All are written to me, and I must get what the writing means.'" He adopts a relaxed, even passive role at the beginning of the poem, but in the course of the poem he consciously expands the self into inclusive consciousness. But this consciousness is not the consciousness of the pheno-
mend world. Rather it is an escape from it. It is an alienation from the egoistic self. Whitman's is the expansion of the ego in the act of creation itself, naming every conceivable object as it comes from the womb. Whitman's movement in Song of Myself is more than absorption; it is also expansion. But Whitman knew that words alone would not be enough to record his movement from the "'I'" to the cosmos, Whitman admitted that people expect from the poet to indicate the path between reality and their souls. Whitman was keenly aware of the dangers of extreme organismism. He has to be the poet of silence.

1. Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p. 49
2. Ibid., p. 39
For the extreme organicist, neither the poet nor the listener should have to approach the other party; for either party can be the poet, and absolute spontaneity of expression should be indistinguishable from absolute receptivity. That Whitman's catalogues are seldom mere lists of words may illustrate his lack of faith in the working of self. Within Whitman's catalogues in *Song of Myself*, items are usually modified, directly by description or indirectly by contrast. Section fifteen is a roll-call of citizens, each one described in a complete sentence. The citizens are self-alienated without any deep passion. They work mechanically:

The peddler sweats with his pack on his back, (the purchaser haggling about the odd cent;)
The bride unrumples her white dress, the minuted-hand of the clock moves slowly,
The opium-eater reclines with rigid head and just-open'd lips,
The prostitute draffles her shawl, her bonnet bobs on her tipsy and pimpled neck.\(^1\)

Forgetful of the self, the poet is not one sing individual alone in *Song of Myself*. At the beginning of section thirty-three his "ties and ballasts"\(^2\) leave him. The poet is "afoot"\(^3\) with his vision, and he observes animal and human activity.

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1. Whitman, Walt. *Leaves of Grass*, p. 35
2. Ibid., p. 50
3. Ibid.
Storming, enjoying, planning, loving, cautioning,
Backing and filling, appearing and disappearing,
I tread day and night such roads.¹

The poet moves from observation to action, it is essentially
and outpouring, intended to stir up not to settle. But
Whitman's movement as one of lyric vision toward epic vision.
The movement, is primarily expansive. His technical problem
is to find the appropriate kind of expansive imagery, the
rhetorical means of enlarging the "I"² into a grand symbolic
figure, both ideal observer and epitome of all that is observed,
a benevolent god surveying his creation with infinite under-
standing and at the same time the suffering servant who parti-
cipates in all human woe:

I take part, I see and hear the whole³

The expansion of self, for Whitman in Song of Myself,
is not easy. He has his reservations, and he knows that he
is embarking on a dangerous journey:

Creeds and schools in abeyance,
Retiring back a while sufficed at what they are,
but never forgotten,
I harbor for good or bad, I permit to speak at
every hazard,
Nature without check with original energy.⁴

¹ Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p. 53
² Ibid.,
³ Ibid., p. 56
⁴ Ibid., p. 24
He intends to journey without the comforting aid of intellectual knowledge. The first seven sections of the poem are a warming up, with the poet torn between his desire to explore the atmosphere (his relationship with nature) and his desire to linger on the grass in sensuousness and comfort:

    Shall I postpone my acceptance and realization and scream at my eyes, That they turn from gazing after and down the road, And forthwith cipher and show me to a cent. Exactly the value of one and exactly the value of two, and which is ahead?  

The catalogue in section two illustrates the positive reward that will come with the poet's merging his physiognomy with nature. The catalogue that begins section four presents the numerous tragedies, the "trippers and askers"², that haunt the poet:

    The real or fancied indifference of some man or woman I love, The sickness of one of my folks or of myself, or ill-doing or loss or lack of money, or depression or exaltations.³

"But they are not the Me myself"⁴, the poet concludes. But

1. Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p.26
2. Ibid., p.27
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
they do influence him once again to adopt the lounging pose. "Apart from the pulling and hauling stands what I am, / Stands amused, complacent, compassionating, idle, unitary." 1 The casual line, "Both in and out of the game and watching and wondering at it," 2 seems more than anything else an attempt to disguise the poet's anguish in indecision. In section five, the poet invites the soul to lounge with him (the self) on the grass, and Whitman writes the most sensual lines in the poem:

I mind how once we 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. 3

But idle sensuality is no more than answer than idle sensuousness. The poet must go to the soul. The short catalogue which follows the lines above is merely the poet's attempt to convince himself that the self and the soul have already merged and that there is no need for a journey. Whitman

1. whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p.27
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
catalogues the extremes of humanity, from the innocent babe to the criminal. He begins by looking down at the babe, a young couple, and a suicide. He maintains this lofty view even as he leaves the catalogue for the scene of the girl and the twenty-eight men in section eleven. From this position the poet moves down into the world. In the extremely long catalogue that comprises section thirty-three, the poet appears to be totally involved with life, and the senses of touch, sight, and sound are fully awake and working simultaneously:

Scorch'd ankle-deep by the hot sand, hauling my boat down the shallow river,¹

He continues:

Over the dusky green of the rhy as it ripples and shades in the breeze;²

He adds:

where the mocking-bird sounds his delicious gurgles, cackles, screams, weeps......³

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1. Whitman, Walt, *Leaves of Grass*, p. 50
2. Ibid., p. 51
3. Ibid., p. 52
The catalogues in sections twelve and forty-three appear to record the poet's expansion of the self, an opening of his perceptions to the life around him and a willingness to approach life at its own level. But the poet has his moments of doubt, of course. The didacticism which interrupts the catalogues is perhaps the way the poet restrains himself from too rapid an involvement with life, or perhaps he again resists the loss of the self. The ''essence''\(^1\) of things may be a difficult burden to carry. The extreme doubt expressed at the beginning of section thirty-eight is similar to the doubt expressed by Christ as He hung on the cross:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Enough! enough! enough!} \\
\text{Somehow I have been stunn'd, Stand back!} \\
\text{Give me a little time beyond my cuff'd head,} \\
\text{slumbers, dreams, gaping,} \\
\text{I discover my self on the verge of a usual mistake.}^2
\end{align*}
\]

He continues:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{That I could forget the mockers and insults!} \\
\text{That I could forget the trickling tears and the blow of the bludgeons and hammers!} \\
\text{That I could look with a separate look on my own crucifixion and bloody crowning.}^3
\end{align*}
\]

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2. Ibid., p.59
3. Ibid.
The poet has, in a sense, sacrificed himself: he has extended himself to all life. But the expressed doubt merely allows the poet to expand himself further, encompassing the gods of the universe in the catalogue in section forty-one and even the worshippers of false gods in the catalogue in section forty-three. The journey has been travelled:

All below duly travel'd, and still I mount and mount. Rise after rise blow the phantoms behind me, A far down I see the huge first Nothing, I knew I was even there, I waited unseen and always, and slept through the lethargic mist.¹

In A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads, Whitman, in describing the suggestiveness of his verse, explains that man, unless alienated from the nerve breaking conditions of life, cannot attain the goal. In Song of Myself he directly addresses the reader, explaining that the reader too has a journey to make:

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.

¹. Whitman, Walt. Leaves of Grass, p.66
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.¹

The journey for the reader is to be the same one the poet
has made, from idle observation by the self to active partici-
pation in the spirit that lies beneath all physical forms.
The journey for the reader, however, is simpler, for he has
had the path cleared by the poet. "Long enough have you
dream'd contemptible dreams,/Now I wash the gum from your
eyes"². The poet tells the reader that he must make his own
way: "Not I, not any one else can travel that road for you,/You must travel it for yourself"³. Whitman begins the poem
with the comfortable statement, "I celebrate myself, and
sing myself,/And what I assume you shall assume."⁴ The
statements made by the idling self in the first seven sections
regarding unification of the self and the soul are unconvincing:

1. Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p.74
2. Ibid., p.69
3. Ibid., p.24
4. Ibid.
I pass death with the dying and birth with
the new-wash'd babe, and am not contained
between my hat and boots,
And peruse manifold objects, no two alike
and every one good,
The earth good and the stars good, and
their adjuncts all good.¹

There has been no test, no purging, no journey:

My face rubs to the hunter’s face when he lies
down alone in his blanket,
The driver thinking of me does not mind the jolt
of his wagon,
The young mother and old mother comprehend me,
The girl and the wife rest the needle a moment
and forget where they are,
They and all would resume what I have told them.²

At the end of section thirty-three the reader should
have likewise made the journey for himself. He should have
formed that one image of the universe in which he loses the
ego, the image which Whitman calls the "huge first Nothing"³
because the image is out of the domain of language. The
journey, however, has not been a step-by-step process. The
poet uses the metaphors of travel, but his metaphorical
language should not lead the reader to assume that the poet is

¹ whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p.29
² Ibid., p.71
³ Ibid., p.67
actually mapping a course for the reader. The poet, strives
to create the impression of spontaneous expansion. The poet's
preference for the present tense indicates his desire to
escape temporal boundaries. The concept of the journey is
used to communicate that which is beyond communication. At
the beginning of the grand catalogue of section thirty-three,
Whitman writes:

Space and Time I now I see it is true, what I
guess'd at,
What I guess'd when I loaf'd on the grass,
What I guess'd while I lay alone in my bed,
And again as I walk'd the beach under the paling
stars of the morning.\(^1\)

The narratives following section thirty-three, illustrate
the poet's escape from the boundaries of space and time.
In section thirty-four, the poet describes the "Fall of
Alamo"\(^2\) and the account is expressed entirely in the past
tense. The poet is completely free to travel to the past.
In section thirty-five, the narrative of the sea battle is
told. Time and distance have been surmounted; they have become,
in a sense, nonexistent. The poet speaks of a perpetual
journey, but the journey, is above time and space. The journey

\(^1\) Whitman, Walt, *Leaves of Grass*, p.50
\(^2\) Ibid., p.56
can be expressed only through paradox: it is both perpetual and instantaneous. The poet is active in his movement away from the self and toward the universe or cosmos:

I discover myself on the verge of a usual mistake.¹

The awareness of the poet ripens and he awakens into the realm of pure knowledge:

I troop forth replenished with supreme power,
One of an average unending procession.²

In Myself and Mine he resolves to perfect himself so that he will be able to '*chisel with free stroke the heads and limbs of plenteous Supreme Gods'*³ and to disseminate '*Every hour the semen of centuries'*⁴.

His very poems are perceived as seed or semen. In Proto-Leaf he declares that the following poems are indeed to drop in the earth the germs of a greater Religion. In So Long! vocal and genital images combine as the throat of the dying person issues its last electric screams, which, like his semen, fructify the earth:

1. Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p.59
2. Ibid., p.60
3. Ibid., p.194
4. Ibid., p.195
Curious enveloped 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, ..... 1

To Him that was Crucified pairs the Whitman persona
and Christ as twin seminal begetters of a new spiritual
progeny, both of them moving among mankind, saturating the
world with their seed, and 'transmitting the same charge and
succession..... Till we saturate time and eras, that men
and women of races, ages to come, may prove brothers and
lovers, as we are'? The charge ambiguously suggests both
Christ's commandment to love one another and the supposed
electrical nature of sexual begetting.

The link between the persona's phallicism and his
vocalism — whatever it may imply in psychological or sexual
terms — is the basic element of the spermatic trope. The
connection between voice and phallus is clearly asserted in
Vocalism, which declares that the 'limber-lipped', 3 orator
(whitman toyed with the idea of becoming an orator) must
undergo a range of experiences before he can attain 'the

1. Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p. 391
2. Ibid., p. 303
3. Ibid., p. 302
divine power to speak words'\textsuperscript{1} and before these words can
'debouch'\textsuperscript{2} from his 'loosened throat',\textsuperscript{3} as inspirational
revelations of life and nature's working. After maturing and
experiencing 'chastity, friendship, procreation, prudence, and
nakedness'\textsuperscript{4}, a 'complete faith',\textsuperscript{5}, and many clarifications,
it is just possible there comes to a man, a woman, the divine
power to use words. Similarly, the celebration of the
'chaste and electric currents' of the persona's genitalia-
'love - juice, love-odor, lip of love, phallic thumb of love',\textsuperscript{6}
in \textit{Spontaneous Me} gives way to the imagined joys of oratory-
'quell(ing) America with a great tongue',\textsuperscript{7} and speaking with
a full and sonorous voice. And in \textit{Salut au Monde!} after
enacting the passive (feminine) role of a spirit medium and
being ravished by an influx of spirit so that what he sees
and hears 'widens',\textsuperscript{8} within him as though he were a pregnant
woman, the persona becomes a phallic utterer, disseminating
what he has absorbed during his mystic state; 'penetrating'.\textsuperscript{9}

1. Whitman, Walt, \textit{Leaves of Grass}, p.302
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p.86
7. Ibid., p.146
8. Ibid., p.108
9. Ibid., p.116
his ideas into the passive vulva of America. "What cities the light or warmth penetrates"\(^1\), he exclaims at the poem's conclusion, "I penetrate those cities myself"\(^2\).

The most sustained examples of the spermatic trope are associated with the portrayals of the poet-persona in various Children of Adam poems, Song of the Answerer, By Blue Ontario's Shore, and the middle sections of Song of Myself.

In sections 24 and 25 of Song of Myself the persona's spermatic attributes form a link with the cosmos. "Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking, breeding"\(^3\), the electrical "afflatus surging"\(^4\) through him, he utters "the pass-word primeval"\(^5\); he becomes the voice of the voiceless, "of cycles of preparation and accretion,/And of the threads that connect the stars — and of wombs, and of the fatherstuff"\(^6\). Caressed by nature's genitalia, he voices a series of tender invocations to his phallic self:

1. Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p. 116
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 43
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
Root of washed sweet-flag! Timorous pond-snipe! Nest of guarded duplicate eggs! it should be you! ....
Trickling sap of maple! Fibre of manly wheat! it shall be you! ....
Winds whose soft-tickling genitals rub against me, it shall be you!
Broad, muscular fields! Branches of live oak! Loving loungers in my winding paths! it shall be you! 1

Doting on his "luscious" 2 self, he beholds "A morning-glory at my window" 3 — the objectification of the ecstatic moment about to erupt into a phallic and vocal utterance:

Something I cannot see puts upward libidinous prongs,
Seas of bright juice suffuse heaven. 4

The up-spurts into the interstellar spheres of his mystic semen, possibly reflecting his self-induced orgasm or the workings of his vivid imagination, are hyperbolical expressions of the persona's generative force, his powers of utterance, and his quenchless spirit. In keeping with the spermatic trope, the sexual climax is transformed into vocalism: the phallic utterance of the persona's semen becomes the seminal

1. Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p. 44
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 45
4. Ibid.
My voice goes after what my eyes cannot reach,  
With the twirl of my tongue I encompass worlds,  
and volumes of worlds.  
Speech is the twin of my vision — it is unequal to  
measure itself;  
It provokes me forever.  
It says sarcastically, Walt, you understand  
enough — why don’t you let it out then?¹

Like a primordial god, he has projected his semen into the  
womb of the universe, and the magnificence of his voice  
harmonizes with the music of the spheres.

In sections 27 through 30 of Song of Myself, declaring  
that ''Mine is no callous shell''², perhaps to differentiate  
himself from mere self-abusers,³ the persona places his own  
hand on the ''headland''⁴ (a thrice-repeated term denoting the  
unplowed land at the end of a plowed furrow) and thus arouses  
himself by ''a touch quivering me to a new identity''.⁵ He is  
temporarily distraught ''prurient provokers''⁶ strain ''the  
udder of my heart for its withheld drip''.⁷ But after an  
apparent spasm in which (to use the words of section 22) he  
appears to ''moisten the roots of all that has grown'',⁸ he

¹. Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p.45  
². Ibid., p.47  
³. Ibid.  
⁴. Ibid.  
⁵. Ibid.  
⁶. Ibid.  
⁷. Ibid.  
⁸. Ibid., p.41
rejoices in the:

Parting, tracked by arriving — perpetual payment of perpetual loan,
Rich showering rain, and recompense richer afterward.
Sprouts take and accumulate — stand by the curb
prolific and vital,
Landscapes, projected, masculine, full-sized, and
golden.¹

The "perpetual payment" and the "recompense" the persona
boasts it, after the hysteria and guilt induced by masturba-
tion have subsided into a self-satisfied calm, are related to
one of the most puzzling lines in the entire poem: "A minute
and a drop of me settle my brain".² Sexual experts, it will
be recalled, generally held that the loss of semen would
result in debility and mental arrangement unless sufficient
semen has been conserved to maintain physical and mental well-
being. When one has learned to retain semen during sexual
union feels that in the course of an hour the physical tension
subsides, the spiritual exhilaration increases, and not
uncommonly visions of a transcendent life are seen and conscious-
ness of new powers experienced. Apparently, the "prurient
provokers" who threaten to rob the hudder" of the Whitman
persona's heart of its "withheld drip" have failed; he has

¹ Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p. 48
² Ibid.
retained enough of his semen to super-thinking. Perhaps the persona was only fantasizing the sensations of sexual ecstasy while conserving the flower of his blood in order to conjure up these "full-sized" and "golden" visions. In any case, following his intense sexual excitement and the subsequent restoration of his spermatic balance, he is inspired to voice the most sustained utterance in all of Leaves of Grass: "I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars"¹, and "I think I could turn and live with animals"², and the catalogue in which he is "afoot"³ with his vision and wondrously articulate.

By Blue Ontario's Shore illustrates the observation that when true artists make love to the world it answers in joy, and gives birth to things that work. In this poem, the persona, like a continental titan, embraces his nation in order to impregnate it with his own spermatic virtues:

Attracting it body and Soul to himself, hanging on its neck with incomparable love, Plunging his seminal muscle into its merits and demerits, Making its geography, cities, beginnings, events, glories, defections, diversities, vocal in him, If the Atlantic coast stretch, or the Pacific coast stretch, he stretching with them north or south,

1. Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p.48
2. Ibid., p.49
3. Ibid., p.50
Spanning between them east and west, and touching whatever is between them....
Through him flights, songs, screams, answering those of the wild-pigeon, coot, fish-hawk, qua-bird, mocking-bird, condor, night-heron, eagle;......

The persona stretches himself flank to flank against the continent, "Plunging his seminal muscle" into its bodies of water, which become "embouchure in him" 2 and "spend" 3 themselves in him. The "embouchure" imagery is ambiguously oral and vulval: "embouchure" denotes the mouth of a river, the opening out of a valley into a plain, or the manner of blowing a wind instrument; "spending" signifies orgasm, as do spends, love-spendings, and similar usages by Lord Rochester, Ik Marvell, Herman Melville, and Philip Roth. The reciprocal spending of the implicitly female North American continent during this embrace reflects the notion, once credited, that women also release a fecundating fluid, analogous to sperm, during orgasm.

By Blue Ontario's Shore establishes the political and aesthetic motivations for the persona's titanic couplings. Only an intense interaction between America and her poet -

1. whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p.272
2. Ibid:
3. Ibid:
tantamount to their sexual embrace - can instill the nation with the democratic virtues embodied in its poet:

Bravas to States whose seminal impulses send wholesome children to the next age! ......
By great bards only can series of peoples and States be fused into the compact organism of one nation ......
Of all races and eras, These States, with veins full of poetical stuff, most need poets, and are to have the greatest, and use them the greatest.
Their Presidents shall not be their common referee so much as their poets shall. 1

The presence of 'poetical stuff' in Mother America's veins nuterates the notion of a female fecundating fluid and lends a cermatic nuance to the persona's declaration that America will "advance to meet" 2 her poetic counterpart "the likes of itself" 3 and mat "his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed". 4 A dozen lines later the persona melodramatically demands that Mother America reward the sexual exertions of her beloved poet with the bestowal of language:

Give me the pay I have served for!
Give me to sing the songs of the great Idea
take all the rests; ...... 5

1. Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p.274
2. Ibid., p.277
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p.278
The ending of this long and diffuse poem confirms that America is identified with her poet and that she has gifted him with words, or rather, with clues, the symbols which he alone can translate into poems by filtering them through his bardic self.

About 1860, when Whitman was frequenting Pfaff's restaurant, the hangout of New York's bohemians, the drama critic William Winter (provoked by Whitman's backhanded praise for the poetic tinkless of Winter's gifted young friend Thomas Bailey Aldrich) baited Whitman to oblige him with his definition of the Poet, and Whitman replied that a Poet is a Maker. And he is "the maker of poems". He "settles justice, reality, immortality". His "insight and power encircle things and the human race." Seen in this perspective, whitman's terse comments show that he had defined himself as a maker in the venerable sense, a vatic or bardic creator, different in essence from the tinkling versifiers of the day. This is his message in an 1860 poem, later incorporated into Song of the Answerer, which calls the veno of mere

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
singers partial and momentary but asserts that the 'true poets'\(^1\) are 'the august master'\(^2\), the luminous words of whose poems reconcile mankind with the source of all wisdom and constitute a higher order of cognition than any other science:

He is the glory and extract, thus far, of things, and of the human race.

The singers do not beget — only THE POET begets, ....
All this time, and at all times, wait the words of true poems; ....
The greatness of sons is the exuding of the greatness of mothers and fathers,
The words of true poems are the tuft and final applause of science.\(^3\)

A closely related passage in the preface to *Leaves of Grass* (1855) says that underlying the structure of every perfect poem is the seed of scientists, of whose fatherstuff must be begotten the sinewy races of bards. In calling the poet a begetter and calling his words 'the tuft and final applause of science', *Song of the Answerer* makes poetry the highest flowering of the imagination. In this sense, 'tuft' may

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2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
connote a garland or a bouquet. But when "tuft" is related to the "exuding" of the spermatic fatherstuff and is recognized as another of Whitman's poetic code words for the phallus like sweet-flag, bunch, or boss, we may then perceive the "words" of poems—and of this phallic poem—as a "tuft", that is, as a spermatic utterance.

The Children of Adam group identifies the sexual drive with the urge to utter poems. The spermatic trope is brilliantly encapsulated in Ages and Ages Returning at Intervals:

Lusty, phallic, with the potent original loins, perfectly sweet,
I, chanter of Adamic songs,
Through the new garden, the West, the great cities,
calling,
Deliriate, thus prelude what is generated, offering these, offering myself,
Bathing myself, bathing my songs in sex,
Offspring of my loins.

The speaker with "the potent original loins, perfectly sweet", personifies the physiological Adam who can inaugurate a new world by virtue of the preservation within his mind of the best seed; he exemplifies Whitman's statement that a American literature can only be generated from the seminal

1. Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p.135
2. Ibid.,p.88
richness and proportion of new masculine persons. Aroused simultaneously by his sexual drive and by his urge to utter poems, the new Adam celebrates that mysterious and "deliriate" moment at which the poem is born - or at least begotten.

"What is generated offering these .......Offspring of my loins" here specifically resignate the Children of Adam poems as well as this very poem, which is both the creative act - duly recorded - and the artifact is that act.

Even those Children of Adam poems which chiefly glorify the procreative powers imply that the persona's sexual deeds encompass his acts of artistic creativity. A Woman Waits for Me endows the persona with "the moisture of the right man"¹, who drains "the pent-up rivers of myself"² these "love-spending"³ - in order to beget "loving crops"⁴ of immortal successors upon the bodies of countless women. But this Adam is more than the new world's archetypal breeder, for, says the speaker, "sex contains all"⁵, not merely "all the passions, loves, beauties, delights of the earth"⁶, but specifically all

1. Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p.84
2. Ibid., p.85
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p.84
6. Ibid.
'songs'\(^1\) as well. Similarly, *From Pent-Up Acting Rivers* is overtly '"the song of procreation'\(^2\), celebrating sorts of couplings, '"the warp'\(^3\) and '"the woof'\(^4\) of '"sex'\(^5\).

Adam a '"vessel'\(^6\) obeying God's commandment - '"The general commanding me'\(^7\) to be fruitful and multiply, alleging, like a true mystic, that the spirit operating within him is furthering a divinely inspired '"programme'\(^8\). And yet his translation of the sexual act into poetry, the transmutation of phallicism into vocalism, of sex into song:

> From that of myself, without which I were nothing.  
> From what I am determined to make illustrious, even if I stand sole among men,  
> From my own voice resonant - singing the phallus,  
> Singing the song of procreation,  
> Singing the need of superb children, and therein superb grown people,  
> Singing the muscular urge and the blending.\(^9\)

Ambiguously, the poem's closing lines suggest that the persona's enfans may be these very Engans d'Adam poems emerging from the mysterious darkness of the poet's passionate soul:

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1. Whitman, Walt, *Leaves of Grass*, p. 84
2. Ibid., p. 76
3. Ibid., p. 77
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., p. 17
8. Ibid., p. 77
9. Ibid., p. 75
From the night, a moment, I, emerging, flitting out, 
Celebrate you, enfans prepared for, 
And you, stalwart loins,  

The "night"² from which the Adam persona emerges is also central to the theme of One Hour to Madness and Joy in which the moment of sexual and "mystic deliria"³ furnishes the speaker with the spiritual and artistic nourishment on which he can "feed the remainder of life"⁴. In diction that is histrionic, if not spasmodic, and reminiscent of the manner in which Ahab speaks of himself as a natural force, he declares:

O furious! O confine me not! 
(What is this that frees me so in storms? 
What do my shouts amid lightnings and raging winds mean?)
O to drink the mystic deliria deeper than any other man! 
O savage and tender achings!⁵

The persona's "achings" are sexual and parental, male and female, through their release "the puzzle - the thrice-tied knot"⁶ will be "untied and illumined"⁷ to bring him

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1. Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p. 77
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 87
4. Ibid., p. 88
5. Ibid., p. 87
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
a godlike "nonchalance" and to have "the gag removed from one's mouth". 2

While that ungagging suggests the inherent decency of sex, it also implies that sexuality liberates the persona's vocalism to have "the feeling today or any day I am sufficient as I am." 3 Freed from the "gag" he becomes an inspired utterer of "something unproved". 4 His amorous spasm is "something in a trance", 5 which will allow him to "drive free", 6 to "love free" 7 and to "dash reckless and dangerous" 8 to gain the cruel release and the mystic illumination which are the twin curses of his poetry. Melodramatically, he cries out:

To ascend - to leap to the heavens of the love indicated to me!
To rise thither with my inebriate Soul!
To be lost, if it must be so!
To feed the remainder of life with one hour of fulness and freedom!
With one brief hour of madness and joy. 9

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1. Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p.87
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p.88
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
Only the strong element of sexuality separates Whitman’s rendering the poetic moment from that in a well-known passage by his Dear Master, Ralph Waldo Emerson, who describes the poet, roused to a sense of beauty and hemmed in by herds of daemons.

In this light, two Children of Adam poems appear to capture precise instant when sexual ecstasy coexists with the 'native moments' of artistic inspiration. In Native Moments this juxtaposition occurs in the poem's grammatical and temporal present during a (possibly masturbatory) fantasy as the solitary persona cries out for "libidinous joys only" and "the drench of my passions" and for "life coarse and rank" and imagines himself, at some later hour, carousing with companions and making love to a prostitute. Implying that his sexuality qualifying him not only "to consort with Nature's darlings" but to guide the American masses, and yearning to release his libidinous tensions in a fulfilment that will be poetic and quasi-political, he vows: "O you shunned persons. I at least do not shun you/I come forthwith in your midst, I will be your poet."

1. Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p. 89
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p. 90
Another juxtaposition of erotic and poetic elements occurs in that dazzling whirligig of sexual images in Spontaneous Me which, once again, plays out the persona's self-stimulated sexual fantasies. His "spontaneous" self seeks sexual and artistic release as he passively conjures up "the negligent list" of acts of love and sexual phenomena throughout nature:

Beautiful dripping fragments - the negligent list of one after another, as I happen to call them to me, or think of them,
The real poems, (what we call poems being merely pictures,)
The poems of the privacy of the night, and of men like me,
This poem, drooping shy and unseen, that I always carry, and that all men carry,
(Know, once for all, avowed on purpose, wherever are men like me, are our lusty, lurking, masculine, poems,) ...  

Here the persona has equated the creation of the poem - and of all "masculine poems" - with the phallus: it sends forth spermatic words and makes the reader intimate with the poems of the privacy of the night, an expression suggesting both the persona's genital is that mysterious world of the spirit

1. Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p. 85
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
from whose dark depths he utters poems.

The ending of *Spontaneous Me*, with its implications of the persona's "relief, repose, content"\(^1\), and his satisfaction with work well done, confirms that we have beheld the sexually charged moment of poetic creation:

> And this bunch plucked at random from myself, 
> It has done its work - I toss it carelessly to fall where it may.\(^2\)

The "bunch plucked at random from myself" suggests that the persona's spermatic creativity has fashioned "*Spontaneous Me*" into mother poetic garland. Here, too, "bunch" operates as a code word, the male genitals, the symbolic outlet of the poets seminal creativity. The phallus begets the song, and here it is the song. In billing the creative act "random", Whitman implies that it is something the persona can toss off "carelessly" whenever this mood seizes him. "*Spontaneous Me*"\(^3\) implies that the orgasm, whether actual or magined, is the poem and that the poem is the orgasm. The poet who wrote "I celebrate myself and sing myself"\(^4\) also rejoiced in

1. Whitman, Walt, *Leaves of Grass*, p. 87
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 85
4. Ibid., p. 24
"singing the phallus"¹ to express that force "of myself, without which I were nothing"². For in Whitman's spermatic trope, the poet, his phallus, and his song merge into one harmonious utterance.

Whitman's most important use of the motherhood mystique is found in Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking. Here the poet suggests that the complete human being, especially the artist, must transcend himself during his development and must experience otherness. Largeness of self is only possible through self-abnegation; fullness of life depends on knowledge of death. By vicariously experiencing the pain of a mockingbird³ singing for its lost "mate"⁴, the narrator, the boy-poet, steps outside himself and outside the safety of his previous experience. The bird, the narrator's dear "brother"⁵, sings of love and death, each of which involves self-denial and is necessary for the young poet to understand if he is to become the "chanter of pains and joys, uniter of here and hereafter"⁶. The poet of selfhood has paradoxically drawn self-denial into

¹ Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p.76
² Ibid., p.75
³ Ibid., p.202
⁴ Ibid., p.206
⁵ Ibid., p.204
⁶ Ibid., p.203
his song. Considering the context of nineteenth-century sentimentalism, it is not surprising that Whitman associates the theme of self-denial with the mother figure, for she represents the ideal of selflessness. The child is part of the mother's self until birth, when he achieves partial selfhood. The child attains full selfhood, it would seem, when he is able to care for his own needs. But Out of the Cradle suggests that independent selfhood is actually impossible. In the poem the mother is represented as the great ocean beside which the child-poet hears the bird sing. The ocean is described as "some old crone rocking the cradle, swathed in sweet garments". Even while the bird introduces the child to the pains of love and death, the old mother hisses and churns behind him. He is free to retreat to her at any moment, and in fact he does turn to the sea for the answers to the questions forced on him by his experience with the bird. It is the sea, the mother, who

Whisper'd me through the night, and very plainly
before daybreak,
lisp'd to me the low and delicious word death,
and again death, death, death, death
Hissing melodious, neither like the bird nor like
my arous'd child's heart,
But edging near as privately for me rustling at
my feet,
Creeping thence steadily up to my ears and laying
my softly all over
Death, death, death, death, death.

It is surprising how a poet who is never tired of asserting the common bonds of humanity should be accused of being one of the greatest egotists in literary history. If Whitman projects experience through the filament of his ego, he is not transgressing the canons of aesthetic communication. The 'I' in Whitman's poetry does not signify the circumscribed self of any particular individual; it symbolises man in his universality. Whitman always sings in his symbolic role as a poet of humanity. Therefore, between his seemingly egotistical utterances and the basic universality of his self there is no difference. 'I am the mate and companion of all people, all just as immortal and fathomless as myself.'\(^1\) Perhaps the only difference between the artist and the common man is that whereas the former can articulate his innermost feelings and urges, the latter remains mute. Otherwise the poet, the sage, and the man in the street, all carry the same spark of immortality in them:

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

\(^1\) Whitman, Walt, *Leaves of Grass*, p.29
He continues:

I swear nothing is good to me now that ignores individuals......
The whole theory of the universe is directed
unerringly to one single individual –
namely to You.¹

I and You, as points and counterpoints of the same
Divine Self, must invariably remain linked to each other.
Whitman was not an 'egoist', therefore, in any ordinary sense
of the word; he had transcended the ramifications of his
individual self to seek identification with the universal, the
divine:

Come, said the Muse,
Sing me a song no poet yet has chanted,
Sing me the universal.²

The most powerful and much used symbol in Whitman's
poetry is that of the "Open road", the symbol of eternal
journey or "Passage to India." This symbol also carries
a great significance for the traditional mystics who wish
to go out from their physical world in search of the self's
lost home. In it the "self" is "a pilgrim and traveller"
to a definite goal, its Jerusalem. The pilgrim's journey

1. Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p.278.
2. Ibid., p.185.
ends when he attains the knowledge of God or Illumination. The "open road" symbol is a process in which "the known world comes into being. For Whitman, the true voyage is the endless becoming of reality:

Allons to that which is endless as it was beginningless, To undergo much, tramp of days, rest of nights, To merge all in the travel they tend to, and the days and nights they tend to, Again to merge them in the start of superior journeys....

In another well-known poem, "The Sleepers", or "Night Poem", Whitman symbolizes night as the world of spirituality, and sleep as death's release of the soul. Here the poet enters the world of dreams, observes the whole range of human life from birth to death, "the new born emerging from gates, and the dying emerging from gates."

No doubt, all the symbols of Whitman are a record of the adventure of human consciousness in areas of discovery and self-expression:

Your facts are useful, and yet they are not my dwelling, I but enter by them to an area of my dwelling.

1. Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p.123
2. Ibid., p.43
In second section of "Song of Myself", the poet expresses his intention of freeing himself of all man-associated things and going to the woods, "undisguised and naked"\(^1\), and there to allow Nature to speak to him with all her 'original energy' unchecked. It is in this way alone that true knowledge and wisdom can be acquired.

The poet says that the houses, rooms, shelves, etc., are all "full of perfumes."\(^2\) He himself likes this perfume, and it also intoxicates him as it does others. But on this particular day he will not permit the perfume to intoxicate him. He loves the atmosphere which is odourless, and which does not intoxicate. He intends to go out to the woods, so that he may enjoy intimate physical contact with the atmosphere. The "perfume"\(^3\) here symbolises man-associated things and "atmosphere"\(^4\) outer nature or the natural environment. The poet would get rid of things of this world, and commune with Nature and in this way get ready for his mystical journey. One of the most sensuous and suggestive pictures of Whitman is contained in the following lines: "A few light kisses, a

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2. Ibid., p.25
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
few embraces, a reaching sound of arms.'

And here is another beautiful picture: 'The play of shine and shade on the trees as the supply boughs wag.'

Next the poet speaks of his delight in solitude, his delight in 'the rush of the streets',' and his delight 'along the fields and hillsides.' He speaks also of his 'feeling of health' and of the song when he rises from his bed and sees the sun. The passage is also indicative of the poet's sound health and his zest for life. He enjoys everything, both human and natural, both the good and the evil. But at present he is determined to commune with Nature and allow her to speak to him unhindered.

True knowledge and wisdom can be gained only through such communion. In the opinion of the poet worldly power and pelf, knowledge gained at second or third hand from books is useless and meaningless. He, therefore, invites his readers to come with him to the open woods, and there in contact with Nature they would acquire knowledge and wisdom directly from Nature. The idea reminds one of Wordsworth who

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
advised his readers in a well-known poem to leave their books 
and let Nature be their teacher:

Have you reckoned a thousand acres much? 
    have you reckoned the earth much? 
Have you practised so long to learn, to read? 
Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems? 
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 you self. 1 

In eleventh section of *Song of Myself* the expanding 
ego or self of the poet achieves identification with its 
lonely, sex starved young woman of twenty-eight, and thus 
expresses her intense feeling of loneliness and her yearning 
for male companionship.

From the window of her room a well-dressed young woman 
of twenty-eight watches twenty-eight handsome young men bathing 
near the sea-shore. She sees them bathing, though they do 
not see her. She is so lonely and sex-starved, that she would

be satisfied with the company of any one of them, even the least handsome.

In her imagination, she goes out and joins them, and bathes and swims with them. In a highly sensuous and voluptuous passage, the poet describes how she passes her hands over their bodies from head to foot. But the young men keep on swimming on their backs unaware of the twenty-ninth bather in their company:

Little streams pass'd all over their bodies,
An unseen hands also pass'd over their bodies,
It descended tremblingly from their temples and ribs.
The young men float on their backs, their white bellies bulge to the sun, they do not ask who siezes fast to them,
They do not know who puffs and declines with pendant and bending arch,
They do not think they rouse with spray.¹

In section XXV of Song of Myself, the sun rises in the sky bright and dazzling, and the soul of the poet also ascends the sky with it, equally bright and dazzling. The quest of the poet is also the same as that of the sun. His soul also moves round the world in search of the divine:


¹. Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p. 32
Dazzling and tremendous how quick the sun-rise
would kill me,
If I could not now and always send sun-rise
out of me.
We also ascend dazzling and tremendous as the sun,
we found our own O my soul in the calm and coll
of the daybreak. 1

With his power of speech he can enfold the world, even
that part of it which is unknown, mysterious, not seen by the
eye. His power of speech challenges him to speak out all
that is within him, but the poet does not accept the challenge.
There is no need for him to speak out and express himself in
words. He prefers silence to speech, and he finds happiness
in silence. Moreover, writing and talking can serve no useful
purpose. They cannot prove anything. His silence is sufficient
in itself to confound the unbelievers. He carries in his face
the full proof of what is contained within:

Speech is the twin of my vision,
it is unequal to measure itself,
It provokes me forever, it says sarcastically,
Walt you contain enough, why don't you let it out then?
Come now I will not be tantalized, you
conceive too much of articulation,
Do you not know O speech how the buds beneath
you are folded?
Waiting in gloom, protected by frost,
The dirt receding before my prophetical screams,
I underlying causes to balance them at last.

1. Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p.45
My knowledge, my live parts, it keeping tally with the meaning of all things, Happiness, (which whoever hears me let him or her set out in search of this day) 

In this section the "I" may be taken to symbolise the Brahma or the over-soul. Interpreted in this way, the poet's self-assertion and self-expansion is no longer felt to be arrogant and aggressive. It then becomes a celebration of the infinitude of the divine. The glory of God needs no proof; it is writ large on the very face of nature:

My final merit I refuse you, I refuse putting from me what I really am, Encompass worlds, but never try to encompass me, I crowd your sleekest and best by simply looking toward you. Writing and talk do not prove me, I carry the plenum of proof and every thing else in my face, With the hush of my lips I wholly confound the skeptic.

In section XVIV of Song of Myself Whitman says that time is endless, and the life of the soul is endless. The soul is born again and again, and every birth adds to the

1. Whitman, Walt, Leaves of Grass, p.45
2. Ibid.
'richness and variety'\(^1\) of the soul. Every life is an addition to the wisdom and experience of the soul, and thus the soul continues to rise higher and higher through the ages. One's soul at the present moment is the resultant of the experience it has passed through since the earliest times when there was chaos and the stars existed unfomed as nebulae. Hence the poet sings ecstatically, 'Immense have been the preparation for me'\(^2\), and 'All forces have been steadily employed to complete and delight me.'\(^3\) It is the victory-song of the poet celebrating the immensity and eternity of his own soul. It is a mystic truth, and the poet has succeeded in giving it a highly charged poetic expression:

Faithful and friendly the arms that have help'd me.
Cycles ferried my cradles, rowing and rowing
like cheerful boatmen.
For room to me stars kept aside in their own rings.
They sent influences to look after what was to hold me.
Before I was born out of my mother, generations guided me,
My embryo has never been torpid, nothing could overlay it.
For it the nebula cohered to an orb,
The long slow strata piled to rest it on,
Vast vegetables gave it sustenance,
Monstrous sauroids transported it in their mouths
and deposited it with care.\(^4\)

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2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
Thus Whitman believes that in modern age man is now beginning to be at war with himself. He has turned his own mind against himself. The spontaneous assertion of individual initiative, feelings, wishes and opinions has been stunted and choked. A general weakening of bonds between men, between communities and institutions has nurtured feelings of inadequacy and apathy. Most of man's alienated behaviour is the result of an unauthentic self.