WALT WHITMAN'S URBAN CROWD

Walt Whitman was born on May 31, 1819, on a farm at West Hills, Long Island. He came of English, Dutch and Quaker ancestry, and was the second child of Walter and Louise Van Velsor Whitman. The English and the Dutch were in almost equal numbers on the Island, and Whitman had both English and Dutch blood in his veins. The mother was closer to her son, Walt, than the father. Her interest in Quakerism was the only religious inheritance the family passed on to the future poet. The Quakers believed in an inner light, complete freedom of conscience, and equality between man and woman, without caring even a whit for the formal ceremonies of the church. Walt Whitman, as a boy, was greatly influenced by radical, democratic views of his father and the Quakerism of his mother.

Whitman spent the major part of his boyhood on Long Island and in Brooklyn and New York. He writes in 'Specimen Days': "All along the Island and its shores, I spent intervals many years, all seasons, sometimes riding, sometimes boating, but generally afoot, absorbing fields, shores, marine incidents, characters, the bay-men, formers, pilots...." He went frequently to Coney Island, "at that time, a long, bare unfrequented shore, which I had all to myself, and where I loved, after bathing, to race up and down the hard sand, and declaim Homer or Shakespeare to the surf and sea-gulls by the hour". 1

The poets' childhood was lived in alternation between the farm on Long Island and the streets of the neighboring city of Brooklyn. "Both the world of
nature and the world of man impinged forcefully on the young boy’s imagination, and the mature poet denied neither but exultingly embraced both.” (qtd. In Dr. Raghukul Tilak. Walt Whitman. 39). After a period of three years of school teaching, he began his first newspaper work for the Long Island Patriot. **During his period as editor, Whitman was living the full life of the city man-son of Manhattan.** A rare photograph that survives from this time shows him neatly bearded, his hat at a rakish angle, a cane jauntily held in his hands, his face expressing the sophisticated self-assurance of a man about town. At this time one of Whitman’s greatest passions was the opera, an art-form that the Italians claimed as their own. He was a veteran opera-goer, and the magnificent music and high melodrama of the opera made indelible impressions on his imagination, impressions that were to help shape the poetry of his masterpiece.

The first edition of the characteristic work was a small volume of twelve poems that he named *Leaves of Grass*, bound in sea-green cloth, the type of which he had set up himself: this appeared in July 1856. The following year he reissued the volume with thirty-two new poems. Some of the poems gave great offence, and there was a hint of prosecuting the author, which caused the publishers to withdraw the book from circulation. Emerson took upon himself the task of remonstrating with Whitman upon his frankness; the poet listened calmly, but the friendly advice had no further effect.

Whitman’s songs are no mere poems of rustic solitudes, they are the songs of the crowded streets, as well as of the country roads; of men and
women of every type. In fact, he seeks the elemental everywhere. His business is to bring it to the surface to make men and women rejoice in—not shrink from—the great primal forces of life.

The Female equally with the Male I sing.
Of Life immense in passion, pulse, and power,
Cheerful, for freest action form'd under the laws divine,
The Modern Man I sing.

(‘One’s -Self I Sing’-1867,lines 6-9)

The great epics of the past had embodied the myths and fables of those ages, the modern epics, specially the American, must embody the 19th century myths, science and democracy. He found that such an epic was lacking, and he set out to make up this deficiency through ‘The Leaves’. His own pronouncements and writings during the different periods of his career make it quite clear that he regarded his masterpiece as the epic of America, the archetypal poem, which gives voice to the national ideals and aspirations of America, which embodies the modern spirit, just as the epics of Homer and Virgil expressed the spirit of their own times.

And critic after critic has agreed with Whitman’s own view of his work. Thus immediately on its publication Thoreau welcomed it as, ‘very brave and American’, and W.H. Rossetti called it, “the poem of American nationality”, a work which catches its flame from, “the fire of Americanism.” (qtd. In
Dr. Raghukul Tilak. Walt Whitman. 39) W. D. O. Conner is ecstatic in its praise and writes, “Behold in ‘Leaves of Grass’ the immense and absolute sunrise. It is all our own. The nation is in it! In form a series of chants, in substance it is an epic of America. It is distinctively and utterly American. Without model, without imitation, without reminiscence, it is evolved entirely from one polity and popular life. The poet without using any powerful, wondrous phrases has easily celebrated the theme of America. The essences, the events, the objects of America, the myriad varied landscapes, the teeming and giant cities, the generous and turbulent population—the whole gigantic epic of our continental being unwound in all its magnificent reality in these pages. To understand Greece, study the ‘Iliad and Odyssey’, study ‘Leaves of Grass’ to understand America”. (qtd. In Dr. Raghukul Tilak. Walt Whitman. 40).

“Song of Myself” is Whitman's most characteristic poem. He must have been working on the “Song” from the down of his resolve to be the poet of the New World in the “strange, unloosen'd, wondrous time” of the earlier nineteenth century— from about 1846 to it's publication in 1855. In the ‘Song’ we find the preparations for the expression of the poet’s robust soul, which symbolizes the soul of a new society. Nothing can stop its evolution.

In order to increase the expressive range of his language, he did not hesitate even to introduce slangs and colloquialism into the language of his poetry. Often he makes free use of words from factories and farms and trades. At other times he compounds words or freely coins new words. At still other
times, he imports words from foreign languages such as the French and the Spanish, and distorts and adapts them to his own uses. Words from his reading, literary terms, much that is grandiose and affected, also survive and are used along with words borrowed from the daily usage both of the city and the countryside. Thus in his language there is a curious and fantastic mixture of words taken from different levels and different contexts. James Miller writes in this connection, “Whitman’s wit inheres in his language; in his sometimes indiscriminate mixture of levels of usage; in his comic, occasionally grotesque, use of foreign words and phrases; and in his blabbing, gabbing, and yawping in a multitude of mingled voices. His book is America’s linguistic melting pot; in it all the languages of all the people are mixed and stirred into one heady, hearty stew. His wisdom is folk-wisdom, which lives in the sayings of the people, in their chants, in their spells, in their incantations- in short, in their language”. (qtd. In Dr. Raghukul Tilak. Walt Whitman. 52).

The heterogeneity of Whitman’s style has come in for a great deal of adverse criticism. But it is well suited to convey the diverse and often opposite and antagonistic philosophies and concepts, which he tried to cram into his poetry. He was a poet of the body as well as of the soul, of the physical as well as the spiritual, of the material as well as the transcendental, of the scientific and the mystic. He could move with perfect ease and swiftness from one opposite concept to another. Whitman’s was a varied, many-sided personality. He is a poet who contains multitudes, it is not difficult to find in his masterpiece most diverse and conflicting philosophies and attitudes. He has
been called the poet of the family and the home, as well as the poet of free love and unrestrained sexuality, for this reason his poetry has been condemned as the "poetry of barbarism." (qtd. in Dr. Raghukul Tilak. Walt Whitman. 58). He has been called the poet of democracy and the poet of science. But he has also been called a great mystic and a great religious poet and a great city poet.

Therefore, different people have reacted differently to his poetry. But today he is regarded not only as the greatest poet of America, but also as one of the greatest poets of the world.

The purpose of the present enquiry is to study in depth Walt-Whitman as a poet of city.

"Walt Whitman is often regarded—rightly—as the poet who introduced the city to American literature."² Whitman drew back from the privacy and interiority toward which his poetic thinking tended, recognizing that it reduced his experience to spectacle and illusion. He sought for grounds on which his vision might be both stabilized and communicated. Although some of his poems, like "Song of Myself," rely on an act of faith that the I and the Life-Force are one, others look for a more secular mediation.

Recently, several writers on Walt Whitman have addressed this paradox by showing how Whitman sought to establish himself as a public poet and to imagine and address an American audience. These include C. Carroll Hollis’ Language and Style in ‘Leaves of Grass’ (1983), M. Wynn Thomas ‘The Lunar Light of Whitman’s Poetry (1987), Kerry C. Larson’s Whitman’s Drama of Consensus (1988), Betsy Erkkila’s Whitman the Political Poet (1989), James

As James Dougherty believes, "Whitman's individualism, in disclaiming affiliation with any person, association, or system that would mediate between the 'Single Person' and the All, did result in a state of mind and a poetry in which 'Self' and Cosmos forever engulf each other as Whitman's attention shifts between these two principles of inclusion. Most of Whitman's poems measure and remeasure the Magic Prison of individualist consciousness. The problems of an egotistical poetic have been discussed by many critics of Whitman, of the American Renaissance, and of Romanticism". 3

The questions raised by Whitman's poems—about the citizen artist, the aestheticizing of what is seen, and encounters within shared space—have continued to trouble imaginations inspired either by him or by the urban world he celebrated. For Whitman America is not simply a people upon a land; it is an ideology. 4 (Dougherty, James. xv).

Anticipating some more recent reflections on mass society, Whitman insists that American egalitarianism need not issue in an agglomeration of identical units. In 1867 he began to preface 'Leaves of Grass' with an "Inscription" that announced two themes for his chant, one the word ENMASSE but the other ONE-SELF—a simple, separate person (Song of Myself. V, II, 557). The world of sight, rather than of speech, was his source of metaphor when in the 1855 preface he spoke of the poet, in his representative and public capacity, as a man of faith; "As he sees the farthest he the most faith."
(...) He sees eternity in men and women... He does not see men and women as dreams or dots. Faith is the antiseptic of the soul.... it pervades the common people and preserves them... they never give up believing and expecting and trusting". The poet may be beset by the terrible question of appearances; experience may threaten to dissolve into flashes on the retina or solipsistic dreams. But in union with the common people of America, he keeps faith in a visible-and yet visionary- world. "The City World" is not only the scene with which he is most familiar: it is also one most likely to afford him that sense of the ‘Many’ in ‘One’ which distinguished the Matter of America and the poetics of the American Bard. In “Pictures”, he painted himself “going up and down Manhattan, through the streets, along the shores. Every hour of the day and night has given me copious pictures,” he wrote at the end of the poem.

“Whitman’s visualizing, descriptive power leads him into the role of the flaneur, the walker of streets and receptor of experience. The way out of simply private feelings-the path between the ‘I’ and the ‘Not Me’, between ‘I’ and ‘You’ as fellow citizens-must pass along the route of language, a language invoking visual images in which poet and reader together repose their faith in the power of the eyesight to create a shared world. The task for Whitman is so to use words and visual images that they will awaken the imaginative faculty of his reader, binding poet and reader into a common citizenship founded on that “Spiritual World” whose realities the common miracle of eyesight anticipates. So, as Whitman’s words must draw upon the communal stock of English, so
must his image invoke a familiar way of seeing if he is to pass over from private consciousness to the role of public poet.

**WALT WHITMAN AND THE CITY:**

- This is the city...and I am one of the Citizens;
- Whatever interests the rest interests me....
- Politics, churches, newspapers, schools,
- Benevolent societies, improvements, banks,
- Tariffs, steamships, factories, markets, stocks
- And stores and real estate and personal Estate. (77)

('Leaves of Grass' *Song of Myself* 42,v, I, 67,p77)

It is commonplace to describe Whitman as the first, perhaps, the premier poet of the American City. But the city and the urban life confronted Whitman with a severe challenge to his ambitions to be American's bard. The adventurous life on the frontier and the bucolic virtues of the farm had already established their ethos in American culture, along with appropriate modes of artistic representation. James Fennimore Cooper and the writers of the old Southwest had immortalized the rude but noble frontiersman; Crevecoeur, Irving, and Whittier had romanticized the husbandman; the Hudson River painters, the Luminists, and the humbler artists of engraving and lithograph had established the painterly image of the American countryside." But the city remained invisible. Benjamin Franklin had used it as the stage for his *New World* version of the legend of the successful Apprentice; and George Lippard had transformed Philadelphia into a gothic menace in 'The Quaker City' (qtd.
Dougherty James 27). There were painted and engraved “views” of every metropolis. But little in American literature and painting suggested the dynamic and complex presence of expanding cities in the mid nineteenth-century American landscape. To turn from the rural world to the life of cities was like abandoning the comfortable literary traditions of Europe for the unformulated possibilities of America. What was there to see? How to see it? How to say what you saw?

But the bard of egalitarian consciousness cannot be one whose vision is confined to the countryside or whose poetic resources are inapt for rendering city life. Song of Myself leaps effortlessly from rural to urban scenes.

The Machinist rolls up his sleeves…
the policeman
travels his beat… the gate-keeper marks who pass,
The young fellow drives the express-wagon…
I love him though I do not know him;
The half-breed straps on his light boots
To compete in the race,
The western turkey-shooting draws old and Young.
Some lean on their rifles, some sit on logs, out from the crowd
Steps the markets man and takes his position and levels his piece;
The groups of newly-come immigrants cover the wharf or levee.

(Song of Myself 15, v, I, 16-17)
But this ease of passage is accomplished by keeping attention-focused on the consciousness through which these pictures flash. They are simply mental images, altogether the possession of the Self. So long as they pass rapidly across the mind, the ‘I’ need not acknowledge them as presences, as ‘Not-Me’. When the attention lingers, though, the differing qualities of each locale must be acknowledged. The machinist and the driver and the shopgirl from a city, and the city forms them. And their life is not like that of trapper and milkmaid. Some of Whitman’s poems are formed upon the juxtaposition of city and country life. He summons up the American agrarian paradise;

Give me the splendid silent sun, with all his beams full-dazzling;
Give me juicy autumnal fruit, ripe and red from the orchard;
Give me a field where the unmow’d grass grows;
Give me an arbor, give me the trellis’d grape;
Give me fresh corn and wheat-give me Serene-moving animals, teaching content.

(‘Give Me the Splendid Silent Sun,’ 1881 I. V. II. 497)

And so, Whitman paints country life with all the enhanced coloration prepared by seventy-five years of American Romanticism. Then he sweeps it all away, as a mere dream of those “tired with ceaseless excitement, and rack’d by the war-strife”. In its place he sets an image of city life, in which the anxieties of war do not seem discordant;

Give me faces and streets; give me these phantoms incessant and endless along the trottoirs!
Give me interminable eyes! give me women!
Give me comrades and lovers by the thousand! 
Let me see new ones every day! 
Hold new ones by the hand every day! 

Give me such shows! give me the streets of Manhattan! 
Manhattan faces and eyes forever for me.

(‘Give Me the Splendid Silent Sun’, 1881.2,v, II, 498-99)

Rather than endorsing directly the cause of continued war, Whitman turns from rural life to the city. For the harmony of the pastoral myth is achieved unrealistically, by acknowledging only features of peace, whereas heterodox ‘New York City’ can assimilate the war as part of its intense and ever-changing spectacle. Also, this turn implicitly rejects the agricultural South for the Urban North, the agrarian past in favour of a commercial and industrial future.

A noncombatant, Whitman experienced the war mainly in its urban guises: parades, politics, manufactures, munitions, transport, hospitals. “First O Songs for a Prelude,” “Beat! Beat! Drums!”, “City of Ships”, and “How Solemn as One by One.” In the summer and fall of 1864, while the peace Democrats contested Lincoln’s presidency, Whitman was in New York recuperating from his hospital in Washington.

But Whitman is not just arguing against the Copperheads. He is also waging a revolution against the poetic resources of his heretofore-pastoral culture.7

The contemporary poets are ague that, in ‘Give Me the Splendid Silent Sun’ and elsewhere, Whitman is assimilating the city into an essentially pastoral vision. On the contrary: he is opening a breach between them that is not only
aesthetic but epistemological. Bove says: “the poet not only testifies to man’s being present in world, but he places himself where the future becomes present, at the point where ‘sight’ and ‘eyes’ are retrieved from metaphysics and coercion. In other words, the poet lives on the verge, on the boundary between what-is and has been within life and tradition and what is not yet”. (Bove.Destructive Poetics, 147).

He draws together the materials for a new artistic schema, using the stuff that pastoralism had found repugnant: streets.... Crowds.... Faces... noise. This is a true revolution, Have- Not against Have. The serenity of his rural landscape outpromises the city’s novelty and excitement. Country life is rich with specific adjective detail, whereas the city cannot muster an intensity of vocabulary to affirm its intensity of life. Further, and most tellingly, the countryside offers substantive things, each seen in its own integrity of being: sun, fruit, orchard, grass, woman, child. In the city we meet not substance but appearance: shows, pageants, theatrics. Integral beings are displayed by fragments and sacrifices-by streets, faces, and eyes, by “phantoms.”

The city is a world of phantoms. For Whitman, this term, akin to “fantasy”, commonly denotes a revenant, an event yet to come or a spiritual being such as a muse. But in his urban poems, it refers to ordinary men and women-casting on them a special significance that is linked to his sense of the dissociation of the Self from its World, expressed in some of the ‘Calamus Poems’. In a drafted poem, never finished, which extends the Calamus mood into the early war years, Whitman made this significance clear. He describes
himself seated in the vaulted cellar of Pfaff's restaurant on Broadway. He compares the cellar to a vaulted tomb, as he looks out at the flood of life around him and on the street above:

What hurrying human tides, or day or night!
What passions, winnings, losses, ardors, swim thy waters!
What whirls of evil, bliss and sorrow, stem thee!
What curious questioning glances—glints of love!

(Broadway, [1888] 1-4)

“Amid the crowds and waves of the city, cutoff from the support of a communal ethos (such as that which sustained the rural poets, like Whittier), Whitman was most profoundly struck by his Cartesian doubt: maybe the things one perceives are only apparitions. Deprived of reality, they become phantoms or shames, solid only on the side that the viewer sees.”8 These are the egotists he addressed in “Song of the Open Road”, who walk formless and wordless through the streets of the city, urbane pageant figures with hell under their skull bones.

“The experience of the street—the dissociated life of the man in the crowd—is for Whitman the epitome of democratic consciousness.” 9 This man is the individual standing over against the All. He can meet it only with the resources of his own imagination. In the face of its unsorted and unsortable variety, ‘Sympathy’ is quickly spent, “Pride” reduced to narcissism. Consciousness of reality yields to Self-consciousness. The urban spectacle forces Whitman to recognize the insubstantiality of his “experience” and to ask whether a world of
mind (I) and a world of fact (Not-Me) can indeed be reconciled. Is there truly a path between reality and the soul? a bridge of words from one soul to another, from I to You? The more intense the city’s “show”, the more keenly Whitman felt the alienation of the experiencer, the spectator. From the deep, secure observatory of the self, the observer looks out at his body and its futile commerce with the world and then, as Emerson wrote, ‘oversees himself’. Thus art becomes a way to deal with external reality, to subject it, as phenomena, to the dominion on of the transcendent self. (Collins. The Uses of Observation, 121).

Whitman shaped this doubt of appearances and of Self into a contrast of country and city in an important short poem in the first edition of ‘Leaves of Grass’, “There was a Child went Forth” (V, I, 149-52). This poem epitomizes the entire journey of consciousness in Whitman’s poetic scheme, from engagement to withdrawal to a renewed confidence in reality founded on a faith in the power of words to transmit a visual experience. Like “Give me the Splendid Silent Sun,” this poem begins amid the comfortably substantial beings of the rural world:

There was a child went forth every day,
And the first object he looked upon and
Received with wonder or pity or love or dead, that
Object he became,
And that object became part of him
For the day or a certain part of the day...
Or for many years or stretching cycles of Years.
However, consciousness has already begun to prey upon this innocence. The child’s powers of vision and of sympathy make him one with reality, but reality in fact thus becomes ‘part of him.’ Advancing through his rural springtime, the child goes from total absorption in nature to an awareness of human beings—strangers and passing schoolchildren—and then to recognition of the particular personalities of his parents (the father mean, angered, unjust; the mother quietly placing the dishes on the supper-table). But just when the child and the poem are entering into socialized consciousness, self-consciousness arises, and in just the hesitation of an ellipsis the “real” world is reduced to “unreal” phantoms—to “flashes and specks.”

“There was a Child Went Forth”, Whitman first dramatizes the child’s burgeoning confidence in the power and accuracy of his senses; then introduces into this paradise the serpent of doubt about those senses and the seeming world they project; and then, finally resolves the child’s doubt with another visual image and, passing from singular to plural, objectifies and communicates his vision. The individualist strain in his poetics necessitates the doubt; and yet the nationalist strain—the need to speak for all America—requires that the doubt be overcome.

Bound together fundamentally by a vigorous, assertive pride of place and time, further unified by an intensely emotional and spiritual perception of the relationship between poet, man and nature, and always mindful of human activities as they bear upon the national purpose, ‘Leaves of Grass’ has its own
vital nineteenth-century American topographical substance. Indeed, if the major aim of all topographical poetry derives from man's need to explore the conditions of his relationship to the earth, no poem has done more than "Leaves of Grass" to 'define America' in terms of place, time, and toil. In singing of "Modern Man" Whitman sings of the Modern America as he settles a continent and creates a democratic nation.

Wordsworth, we remember, was uneasy about crowds, noise, motion, congestion and other by-products of a "too busy world," as a matter of predisposition and artistic choice, he turns away from the "unmanageable" complexities of the city. Whitman, however, loved "America's busy, teeming, intricate whirl" (Whitman, 'Eidolons' line 34) and sought to give an impression of this zestful interplay of human energies not by dismissing it summarily or by using it as a foil for more "truthful" more "manageable" elements of urban experience, but by extending it as a broad simultaneous effect-positive evidence of "Life immense in passion, pulse, and power". (Whitman, One's Self I Sing, line 6).

He thus deals with the fact of multiplicity or intricacy by naming if not fully describing the endless particulars he confronts; and if this method sometimes seems repetitious, habitual, or merely mechanical, it may also become poetically energized by some large vision or dramatic idea.

Mindful of "Life Immense" rather than of the opposition between the country and the city, one of the most common features of the older topographical tradition, Whitman does not ordinarily distinguish between the
two. There is no hint of William Cowper’s “God made the country, and man made the town” in the typically wide-ranging parallels of section 18 of “Starting from Paumanok.”

See, in my poems, cities, solid, vast, inland,
With paved streets,
With iron and stone edifices, ceaseless vehicles,
And commerce,
See, the many-cylinder’d steam printing-press
See, the electric
Telegraph stretching across the continent.

(‘Starting from Paumanok’, 265-268)

Against the background of frontier and farm, but not in contrast with it, are the major thrusts of recent nineteenth-century technological advancement, including the then novel ‘paved streets’ and ‘iron and stone edifices’ of the recognizably modern American city. This astonishing poetic conglomeration of frontier farm, city mine, and factory is bound together only by two elements, which they all share growth and the poet’s positive, imaginative grasp of the fact of growth. Thus all items of this lengthy catalog must contribute to a positive, accumulating rhapsodic total, typically culminating in the vital presence of the poet himself. Unlike his two predecessors Jago and William Cowper, who much more accurately describe the effects of early industrialism, Whitman avoids any suggestion that primitive technology may be accompanied by smoke, dirt, noise and danger, to say nothing of social disruption and economic injustice. Whitman was of course not alone in his apparently naïve acceptance of the machine age in America. By the late 1840s, writes Leo Marx, “the image of the American
machine has become a transcendent symbol: a physical object invested with political and metaphysical ideality." (Leo Marx. The Machine in Garden, p.206) Marx goes on to describe the special impact of the machine in the New World: “Like nothing ever seen under the sun, it appears when needed most: when the great west is finally open to settlement, when democracy is triumphant and gold is discovered in California, here—as if by design—comes a new power commensurate with the golden opportunity of all history.” (Leo Marx. The Machine in Garden, p.206) Considering this marvelous “New Power,” American writers express “a plausible in-credulity, wonder, elation, and pride; a generous, humane delight at the promise of so much energy so soon to be released.” The rhetoric of progress, moreover, “rises like a froth on a tide of exuberant self-regard, sweeping over all misgivings, problems, and contradictions” (Leo Marx. The Machine in Garden, p.206-7)

Though Whitman greeted the machine with enthusiasm, Whitman was sometimes uneasy or uncertain about the effects of industrialism upon American cities, where the symbolic import of the machine may not have been altogether “transcendent”.

In fact it is the scientific doctrine that nothing is insignificant in Nature, that she takes as much care in producing a leaf of grass as a planet, is the very basis of Whitman’s “Leaves of Grass”. To him it is significant, because he believes that though so low and humble, the sum total of nature’s process is involved in the creation of a single blade of grass, as much as it is involved in the birth of a galaxy. Whitman had faith in science and modern technology and
honored the scientist and their inventions heartily. It was actually the scientific truth of "Leaves of Grass" which first caught the attention of Ann Gilchrist. In "A Woman's Estimate of Walt Whitman," she appreciated the poet's incorporation of modern science, and remarked: "The man of science finds the letters and joins them into of science furnishes the premises; but it is the poet who draws the final conclusions." Of course in her estimate, as in Whitman's too, the poet has a higher position than that of the scientist.

'Whitman was the first important American poet to celebrate science. He rejected the romantics that science despoils the virgin purity of nature and preys on the poetic imagination. Whitman violated the spirit of science the better to gratify his cosmic affirmations and mystical worldview. Despite his putative defense of science, Whitman was imbued with a Romantic mentality'. (The article appeared in 'Skeptical Inquirer', p.51 [4]).

For poets in the past who wrote within the georgic tradition, the country had provided a natural antithesis to the stock image of the vice-ridden city, but Whitman's "Open Road" version of the antithesis seems to reverse the stereotype effect: the attractions of the "Open Road" are merely stock images for all things that have been found desirable to the romantic imagination: heroism, beauty, wisdom, love, happiness. With respect to the city Whitman sees things much more clearly.

The evils there are not represented by the traditional vices (pride, greed, envy, lust, and so forth) but by institutions and functionaries intrinsic to civilized urban life: libraries, schools, lecture halls courts, priests, preachers,
lawyers, teachers, judges. In Whitman’s joyfully laboring and growing America, it is the development of this enclosed, conventional, rule making world—a world ‘character’d’ in the same sense that Blake’s London is “Charter’d”—that must be characterized as sinister, doubly sinister because it continually offers “the old smooth prizes” of success and riches. Less visible because less obviously related to that entrenched structure of reward is the human dimension of weakness, suffering, failure, and evasion, all compounded with the elemental necessities of life and the inescapable routines of work. This dimension Whitman cannot ignore, though what he calls the profound lesson of “reception” clearly runs counter to his theories about the positive themes and materials of the American poetry.

The early market man, the hearse, the
Moving of furniture into the town, return
back from the town,
They pass, I also pass, and anything passes, none
Can be interdicted,
None but are accepted, none but shall be dear to me.

(‘Song of the Open Road’. line 20-24)

Whitman however—as he admitted in “Starting from Paumanok” is compelled to write about evil as well as good, about vice as well as virtue. He is also compelled to write about the prosaic as well as the “poetic”, for in “The Open Road” he next presents the most commonplace aspects of the urban scene, finding even in their “impassive surfaces” the secret, ingrained essence of everyday human life. All is overwhelmingly familiar: walks, curbs, houses, windows, porches, doors, “gray stones of interminable pavements”, but
From all that has touch'd you I believe you have imparted to
Yourselves, and now would impart the same secretly to me.
From the living and the dead you have peopled your impassive
Surfaces, and the spirits thereof would be evident and amicable within
(‘Song of the Open Road’. lines, 37-41)

We understand the urgency of Whitman’s summons to the freedom and
joy of a complete spiritual transformation when he describes the stultifying
effects of entrapment by social forms and modes. These forms and modes
embody not the living will of the community but the structure of falsifications
that is erected by habit and pretense. Outwardly, all seems well as people move
about the streets of the city, pursuing public business or private pleasure but
their lives are blighted by secrecy, distrust, and deception.

Whoever you are, come forth: or man or women come forth!
You must not stay sleeping and dallying there in the house,
Though you built it, or though it has been built for you.
Out of the dark confinement; out from behind the screen!
Formless and wordless through the streets of the cities,
Polite and bland in the parlors,
In the cars of railroads, in steamboats, in the public
assembly,
Home to the houses of men and women, at the table, in the
Bedroom, everywhere,
Smartly attired, countenance soiling, from upright, deaths under
The breastbones, hell under the skull-bones.
(‘Song of the Open Road’. lines, 191-203)

Thus Whitman peers for a moment behind the masks and costumes of
middle class urban types whose pre-occupation with conventional patterns of
conduct fails to conceal the fact of death or death in life. In exploring a number of social and psychic symptoms— isolation, evasion, alienation, repression—Whitman demonstrates an awareness of certain pathological states, which are now almost invariably related to the stresses of modern urban life. (Weimer, The City as Metaphor.20) Implicit in this awareness, moreover, is the poet's claim for a special consciousness of the hidden ranges of urban experience, as if he were privileged to intuit and reveal private states he could never actually observe: "our of the dark confinement! ... I know all and expose it."

Another early poem dealing with the difference between appearance and reality (or 'false realities' and 'true realities') is "Thought" (1860). "Keeping fair with the customs," like the quietly desperate men and women in "Song of the Open Road", these triumphant winners of "the old smooth prizes" are exposed as indistinguishably naked nonentities whose carrers reflect pointless rivalry and self-hatred.

Of persons arrived at high positions,
Ceremonies, wealth, scholarship, and thelike;
To me all that those persons have arrived
at sinks away from them,
except as it results to their bodies and souls.

(‘Thought’ [1860].lines,1-4)

Whitman's vivid but desperate imagery reflects a strange mixture of attitudes as he wavers between disgust ("rotten excrement of maggots") and pity (Sad, hasty, unwaked, somnabules walking the dusk). "But the later image seems much more accurate in evoking the illusory nature of structured
experience, wherein habit and custom form patterns from which there can be no deviation."\textsuperscript{14} If the "true realities" can be associated with the spiritual fulfillment described in "Song of the Open Road" the "false realities" are obviously centered in the city: "the old smooth prizes" of position, wealth, and power have always been defined by the conditions and goals of urban life.

Though it is one of Whitman's great poems, "Song of the Open Road"; nevertheless serves as a convenient key to the many scattered, unrelated allusions to the city in "Leaves of Grass". It is possible, for instance, to view many of Whitman's various attitudes toward people of the city with respect to the formula that defines them as victims of "false realities" or at least captives of a system they cannot fully understand. For the hapless winners of "prizes" - the rich, the successful, the well adapted - Whitman exhibits no sympathy and very little pity; in "Faces" (1855), "the shaved blanch'd faces of orthodox citizens" arouse a disgust that is vented in images that border on the obscene. (Walt Whitman "Song of the Open Road", Section 2).

However, the more obvious losers in life-the prostitutes, the drunkards, the felons-are lovingly embraced: "NONE", says Whitman "but shall be dear to me". Single short poems, like "You Felons on Trial in Courts" (1860), "The City Dead-House" (1867), and "To a Common Prostitute" (1860), stress Whitman's compassion and sense of identity with the victims of a "closed" system of law and morality: "I walk with delinquents with passionate love". ("You Felons on Trail in Courts").
In other parts of "Song of Myself" Whitman "minds" various aspects of city life: the lunatic taken to the asylum, the cripple bound upon the operating table (section 15): in section 26 he also hears the mixed sounds of the city: friendly talk among the young, laughter, argument, "the tones of the sick", the judges death sentence, the chant of the stevedores and anchor lifters, fire alarms, trains, whistles, the music of the funeral march, the opera chorus, the soprano (it is only her voice that really moves him in the gamut of urban sounds: "it wrenches such orders from me I did not know I possess’d them"). Sometimes, to be sure, Whitman seems to be more than merely "mindful", of the human scene:

"I am afoot with my vision", he writes in section 33, "Wherever the human heart beats with terrible throes under its ribs". Later in the same section he identifies himself with the victim of a collapsed building: "I am the mash’d fireman with breast-bone broken". Such scenes of violence remind us that life in the city has began to reflect those terribly destructive forces which today we calmly accept as normal and even necessary on infestations of the powers that reside in the day-to-day life of the compacted human community.

WHITMAN'S MANNAHATTA:

"Mannahatta" (1860), one of the few poems in "Leaves of Grass" wholly devoted to the city, illustrates a third type of response. This response finds most frequent expression in scattered but memorable lines and phrases which suggest in visionary: "Superb Faced Manhattan" "Million-Footed Manhattan" "Mast-Hemmed Manhattan", and their equivalents. In Manhattan, "Sky, water, land, people, and the essential human activities are
those of physical Manhattan, but the poet, in bestowing upon his city its ancient Indian place-name, gives it a spiritual dimension beyond the truth of fact. Whitman also contends that there is no need to wait, for his ideal city does in a sense already exist.

I was asking for something specific and perfect for my city,
Whereupon lo! Up sprang the aboriginal name.
Now I see what is in a name, a word, liquid, sane,
Unruly, musical, self-sufficient,
I see that the word of my city is that word from of old,
Because I see that word nested in nests of water-bays, Superb,
Rich, hemm’d thick all around with
Sail ships and steamships,
An island, sixteen miles long, solid founded,
Numberless crowded streets, high growths of iron, slender,
strong, light, splendidly uprising toward
Clear skies

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

The mechanics of the city, the masters,
Well-form’d, beautiful-faced, looking, you
Straight in the eyes,
Trottoirs throng’d, vehicles, Broadway, the
Woman, the shops and shows,
A million people-manners free and superb open voices...
hospitality-the most courageous and friendly young men, city of hurried and sparkling waters! City of spires and mast’s!

City nested in bays! My city!

“Mannahatta” (1860:LG: 474-75)

In “Mannahatta” the primal garden of the past, the thrilling crowds of the present, and the loving harmony of the future have already merged. In
contrast to the unreal city of New Jerusalem, the actual city of New York, imaginatively transformed into "Mannahatta," belongs to the here and now can be physically enjoyed as an everyday reality—the 'simple produce of the common day,' in Wordsworth's phrase. The city encapsulates itself in a word, but just as the poet perceives in its letters the "high growths of iron" rearing up and the sparkling bays nesting them, so the word becomes the physical, sexual being, rising up before the eyes-spoken, as an Genesis, into existence. The 'beautiful faced inhabitants' "looking you straight in the eyes" complete this landscape of consummation, marrying observer to scene through the intense pleasure of a flashing glance.\(^{15}\)

Whitman does indeed "see what there is in a name," for he never uses the words New York in his poetry, always Manhattan or Manhattan. On the basis of his notes, that he made for a lecture indicate, he wished to distinguish between the literary city, a city of imagination linked in name and spirit to the pure beginnings of the island (a place of "swift tides and sparkling waters"), and the contemporary often in egalitarian center of American commerce. If Manhattan is "musical, self-sufficient," capable of expressing all that he loved about his city, New York regrettably commemorates the name of the 'tyrant' Duke of York who later became James II. The name represents the best to which free and democratic citizens might aspire, the other implies moral servitude and misuse of the city's natural abundance.\(^{16}\)

In its poetic incarnation as Manhattan, then, Whitman's city appears less a mundane New York than a modernized New Jerusalem. The components of
the actual city-buildings, crowds, traffic, shipping, the routine yet memorable
gesturer of countless individuals—give Whitman's poetry its tremendous
energy and specificity. At the same time, the city's potential and excitement, is
vibrant melding of natural beauty and man-made wonders, lend it the mythic
quality that Whitman declares his poems will perpetuate, "The conflicting
concerns of mid-nineteenth century New-York as a political and economic
entity are rarely permitted to intrude, for the tension in Whitman's city poetry
lies elsewhere."

But the pervasive topographical elements of "Mannahattan" carry with
them a more important effect in terms of the city as a human community
occupying a particular physical place. In Whitman's poem the city is for once
in harmony with nature, operating within its rhythms of tides and seasons and
fulfilling its broad-topographical design; heights, bays, shores, and island are
one with the contours of the man-made metropolis.

Whitman's experiences in Manhattan in the forties show him surveying
American society, familiarizing himself with its possibilities and its flaws, and
preparing himself to produce fully representative poetry. If as he once said, his
poetry was "a great mirror of reflector of society," it was a mirror in which
America would see itself artistically improved.

CALAMUS POEMS:

Between writing "Song of Myself" and the "Calamus poems", Whitman
moves from the long poem to shorter lyrics and in the process gives a more
universal cast to the inhabitants of his town and their milieu. Forgoing detailed
descriptions of his fellow citizens, as well as his mystic claims to have shared in their varied lives, Whitman curiously achieves a more personal effect by focusing instead on an archetypal moment: the poet’s walk through the heart of the city. In these poems Whitman stakes everything on the emotional and physical contact he can establish with causal friends and instantaneous lovers. This pursuit of perceptual certainty through bodily knowledge not only underlies Whitman’s vision of the ideal city but also, because it inescapably involves the mediation of the text, provokes desperate effort to recreate the material world within the textual one.

Of the forty-five poems in the original ‘Calamus’ section of the 1860 “Leaves of Grass”, nine deal explicitly with urban experience, and several others help define the relation between the poet the physical world.

According to M.Wynn Thomas, in Calamus Whitman approaches the city in two ways; first, by considering its “uncertain and perhaps unredeemable character” and second, by describing the ideal communities he would like to see in its place (370). But there is a crucial third approach that mediates between the other two: Whitman regards the intimate contact between citizens as the only way to settle qualms about the city’s unreality, expressed in the first group of poems, and also as the only way to establish the ideal “city of friends” described in the second group.

Whitman addresses his most powerful poems to unknown strangers seen in the streets as he passes. Occupations or physical traits do not matter; a look suffices to tell the poet all he needs to know about the new lovers he finds
wherever he turns his head—for Whitman’s supreme urban experience requires only a quick glance and lasts as long. The momentary eye contact between strangers in the crowd both ignites their passion and fulfills it:

City of orgies, walks and joys,
City whom that I have lived and sung
In your midst will one day make you Illustrious.

('City of Orgies' [1860]. lines 1-4)

In "City of Orgies" (1860), Whitman fuses two of Baudelaire’s central motifs, bathing in the crowd and the “swift flash of eyes between strangers.” In regarding the city as a vast conglomeration of sexual desire and promise, Whitman has much in common with the French poet, who was his close contemporary.21

Both poets single out eye contact with strangers on a busy streets as a metaphor for the stimulating yet disjunctive nature of modern city life. If Baudelaire discovers in each bizarre a beautiful stranger the depths of his own estrangement and the city’s propensity to rapture human connections, Whitman seizes his satisfaction from the initial contact, ephemeral as it may be.22

For Whitman, the visual interplay between poet and the passers by embodies the essence of the city’s offerings, and upon this momentary rapport all other friendships and worthwhile communities build. Whitman’s ‘City of Orgies’ indicates the poet’s preference for rapid, repeated encounters with his fellow citizens rather than static pictures. Processions, social occasions, and buildings seem paradoxically more transient than the lingering intensity of
glances exchanged with sudden lovers in the streets. (‘Once I passed Through a Populous City’, 1860:109-10).

The two poet’s treatment of urban low life is different that, evil in Baudlairean sense “never touches [Whitman] to the core and he can lay no claim, therefore, to being the poet of the dark side of the city” (53). But Whitman’s urban torments, though of a deferent order from those of Baudelaire, do exist, and stem from his need for poetic self-incarnation through the melding f body and textual energies. (qtd. William Chapman Sharpe Unreal Cities, 190.)

As Whitman writes in “Song of the Broad Axe” (1856) “How the floridness of the materials of cities shrivels before a man’s or woman’s look?” (LG.190) Casual but loving contact is the most permanent feature of the city, a city where the word Orgies has no negative connotations, but is rater synonymous with that quintessential urban activity, walking, and its result, joy. “This intimacy between lasting friends and instant lovers lies at the heart of Whitman’s celebration of the city, it forms the irreducible core of his poetic effort to convey that community to his readers”.  

Whitman’s roving eye delights not only in what Baudelaire called ‘the blish of multiplying numbers.’ Sometimes it fastens on single member of the crowd, perhaps someone already looking his way.

Among the men and women the Multitude,
I perceive one picking me out by secret and divine sings
acknowledging none else, not parent, wife, husband, brother, child, any nearer than I am, some are baffled, but that one is not- that one knows me. Ah lover and perfect equal, I meant that you should discover Me so by faint indirections; And I when I meet you mean to Discover you by the like in you,

('Among the Multitude', 1860.135)

The poem is rare among Whitman's descriptions of the passing glance, for it shows the poet being caught in the gaze of another. The divinity of the eyesight that bears a look of love, the instant rapport between sharers of a gaze that transcends all other personal attachments-these characteristic qualities of the encounter are now being reported by the object of scrutiny. But the poet is for from helpless in his visual field, for from being discomfited by it; rather, he claims credit for the situation.

"I meant that you should discover me so by faint indirections." ('Among the Multitude,' 1860.line-7) He salutes the on looker as his lover and equal, and announces that he will discover him in return. Yet there is an element of narcissism in these echoing, reciprocal actions, as though the poet were looking in a mirror. Do such optic excursions enable the poet to reach out to others? Or is he just gazing at his own reflection? The poem hints at the voiceless signs by which homosexual lovers recognize each other. Edwin H. Miller suggests that Whitman's language of the eye animates a lonely cityscape through a

If the gaze penetrates to no sexual difference, the image of this “perfect equal” may produce just such a sense of mirroring self-admiration. The actual contact that could confer separate if similar identities upon poet and Other is deferred beyond the poems end: “And I when I meet you mean to discover you by the like in you”. Many of Whitman’s poems pursue the endless stream of potential lovers that the city streets provide. For example ‘I Dreamed in a Dream’ (1860), ‘A Noiseless Patient Spider’ ‘Poem of Joys’ (1860). ‘Manhatta’ (1860), and ‘Faces’ (1855).

Yet in only one does Whitman match the finely poised ambiguities of Baudlaire’s ‘A Une passante.’ Though he could not have known Baudlaire’s poem, his own “To a Stranger,” written the same year (1860), provides an uncannily direct reply.

Passing strangers; you do not
know how longingly I look upon
You must be he I was seeking, or
she I was seeking, (it comes to me
as of a dream.)

(‘To a Stranger’. 1860. lines, 1-4 127).

Here the city, the presence of the crowd, and the eye contact between poet and stranger are so much a part of the moment that they are assumed and never mentioned. In contrast to “A Une passante” where no words are possible in the deafening street. Whitman asserts that there is no need for words:
"I am not to speak to you." Sight alone is enough, enabling the poet "to see to it" by his act of poetry and memory that the moment will not be lost. Both the poets, in one or the other way make the poem a site of possession, but Baudelaire commemorates the past, while Whitman looks to the future.

Whitman's object of desire is discreetly sexless and undefined. The stranger may well be, in fact, like a brother or sister ("you grew up with me were a boy with me or girl with me") further complicating the nature of poet's longing.

Yet his "chaste" feeling can hardly be platonic. In three other 'Calamus' poems, "Behold This Sworthy Face" (Leaves of Grass.126), "A Glimpse" (Leave of Grass.131) and "What I think You I Take My Pen in Hand" (Leaves of Grass.133), Whitman's urban lovers do make physical contact, sharing kisses, holding hands, and parting with loving hugs in the midst of a crowd. 'To a Stranger,' strives to achieve that established relationship for its participants as well; the intensity of the poets conviction that the stranger is not really strange (I ate with you and slept with you) attempts to preclude the unfulfilled desire it expresses. Not only do the eyes and imagination find their, consummation in the instant of crossing, but also does the body: "you give me pleasure of your eyes, face, flesh, as we pass, you take of my beard, breast, hands, in return." Here Whitman turns formation of Self into Other: "your body has become not yours only nor left my body mine only". (To a Stranger.1867lines,6-7).
Whitman usually takes care not to give the impulse too much reign; for it dangerously suggests that the poem may be more an inscription of emptiness than a cry of ecstatic repletion. Instead of containing multitudes, the poet may be exposed as a vast hollowness that craves them. The significantly titled “Poem of Joys” (1860) demonstrates not only how closely Whitman associates the urban throng with sexual desire but also how painfully unrequited he sometimes feels his love to be:

O for the girls, my mate! O for
Happiness with my mate!
O the young man a, I pass; O I am
Sick after the friendship of him who,
I fear, is indifferent to me. O the streets of cities!
The flitting faces—the expressions, eyes, feet, Costumes!
O I cannot tell how welcome they are to me!
O of men—of women toward me as I pass the memory
Of only one look—the boy lingering and waiting.

(Pearce, 261)

The familiar “joys” of streets, faces, eyes, all in constant flux, are present; but they are compromised. Even more strongly than ‘To a Stranger’: the passage confesses the ache amidst the excitement, the “sick” yearning for more satisfaction, more recognition, more love than “only one look” can provide. Whitman, like Baudelaire, appears to depend upon the crowd for his own self-animation, the ardent vitality of his life ignited by the eyes and bodies of others around him and by the memory of unnamed possibility.

As William James points out, Whitman prefers to stress his delight in belonging to the crowd, omnivorously devouring. He aware
are as lonely as he is, permits him to discover a paradoxical emotional unity in the very isolation that prevents their embrace. A line from "Poem of Joys" celebrates that comforting revelation; O the Joy of that vast elemental sympathy which only the human soul is capable of generating and emitting in steady and limitless floods" (A Song of Joys, lines, 28-30)

It is almost inevitable, then, that his ideal city should be built around the free and open love of its citizens, easing the chronic tension between eye and other.

WHITMAN'S IDEAL CITES:

In the 1876 Preface to "Leaves of Grass" Whitman retrospectively asserted that his poetic intentions had been utopian, that his poems were meant to lay the basis for a sexually healthy and therefore vibrant-body politic.

"to make a type-portraits for living...
joyful and potent, and modern and
free-male and female, through
the long future-has been, I say, my
general
object.... I also sent out Leaves of Grass
to arouse and set flowing in men's
and women's hearts,.... Endless streams
of living pulsating love and friendship".

('Leaves of Grass', 752-53)

A number of poems published in 1860 are specifically dedicated to representing Whitman’s ideal urban society. He crystallizes his vision of universal love in the short poem, "I Dream'd in a Dream": 
I dreamed in a dream I saw a city invincible
To the attacks of the whole of the rest of the earth,
I dream'd that was the new city of Friends, nothing
Was greater there than the quality of robust love,
It led to the rest, it was seen every hour in the actions
Of the men of the city, and in all their looks and words.

('I Dreamed in a Dream', 1860.lines, 1-7)

In this new, unconquerable city of brotherly love, the ephemeral looks and words of lovers have become the tangible proof of the city’s greatness.

"Whitman’s dream permits the repressed sexuality of the present to become the future city’s central life force". 26

Whitman also makes this claim in “Song of the Broad-Axe” (1856)- where the great city (“greatest” city in the 1860 version) thrives on the sexual health of its men and women.

Where the city of the faithfully friends stands,
Where the city of the cleanliness of the Sexes stands,
Where the city of healthiest Fathers stands,
Where the city of the best-bodied mothers stands,
There the great city stands.

('Song of the Broad Axe'. 1856.lines, 130-135)

In contrast to the poems about personal interaction in the contemporary city, those about the visionary cities of the future contain no second-person address, no direct appeal to readers and lovers. Rather, they take that close relationship as already established, and make it the basis for the ideal cities yet to come. “I will make the continent indissoluble,” Whitman proclaims:

I will make inseparable cities with their arms
About each other’s necks, by the love of comrades,

By the manly love of comrades,

('For You O Democracy’ 1860. lines, 8-12).

In this amorously utopian version of manifest destiny, the poet imagines cities rapturously embracing, for the happy contact by which individual citizens participate in the human community ought to guide their polis as well. Similarly, in “I Hear it was Charged against Me” (1860), the poet claims that he is “neither for, nor against institutions” but that “he will establish in the Manhattan and in every city of these states”, what he calls “the institutions of the dear love of comrades” (Leaves of Grass. 128). “Poems like these make it clear that Whitman is not proposing to restructure urban political life, but is rather like, Blake or Lawrence, offering a vision of how society could begin to reshape itself from the individual outward. (Machor, 333-35, Tanner, 8.)

Ultimately Whitman’s city emerges as a kind of prelapsarian Eden where hearty, unselfconscious citizens can love without inhibition. Innocent of Adam’s fall into sexual guilt and of Babel’s fall into urban alienation, the men and women of these cities live openly and communicate easily.

In “Ages and Ages Returning at Intervals” (1860), the poet presents himself as primal, fertile, unconstrained;

I chanter of Adamic songs,
Through the new garden the west,
The great cities calling, Bathing myself,
bating my songs in sex offspring of my loins.
(“Ages and Ages Returning at Intervals”, 1860. lines, 1-8)
CROSSING BROOKLYN FERRY:

"Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" was first written in 1856 and then included in the "Calamus" section of the "Leaves of Grass." It is a long poem in nine sections, and it ranks very high in the poetry of Whitman. It dramatizes a simple, ordinary; experience in such a way as to symbolize the mystic unity that pervades all mankind and the universe. Its theme is thus the basic 'oneness of life', for all are born into this existence out of the same over soul of the entire world, and all are involved in the same scenes and sights, and the same activities of this Sansar or material world. Time and distance are meaningless, for the "oneness of all" is basic and spiritual.

In Crossing Brooklyn Ferry, "Whitman is not so much concerned with representing the city as he is with representing what might be done with it". He appears to have had great plans for the "spiritual" urban spectatorship he describes in the poem. The paradigm of visual interaction with crowds developed in this poem appears also in the utopian poems Whitman wrote shortly after "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry." In several of the "Calamus" poems, and in some of the "Drum-Taps" poems as well Whitman explores the possibility of using what he had worked out in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" as the basis of a comprehensive poetic, spiritual, political and erotic system suited to the conditions of modern urban life.

In his poems Whitman claims to have adapted the phronological concept of "adhesiveness," in such a way that it can provide the emotional and spiritual
basis that democracy appears to lack. It is Whitman's apparent belief that 'adhesiveness is the supreme and that the city best promotes it fruition'

In Whitman's poem "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" everything is in motion. The poet is standing on the ferry as it crosses the East River between Manhattan and Brooklyn; the locus of the poem is his consciousness. The multitude of passengers on the ferry who excite the poet's imagination are on their way home to one city from work in the other. Whitman had been a newspaper reporter and a compulsive pounder of the streets of Newyork and Brooklyn; both people and port were a constant delight to him, as he had always had, he tells us in 'Specimen Days,' "a passion for ferries; to me they afford inimitable, streaming, never failing, living poems". A sharpness of observation in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" attests to Whitman's Canny eye for urban reality, and yet the poem presents this reality in largely generalized terms. This was deliberate on Whitman's part; he wanted to raise the images of himself as a poet, the two cities, their working population, and the water-crossing to universal and mystical significance.

"Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" is a poem of the self; its center of gravity lies in the vision of the poet rather than in the objects enumerated, which are made transparent by the overwhelming power of his vision. The city of monuments and buildings is conspicuously absent; what Whitman gives us are other attributes of the city: the crowds of workers and their stations in life, the port with its ships, transportation and trade, and not least himself as denizen of the city.
The peculiar stage of this poem is the empty space between two cities. This space is river, which is at the same time both the East River in Newyork and simply a river. As in "Our Mutual Friend", the mythic archetypes of city and river are combined with commerce. The ferry is the essential link and necessary bond of communication between the two cities; it is also a bond between the poet and the mankind, and between past, present and future.

Everything in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" is in motion relative to everything else: water, tides, history, people, even the pronouns. The poet himself, at the center of both archetypal and historical worlds, is moving with the crowd relative to the offstage cities. Whitman perception of them changes as the relative position of the moving boat changes. He also looks down at the water and up at the sky. Relativism is basic to this world, which tries to include everything in human life and to establish a unifying pattern among its elements.

Whitman's preoccupation with the city's surface and depth, its textual reflection and physical reality, make it appropriate that he should begin his poem by confronting the mirroring surfaces of sea and sky. The first two lines enlarge the notion of visual rapport with a passing stranger to include the landscape itself:

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.  
(Leaves of Grass, 159 [Crossing Brooklyn Ferry.] lines, 1-3)

Just as the poet eliminates the difference between himself and others through a single glance, he now sees eye to eye with the entire external world.
The reiterated phrase "face to face" evokes St. Paul's relation to God, and implies that Whitman's experience of the city is providentially sanctioned, and more celestial than earthly. The poet inspects his subject, not through a glass darkly, but by looking directly into the natural manifestation of the Divine countenance—which, reflected in the water, will turn out to be the poet's own. ('Face to Face'. Whitman's Biblical Reference in 'Crossing Brooklyn Ferry'. Walt Whitman Review 24.1978.7-6).

Far from being a timeless, static movement everything is in motion around the city ferry—tide, shipping, seabirds, snapping flags above shore and sail. While the ferry traverses the river from Manhattan's business district towards Brooklyn hills, poem and poet rest poised between city and country, day and night, amid earth, air, and water, with the fourth element, fire, visible in the settingsun and the brightening flares of foundry chimneys.

The next few lines prepare for another and even more important crossing.

"Crowds of men and women attired in the usual costumes,
How curious you are to me! on the ferry-boats the
Hundreds and hundreds that cross, returning home,
Are more curious to me than you suppose, and
You that shall cross from shore to shore
Years hence are more to me, and more in
My meditations, than you might suppose.
(Leaves of Grass. 159. 60 Crossing Brooklyn Ferry.lines, 35)

"Poet and reader begin to engage in a double motion, not just across the river in their respective eras, but across time and text, toward each other." As Ziff notes, 'Whitman translates himself into his audience, joining it finally to
view that “I” of the poem as apart... the “We” at the close of the poem is the poet among the readers, and the you’ ... becomes the object of their shared world, among which the poem now takes its place” (587-88).  

The shifting referent of “you” here indicates the line of the poet’s attack; first he names fellow participants in the present scene, then an unsupposing contemporary reader, and finally ferry riders and readers of the years to come. In place of the delocalized encounter usual in lyric poetry, Whitman situates the reader as part of a specific urban landscape, the poets own. As it develops, their bond will depend increasingly on their common experience of the scene they share, each separable from the harbor and its sights. The mirroring relationship that being “face to face” with water and sky implies thus prepares for the subsequent effort to bring poet and reader to a similar understanding.

Drawing his own breath from the objects around him- “The impalpable sustenance of me from all things at all hours of the days”- the poet dissolves his being into the city’s: the simple, compact, well-joined scheme, myself disintegrated, everyone disintegrated yet part of the scheme” (Leaves of Grass, 160). The enduring differences of the crowd are the means to and proof of the identity which assimilates them; the “certainty of others” cannot be denied, making urban perception a sort of divine rosary: “The glories strung like beads on my smallest sights and hearing, on the walk in the street and the passage over the river (Leaves of Grass, 160). The “scheme” in they share comprises the poem as well as the city and citizens, and through it Whitman intends to bring them all to an awareness of their underlying union with the landscape.
Thus, in section 3 the poet insists on the converging parallels between his life, his city, and those of the reader:

It avails not, time nor place-distance avails not,
I am with you, you men and women of a generation, or
Ever so many generations hence, just as you feel when
You look on the river and sky, so I felt, just as any
Of you is one of a living Crowd; I was one of a crowd,
Just as you are refresh’d by the gladness of the river and the
Bright flow, I was refresh’d,

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

I too many and many a time crossed the river of old

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

Saw the reflection of the summer sky in the water,
Had my eyes dazzled by the shimmering track of beams,
Look’d at the fine centrifugal spokes of
light round the shape of my head in the sunlit water.
(Leaves of Grass, 160-61 [Crossing Brooklyn Ferry] 20-32)

Like ripples spreading outward from his haloed head, the next twenty lines describe clouds, bay, ships, sailors, and shore as day deepens into night. Each line begins with or implies verbs of sight: “watched,” ‘saw’. “Looked”.

At this stage, visual interaction is primary, the intensity of the poem’s sight becoming the reflection of the self-reflection; that poet and reader see in the landscape.

Yet in other poems expressing this textual-material tension, he voices his fares about his unreality and solitude, in order to overcome them:
I too walked the streets of Manhattan Island, and bathed in the
waters around it: I too felt the curious abrupt questionings stir
within me,
In the day among crowds of people sometimes they came upon
me,
In my walks home late at night or as I lay in my bed they came
Upon me, I too had been struck from the float forever held in
solution,
I too had received identity by my body.
That I was I knew was of my body, and what I should be
I knew I should be of my body.
(Leaves of Grass, 162,[Crossing Brooklyn Ferry],1856,58-64)

It is only through the body, finally, that the poet can address the sexual
and metaphysical questioning that have risen from the city to disturb him,
and through which, in his isolation, he can feel his connection to countless
others like him.

This is Whitman’s strongest move, to draw bodily upon the reader’s own
body and personality to give substance to himself. As he ingeniously puts it in
the 1876 Preface, “I meant LEAVES OF GRASS... to be the poem of identity,
(of Yours, whoever you are, now reading these lines)” (Leaves of Grass, 752).
Anticipating that the reader may not always possess an identity and outlook
conducive to reproducing the poet’s own, he counters by skillfully insinuating
just how “whoever you are” might feel deep down inside. Thus, in “A Song for
Occupations,”(1855) he remarks reassuringly, “if you meet some stranger in
the streets and love him or her, why I often meet strangers in the street and love
them" (Leaves of Grass-212). This typical allusion to the fellowship of shared emotions cleverly assigns to the reader habits that actually belong to the poet.

In practice, the intimate effect of Whitman's appeal transcends its shakiness as a rhetorical strategy. Built entirely on this principle, Section 6 of "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" not only contains Whitman's most convincing attempt to prove that he too "knew what it was to be evil," but also provides one of his most eloquent descriptions of casual urban love and longing: "I too" he says.

Yet the final section leaves no doubt as to the outcome. Poets and reader return to the panorama of harbor, town, and sky, now in full rapport with it. Other writers may engage our interest by investing their images with enough symbolic resonance to make us feel that we too share their urban sensibility. But Whitman makes himself and the reader co-eternal with the city, joined with it in a permanently orgasmic union.

Stand up, tall masts of Manhattan! stand up, beautiful
Hills of Brooklyn!
Throb, baffled and curious brain! throw out questions and answers!
Suspend here and everywhere, eternal float of solution!
Gaze, loving and thirsty eyes, in the house or street or public assembly!

(Leaves of Grass.164 [Crossing Brooklyn Ferry] 1856, lines, 104-108)

The admonition to the "loving and thirsty eyes" points to the source of this giant procreation: flooding tides, drenching clouds, erect masts and hills,
and ejaculating mind all leap almost visibly from poet's animating glance. For Whitman, city life does not exist apart from his perception of it.  

Of Whitman's refusal to distinguish between city and soul, Quentin Anderson writes, "bodies and images are simply co-relative with soul". They exist only in that they are apprehended; we exist only in the measure that we apprehend them... It is an assertion that what is seen is correlative with a seer or seers ... In sum, there is no evidence that in the Whitman of 1856 there is a separate realm in which "soul" enjoys an existence independent of a presented scene.

For Whitman, it is just as his own life would be empty without the city to stimulate poetry. Mingling with the material of his creation, the poet becomes a god, the mirroring environment of the opening lines now spontaneously providing haloes for him and his city of saints: "Diverge, fine spokes of light, from the shape of my head, or any one's head, in the sun it water!"(Leaves of Grass. 165[Crossing Brooklyn Ferry]. 1856).

The conclusion of this interchange carries with it the heightened awareness that inanimate objects manifests as much of the heavenly as the poet's silhouette in the water. The assimilation of matter and mind by one another is complete:

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 your 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 Towards the soul.**

(Leaves of Grass. 165 [Crossing Brooklyn Ferry]. 1856 lines, 125-130).

Creating a self commensurate with the city, and a city inseparable from the self, Whitman nevertheless does not claim to have mastered or subsumed the phenomena he addresses: "*We fathom you not*”. The plural subject confirms that Whitman has decisively joined himself to the former “you” of the reader, both becoming fellow admirers of the harbor scene that lies open to them.

The city and its objects, although unable to withhold their substance from the desire of the poet who wishes to internalize them, still remain independent parts toward eternity. With the realization of permanence and perfection the poem claims for itself a lasting status in the field of entities penetrated by sight and born of the body. As the imagination and body are projected into the urban landscape which has become cosmic, and material phenomena are planted within, the poem partakes of world and word in its own “unknown ways”, the ever-retraceable record of the souls, embrace of the city.

Whitman himself was at times skeptical of the reality of this encounter. But through his amorous "*face to face*” apprehension of the city’s stones, streets, and passing strangers, and his absorption of them in return, he builds in his poetry the almost palpable city of Manhattan, a modern, secular, and sensuous New Jerusalem fabricated from the contemporary materials of
thriving New York. Defying texuality by announcing it, he asserts the solidity of his city by claiming the reader’s body for his own. If his frank sexuality as a “lover of populous pavements” (‘Leaves of Grass, 15, [Starting from Paumanok], line-3) makes him more thoroughly sympathetic to modern city life than Blake, Wordsworth, or even Baudelaire, his ‘terrible doubts’ about the substance of his vision bind him to all the poets of the unreal city, and foreshadow the fractured cityscapes of The Waste Land and Paterson.

In a letter written in 1889, two years before his death, Whitman addresses for a final time the relation between his poems and the city, setting out in the process what would later become the underlying principle of William Carols William’s epic. He summarizes the bond with a characteristic appeal to the sexual conjunction that was always, for him, at the heart of both urban and literary existence. “I can hardly tell why, but feel very positively that if any thing can justify my revolutionary attempts and utterances it is such ensemble - like a great city to modern civilization, and a whole combined clustering paradoxical identity a man, a woman”. 34

The worth of “Leaves of Grass” as innovative poetry, Whitman concludes, lies in the book’s being itself like a city. In its variousness, its desires and frustrations, its sense of being separate from, yet joined to the lovers on the other side of the page, it embodies the “whole combined clustering paradoxical identity” of male and female that marks the “ensemble” of Whitman’s work. By the force of the analogy, Whitman completes a circuit that he had dedicated his poetic career to closing-from the physical body of the
poet to the body of his work, and ultimately, mysteriously, to a city. (qtd. William Chapman Sharpe Unreal Cities, 101).

If the city is the concrete image of his life's work, then his life's work, then his life itself may seem to merge with that irresistible metropolis which "insatiate," he takes such paints to make solid in his writing.

**WHITMANIAN URBANIZATION:**

William James has rightly remarked that Whitman felt the human crowd as rapturously as Wordsworth felt the mountain.35 Scholars and Critics have acknowledged Whitman's urbanism, and his position as poet of urban life is unquestioned. (qtd. Brand Dana. The Spectator and the City in 19th Century American Literature).

The twentieth-century poet slinks into his study and says, No crowds for me.36 But Whitman took it on. He is the only modern poet who has the courage to meet the crowd. And, falling back into his demotic French, he delivers the abstraction Enmass. "Endless unfolding of words of ages and mine a word of the modern, the word En-mass." Whitman wanted to create the full individual, the full persons, and the he did by tearing away the draperies. His wish was to form the complete person, the freeman, the man free in himself, in order to put this free man into the world. The dialectical conflict in Whitman, as in everyone else, is the free individual versus the crowd of mankind. He saw beyond history and beyond America. But what he saw was with the American vision: the past is of the whole race of man. And this deed is not discovery of triumph or a formula of belief: it is the giving oneself-the Whitman in oneself—
to the other, the comrade. Whitman is no humanist and no ordinary libertarian but a seer who dreams of free individuality, in a world of free souls. The open road may be commonplace symbol, but it is a deliberate symbol, and it stands for an actuality. That actuality is America as Whitman sees America in himself. He says in “Song of the Open Road”:

I think heroic deeds were all conceived in the open air, and all
Free poems also, I think I could stop here myself and
Do miracles… ...Here a great personal deed has
Room…Here is realization…. Here is adhesiveness…
Do you know what it is as you pass to be loved by strangers?…..
They go, that they go! I know that they go, but I know not
Where they go, but I know that they go toward
The best toward something great.

(Song of the Open Road, 1856, lines, 48-54)

At the intersection of pragmatism and urbanization in American culture stands Walt Whitman. Long recognized as America’s first urban poet, Whitman also has an important relation to pragmatist thought. Rather than following the recent trend of viewing Whitman as a pragmatist, it may be argued that the social crisis produced by urbanization shaped Whitman’s poetry and pragmatist thought in similar ways.

As the participial title of “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” suggests, Whitman was really an urbanizing, rather than urban poet. His experience of the city in his middle life, the experience that prompted his best poems, was mediated by his earlier experience in the country. Like many men of his generation, he moved from village to city. His poems bear the signs of a mind adjusting to a
new sense of identity and community. The first two editions of "Leaves of Grass" (1855 and 1856) begin with tone of great hope and eager celebration that grows conflicted in subsequent editions, notably 1860 and 1867, in which one can find the poet arriving at a new understanding of communal relationships in modern urban environments. In working through this process, Whitman experienced a skepticism to which the pragmatists would also respond.

The long history of urbanization in Europe and America is also the history, in philosophy, of the articulation of skepticism about whether and how we know other people. The characteristically urban experience of coming face to face with a person you have never seen before and may never see again raises doubts about the assumptions commonly brought to social interaction. Does this person feel as I do? What is he thinking about me? Do we share any beliefs in common? Do his words gestures mean the same to him, as they seem to mean to me? Long before the advent of the "great" city, but at the cusp of the modern period, Descartes articulated the problem of other minds-do other people have minds, and how do I know this? All these questions in the context of seeing a stranger on the street. During the second meditation, debating whether knowledge of things derives from the senses or the intellect, Descartes looks out the window and sees men crossing the square. "Yet do I see any more than hats and coats which could conceal automations? Judge that they are men. "And so something, which I thought I was seeing with my eyes, is in fact grasped solely by the faculty of judgment, which is in my mind."38 Seeing men
he does not know socially, he realized that his confidence in their likeness to him is based on a process of reasoning, not on sensory evidence. Though desecrates himself does not question this reasoning, a long series of photospheres after him elaborate on the problem and acknowledge that much of our confidence in the existence of other minds is unfounded. It is profoundly a modern problem, testified to by the way Descartes, and after him John Stuart Mill, situate it in the context of "seeing men walking" in city streets.

Whitman's first poems published in "Leaves of Grass" embrace a universalizing rhetoric that cuts through the problem of urban alienation by energetically denying it. In the famous opening poem of 1855 (later titled "Song of Myself"), Whitman proclaims, "I celebrate myself," to which he adds an imposition on the reader -- "And what I assume you shall assume--then completes the flourish with a negation of the difference between "me" and "You". For every atom belonging to me as good belong to you.40 (27). The poet's unabashed use of the first person and even his own nickname--"Walt Whitman, An American, one of the roughs, a kosmos" (50)--struck many readers as outrageous in his own day, but from a modernist perspective, his self-absorption is less outrageous than his assumption of what he called sympathy, the ability through which he claimed to know the minds and hearts of others: "whatever is done or said returns at last to me" (50). For the inspired poet, the sympathetic imagination knows no bounds, neither gender ("My voice is the wife's voice, the screech by the rail of the stairs") (64), nor race ("I am the hounded slave.. I wince at the bite of the dogs") (65), nor the extreme ranges of
experience, such as crime (Not a youngster is taken for larceny, but I go up too
and am tried and sentenced” (70), great adventure and even death (“I am the
mashed fireman with breast-bone broken”) (65). The distance that the poet
claims to overcome through sympathy is comparable to the distance that
strangers feel from one another in the great city and also the distance between
the poet and the mass audience in the age of print-another gap across which the
poet reaches, addressing his readers as lovers in the second untitled poem of
1855 (later “A song of occupations’’)

Come closer to me, Push close my lovers and
Take the best I possess, this is unfinished
Business with me... how is it with you?
I was chilled with the cold types and
Cylinder and wet paper between us. (89)

Whatever the reader in his own time may have thought about the poet’s
faith in his oneness with others, readers in the twenty-first century are likely to
look with cynical irony or with a deep sense of loss upon the poet’s faith that
his experiences would align with those of future readers. Whitman could not
have imagined the isolation that comes with automobile travel-each individual
enclosed within his own bubble of glass and steel, protected from contact with
other people and from the choking atmosphere of exhaust, careening across the
river on asphalt high above the water. It would take an act of denial on the
Whitmanian scale for the modern reader not to feel the tug of resistance when
the poet asserts, after a long catalog of waterfront images, "These and all else were to me the same as they are to you" (310).

Whitman also tries to imagine himself as the center of admiration in an urbanized culture of crafts men, the result is similarly vague. In another 1855 poem, the fantastical dream vision titled "the sleepers in later editions, appear, these lines, for example:

Well do they do their jobs, those journeymen divine.

Only from me can they hide

Nothing and would not if they could. (108)

But "The Sleepers" also gives us a more vivid picture of human sympathy. Not surprisingly, the vision appears in another vignette from village life taken from the previous generation. The story seems intended to provide a model for affection arising from chance encounters, a situation which will become for Whitman a poignant phenomenon of city life.

"Hours Continuing Long" a poem in which Whitman explicitly stages the speaker's doubt and despair as a withdrawal from the places of human habitation and a activity: "Hours of the dusk, when I withdraw to a lonesome and unfrequented spot... deep in the night, when I go forth, speeding swiftly the country roads, or through the city streets... in a group of poems that begins with the words "in paths untrodden" this staging is clearly emblematic of an important theme of leaving the city and its press of people. Though he does not eschew the city entirely, he continues to inhabit it only at night, when he can avoid confrontation with its crowds of busy strangers. This withdrawal
complements his sense of epistemological and sympathetic isolation from all other humans. Human contact, both intimate and casual, is replaced in the poem by the anonymous, mediated, remote contact of reader and poet. This process of withdrawal from urban density will be recapitulated in several ways in the 1860 “Calamus” group, though in those subsequent poems, Whitman is primarily concerned to validate private intimacy over casual contact with the crowd. “Hours continuing Long,” suggests that the impulse towards seclusion derives originally from a sense of doubt and betrayal, rather than satisfaction and mutuality in love.

Whitman addresses this aspect of doubt more explicitly in “Of the Terrible Question of Appearances” (“question” changed to “doubt” in 1867 and subsequent editions). This poem, belonging to the 1860 “Calamus” group, proposes the problem in quite philosophical terms:

Of the terrible question of appearances,
Of the doubts, the uncertainties after all,
That may-be reliance and hope are but
Speculations after all. That may-be identity
Beyond the grave is a beautiful fable only,
May-be the things I perceive-the animals,
Plants, men, hills, shining and flowing waters,
The skies of day and night-colors,
Densities, forms-may-be these are,
(as doubtless they are,) only apparitions, surround us and pervade, us,
Then I am charged with untold and untellable wisdom-I am silent-I
Require nothing further, I cannot answer, the question of appearances,
Or that of identity beyond the grave,
But I walk or sit indifferent, I am satisfied,
He ahold of my hand had completely satisfied me.
(Blue Book 352-367)

In contrast to "Whoever you are," this poem is about guileless in its presentation of the problem of doubt, openly acknowledging that skepticism cannot be satisfied by its own means. How does the speaker know that his lover’s affection isn’t merely an appearance? He certainly does ‘t know, as he admits, but he chooses to go on with human activity regardless. The “turn” in the center of this poem sets a pattern in “Calamus” for the problem of doubt, which Whitman consistently raises and then drops. The response to skepticism is social confirmation social interaction in a community of like-minded agents and inquirers—but there is no pretense that confirmation actually resolves doubt about other minds.

What, than, is the nature of this “Confirmation” that the “Calamus” speaker seeks, and sometimes finds? It is, primarily not urban; it is conceived as an alternative to the scenes of mass democracy present in “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry”. Confirmation from readers is also broader, stretching across geography and into the future: it is largely imagined and potential. Ultimately, as well, it recapitulates the sense of public space lost by Whitman’s staged retreat from the city”. 42

“The Chief Street of a Great City”, wrote Whitman in 1856, is a curious epitome of the life of the city; and when that street, like Broadway, is a thoroughfare, a mart, and a promenade all together, its representative character is yet more striking (“Broadway”). Whitman’s city poem shares the
representative features of Broadway, the conjunction of thoroughfare, promenade, and marketplace: a place of passage, movement of people, goods, and useful knowledge, and a place of display and spectacle, of things in the guise of goods in shop windows and of persons in the guise of exchangeable, social identities. “Epitomized by its greatest thoroughfare, Whitman’s city brings people together in countless varied and fluid transactions, unutterable in their variety and veiled in their changeableness. People pass blindly and mingle unknowingly with others who are their immanent “you”. “The Street instructs the poet to interrupt the flow without dispersing it, to seize “whoever you are” as the necessary occasion for “my poem.”

Whoever you are, now I place my
Hand upon you, that you be my poem
I whisper with my lips close to your ear,
I have loved many women and men, but I
love none better than you.
O I have been dilatory and dumb,
I should have made my way straight
To you long ago, I should have babb’d nothing but you,
I should have chanted nothing, but you.

(“To You”, ‘Leaves of Grass’ 233)

The audacity of “That You Be My Poem” confirms the extremity of need, only you gives voice to I, only the fusion of I and You which is the poem brings me to myself, and you to yourself. Whitman’s city is the imaginative space where such things happen—not a place he represents but a process he enacts. The lesson of Broadway, its instruction in the mutuality and
interdependence of You, and I constitutes Whitman’s poesies: not a speakable lesson but a continuing process, the originating event of his discourse.

Perhaps the coming and going or ebb and flow pattern provides an enabling condition for Whitman to confront the crowd in the first place, to confront it "face to face" as a condition of his own being, as the "dumb", "beautiful ministers" which minister to harmony with the world at a close of "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry". Section 42 of "Song of Myself" restates the earlier dynamic relation of poet to crowd in somewhat more opaque but paradoxically illuminating terms:

A call in the midst of the crowd,
My own voice, orotund sweeping and final,

(Leaves of Grass, 76)

The poet minds his own voice calling at once to the crowd and to himself, calling himself through or by or means of the crowd: an act of self-inter-polation, himself as the "performer" in the following lines:

Come my children, come my boys and girls, my women.
Household and intimates, now the performer launches his
Nerve, He has pass’d his prelude on the
Reeds within. And a few lines later, in an ecstatic fit:
My head slues round on my neck, music rolls, but not
From the organ. Folks are around me, but they are
No household of mine. (Leaves of Grass. 76).

The poet comes to himself through the intermediary of the crowd, the call emerges from and expresses the oneness of being close and being distant. Coming and going define a mode of acceptance, Whitman’s way of placing
himself in the crowd yet holding (or with holding) himself free and aloof from it, far enough away to witness, it, to discern its patterns, to re-create from it, for enough away to witness it, to discern its patterns, to re-create it as an element of his own being, what he call “soul” as in the final lines of “Crossing Brooklyn ferry:” “You furnish your parts towards eternity, Great or small, you furnish your parts toward the soul”(Leaves of Grass.165).

“Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” recapitulates the ebb flow pattern in the representation of crowd and the self’s relation to the crowd. The capacious, vehicular structure of that poem invites the relation to the crowd. The capacious, vehicular structure of that poem invites the epithet processional, a form of movement, in this case stately, majestic, with great forma feeling, though in the case of the Kaleidoscopic panorama in section 8, agitated, uncertain edgy. In “There was a Child Went Froth.” Broadway Pageant” “City of Ships”, and “Give Me the splendid Silent Sun”, whatever the emotional tonality of the procession its effect is to produce an idea of a totality, an assembly of parts constituting an immanent even if not yet present whole. Processional form signals a hope of unity at the site of difference and conflict: it is Whitman’s crowd control, we might say, his way of subduing and containing recalcitrant particulars within his dream of an American oneness-his answer (in the sense of equivalence) to the cop’s star or club at the center of the crowd.

We can better approach the problem of dissonance in Whitman’s city, then, by looking at his compositions. When Whitman writes to Doyle, “you see
everything as you pass, a sort of living, end less panorama,” he is being serious about the worth and value not just of seeing but of this particular mode of urban perception, a moving mode of dynamic panorama, the mode of procession. It constructs itself as a recounted movement through city space, a passage which attempts to comprehend a whole in its parts, to create an impression of a totality out of desperate, disjunctive parts.

Nowhere in his poetry does Whitman explore industrial discontents, the problems of urbanization, the impact of the dynamo, or the religious doubts fostered by new scientific, theories. Against the background of frontier and farm, but not in contrast with it, are the major thrusts of recent nineteenth century technological advancement, including the then novel “paved streets” and “iron and stone edifices” of the recognizably modern American city. This astonishing poetic conglomeration of frontier, farm, city mine, and the factory, is bound together only by two elements, which they all share; growth, and the poet’s positive, imaginative grasp of the fact of growth. Thus all items of this lengthy catalog must contribute to a positive, accumulating rhapsodic total, typically culminating in the vital presence of the poet himself. Unlike his two predecessors Jago and William Cowper, who much more accurately describe the effects of early industrialism, Whitman avoids any suggestion that primitive technology may be accompanied by smoke, dirt, noise, and danger, to say nothing of social disruption and economic injustice.

Whitman touches upon the problem of evil in a brusquely off-handed manner, as if he knew there were something amiss in his orating.
I make the poem of evil also, I commemorate that part also,
I am myself just as much evil as good,
And my nation is—and I
Say there is fact no evil,
(or if there is I say it is just as important
To you, to the land or to me, as any
Thing else).

(‘Starting From Paumanok’. 98-101)

“The largeness of nature or the nation were monstrous without a corresponding largeness and generosity of the spirit of the citizen said, Whitman early in the 1855 preface to ‘Leaves of Grass,’ the poet also spoke the endless range of materials available to that new species of artist, the American poet. Not nature nor swarming states nor streets and steam ships nor prosperous business nor farms nor capital nor clearing may suffice for the ideal of man… nor suffice the poet. No reminiscences may suffice either. A live nation can always cut a deep mark and can have the best authority the cheapest… namely from its own soul. This is the sum of the profitable uses of individuals or states and of present action and grandeur and the subjects of poets—as if it were necessary to trot back generation after generation to the eastern records: as if the beauty and sacredness of the demonstrable must fall behind that of the mythical; as if men do not make their mark out of any times; the pride of the united states leaves the wealth and finesse of the cities and all returns of commerce and agriculture and all the magnitude of geography or shows of exterior victory to enjoy the bread of full sized men or one full sized man unconquerable and simple.
As Whitman declares—"our America today I consider in many respects as but indeed a vast seething mass of materials, ampler, better, (worse also), than previously known-eligible to be used to carry toward its crowning stage, and build for good the great Ideal Nationality of the future, the Nation of Body and the Soul". No limit here to land, help, opportunities, mines, products, demands, supplies—with “I think our political organizations, consistent with our politics, or becoming to us—which organizations can only come-in time, through native schools or teachers of great Democratic Ideas, Religion-through Science, which now, like a new sunrise, ascending, begins to illuminate all and through own begotton poets and Literatures... The moral of a late well-written book on Civilization seems to be that the only real-foundation-walls and basis of true and full civilization, is the eligibility and certainty of bound less products for feeding, clothing, sheltering, with communication, and with civil and ecclesiastical freedom, and that then the esthetic and mental business will take of itself.”

Whitman could not transcend the limitations of what was in mid-nineteenth century America the most familiar mode of favorable urban representation. As William Jame’s remark that, all that Whitman was able to see more to value in urban life than his contemporaries, like others of his time, was unable to turn toward the crowd a gaze that could accept the reality of its, otherness, that desired to reduce it to neither insubstantiality not coherence.44 The inability of nineteenth-century spectators to look at crowds with a questioning rater than an imperial gaze is one of the many human tragedies of
that century. Whitman at least tried to offer a theory of how it might be possible to live in the midst of crowds of strangers. He sought to provide an alternative to the reactionary and fastidious disgust that so many of his cotemporaries felt in the metropolis. This offer is laudable and much of Whitman's urban poetry is unquestionably impressive. His urbanism is, however, marred by the paropticism of his age.

Whitman's "Optimism", however, is not based on his close observation of the progress-social, political, and scientific-made by man during his own age. He was indeed lucky to belong to a country with very few age-old traditions, with a very short history, and with infinite possibilities suggested by its vast expanse, the mingling of different nationalities, the new heritage of democracy, and the absence of any indigenous feudal traditions. He made the most use of the circumstances provided by nature and man, and rightly insisted on beginning with a clean slate.

His unbounded optimism can be, of course, condemned by the sophisticated critics by calling it uncritical, or by describing it as cheap and based on a worship of material progress. But when we remember Whitman's reminders, often annoyingly repeated, about the "Spiritual" aspects of life we realize that he is not blind to the inner life of civilized man. Nineteenth-century America was progressing so rapidly in every sphere that to ignore the great strides in social and political thought, in science and technology; was naturally impossible for a poet with a great social awareness. Whitman compels us to ask a fundamental question about the role of a poet—is he expected to be a thorough-
going introvert whose poems touch the world of objects only occasionally and indirectly, or is he expected to be an extrovert with a real contact with the everyday activities of men?

A great poet like Shakespeare can easily combine the two attitudes, but in lesser poets the emphasis is bound to vary from poem to poem. For Whitman both the attitudes are vital and this is why for some critics Whitman is almost an oriental mystic and for others, an arrogant salesman of modern civilization. But both these interpretations are equally true or untrue and he is, like the average man and woman of any country, a believer in both the body and the soul. Thus “reality” for him does not mean only man’s unconquerable mind and his relations with his maker: his reality also includes man’s relations with other men, a communion with other minds, and a study of the infinite riches of Nature. His honest and disarming admission of his self-contradictions is enough to show that he is always aware of the “duality” everywhere but wants to have a juxtaposition, if not an exact reconciliation, of the opposites. His attempts at the reconciliation, however, are not on the plane of philosophical thinking—Eastern or Western—but on the level of everyday life, a practical, almost unconscious, union of the life of contemplation and the life of the action. Many passages in “Leaves of Grass”, though obviously dramatic, read like apologetic confessions; so candid is the tone and so passionate the expression. The following passage from “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” is perhaps the best summing-up offered by Whitman himself.
"It is not upon alone the dark patches fall,
The dark threw its patches down upon me also".

(Crossing Brooklyn Ferry)

Whitman believed in "individualism". As James Dougherty believes, Whitman’s individualism, in disclaiming affiliation with any person, association, or system that would mediate between the single person and the all, did result in a state of mind and a poetry in which self and cosmos forever engulf each other as Whitman’s attention shifts between these two principles of inclusion.45 Whitman’s view of the relationship between the individual, society and the cosmos led him occasionally to see the whole of life as a sort of cosmic dance, in which everyone and everything moves according to its own laws and both fulfills its-own destiny and play its proper part in the general movement. This is an old nation among poets and philosophers, going back to Plotinus and beyond. When Whitman declares that:

All is a procession,
The universe is a procession
With measured and perfect
Motion....................

The individual whose true self combined equally body and soul was for him the root fact of existence. The “rapport” to use one of Whitman’s favorites words between such individuals and between each individual and Nature provides the basis of true civilization; it is a prerequisite of the good society. "Produce great Persons, the rest follows” he declared in “By Blue Ontario’s
Shores," and great persons for him were real persons, not marionettes, not-to use another of his favorites terms-"dandified" persons, mechanical slaves of fashion or dupes of their own narrow and unrealized selves. Every one is capable of self-realization if not narrowed and corrupted by bad influences and bad habits; and that is what Whitman means when he talks about the importance of the "average".

Democracy, for Whitman, did not mean individualism alone. It included "individuality, the pride and centripetal isolation of a human being by himself", but it included also equality; "the leveler, the unyielding principle of the average". "These two principles were" confronting and ever modifying the other, often clashing, paradoxical yet neither of highest avail without the other.” They could only be reconciled only by the addition, of the third element in the revolutionary trinity, the principle of fraternity, "the manly love of comrades."

"Loving Comradeship" was for Whitman the essential keystone of American democracy. In so far as he made this principle a reality, he may be said to have supplied what was lacking in the original transcendentalist doctrine and to have surmounted the pessimism of writers like Edgar Allan poet, Nathaniel Hawthorn, and Herman Melville.46

Whitman invented his urban processional as a way of moving through the city, through its encountered others, directly to the soul, means of attaching the city’s incalculable collective wealth, “the money value of (its) real and personal estate” to human experience.47
Whitman calls for a free "Channel" for the things of the New World, one without the mediating hand of the author. Without the mediating hand of the author. Whitman aimed to envision the American city as an endless process of becoming, formless yet formed and he found an early form of achieving this in the shape of newspaper page, changing daily, yet regular in overall layout.\textsuperscript{48} (Betsy Erkkila and Jay Grossman 166).

Whitman's poem live in the reality of the present day. He draws everything into the sphere of the time and space of he himself is living in.\textsuperscript{49} whether birds, a drop of water, phantoms, are employed, the items always take shape through a distinguishing phrase or figure of speech. They prove themselves to be the partners Whitman needs for bringing his ideas to life. By that means his great intentions turn into facts. Whitman loves the red, the white, and the black man, the grass and the redwood tree; his soul embraces the ancient myths and modern civilization; he holds in himself, spiritual enthusiasm and bodily passion.

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CHAPTER-III

Bibliography:


40. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations of Whitman’s Poems are from *Complete Poetry and Collected Prose* (New York: Library of America, 1982) and are cited by page number.


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