To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by M. Jimmie Killingsworth entitled "The Life Below the Life: Walt Whitman's Poetry and Sex in Nineteenth-Century America." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

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THE LIFE BELOW THE LIFE: WALT WHITMAN'S POETRY AND SEX IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA

A Thesis

Presented for the

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ABSTRACT

Walt Whitman embodied in his poetry the most complete treatment of sexuality attempted by any poet up to his time and thus figures significantly in the sexual movement in American life and letters of the nineteenth century. Throughout his career he came into conflict with the conservative reaction to this movement, emerging as a revolutionary in the eyes of Christian moralists like Secretary of the Interior Harlan and Anthony Comstock. He also offended the artistic sensibility as well as the manners and morals of the genteel tradition represented by poets and critics such as Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Many of these critics called Whitman a free lover, and his writing does share many affinities with the dogma set down by members of the free-love movement. As he was confronted with their ideas, Whitman exhibited a curious ambivalence towards free-love advocates like Ezra Heywood and David G. Croly, a fact which has not received the critical attention it deserves. In final analysis the poet seems to have rejected the various statements of social reorganization based on free-love principles, probably because his own ideas were less systematic and scientific. Judged in relation to these two extremes, that is, the conservative and radical traditions in sexual theory and ethics, Whitman appears

to inhabit the middle ground. Many elements of his poetry and thought seem to be derived from the ideas set forth by medical writers of sex education literature, another area critics have all but overlooked. From theorists like Dr. Edward Dixon and phrenologist Orson Fowler, Whitman borrowed language and concepts such as the theory of sexual electricity. Whitman's development of his sexual theory illustrates the process by which he incorporated into his poetry ideas from the public realm of thought.

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INTRODUCTION

The critical attitude which views history as the factual foundation of literature is particularly appropriate to the study of Walt Whitman's poetry. Drawing on his education from the newspaper offices and streets of nineteenth-century America, Whitman in his poetry encompasses fully and accurately a segment of social and intellectual history. Moreover, his Leaves of Grass left a strong scent in the noses of contemporaries, a sensation not pleasant for all but one which always demanded notice because it was so unusual, yet curiously familiar. Whitman's book was not popular in his lifetime, though it inspired the critical attention of a great many people, including angry reviewers, apologetic friends and famous public figures; it received much public attention in the form of adverse criticism, though ironically its actual reading audience was small. Thus, to come to a full understanding of Leaves of Grass the present-day reader must take the large view in assuming that this poetry broaches subjects and themes which the thinking men of the times felt compelled to embrace warmly or reject violently. The full lesson of Walt Whitman's work is then historical as well as literary, for a close examination reveals sides of American culture too often overlooked,

ignored or forgotten. In turn, some of these cultural traits meant much to Whitman as they affected his creative process and were part of the multitudes he contained. Hence, they are indispensable aids to understanding Leaves of Grass.

This study of Whitman and his poetry deals with sex, the subject which raised the greatest cry of controversy in the poet's day and which he called "the thing in my work which has been most misunderstood--that has excited the roundest opposition, the sharpest venom, the unintermitted slander, of the people who regard themselves as the custodians of the morals of the world."[1] Much has been said about this subject, but never has it been the center of a single study focusing on Leaves of Grass and closely related biographical and historical material. The purpose here is to learn more about the poems dealing with sex as they relate to the moral, scientific and aesthetic thought and attitudes of Whitman's world. Hopefully, this knowledge will help to establish the context of these ideas about sex in the historical scheme of sexual theory and in the history of ideas in general.

In addition to a portrayal of some general feelings

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[1]Horace Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, III (New York: Mitchell and Kennerley, 1914), 453.

about sex prevalent in Victorian America, Chapter I discusses the venomous opposition to sex expression in Leaves of Grass and the source of these attacks, the self-appointed guardians of public morals. This chapter presents Whitman as a revolutionary of sorts, as he was figured in the more conventional minds of the period. Also included here is an account of Whitman's friends and admirers who came publicly to his defense against such attacks. The problem of Chapter II is to ascertain how much of a revolutionary Whitman actually was. The ideas he expressed in various stages of his writing, especially in his poetry, contrast with the writings and actions of the most radical nineteenth-century sex theorists, the so-called free lovers. Whitman had direct contact with some of these men, and he was at least interested in their views. He was certainly influenced by his contact with the writers of "medical" sex education literature, and this contact is the subject of Chapter III. Whitman's relationship with these various intellectual groups proves to be as important as his connection with other schools, such as the transcendentalists, whose influence scholars have already thoroughly examined, perhaps overstated.

The sex poems of Leaves of Grass suggest their own critical limitations, in that few poems after the

third edition of 1860 deal with the subject, at least not with the courageous vigor the poet exhibited in the fifties. Therefore, the poems discussed here are those written during the early years of Whitman's poetic career, the years when he was most assuredly the poet of the body, when he could say, "I am Walt Whitman, liberal and lusty as nature."[2]

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[2]Walt Whitman, "To a Common Prostitute," in Leaves of Grass, eds. Sculley Bradley and Harold W. Blodgett (New York: Norton, 1973), p. 387.

CHAPTER I

THE TRADITION

The 1855 Leaves of Grass and the two subsequent editions were obviously the works of a revolutionary. The strange blend of prose and poetry confused the aesthetic sensibility of the times; with an unheard of force of literalness the poet shocked the moral sense; and the unusual symbolism suggested "free and brave thought," to use Emerson's phrase, which was surely "something of a monster" to nineteenth-century minds. Whitman's poetry represents a broadening of his century's thought; not that it was previously narrow, but Whitman's thought encompassed a factual scope even larger than that of far-reaching contemporaries like Emerson, Thoreau, Poe, and Melville. In the area of sex, Whitman exhibited a revolutionary boldness. Henry Adams saw him as one of the few American artists "who had ever insisted on the power of sex," understanding the necessity of the poet's challenge to American art, language and education, all of which Adams viewed as sexless.[1] Similarly Thoreau lamented, "We are so degraded that we cannot speak simply

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[1]Henry Adams, The Education of Henry Adams (New York: Modern Library, 1931), p. 385.

of the necessary functions of human nature."[2] In the 1850's Walt Whitman came forth singing the song of sex:

> From pent-up aching rivers,
> From that of myself without which I were nothing,
> From what I am determin'd to make illustrious,
> even if I stand sole among men,
> From my own voice resonant, singing the phallus,
> Singing the song of procreation,
> Singing the need of superb children and therein
> superb grown people,
> Singing the muscular urge and the blending. . . .[3]

In this 1860 poem Whitman explicitly praises not only the result of sex, procreation, but also the instinct or "muscular urge" and the act itself, the "blending" of human bodies. Even though such psalms were rare in the poet's day, this study will demonstrate that there was a rather large body of formal sexual discussion in nineteenth-century America and that Whitman dealt with subject matter, ideas and language drawn from the mainstream of this discussion. With these materials the poet articulated the most interesting sexual thought of his day. Moreover, he wove into his poetry sexual symbols, sexual rhythms, every idea associated with sex, all of which produced a muscular fiber of experiential association. Many of his contemporaries balked at this new, literal force as they were naturally surprised by Whitman's

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[2]Henry David Thoreau, Walden, ed. J. Lyndon Shanley (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 221.

[3]Walt Whitman, "From Pent-up Aching Rivers," in Leaves of Grass (1973), p. 91.

leap onto paths untrodden in the field of American poetry.

Nevertheless, Whitman's sex expression is emblematic of a need for free discussion of the subject in American literature around the time of the Civil War, according to some literary historians.[4] Much talk about "manliness" and vigor was in the air, and it is evident that many writers like Whitman believed that the sexual instinct could provide a source for this energy in art, as it does in life. Like Adams and Thoreau, Whitman's defenders Richard Maurice Bucke, John Burroughs and William Douglas O'Connor praised Whitman for fulfilling this literary need and for filling a gap in the range of man's knowledgeable expression. Dr. Bucke, one of the first medical psychoanalysts, wrote, "Leaves of Grass is really the largest single step ever taken in this special line of progress towards sexual purity."[5] "The poet stands in the garden of the world naked and not ashamed," writes John Burroughs, American naturalist and friend of Whitman: "It is a great comfort that he could do it in this age of hectic lust and Swinburnian impotence. . . ."[6] And

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[4]For a discussion of this need, see William Wasserstrom, Heiress of All the Ages: Sex and Sentiment in the Genteel Tradition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1959), pp. 30-31.

[5]Richard Maurice Bucke, Walt Whitman (Philadelphia: McKay, 1883), p. 165.

[6]John Burroughs, Walt Whitman: A Study (Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside, 1901), p. 196.

Whitman's staunchest and most eloquent defender, William O'Connor, wrote what has been called the greatest polemic defense of a poet fighting censorship,[7] The Good Gray Poet, in which he figures the poet heroically, rescuing "from the keeping of blackguards and debauchees, to which it has abandoned . . . the general element of . . . sexuality."[8]

It is true that other writers like Hawthorne, Poe and especially Melville dealt with sex, used sexual imagery and implied the power of the sexual impulse--they too were interested in the passions of man. However, these writers did not speak plainly in so doing; they veiled their sex expression in euphemisms and obscure imagery. As Edwin Miller and D. H. Lawrence point out, the forcefulness of their art suffers from their consciousness of social taboos.[9] But Whitman approached the subject literally and realistically in what O'Connor called a "bolder treatment than any other poet has yet permitted himself, especially in its prominently extolling the body and all its attributes and organs."[10] As early

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[7]F. DeWolfe Miller, "Before The Good Gray Poet," Tennessee Studies in Literature, 3 (1958), 90.

[8]William Douglas O'Connor, The Good Gray Poet, in Bucke, Walt Whitman, pp. 118-119.

[9]Edwin H. Miller, Walt Whitman's Poetry: A Psychological Journey (New York: New York University Press, 1968), p. 71.

[10]See F. D. Miller, "Before The Good Gray Poet," pp. 92-93.

as 1848, when Whitman was writing for the New Orleans Crescent, he defended the right of artists to portray the nude in art,[11] and Whitman employed that right, as well as the right of the artist to revolt against the taboos of society which he considers outworn and harmful to human experience. In the 1855 Leaves the poet openly challenged repression:

> Through me forbidden voices,
> Voices of sexes and lusts . . . voices veiled,
> and I remove the veil,
> Voices indecent by me clarified and transfigured.
>
> I do not press my finger across my mouth,
> I keep as delicate around the bowels as around
> the head and heart,
> Copulation is no more rank to me than death is
>
> I believe in the flesh and the appetites. . . .[12]

He longed to "unscrew the locks from the doors," to bring unmentionable subjects into the forum of public interest. Men like Thoreau and later Adams may have wanted to see the subject broached, may have even called for sex expression in life and letters, but the fact that Whitman acted on these principles makes him unique among nineteenth-century writers.

Furthermore, some of Whitman's sex poems seem

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[11]Walt Whitman, "Model Artists," in The Uncollected Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman, ed. Emory Holloway (Garden City, N. J.: Doubleday, 1921), I, 191.

[12]Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass: A Facsimile of the First Edition (San Francisco: Chandler, 1968), p. 29. The periods in the second line are Whitman's.

designed specifically to shock, especially those in the "Children of Adam" section of Leaves of Grass. Because of this intention these leaves are revolutionary, and as most other revolutions, artistic or otherwise, this book incurred reaction from several camps and individuals. Speaking of Whitman's experiment in sex expression Burroughs writes, "To have done it without offense would have been proof that he had failed utterly."[13]

Expressions of this sort faced a difficult public, as is evidenced by the defensive attitude of the authors, most of whom, including Whitman and his defenders, found it necessary to resort to conventional apologies, such as that based on the innate purity of nature. Joseph B. Marvin, defending Whitman in the Boston Radical, writes, "There is an instinct of silence, which, it is said, Whitman, in his group of poems entitled 'Children of Adam' rudely ignores and overrides. But so does the physiologist and the true physician ignore this instinct and break the silence. . . ."[14] But even respected doctors were not safe from censure. Dr. Edward H. Dixon's medical treatise, Woman and Her Diseases (1847), bears the same inscription as The Truth About Love (1872) by the free-love advocate David Goodman Croly: "Unto the pure all things are pure."

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[13]Burroughs, Walt Whitman: A Study, p. 196.

[14]Reprinted in Bucke, Whitman, pp. 163-164.

One must remember that this was an age in which Emerson was privately censured for using the word "spermatic" in one of his essays, according to O'Connor, who also relates an anecdote about Charles Sumner. During a speech, the abolitionist senator characterized the young state of Louisiana as "a seven months' child, begotten by the bayonet, in criminal conjunction with the spirit of caste," after which he was reminded that there were ladies in the Congressional gallery.[15] Viewpoints from across the sea also supported the assumption that nineteenth-century America was at least partially "Victorian" in matters concerning sex. Whitman's friend Edward Carpenter, English homosexual and crusader for sex study, criticized the puritanical "snarling and slandering" American press for their attack on Whitman. "Things are pretty bad here in this country," he said in a speech to a psychological association in London, "but in the states . . . they are ten times worse."[16] Likewise, an indignant reviewer of Leaves of Grass in the London Critic of 1855 asks, "Is it possible that the most prudish nation in the world will adopt a poet whose indecencies stink in the nostrils?"[17]

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[15]O'Connor, The Good Gray Poet, in Bucke, Whitman, p. 122.

[16]Edward Carpenter, Some Friends of Walt Whitman (London, 1906), p. 12.

[17]Reprinted in Bucke, Walt Whitman, p. 196.

The attacks on Whitman, which were thus inevitable, came from two types of people. Each type is characterized by its world view and hence may be assigned to one of two historical groups or traditions. One group was made up of conservative Christians from the Puritan tradition. Intensely patriotic, didactically moralistic and zealously religious, these crusaders were capable of heated reaction based principally on emotion and ignorance. The other group of detractors belongs to the so-called genteel tradition. Their attacks, though they were also morally motivated, were more intellectually and less emotionally executed. Very often these sophisticated assaults were aimed at the literary aspects of Leaves of Grass, for the members of the genteel tradition were disgusted with the manners as well as the morals of Whitman's book, though the distinction is surely slight.

The first group, Conservative Christian moralists, read Whitman with what Burroughs called "a narrow, bourgeois spirit,"[18] and the most ardent representative of this repressive force was Anthony Comstock; so much of an exemplar was he that this tradition of zealots may be labeled "Comstockian." Comstock was secretary of the Y.M.C.A.'s Society for the Suppression of Vice in New York from 1873 to 1915, during which time he carried out a

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[18]Burroughs, Walt Whitman, pp. 169-170.

personal vendetta against what he considered social vice, against gambling, drinking, and obscene literature to mention a few areas. He was an effective lobbyist partially responsible for forcing an 1872 amendment designed to strengthen an 1842 federal law which prohibited the mailing of obscene literature.[19] Shortly after the passage of the bill, Comstock was appointed special agent to the post office department. Operating in New York and later in Boston, he kept a stern eye fixed on all books traveling through the mail of the two cities. His biographers agree that Comstock was not qualified to judge the moral implications of art, that he could not distinguish between art and pornography, and that he had no discretion.[20] Furthermore, critics often have questioned his integrity because of his deceitful methods of gathering evidence which included the use of "decoy letters."[21] Some reacted violently to his injustice, including William O'Connor who in a letter to the New York Tribune said, "Mr. Anthony Comstock's hostility to the nude

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[19]Heywood Broun and Margaret Leech, Anthony Comstock: Roundsman of the Lord (New York: Literary Guild, 1927), pp. 87-88.

[20]See M[ark] V[an]-D[oren], "Anthony Comstock," in Dictionary of American Biography (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1928), IV, 330.

[21]D.R.M. Bennet, Anthony Comstock: His Career of Cruelty and Crime (1878; rpt. New York: De Capo, 1971), p. 1011.

appears to extend to even the naked truth."[22] Whitman said of him:

> The psychology of that man would baffle devils: . . . he never yet has discovered the difference between virtue and vice: he's not so much knave as ass. . . . They say sometimes that he's incompetent for his job: I go farther than that: I say there should be no job: we want no censors, monitors, inquisitors.[23]

The poet was not alone in his dislike for the man. Nevertheless, Comstock represented an important segment of public opinion which had a significant influence on American thought;[24] the fact that he was able to attain a substantial amount of power as an unqualified, private citizen is evidence of one moral tendency of the day, an anti-materialistic tendency strangely peppered with a spirit of reform. "Why should literary poison be sold any more freely than mineral or vegetable poisons?" Comstock asks in his book Traps for the Young: "The latter, at the worst, can but kill the body. The former not only brings moral death, but suffers the victim to live on a wretched existence in the world, corrupt and a corrupter of those about him."[25] Apparently Whitman's

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[22]Reprinted by William White in "Mr. Comstock as Cato the Censor," Walt Whitman Review, 5 (1959), 55.

[23]Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, IV, 92.

[24]See Broun and Leech, Comstock, p. 15.

[25]Anthony Comstock, Traps for the Young, ed. Robert Bremner (1883; rpt. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 179.

name appeared on the moral vigilante's list of corrupters, for Comstock has been implicated in one attempt to censor certain lines and poems in Leaves of Grass. The historical significance of Comstock's influence is evident, in that Whitman's struggle against expurgation is one of the most important literary battles of this sort in the history of American letters, one which predated and foreshadowed the publishing efforts of Henry Miller and other twentieth-century sex expressionists.

The facts surrounding the attempt to expurgate the Leaves in 1882 are well known.[26] After a long search for a permanent publisher, Whitman had come to terms with Osgood and Company in Boston, but on March 1 the District Attorney of the city notified the publishers that the book was classified as obscene literature. They, in turn, informed Whitman that they would print the book only if he agreed to accept the list of deleted lines which the D. A. included in his notification. Not satisfied with this list, Whitman submitted his own, which the D. A. rejected. In another letter to the poet, the publishers acknowledged their belief that the D. A. would accept the book if two complete poems, "A Woman Waits for Me" and "To a Common Prostitute," could be omitted, but Whitman

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[26]See Gay Wilson Allen, The Solitary Singer (New York: Macmillan, 1960), pp. 498-500.

refused this offer and took his business elsewhere--to Rees, Welsh and Company in Philadelphia.

As Gay Wilson Allen points out, scholars have never completely settled on the exact identification of the person who reported these poems to the D. A.; even Whitman and his friends were not completely sure.[27] But it is reasonable to assume that Anthony Comstock, who was active in Boston at the time, was responsible, especially since these two poems, "To a Common Prostitute" and "A Woman Waits for Me," were part of a postal package mailed by Ezra Heywood later in the same year. Comstock arrested Heywood, the founder of the New England Free Love League, on October 26, 1882 under the charge of distributing obscene literature through the United States Post.[28] By this time Whitman was beginning to fear that his entire book would be banned from the mail, an action which would have led to financial disaster for any writer. On June 28, Whitman wrote to O'Connor: ". . . I think the enemy (in Boston) have formally appealed to the Post Master General to order L. of G. excluded from the mails under the Comstock statutes. . . ."[29]

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[27]Allen, Solitary Singer, p. 589n.

[28]Edwin H. Miller, ed., The Correspondence of Walt Whitman (New York: New York University Press, 1961), III, 312n. For a discussion of Whitman's relationship with Heywood, see Chapter II below.

[29]Whitman, Correspondence, III, 295.

Again O'Connor rushed to Whitman's defense as he had done with The Good Gray Poet in 1866, even though in 1882 he and the poet had been at odds for some time over the question of the enfranchisement of newly-freed Negroes.[30] In his letter to the Tribune dated August 16, 1882, O'Connor cited an interview with Comstock which had appeared in the August 6 issue of the paper. Apparently Comstock had suggested that he would try to persuade the Postmaster General to prohibit Leaves of Grass from the mails, but O'Connor refuted his right to do so:

> The principle which the Postmaster-General keeps in sight for the government of his action in reference to mailable matter thoroughly respects literature and the rights of the reading public. It is distinctly understood--and by no one better than Mr. Comstock, despite his braggadocio--that any book belonging to the day-lit realm of letters, published openly by a reputable publisher, recognized by the literary class, admitted into libraries, discussed by reviews, accepted under any conditions by the general public will not be excluded from the mails.[31]

O'Connor goes on to say that Comstock attempted to conceal the fact that the Boston postmaster had already attempted to stop George Chainey from mailing a pamphlet containing a quotation from Leaves of Grass, but had failed in his appeal to the Postmaster General because of the aforementioned principles. O'Connor literally dared Comstock

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[30]See White, "Comstock as Cato the Censor," p. 54.

[31]Reprinted in White, "Comstock as Cato the Censor," p. 56.

to take such action. Besides this defender from Washington, Whitman also had support in Boston. Benjamin R. Tucker, the editor of the Liberty, printed an ad in which he offered to sell and mail Leaves of Grass and in which he informed Comstock (by name) that if necessary he would test the censor's threat in court.[32] But Comstock was a hard nut to crack, and no one was more aware of this fact than Whitman, who wrote again to O'Connor on November 12, after Heywood's arrest: My impression is that Comstock's chief object is to get, (by snap judgment probably) a judicial decision on which he can base a show to go before the P. M. General . . . [Whitman's italics]."[33] However, the principles stated in O'Connor's letter were apparently strong enough to support Whitman in this battle, for the poet retained his right to send Leaves of Grass through the mail, though his fears were evidently justified in light of this awesome Comstockian power.

Whitman had not been so fortunate in his earlier dealings with another powerful, Comstockian moralist, Secretary of the Interior James Harlan, who fired Whitman from his clerkship in the Bureau of Indian Affairs on June 30, 1965. This action inspired O'Connor to write

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[32]See E. H. Miller, ed., Correspondence, III, 348-349n.

[33]Whitman, Correspondence, III, 314.

The Good Gray Poet, and until recently scholars have assumed that Harlan, an ex-methodist minister, dismissed Whitman simply on the grounds that he was the author of Leaves of Grass. Harlan offered this justification to J. Hubley Ashton, Assistant Attorney General, whom O'Connor had persuaded to meet with Harlan in order to determine the actual reasons for the dismissal. The only documentation for this meeting and for Harlan's motivation hitherto has been found in Ashton's account of the incident in a 1902 letter to Charles W. Eldridge[34] and in Whitman's own account given to Horace Traubel, in which the following explanation of Harlan's response appears:

> The Secretary said, W. was the author of Leaves of Grass. Ashton said, Well, is that the reason? The Secretary said, Yes. He then went into a sort of narrative to the following purport. He was examining round the building, after office hours, and either in or on a desk he saw the Book. He took it up, and found it so odd, that he carried it to his room and examined it. . . . He found in the book in some . . . marked passages matter so outrageous that he had determined to discharge the author. . . .[35]

To supplement this documentation, Jerome M. Loving recently has found new evidence which seems to qualify and

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[34]Reprinted in Clara Barrus, Whitman and Burroughs, Comrades (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1931), pp. 27-30.

[35]Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, III, 472.

specify Harlan's motivation.[36] Whitman was not the only employee under Harlan's power whom the Secretary considered unworthy of his position, as is evidenced by the firing of several people in the Bureau of Indian Affairs, including the Chief, William P. Dole, to whom Harlan issued the following order on May 30, 1865, one month before Whitman's discharge:

> Sir:
> You will please report to me as early as practicable the names and positions in your Bureau of all employees whom you know to have entertained disloyal sentiments towards the Government of the United States since the Bombardment of Ft. Sumpter [sic].
> 2d All such persons as have not been known to entertain loyal sentiments, and who have affiliated with those who were known to be disloyal.
> 3d All such persons as are not necessary for the transaction of the public business, or who are inefficient.
> 4d All such persons, as disregard in their conduct, habits and associations the rules of decorum & propriety prescribed by a Christian Civilization.[37]

As Loving points out, Dole's reply that he was not aware that such people were in his bureau probably irritated Harlan and led to the Chief's dismissal. But more importantly this evidence proves that Harlan did not single out Whitman for persecution; instead Whitman fell

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[36]Jerome M. Loving, "Whitman and Harlan: New Evidence," American Literature, 48 (1976), 219-222.

[37]Reprinted in Loving, "Whitman and Harlan," p. 221.

among a small crowd, all of whom were dismissed for their political and moral associations. The poet did not fulfill the Secretary's requirements obviously because he had written an immoral book, but, as Loving suggests, Harlan may have found fault with Whitman's efficiency since he was taking off afternoons to tend the wounded in the Washington hospitals and since he did not discriminate between confederate and federal soldiers in the course of his wound dressing. However, the reason he gave Ashton was the most convenient, because he would have found it difficult to justify these last stipulations on account of Whitman's service to his country in the war hospitals. Perhaps Harlan also felt that Ashton would be more sympathetic toward a justification established on moral grounds.

Like Comstock, Harlan was a tough, moralistic republican who believed in the power of moral reform and who often took drastic measures to demonstrate the power of his ethical convictions. Time and time again Whitman's poetry has been the object of attacks from this type of person. The Comstockians believed that any mention of sex leads to lust and wickedness. As Comstock himself put it, "You cannot handle fire and not be burned; neither can the black fiend Lust touch the moral nature

without leaving traces of defilement."[38] Whitman believed conversely that repression of sex discussion makes for "covered over disease" resulting from ignorance and leading to vice.[39] This difference of opinion, which continues into the present day especially in discussions of education, has never been presented in a manner so dramatic. On one side, angry Comstockians appear, such as the reviewer in the Boston Post who read the sex poems in Leaves of Grass as "lust run rampant and holding high revel in its shame,"[40] and on the other side Whitman and O'Connor, his fiery defender, crying that "a most serious and heinous wrong" has restricted "the free action of genius."[41] In this light Whitman may be viewed as a moral revolutionary colliding with the reaction of zealous fanatics still hidebound by the narrow ethics of the seven deadly sins. "My call is the call of battle," he wrote, "I nourish active rebellion."[42] He rebelled against the medieval-like morality that he felt crowding his expression and his life. From his attempt to broaden the range of

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[38]Comstock, Traps for the Young, p. 169.

[39]See Walt Whitman, "A Memorandum at a Venture," North American Review, 134 (June 1882), 546-550.

[40]Reprinted in Bucke, Whitman, p. 201.

[41]O'Connor, The Good Gray Poet, in Bucke, Whitman, p. 129.

[42]Whitman, "Song of the Open Road," in Leaves of Grass (1973), p. 158.

ethical discussion sprouted lines like "Lusts and wickedness are acceptable to me,"[43] lines intended to shock people out of their slender, moralistic security, yet certain powerful people did not yield readily their ethical right of way.

Thus the Comstockians had quite an effect on Whitman's life through their hard-headed attack based on traditional moral systems. Whitman also found enemies among the literary class, men who founded their ideas about art and life on a prescribed system of gentlemanly behavior which Whitman contradicted at every turn. Mainly centered in New England, this genteel tradition, as it came to be called, exhibited most of the trappings of European aristocracy. Perhaps their reactions to Leaves of Grass were as emotionally motivated as the Comstockians--John Greenleaf Whittier, for instance, is reputed to have thrown his copy of the book into the fire[44]--but these men were of the literary realm; their attacks were civilized and refined, based on critical tenets drawn from the study of past literature. Although these critics did not affect Whitman's life as directly as Comstock or Harlan, their constant public and private

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[43]Walt Whitman, "You Felons on Trial in Courts," in Leaves of Grass (1973), p. 386.

[44]Lawrence Willson, "'The Body Electric' Meets the Genteel Tradition," New Mexico Quarterly, 26 (1956), 371.

bombardment is bound to have affected Whitman's poetry, for he, as much or more than any other American writer, was sensitive to criticism; throughout his life he kept clippings of reviews from magazines and newspapers. One can understand Whitman's concern with public opinion since he believed that "The proof of a poet shall be sternly deferr'd till his country/absorbs him as affectionally as he has absorb'd it."[45]

As historian Fred Lewis Pattee suggests, the "primal Whitman" of the first three editions of Leaves of Grass was not satisfied with all of the values he had absorbed from his country, including the "Harvard standards" and "imported Victorian refinement" of the "New England florists."[46] Even Emerson, the New England idol who praised in his famous letter "the solid sense" and "sober certainty" of the copy of the 1855 edition that Whitman sent him, was a little taken aback when the 1856 version appeared with its expanded number of poems dealing even more boldly with the subject of sex. He may have been surprised further by the fact that the private praise of his letter had gone public: "I greet you at the beginning of a great career--R. W. Emerson" was

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[45]Walt Whitman, "By Blue Ontario's Shore," in Leaves of Grass (1973), p. 351.

[46]Fred Lewis Pattee, The Feminine Fifties (New York: Appleton-Century, 1940), p. 41.

printed in gold gilt on the spine of the outer cover. By 1882 when the poems dealing with the "passion of woman love" had been arranged and settled into the "Children of Adam" section for twenty-two years, Emerson advised Whitman to drop some of the more dynamic, but the poet thanked him for his interest and refused to do so. Emerson's motivations for such advice are not completely clear. Whitman told Traubel that "Emerson's objections to the outcast passages in Leaves of Grass . . . were not moral or literary, but were given with an eye to my worldly success."[47] In an article printed after the death of both men, Charles Wesley Eldridge, Whitman's friend, supported this view, saying that Whitman told him that "Emerson's principal arguments were directed to showing that if the . . . passages were retained it would interfere with the general circulation of the book and impede his early recognition as a poet. That men would not buy the book and give it to women. . . ." Eldridge adds that Whitman was somewhat disappointed "to find such temporal considerations the chief arguments offered by so great a man as Ralph Waldo Emerson."[48] O'Connor also said that Whitman gave him the same account

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[47]Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, I, 50.

[48]Charles Wesley Eldridge, "'A Woman Waits for Me': The Personal Relations of Emerson and Whitman," The Conservator, 7 (May 1896), 39.

of the discussion on Boston Commons that day,[49] but Whitman, who respected Emerson as the only great public figure who took an active interest in the advancement of his poetic career, may have been covering for the moral squeamishness of the transcendentalist. John Townsend Trowbridge, friend to both men, supported Emerson's point of view, believing that the chief fault he found with Leaves of Grass was a single poem, "A Woman Waits for Me," which Trowbridge also found distasteful; this gentlemanly friend went so far as to say that Whitman might have sacrificed the poem in the Osgood edition and foregone the wrath of the district attorney.[50] It seems that Emerson was never quite at ease with such literal talk on the subject of sex as found in "A Woman Waits for Me" and in other poems. With another now famous letter to Carlyle Emerson included a copy of Leaves of Grass with the stipulation that he might use it to light his pipe if he found the morals lacking.[51] Burroughs explains Emerson's attitude psychologically: "The subordination by Whitman of the purely intellectual, which runs all

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[49]See Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, II, 14-15.

[50]J[ohn] T[ownsend] Trowbridge, "Whitman Inspired and Uninspired," The Conservator, 7 (March 1896), 5.

[51]See Ralph Waldo Emerson, The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle, ed. Joseph Slater (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1964), p. 75.

through his poems, is one source of their power, Emerson, who was deficient in the sensuous, probably could not appreciate."[52] Thus the values of Whitman's friends in New England limited their endorsement of his book. They did not know quite what to do with Whitman. Thoreau said that he was unsqueamish enough to eat a fried rat if necessary, but Whitman's sensual power was rather difficult for even him to swallow, though he finally did and with apparent relish, as is evidenced in a letter to Harrison Blake dated December 7, 1856:

> There are two or three pieces in the book which are disagreeable, to say the least; simply sensual. He does not celebrate love at all. It is as if the beasts spoke. I think that men have not been ashamed of themselves without reason. No doubt there have always been dens where such deeds were unblushingly recited, and it is no merit to compete with their inhabitants. But even on this side he has spoken more truth than any American or Modern that I know. I found his poem exhilarating, encouraging. As for its sensuality,--and it may turn out to be less sensual than it appears,--I do not so much wish that those parts were not written, as that men and women were so pure that they could read them without harm, that is, without understanding them. One woman told me that no woman could read it. . . . Of course Walt Whitman can communicate to us no experience, and if we are shocked, whose experience is it that we are reminded of?[53]

However, other readers of the genteel tradition

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[52]Burroughs, Walt Whitman, p. 61.

[53]Henry David Thoreau, Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau, ed. F. N. Sanborn (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1894), pp. 345-346.

could not find it in themselves to read Whitman's poetry with the honesty and innocence that Thoreau suggests and exemplifies. But, unlike the Comstockians, they did take the trouble to attack Whitman on particular grounds. They launched their criticism toward what they considered the poet's egotism, his barbarism, his animalism, and, closely related to all of these areas, his sensuality unmasked by metaphor or euphemism, his direct approach to the unapproachable. Although they may not seem so at first, these were literary complaints.

First of all, the criticism aimed at the poet's egotism seems to have resulted from a misunderstanding of his special use of the persona in his poetry. A reviewer from the Christian Examiner thought that such employment of the first person represented "ithyphallic audacity,"[54] probably referring to lines such as the following from "A Woman Waits for Me":

> It is I, you women, I make my way,
> I am stern, acrid, large, undissuadable, but I love you,
> I do not hurt you any more than is necessary for you,
> I pour the stuff to start sons and daughters fit for these States, I press with slow rude muscle. . . .[55]

Along the same lines, Oliver Wendell Holmes once said

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[54]Willson, "'The Body Electric' Meets the Genteel Tradition," p. 370.

[55]Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass (1973), p. 102.

privately that some of Whitman's poems "are among the most cynical examples of indecent exposure I recollect. . . ."[56] Misunderstanding the persona also caused problems when genteel readers noticed the poet's association with persons of low degree, with bus drivers, felons, and prostitutes. Burroughs often defends Whitman in this area, stating how foolish it is to confuse Whitman, "the private individual," with Whitman, the persona, posing as "the representative of . . . all types and conditions of men," as "the new democratic personality."[57] He also points out that Emerson never really understood Whitman's position as the "apostle of the roughs."[58] This sort of misunderstanding goes hand in hand with the accusations of barbarism. The seeming formlessness of Whitman's verse and the realism of his style repulsed those possessed of refined values. As Pattee instructs, during the time of the first three editions of Leaves of Grass realism was considered vulgar; Melville's Typee and Omoo were attacked on similar grounds.[59]

Whitman also came under attack on account of his

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[56]Willson, "'The Body Electric' Meets the Genteel Tradition," p. 372.

[57]Burroughs, Walt Whitman, p. 192.

[58]Burroughs, Walt Whitman, p. 51.

[59]Pattee, The Feminine Fifties, p. 30.

animalism, a quality which foreshadowed the revolt of the naturalistic writers against the genteel tradition later in the century. In a passage published in 1856 and later removed from the Leaves, Whitman writes, "Let the cow, the horse, the camel, the garden-bee--let the mudfish, the lobster, the mussel, the eel, the sting-ray, and the grunting pig-fish--let these and the like of these, be put on a perfect equality with man and woman!"[60] When Whitman was preparing his 1860 edition, Charles Gaylor, Whitman's predecessor as editor of the Brooklyn Times, summed up the essence of this reaction in the following satire published in his comic daily, Momus:

> Walt Whitman well names his obscene productions
> Where he riots in filth, on indecency feasts,
> For 'tis plainly the simplest of simple deductions,
> That such "Leaves of Grass" can but satisfy beasts.[61]

However, with the appearance of the 1860 Leaves, the new well-wrought and religiously significant poems like "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" took some of the air out of the critics' sails, at least, as Henry S. Canby points out in his comment on the Momus satire, out of those sails which flagged the charges of egotism and irreligion. The effectiveness of his style became

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[60]Walt Whitman, in Leaves of Grass (1973), p. 592.

[61]Reprinted in Henry Seidel Canby, Walt Whitman: An American (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1943), p. 183.

apparent as the cries against his barbaric form began to die out. Ironically, Whitman's style was never as strong after 1860. Perhaps these accusations had some effect on the poet, for he began to revert to conventional stylistic techniques and diction as early as 1865 in Drum Taps.

By this time Whitman's genteel critics turned their guns almost exclusively on the portrayal of sexual attraction in Leaves of Grass. Typical of this criticism was the constant attack of Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a poet and critic who was rather popular during the period. Higginson was a bitter enemy of Whitman and his poetry which he derided even after the poet's death. For a while Whitman suspected Higginson to be the culprit who reported his poems to the Boston D. A. in 1882.[62] It was Whitman's brand of manliness and his attitude toward the love of woman which most irritated Higginson. Higginson's biographer notes that Whitman's picture of love of woman was entirely barbaric and disrespectful in Higginson's eyes, that his manliness was "entirely muscular"; Higginson preferred chivalric manners and the sentimental portrait of love so popular and commonplace during the day.[63]

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[62]See Whitman, Correspondence, III, 283.

[63]See Tilden G. Edelstein, Strange Enthusiasm: A Life of Thomas Wentworth Higginson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 354.

As Burroughs suggests, "Whitman is seldom or never the poet of a sentiment, at least of the domestic and social sentiments."[64] The women of his poetry are athletic and sexy; the pure, lily-white woman as she is figured in sentimental literature becomes something stronger and certainly different in Leaves of Grass, a more sexually mature flower:

> This is a full-grown lily's face,
> She speaks to the limber-hipp'd man near the garden pickets,
> Come here she blushingly cries, Come nigh to me limber-hipp'd man,
> Stand at my side till I lean as high as I can upon you,
> Fill me with albescent honey, bend down to me,
> Rub to me with your chafing beard, rub to my breast and shoulders[65] [Whitman's italics].

Whitman said in 1856 that he had "seen enough of mean and impotent modes of expressing love for men and women,"[66] and as he searched for a new mode he clashed with representatives of the old sentimental school, like Higginson, who preferred parlor wooing to primitive fulfillment. However, Higginson stands apart from other representatives in one respect, in that he was the first critic to imply publicly that the love in Whitman's poetry is abnormal, that it is homosexual. In his column in The Nation of

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[64]Burroughs, Walt Whitman, p. 195.

[65]Walt Whitman, "Faces," in Leaves of Grass (1973), pp. 466-467.

[66]Walt Whitman, "By Blue Ontario's Shore," in Leaves of Grass (1973), p. 353.

1892, the year of Whitman's death, Higginson wrote:

> . . . there is the same curious deficiency shown in him, almost alone among poets, of anything like personal and romantic love. Whenever we come upon anything that suggests a glimpse of it, the object always turns out to be a man and not a woman.[67]

And it is true that the poems celebrating homosexual or manly love in the "Calamus" section of Leaves of Grass are handled with more sentimentality and apparent personal interest than those of womanly love in "Children of Adam," but this fact does not excuse Higginson's charge of abnormality. One finds substantiation for this charge in Higginson's attack on Whitman's choice of service during the Civil War: "a stalwart poet, who--with the finest physique in America . . . preferred to pass by the recruiting-office and take service in the hospital with the non-combatants."[68] Again, a genteel value--this time some Renaissance notion of chivalry--stands in the way of appreciation for a poet interested in reforming the moral and intellectual standards of his time. All his life to face viciously soured reaction was Walt Whitman's fate.

How well Whitman weathered these attacks is open to some question. Leaves of Grass, besides being one of

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[67] [Thomas Wentworth Higginson], "Recent Poetry," Nation, 55 (1892), 12.

[68] [Thomas Wentworth Higginson], "Recent Poetry," Nation, 33 (1881), 476-477.

the most frequently attacked books of the nineteenth century, was probably the most constantly revised as well. It is difficult to assign motivations for revision--did the poet remove certain passages simply because they were objectionable rather than for artistic reasons? Certainly some of the passages rejected were artistically inferior, such as that removed from what was to become "Song of Myself" as it appeared in 1855: "Thruster holding me tight and that I hold tight!/We hurt each other as the bridegroom and the bride hurt each other."[69] The lines immediately preceding these describe metaphorically a sexual fusion between the "bare bosom'd night" and the "voluptuous cool-breath'd earth," in which the persona takes a passive roll. The deleted lines break the continuity of the metaphor as they involve the persona in a confusing relationship with the night and earth; he is no longer the observer of the sexual force of nature; rather he is drawn into the activity by some "thruster" whom the reader is unable to identify. However, other passages seem to have been deleted because of their revolutionary approach to the subject of sex. As the editors of the Comprehensive Reader's Edition of Leaves of Grass point out, some of the lines from one of Whitman's

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[69]Walt Whitman, in Leaves of Grass: A Facsimile of the First Edition, p. 27.

most interesting poems, "The Sleepers," the poet dropped for discretionary rather than aesthetic reasons.[70] The poem is an original handling of dream situations some of which deal with what Edwin Miller calls "latent and universal taboos."[71] The following passage is valuable because it exhibits psychological realism unusual for the day, but Whitman dropped it in 1881--a pity since it presents a unique questioning of the fears of nakedness as related through the mind of the persona who poses as an adolescent on the bridge of sexual maturity; he is afraid of the new power he feels, yet is simultaneously excited and curious about it:

> O hot-cheek'd and blushing! O foolish hectic!
> O for pity's sake, no one must see me now! my clothes were stolen while I was abed,
> Now I am thrust forth, where shall I run?
>
> Pier that I saw dimly last night, when I look'd from the windows!
> Pier out from the main, let me catch myself with you, and stay--I will not chafe you,
> I feel ashamed to go naked about the world.
> I am curious to know where my feet stand and what this is flooding me, childhood or manhood--and the hunger that crosses the bridge between.[72]

The symbolic power of this picture of personality is rarely matched in literature, even in Whitman's own,

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[70]See Leaves of Grass (1973), pp. 424-425n.

[71]E. H. Miller, Walt Whitman's Poetry, p. 72.

[72]Walt Whitman, in Leaves of Grass (1973), pp. 626-627.

yet he tossed it aside, knowing perhaps that the society he lived in feared realism as much as nakedness. Other passages found among the Whitman papers never made it into Leaves of Grass. Some were revolutionary in their direct attack on social values, such as the following which seems to be aimed directly at the genteel tradition:

> White, shaved, foreign, soft-flesh'd, shrinking,
> Scant of muscle, scant of love power,
> Scant of gnarl and knot, modest, sleek in costumes,
> Averse from the wet of rain, from the fall of snow, from the grit of stones and soil,
> A pretty race, each one just like hundreds of the rest,
> A race of scantlings from the stony growth of America.[73]

Even though Whitman said that "Expurgation is apology,"[74] the poet apparently felt forced to apologize after so many years of attack. The first English edition of 1868, Poems of Walt Whitman, did not contain the more questionable poems. He also offered to compromise with the Boston censors by deleting certain lines, so long as they printed the pages in such a way that readers would not notice the change. And finally in 1892, the worst was realized with the appearance of the expurgated Boston edition, Selected Poems of Walt Whitman, which did not escape the critical eye and venomous pen of Thomas

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[73]Walt Whitman, in Complete Writings, eds. Richard Maurice Bucke, Thomas B. Harned, and Horace L. Traubel, III (New York: Knickerbocker, 1902), 258-259.

[74]Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, I, 151.

Wentworth Higginson, who wrote,

> . . . it is one of the curious phases in the varying fame of Walt Whitman that his death almost precisely coincided with the publication of that which he had persistently deprecated during life, an expurgated edition of his poems.[75]

In the same article, Higginson tauntingly remarks that only this edition is fit to "be left openly about the house."

Whitman never revealed the reasons why he bent to the critical wind, but they have been the subject of much speculation. Edwin Miller believes that Whitman allowed expurgation and wrote no more sexual poems after 1860 on account of the Harlan incident and the resulting good gray poet image O'Connor sought to project.[76] DeWolfe Miller suggests that his image created in Whitman a desire to become a religious poet, since O'Connor emphasized the religious potential of his early poetry.[77] Undoubtedly Whitman's experience in the Civil War also affected this shift in poetic purpose; perhaps he began to realize the frailty of the body electric through his wound dressing as well as through ill health which plagued him constantly after the 1870's. But the fact remains that the never-ceasing attacks on his book had an enormous

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[75]Higginson, "Recent Poetry," Nation, 55 (1892), 11.

[76]E. H. Miller, Walt Whitman's Poetry, p. 10.

[77]F. D. Miller, "Before The Good Gray Poet," p. 96.

effect on Whitman's poetic directions. Speaking of Leaves of Grass Whitman wrote, "Camerado, this is no book,/who touches this touches a man,"[78] and it is evident that the turbulent and fleshy poet of the first three editions lost the power that the expression of sex afforded him, and that the religious poet of "Passage to India" and the later poems turned from his concrete, earthly power; enfeebled by constant attack, the book and the man after 1860 reflect the scars of revolution and reaction. By the time the world came around to realization of his great power, the poet of the body was a bag of bones pushing up a different kind of leaves of grass.

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[78]Walt Whitman, "So Long," in Leaves of Grass (1973), p. 505.

CHAPTER II

THE RADICALS

In the area of sexual ethics perhaps the most definite emotional and intellectual tendency of nineteenth-century America was a dissatisfaction with existing institutions. This critical attitude resulted in social movements marked by two general directions, as it were, backward and forward. Some enthusiasts argued for reaction based on puritanical moralism exhibiting a fervor which approached Great Awakening proportions, while others, such as scientific and positivistic theorists, simultaneously sought social reform founded upon new knowledge of the principles of man's existence. Few historical periods have proved more conscious of the old and the new, of liberalism and conservatism and the conflict between.

The earnestness with which various advocates strove to perfect the species, to make the world a fit place for happy living, was often spiced with violent extremism. A case in point is the fact that a free-love movement could exist side by side with the reactionary ethical movement adopted by the Comstockian and genteel traditions. This fact may surprise the twentieth-century observer who is comfortable in his stereotypes of "Victorian" America.

But people then believed in taking sides and in ranting vigorously across well-drawn lines. Of course, problems developed from this constant friction; if a man intended to remain outside the quarters of battle yet retain his right to speak freely on the issue at hand, he was either caught in the crossfire, or he found himself drawn into the welcoming arms of one camp, or he would fall under the attack of the other whether he had aligned himself with the enemy or not. In the fight to reform the ethics of sexuality Walt Whitman tripped into such an unenviable predicament. During the poet's attempt to free sex expression from the conservative censors, members of those ranks believed him to be associated with the so-called free lovers. These scientific radicals, on the other hand, according to their particular principles viewed him either as a hero of their cause or as an unscientific and primitive representative of a force even more regressive than that of their chief adversaries, the religious moralists. From the biographical information at hand and from the indirections presented in his poetry, it is difficult to say whether Whitman preferred to be known as a friend or foe to the free lovers. Publicly and privately he derided their ideas, yet certain of his statements, especially those in Leaves of Grass, seem to have much in common with them. This ambivalence, so evident in the sum of Whitman's reactions to this historical

situation, is one of the most curious facets of his career, yet scholars have awarded its significance with only an occasional page.

The free-love movement in the United States of the last century was not a unified one; rather it was built upon the reformatory efforts of individuals and small groups, each having individual motivations. Some men like Ezra Heywood and his New England Free Love League were interested mostly in the reform of marriage laws and traditions, while others included free love as only one aspect of programs advocating total social reorganization--such as the case of Stephen Pearl Andrews in his system of Pantarchism and John Humphrey Noyes and his followers who founded the Utopian Commune at Oneida, New York.

The earliest signs of interest in the reform of sexual ethics appear with the beginning of the birth control movement in America in 1831, the year in which Robert Dale Owen published the first edition of Moral Physiology. This book, which details a birth control method called "male withdrawal" now known for its unlikely efficiency, is important because it is an attempt to examine man's sexual instinct in the light of "genuine modesty [which] has its seat in the heart, not in the outward form of sanctioned custom. . . ."[1] Owen presents

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[1]Robert Dale Owen, Moral Physiology: A Brief and Plain Treatise on the Population Question (1831; rpt. London, E. Truelove, 1870), pp. 8-9.

the decidedly "modern" point of view that something must be done about man who often indulges in the pleasurable aspects of the sexual instinct, acting "simply from animal impulse" and not "from any calculation of the consequences."[2] In respect to sex expression, the significance of the book lies in the author's attitude toward his subject. Owen seems to accept readily man's need for sexual pleasure in his desire to incorporate these "animal" drives into practical social forms, as well as to eliminate their detrimental effect, overpopulation. Aware of the potential social value of sex, Owen writes of the reproductive instinct: "Controlled by reason and chastened by good feeling, it gives to social intercourse much of its charm and zest."[3]

Written in much the same spirit, another book on birth control came out in 1832. Fruits of Philosophy by Charles Knowlton, a serious book despite its tongue-in-cheek title, introduces douching as a more effective means of limiting population. Although Knowlton touches on some ethical questions in the defense of his subject, his treatment is primarily medical as it is less socially and economically oriented than Owen's. Nevertheless, they shared common ground in their problems of publication;

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[2]Owen, Moral Physiology, p. 15.

[3]Owen, Moral Physiology, p. 13.

Dr. Knowlton was jailed for three months and Owen found it necessary to abandon his American publisher and resort to an English firm. These two writers are the fathers of two very large and almost unbelievably popular movements in the literature of sex theory and reform. Knowlton represents the beginnings of a medical movement in sex education which flourished in the late forties, fifties and sixties,[4] while Owen with his social and economic concerns is the predecessor of the free lovers who did not come into prominence until after the Civil War. By 1883 the doctrines of free love were so well known that Anthony Comstock felt moved to devote an entire chapter to their derision in his Traps for the Young. Of what he calls "Free-Love Traps," he writes:

> Science is dragged down by these advocates, and made a pretended foundation for their argument, while their foul utterances are sought to be palmed off upon the public as scientific efforts to elevate mankind. With them, marriage is bondage; love is lust; celibacy is suicide; while fidelity to marriage vows is a relic of barbarism. . . . Nothing short of turning the whole family loose to run wild like the beasts of the forest will satisfy the demands of the leaders and publishers of this literature.[5]

The writers of free-love propaganda came into conflict with the same kind of people who troubled Whitman

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[4]See Chapter III below for a discussion of this movement and Whitman's connection with it.

[5]Comstock, Traps for the Young, pp. 158-159.

throughout his career. The poet unintentionally came to be associated with the free lovers because of this externally induced comradeship in the fight against censorship and perhaps because of his association with the earlier free soil party and other liberal factions also peopled by men like Heywood and Andrews. Along with these causes one must include the revolutionary spirit and language so pronounced in some passages of Leaves of Grass. In one ecstatic song, the persona longs "To escape utterly from others' anchors and holds!/ To drive free! to love free!"[6] During their talk on Boston Commons Emerson warned Whitman of the possibility that he might be associated with the free lovers through these apparent doctrinal similarities,[7] though Whitman was probably already aware of such a chance, since ten years earlier Harlan reputedly had accused him of incorporating free love material into his poetry.[8] Assuredly, to interpret some of the poems otherwise is difficult, as Gay Wilson Allen suggests in his comments on the "Children of Adam" poems.[9] A good example is "One

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[6]Whitman, "One Hour to Madness and Joy," Leaves of Grass (1973), p. 106.

[7]See Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, II, 14-15.

[8]See O'Connor, The Good Gray Poet, in Bucke, Walt Whitman, p. 101.

[9]Gay Wilson Allen, The New Walt Whitman Handbook (New York: New York University Press, 1975), p. 98.

Hour to Madness and Joy," a poem Whitman wrote to enlarge the "Enfans d'Adam" section which was new to the 1860 edition. The poet seems to totally disregard the conventions of sexual control in favor of a mystic-like release into sexual ecstasy:

> One hour to madness and joy! O furious! O confine me not!
> (What is this that frees me so in storms?
> What do my shouts amid lightnings and raging winds mean?)
>
> O to drink the mystic deliria deeper than any other man!
> O savage and tender achings![10]

Whitman's break with the average social attitudes towards sex, those of "previous ties and conventions," and his search for a more natural and enjoyable one, his desire "To find a new unthought-of nonchalance with the best of Nature"[11] align him with the free-love thinkers of his day. Furthermore, lines which express these ideas are not rare in Leaves of Grass; at times the poet speaks of loving freely the strangers in the street,[12] or of joining in "the midnight orgies of young men."[13] In "Song of Myself," he uses a free-love-like idea to metaphorize his

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[10]Leaves of Grass (1973), p. 105.

[11]Leaves of Grass (1973), p. 106.

[12]See "A Song for Occupations," Leaves of Grass (1973), p. 212.

[13]"Native Moments," Leaves of Grass (1973), p. 109.

determination to break through social barriers for the sake of identification with all human experience:

> I am a free companion, I bivouac by invading watchfires,
> I turn the bridegroom out of bed and stay with the bride myself,
> I tighten her all night to my thighs and lips.[14]

However, to understand Whitman's actual attitude toward the free lovers, one must examine the paths he crossed with them in his life, literary activity and thought. During his trouble with the Boston censors in 1882, Whitman found himself in league with Ezra H. Heywood, a Massachusetts pamphleteer and social reformer. On November 12, Whitman wrote to O'Connor:

> I have rec'd a long letter from Ezra H. Heywood--dated Princeton, Mass.:--Heywood has been arrested by Comstock--part at least of the cause appears to be sending printed slips by mail with "to a common prostitute" and "a woman waits for me"--supplements to Heywood's "the word"--(I believe I will enclose H's letter--slips and all) . . . (As to the vehement action of the Free religious & lover folk, in their conventions, papers . . . in my favor--and even proceedings like these of Heywood--I see nothing for myself or friends to do than quietly stand aside & let it go on)--what do you think?[15]

By this time in his life, Whitman was showing an obvious interest in the free love movement, but he was understandably wary of offering public, even private, support after having already confronted rigorous reaction in the form of press reviews and the attacks of Harlan and Comstock.

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[14]Leaves of Grass (1973), p. 65.

[15]Whitman, Correspondence, III, 314.

A little battle worn, he was probably relieved when O'Connor advised him to maintain his caution. Again, however, O'Connor himself assumed an active role, unable as he was to resist the temptation to enter a fight for the cause of free speech. He had cited a newspaper report of Heywood's arrest in an October 27 letter to Whitman, in which he spewed, "I don't like Heywood's ways, and I don't like the Free-Love theories at all, but he has his rights, which these devils trample on."[16] Regardless of this statement of rights, O'Connor was worried for the sake of Whitman's public image. Whitman's advice that he "not feel anxious a bit"[17] about the Heywood trial is evidence of O'Connor's concern for public opinion.

Like most people's reactions, Whitman's reactions to certain situations vary according to the particular point of view of the person he is addressing. He often overemphasizes his capacity for caution when dealing with O'Connor as he does in his letters on the Heywood trial. From these it would seem that Whitman felt indifference towards the free-love movement, especially as it concerned the conditions of his poetry's success, with which O'Connor was constantly concerned. On the other hand, Whitman's statements take on a bolder quality when

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[16]E. H. Miller, ed., Correspondence, III, 312n.

[17]Whitman, Correspondence, III, 320.

directed towards someone like his idealistic young friend and biographer, Horace Traubel. For instance, after Heywood's acquittal, the result of public outcry against Comstock, Whitman expressed to O'Connor a guarded pleasure in a letter of April 14, 1883:

> Do you see in the Heywood trial, the judge peremptorily ruled out the L of G slips part of the indictment--(which ruling out "was received with applause") & H was afterwards on the remaining part or parts acquitted. So A[nthony] C[omstock] retires with his tail intensely curved inwards.[18]

Here Whitman emphasizes Comstock's defeat and the public sympathy for Leaves of Grass, yet in a later discussion with Traubel, Whitman intimates a somewhat warmer regard for Heywood. In referring to a legal struggle with Comstock which resulted in Heywood's imprisonment, he says, "I suppose you know about that fellow Heywood? He was a free lover . . . he was really an important man--brave in his view: he was unqualified--went to jail--suffered."[19] Therefore, it is difficult to know how Whitman really felt about Heywood. In one place he expresses an idealistic sense of brotherhood and a knowledge of the free lover's "importance," whereas in another, his true opinion is too much obscured by his sense of caution, as in his letter to Dr. Bucke, dated March 19, 1888.

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[18]Whitman, Correspondence, III, 338.

[19]Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, III, 566.

Acknowledging that he had received a visit from Heywood, Whitman writes that he "treated him politely but that is all."[20]

Nevertheless, Whitman had much in common with Heywood whether he knew it or not. For instance, Heywood's writings though popular were often misunderstood; O'Connor believed that he had "flatly broken a statute" in his first literary and legal attempt to defy Comstock despite the judge's decision to the contrary.[21] The fact is that the writing found in Heywood's journal, The Word, and in his boring social tract on the state of marriage, Cupid's Yokes, could never be considered erotic, except by someone with a twisted set of values such as Anthony Comstock. Heywood's only "crime" was an attack on the conventions of society--he and his friends who formed the New England Free Love League even rejected the convention of time, altering 1873 A. D. to 1 Y. L. (Year of Love).[22] His battle with the conservatives over the question of free speech was just as significant as Whitman's fight for freedom of sexual expression in literature. Both sought to rid the United States of the

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[20]Whitman, Correspondence, IV, 157.

[21]See Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, IV, 90-91.

[22]Z[echariahn] C[hafee], Jr., "Ezra Hervey Heywood," in DAB, VIII, 610.

regressive force represented by Comstock, whom Heywood attacked point-blank in an article in The Word. Referring to the censor as a "religio-monomaniac," Heywood denounced the statute of 1873 as an imposition on personal liberty.[23]

The expressions of Whitman and Heywood are similar both in their treatment of the position of women in society and marriage and in their defense of the natural and social value of the sexual instinct in the tradition of Robert Dale Owen. Heywood's interest in the position of women probably spurred his enthusiasm for "A Woman Waits for Me" and "To a Common Prostitute," Whitman's poems which state most clearly his concern for women. Even though the poet did not admit his apparent affinity with the pamphleteer, Heywood's inclusion of the two poems in his mail packet indicates his desire to support his own ideas with those of Whitman. In dealing with the question of women's place in society, Whitman and Heywood were drawing from the realm of public thought, for the issue was constantly under scrutiny in the magazines and journals. It is Heywood's prime consideration in Cupid's Yokes, in which he argues that marriage is a barbaric institution. It is, he says, an undemocratic arrangement unfair to the wife as it is very often only a legalized situation of unnatural lust favoring the desires of a

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[23]See Broun and Leech, Comstock, p. 172.

slavemaster-husband.[24] Considering this view of society, it is easy to reach the conclusion of Heywood's biographer that these ideas were much in advance of the times,[25] as were Whitman's. Although these topics were drawn from the forum of public interest, they were treated radically in the writings of Heywood and Whitman.

Heywood obviously found Whitman's poems a source of excitement, perhaps even influence. In "A Woman Waits for Me," the poet seems to encourage women to develop their interest in physical life, for they are "no less" than men in that respect:

> They are not one jot less than I am . . .
> They know how to swim, row, ride, wrestle, shoot, run, strike, retreat, advance, resist, defend themselves,
> They are ultimate in their own right--they are calm, clear, well-possess'd of themselves.[26]

Heywood likewise called for the necessity of mutually developed physicality in love, emphasizing the equality of women. The free lover would have agreed with Whitman's demand that the new woman must be active: his persona declares, "Now I will dismiss myself from impassive women."[27] Heywood wanted a social situation wherein women

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[24]See Ezra Heywood, Cupid's Yokes, in Sexual Indulgence and Denial (1876; rpt. New York: Arno, 1974), p. 8.

[25]C[hafee], in DAB, VIII, 610.

[26]Leaves of Grass (1973), p. 102.

[27]Leaves of Grass (1973), p. 102.

might choose freely the manner through which their sexual desires would be fulfilled, whereas Whitman longed for a new breed of woman, "fierce and athletic," who could match as well as relinquish herself to the desires of the most perfect man. But despite the differences in these points of view, both are progressive; both writers sought reform which would elevate socially and morally the position of women.

Furthermore, both men had questions about the structure of marriage and family--Heywood approached his directly, Whitman indirectly. In Cupid's Yokes, Heywood calls for a radical break up of the institution of marriage, which was to be replaced by a loosely organized system of cohabitation free from legal and religious bonds. He questions the value of existing institutions and their power over men: "Why should priests and magistrates supervise the sexual organs of citizens any more than the brain and stomach?"[28] Whitman also worried about the effectiveness of family structure as it stood in his day. His statement to Ellen O'Connor that he thought fatherhood a failure finds support in the emphasis of his poetry on motherhood at the expense of the reciprocal institution.[29]

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[28]Heywood, Cupid's Yokes, p. 21.

[29]See Ellen M. Calder, "Personal Recollections of Walt Whitman," Atlantic Monthly, 99 (1907), 828.

By his use of the perfect-man-persona, Whitman calls for the man worthy of women who attain their natural perfection in motherhood. "I will be the robust husband of these women," boasts the persona whose fatherhood promotes progress towards the perfection of the species: "I shall demand perfect men and women out of my love-spendings. . . ."[30]

In realizing the unemployed potential of women in society, Whitman sympathetically refuses to ignore the humanity of the most debased group of the sex, prostitutes. The perfect-man-persona, who is "liberal and lusty as nature," directs the prostitute of his poem: "My girl I appoint you with an appointment, and I charge you that you make preparation to be worthy to meet me. . . ."[31] Heywood's similar sympathy for prostitutes is evidenced by his choice of "To a Common Prostitute." He blamed social conditions for motivating women to sell their bodies. "In marriage, usury, and the exceptionally low wages of women," he writes in Cupid's Yokes, "I find the main sources of 'prostitution.'"[32]

The practical and judicious attitude of Whitman and Heywood toward the problem of prostitution is the

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[30]Leaves of Grass (1973), pp. 102-103.

[31]Walt Whitman, "To a Common Prostitute," in Leaves of Grass (1973), p. 387.

[32]Heywood, Cupid's Yokes, p. 20.

result of their realistic acceptance of sexual energy and its many manifestations. Each of them goes a step further than the relatively cautious Owen in actually affirming the power and beauty of the sex drive. For Whitman,

> Sex contains all, bodies, souls,
> Meanings, proofs, purities, delicacies, results, promulgations,
> Songs, commands, health, pride, the maternal mystery, the seminal milk. . . .[33]

The all-encompassing power of sexuality was just as clear to Heywood. In Cupid's Yokes, he writes:

> The union of hearts expresses and ultimates itself in the union of bodies. Love is attraction; seeking unity, it is desire, in unity, happiness.[34]

Herein lies the greatest affinity of Whitman and Heywood--their praise of the unifying power of sex in all its stages, desire, deed and result.

They share this affinity with another free-lance free lover, David Goodman Croly. For some time Croly was a popular and prosperous journalist in New York, editing the World from 1862 to 1872 and the illustrated Daily Graphic from 1873-1878. He lost his editorship of the Graphic because the owners became displeased with his tendency toward tough individualism and iconoclasm,[35] a

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[33]"A Woman Waits for Me," Leaves of Grass (1973), p. 101.

[34]Heywood, Cupid's Yokes, pp. 13-14.

[35]M[uriel] S[haver], "David Goodman Croly," DAB, IV, 560.

tendency readily apparent in the writings he published individually. In 1864 he produced Miscegenation (a word he coined himself) which advocates the mixing of the black and white races in a program designed to create the perfect North American race.[36] Between 1870 and 1873 Croly published a journal of free-thought called The Modern Thinker in which he gathered and wrote articles on a variety of philosophical and ethical topics. As an advocate of scientific positivism, Croly was always on the lookout for alternatives to social institutions that he deemed outmoded, including marriage. The pink, yellow and blue pages of The Modern Thinker are filled with articles on free love and the "sex question." But Croly's most important contribution to sex theory is his book, The Truth about Love. Published in 1872, this treatment of the moral and social questions involving sex is almost incredible in its candor and closeness to present-day sexual theory, yet it has for a long time been out of print as it has been all but completely overlooked.[37] The first

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[36]I have not been able to examine this book, but it is discussed briefly in Shaver, DAB, IV, 560.

[37]Shaver, for instance, does not even mention it. According to the National Union Catalog, only three copies of the first edition and two of the second exist in public collections. I have examined both editions in the U. S. Library of Congress. References in this study are to the first.

edition bore the simple subtitle, A Book for Adults, but the slightly toned-down second edition which appeared later the same year was called The Truth about Love: A Proposed Sexual Morality Based upon the Doctrine of Evolution, and Recent Discoveries in Medical Science. Just as Heywood attempted to free sexuality from the hold of religious and legal morality, Croly hoped to broaden the scope of sexual thought by interpreting the sex drive and its results in terms of the expanded range of man's knowledge. Like Heywood and Whitman, Croly was progressive and his writing was reform-oriented.

Whitman knew Croly and had published some poems in the Daily Graphic while the free love advocate was editor in the seventies, though these poems were not on the subject of sex. By the time they were written, Whitman had dropped the perfect-man-persona, the "flowing savage" or "robust husband," and had assumed the mask of the nearly sexless good gray poet. Whitman's relationship with Croly was apparently that of a polite acquaintanceship. Under Croly's management the World for the most part had shown sympathy for Leaves of Grass.[38] And while he was at the Daily Graphic, Croly was printing poems like "A Warble for Lilac Time," while other editors, such as Bret Harte, were rejecting poems as important as "Passage to

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[38]See E. H. Miller, ed., Correspondence, II, 204n.

India." Whitman told Traubel, "Croly was really good to me," and awarded his friend with a note from the editor which might have been interpreted differently, since in it Croly complains about the poet's turtle-like progress in getting his copy straight for the Graphic.[39]

At the present time there is no biographical evidence to prove that Whitman read Croly's writings on sex, though the concerns of the two writers have many points in common. First of all, both extended the tradition of Owen in realizing the importance of sex and the necessity of discussion on the subject. In The Modern Thinker, Croly writes, "Of all the subjects relating to the life of man upon this planet, there is no one of such prime importance as the generative act between the sexes."[40] Furthermore, Croly's purpose for writing about sex is similar to Whitman's, in that both men were interested in expressing the relationship of the individual personality to his world, and each regarded sex as one of the keys to understanding this relationship, though Croly's concerns were more socially oriented. The Truth about Love calls for a restructuring of the marriage relation

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[39]Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, III, 560-561.

[40]D[avid] G[oodman] Croly, "The Sexual Question," The Modern Thinker, 1 (1870), 93.

with respect to the demands of the sexual instinct, which the author understands as the principal basis for cohabitation. He writes:

> even the strangest and most extravagant aberrations of the sexual instinct should be taken into consideration; allowances should be made for them; . . . we should frame a philosophy of marriage based upon human nature as it is.[41]

It is interesting to note that, like Whitman, Croly favors the institution of motherhood in his attempts at redefining sex roles. In one place he argues that "as civilization advances, man becomes more and more the child of his mother."[42]

The Truth about Love also covers the common ground of prostitution. In arguing that prostitutes supply "a great social need," Croly refers to and agrees with the position of Dr. W. W. Sangar who favored a system of legalization and licensing.[43] While Whitman was editor of the Brooklyn Daily Times in 1859, he had exhibited a similar sympathy in a favorable review of Sangar's History of Prostitution, which is presently considered a standard text on the subject.[44] The review was the first

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[41]David Goodman Croly, The Truth about Love: A Book for Adults (New York: D. Wesley, 1872), p. 17.

[42][David Goodman Croly], "Stirpculture: Regulated Human Procreation," The Modern Thinker, 2 (1873), 67.

[43]Croly, The Truth about Love, pp. 17-18.

[44]See Emory Holloway and Vernolian Schwarz, eds., I Sit and Look Out (New York: AMS Press, 1966), pp. 118-119.

in a series of three pieces relating to sexuality, the publications of which probably led to Whitman's dismissal[45]--thus Croly was not alone in his ability to run amuck of the owners of the newspaper for which he worked. In the second article entitled "A Delicate Subject," Whitman takes an even more definite stance in favoring a system which controls rather than prohibits prostitution, again referring to the conclusion of Sangar's book.[46]

The third article in this informal series deals with a subject also broached in The Truth about Love, and it presents one of the most interesting facets of Whitman's concern with sexuality. "Can All Marry" treats the problem of "ugly women" who, through the suppression of their natural desires, often become victimized by "much folly and some sin." Whitman expresses a good deal of sympathy for these old maids who long for "one draught of the fresh outer air" and "one glimpse of real life and nature," who seek to be free from "the close atmosphere of the guarded castle."[47] The correspondences of this article and the illuminating expression of Section 11 in

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[45]See Holloway and Schwarz, I Sit and Look Out, p. 13.

[46]See I Sit and Look Out, pp. 119-120.

[47]I Sit and Look Out, pp. 120-122.

"Song of Myself" are obvious.[48] The picture of the lady who "owns the fine house by the rise of the bank" and who watches from behind the blinds the twenty-eight young men bathing by the shore is a brilliant portrayal of the interactions of desire and imagination and of one who is unable to participate in an active physical life. Croly was also aware of certain twenty-ninth bathers in society. In The Truth about Love, he asks what should "our course be toward single sisters, old maids and widows . . . who would be in danger of suffering from unsatisfied sexual desires?"[49] In their discussion of the relationship of imagination and physical desire, of "other vents for the ordinary degrees of the sexual passion besides actual coition,"[50] and especially of the dangers resulting from suppression of the sexual drive, Croly and Whitman predate Freud and other twentieth-century psychologists.

There are other likenesses between Whitman and Croly. Both writers, for instance, were interested in projecting in their writings the image of an ideal human being who is complete in every mode of experience, physical and otherwise. In The Truth about Love, Croly

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[48]See Leaves of Grass (1973), pp. 38-39.

[49]Croly, The Truth about Love, p. 165.

[50]Ibid.

describes a man much like Whitman's persona of the poems written before 1860:

> The coming man, the splendid man of the future will be as full of "noble rage" as the stallion or the bull, at the sight of a proper female. But then he will be as great morally and intellectually as he is physically, and will be able to subordinate his grand passions to higher human uses. The misery of our present social arrangements is that men and women with this mighty gift of sexual puissancy are unprovided for. Their lives are wasted. . . .[51]

Furthermore, Croly, like Whitman, felt that sex was unprovided for in art as well as in social forms, but in his discussion of the artistic problem one notices the first signs of his divergence from Whitman's point of view. In fact, Croly believed that the literary efforts of his contemporaries treated sex in two ways only, decadently or pornographically. He thought Whitman's poetry crude and the appreciators of Leaves of Grass decadent. In The Truth about Love, he observes:

> if you will carefully note the pleasure which greets Walt Whitman among the highly cultivated classes, you will see that it is with them a case of "reversion" to brute life. What a singular phenomenon it is to behold these white-cravatted gentlemen . . . going into ecstacies over a man "who loves the smell of armpits"--who pictures the wife sleeping with her hand upon her husband's thigh--who has raised so many "barbaric yawps" over the sublimities of fornication.[52]

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[51]Croly, The Truth about Love, p. 51.

[52]Croly, The Truth about Love, pp. 83-84.

Croly believed Leaves of Grass to be an expression of bestiality and gross primitivism on account of Whitman's emphasis on the purely physical side of man's nature. When the poet wrote these poems such an emphasis was necessary because the public expression of physicality was sadly lacking. But by the time of Croly's book, much discussion of sex was in the air, and therefore he called for a more civilized or perhaps scientific expression.

In 1855 Whitman sought out the newest ideas and literary forms for the matter of his poetry, but by the seventies the public enjoyed a greater understanding of sex and were better fitted with language suitable for proper articulation of ideas on the subject. Croly interpreted the sex drive in terms of evolutionary theory in 1872, while in the 1850's Whitman was borrowing language from contemporary medical writers and phrenologists to discuss sex. His expression was often couched in metaphorical language, and his use of animal imagery in describing the sex drive bothered the more "scientific" free lovers as much as his genteel critics. Whitman's poetry was less systematic and practical than most of the free love doctrine, a difference which might be attributed more to his poetic form than to the ideas embodied therein. A perfect example of this basic parting of ways is found in the respective treatments of ideal society. While

Whitman calls for "perfect men and women" and implies a state in which these people might prosper and live fulfilling lives, that is, the state of the New World full of energy and health, Croly directs his readers' attention to an actual program set down and systematized with the purpose in mind of realizing such a state. Croly demanded that what was so often called "free love" could become "organized love," and that through such social systematization man might perfect his race. To prove such a program possible, Croly refers to the Utopian Commune at Oneida, an example popular in free love literature. The founder of this idealogically Christian colony, John Humphrey Noyes, advocated new forms of sexual indulgence, such as the initiation of youngsters into sexual experience by experienced adults.[53] Noyes and his followers also preached and practiced "stirpculture," an attempt to perfect the human race through controlled breeding. Though Croly believed that such "scientific propagation" would be likely to remold class restrictions in a way destructive to society,[54] he allowed Noyes to set forth his argument in The Modern Thinker.[55]

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[53]See Croly, The Truth about Love, p. 127.

[54]See [Croly], "Stirpculture: Regulated Human Procreation," The Modern Thinker, 2 (1873), 62.

[55]John Humphrey Noyes, "Scientific Propagation," The Modern Thinker, 1 (1870), 97-120.

There is no reason to believe that Whitman regarded these rigorous systems of social reorganization in a favorable light. Though he wanted social improvement as much as the next person, he was interested more in the development of the individual within the specified system and in turn the improvement of the system through the individual. On the other hand, Noyes argued that too much labor had gone into the perfection of the individual while not enough had been allotted to society as a whole unit.[56] But Whitman's ideas were molded in earlier dyes, such as Jeffersonian democracy instead of socialism and phrenology rather than strict scientific Darwinism. Even when Whitman addresses his reader, regardless of the Leninish ring of "camerado," he addresses the individual on a basis of one to one, because that force he felt the strongest.

It is no secret to Whitman scholarship that Whitman distrusted large and well-organized social movements, and his distrust spread to and influenced his reaction to some of these attempts at reorganizing social institutions. Many of these efforts included free-love doctrines with which Whitman might have agreed had he not been so brow-beaten by his critics and had these ideas not been set forth in the form of sweeping social movements. In an

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[56]Noyes, "Scientific Propagation," p. 97.

article he wrote for the Times entitled "The Radicals in Council" (June 29, 1858), Whitman had satirized persons interested in mass reform of various sorts. He included among them "free lovers" who considered the marriage relation to be "a detestable humbug."[57] Along the same lines he attacked the "loose popular literature" of the day in an article aimed obviously in the direction of the free-love movement as it represented a plan to renovate society. As early as September 2, 1857, when free-love ideas were only in the seedling stages, Whitman had cursed them through his conventional editorial mask: "'Progress' and 'Liberal Ideas' are good. . . . But what may be good in material science may be evil and continually evil when applied to moral questions."[58]

Whitman's attitude toward the heavily rationalized social projections of Stephen Pearl Andrews is typical of his reactions to movements of that sort. Andrews devised a system he called Pantarchism of which free love was a part.[59] Whitman was at least interested in Andrews' ideas, for in a letter to Mrs. O'Connor, dated November 15, 1863, he describes a visit to the so-called "Headquarters of Pantarchy" at 15 Charles Street, New York. He "did not

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[57]I Sit and Look Out, pp. 45-46.

[58]Ibid.

[59]See Madeleine B. Stern, The Pantarch (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), pp. 4-5.

see Mr. or Mrs. Andrews," but happened to encounter instead Charles Howells, a young man who was the mutual acquaintance of Whitman and the O'Connors. He claims to have listened to Howells' "statement of the Pantarchian scheme" in "dead silence," but apparently remained unconvinced of its value, for at the expense of the scheme he expresses confidence in the moral fortitude of the young man: "he may prove more able to pick his way through the humbugs of the world than we were thinking."[60] Mrs. O'Connor further substantiates Whitman's insinuation that Andrews' ideas were "humbug" in her "Personal Recollections." She reports:

> the fiercest denunciations that were heard from Whitman were against that which he called "free love." He gave it no quarter, said its chief exponent and disciple--Stephen Pearl Andrews--was of the type of Mephistopheles, a man of character without a heart. . . .[61]

This statement, which is supported by Whitman's friend John Townsend Trowbridge,[62] is indicative of a general attitude of Whitman's toward the large-scale free-love movements--to him they were like their leaders, cold, "without a heart," too highly systemized, and they existed at the expense of individual consciousness.

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[60]Whitman, Correspondence, I, 182-184.

[61]Calder, "Personal Recollections," 829.

[62]See R. A. Coleman, "Trowbridge and Whitman," PMLA, 63 (1948), 266.

The difficulty of striking through the mask of a particular moment to the essential Whitman is nowhere so evident as in a study of his relationship with the various factions of the free-love movement. Whitman's public pose shifts often--from friend to friend and situation to situation--and his poetic pose undergoes at least one major metamorphosis (after the 1860 Leaves). His private life he guarded carefully. There is nothing, biographically speaking, which would lead to any definite conclusions as to the poet's actual attitude toward living life according to free-love doctrines. Even though he boasted to John Addington Symonds that he had fathered five illegitimate children, there has been no evidence informing the validity of that bit of autobiography. Whitman was probably overreacting to a question about his apparent homosexuality which took him by surprise. Furthermore, despite the affinity of the ideas in his poetry with those of free love, certain biographical details render him as ethically conservative as an old hen. For instance, he became angry and ill-at-ease with the "Bohemian" poetess and actress Ada Clare, because she publicly confessed to coercing her lover into seducing a young lady with whom he corresponded.[63] Although Whitman

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[63]See Albert Parry, Garrets and Pretenders: A History of Bohemianism in America (New York: Covici and Friede, 1933), p. 27.

met and mingled with Clare and other members of literary groups at Pfaff's Beer Cellar in New York, Albert Parry, the historian of American Bohemianism, argues that he was not so decadent in his life and work as they were.[64] It is important to note that Whitman's writings were in their most "physical" stage at the time of his association with these Pfaffians, between 1855 and 1860. During the same period some of his articles for the Times seem progressive in content and spirit, while others approach downright reaction. Take for example an editorial in which he condemns the practice of young women who engage in public kissing as a form of flippant salutation. In a motherly tone he advises that such a "sweet and holy token" should be reserved for one's chosen beloved.[65] On the other hand, when pressed for his opinion of free love by communist Horace Traubel in the eighties, Whitman would reply, "Why--you are catechizing me! Free love? Is there any other kind of love?"[66] At another point he admits to Traubel that the existing laws on "marriage forms" are "far from ideal,"[67] and in another he claims, "Any love that involves slavery is a false love,"[68]

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[64]Parry, p. 42.

[65]I Sit and Look Out, p. 114.

[66]Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, II, 331.

[67]Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, III, 439.

[68]Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, I, 224.

employing diction similar to the free lovers. Whitman's variety of opinion on the subject is overwhelming.

However, though Whitman's views and actions seem contradictory to free love, it does not necessarily follow that his poetry does not partake of similar ideas. Such contradictions exist in the lives and writings of the free-love advocates themselves. Croly and Heywood, for instance, attacked the institution of marriage but both were happily married. The best explanation is that Whitman pursued the same trains of thought concerning sexuality, even had much in common with the free lovers, perhaps even influenced some of them, yet there is one great idealogical and methodological difference between the poet and these freethinkers. To borrow the explanation of Havelock Ellis, "Morality is [in the poetry of Whitman] . . . the normal activity of a healthy nature, not the product either of tradition or of rationalism."[69] The sexual ethics implied in Whitman's work are a departure from tradition, but they are not so "advanced" as to admit a definite correlation with the superrationalism of free-love doctrines. His desire was to represent the sexual power of the healthy and perfect individual free from limitations, traditional and otherwise.

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[69]Havelock Ellis, The New Spirit (Washington, D. C.: National Home Library Foundation, 1935), p. 106.

CHAPTER III

THE EDUCATORS

Of all the great poets who have written in English, Walt Whitman is probably the most original and individualistic. However, if he seems to stand solitary, completely apart from all other movements in the area of sexual thought and expression, it is a false impression. In the 1850's, armed with a power of poetic curiosity few have equaled, Whitman searched the public realm of thought for new modes of expression--new words, new ideas, anything which would enhance the innovative poetic character of Leaves of Grass.

Although it is evident that Whitman distrusted the overly systematic forms of science embraced by members of the free-love movement, this lack of faith did not extend to science in general. In fact, he was indebted to certain branches of nineteenth-century popular science, those which fit into the mold of his own ideology. John Burroughs, who was an acclaimed naturalist as well as an early Whitman biographer, once said, "Whitman's relation to science is fundamental and vital. It is the soil under his feet."[1] In "Song of Myself," the poet acknowledges his

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[1]Burroughs, Whitman, p. 252.

enthusiasm: "Hurrah for positive science!"[2] And in the "Song of the Answerer" he avows that "The words of true poems are the tuft and final applause of science."[3]

In terms of his sex expression, Whitman incorporated science into his poetry by turning to the medical writers of sex education literature. These immensely popular writers, ranging from licensed medical doctors to phrenologists to quacks, represented a type of science which suited the poetry of Whitman perfectly, both in spirit and idea. They practiced a kind of speculative science, based on almost casual observation of empirical circumstances, in short, the kind of science now almost universally scorned as pseudoscience. But regardless of the twentieth-century demand that science be mathematically definite, Whitman (and many others as well) believed that such inquiry should admit of some amount of uncertainty, even vagueness. Perhaps this approach is more honest. Whitman described to Traubel his view of the nature of true science:

> I like the scientific spirit--the holding off, the being sure, but not too sure, the willingness to surrender ideas when the evidence is against them: this is ultimately fine--it always keeps the way beyond open. . . .[4]

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[2]Whitman, Leaves of Grass (1973), p. 51.

[3]Whitman, Leaves of Grass (1973), p. 170. See also Preface to Leaves of Grass of 1855, in Leaves of Grass (1973), p. 721.

[4]Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, I, 101.

It is not so surprising that the poet of the body should seek out the most up-to-date knowledge of man's physical nature that he could come by. In "Song of Myself" the poet affirms his credentials as well as his faith in physicality:

> Having pried through the strata, analyzed to a hair,
> Counsel'd with doctors and calculated close,
> I find no sweeter fat than sticks to my own bones.[5]

Whitman actively gathered new information on the subject of sex and anatomy. In a personal note of the 1850's, he reminds himself to "Read the latest and best anatomical works. Talk with physicians."[6] Looking among the Whitman papers in the Library of Congress, one finds that this intention was no idle one, for throughout the various scrapbooks there are clippings from works like Hall's Journal of Health, the Water-Cure Journal and the American Phrenological Journal. In general the medical sex educators had much more in common with Whitman than their type of speculative scientific spirit. They do not seem so "modern" as the scientific free lovers; rather many of their views are downright old-fashioned. For instance, almost universally they argue that masturbation leads to everything from intestinal disorders to sterility

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[5]Whitman, Leaves of Grass (1973), p. 47.

[6]Whitman, Complete Writings, eds. Richard Maurice Bucke, Thomas B. Harned, Horace L. Traubel (New York, 1902), X, 10.

and insanity. On the other hand, they were progressive enough to break with the tradition of silence surrounding the field of sex, and in doing so they suffered the usual consequences. In his attack on Comstock, D.R.M. Bennet cites two cases in which actual medical doctors were fined on Comstock's testimony because they published books on sexual diseases.[7]

Happily there is no evidence that Whitman read the more quackish of these writings, such as The Monitor (Chicago, 1866) by Dr. James or Love and Its Hidden History (Boston, 1869) by Count De St. Leon. But without a doubt Whitman discovered an affinity between the ideas of his poetry and those of the more reputable sex educators, men like Dr. Edward H. Dixon and the phrenologist Orson Fowler. To illustrate Whitman's debt it is necessary only to examine the relationship of "I Sing the Body Electric," one of the most successful "Children of Adam" poems, with the concept of sexual electricity as it appears in the works of these educators.

This concept was a popular one adhered to by most of the sex educators. Statements of it appeared as early as 1849,[8] but the fullest and clearest statement of the

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[7]See Bennet, Anthony Comstock: His Career of Cruelty and Crime, pp. 1036-1041.

[8]See, for instance, Samuel Warner, "Electricity the Great Acting Power of Nature," American Phrenological Journal, II (1849), 151-152.

theory of sexual electricity came out in Dr. Edward H. Dixon's The Organic Law of the Sexes: Positive and Negative Electricity and the Abnormal Conditions that Impair Vitality. This pamphlet published in 1861 summarizes ideas previously advanced by Dr. Dixon and other educators, and there is little doubt that Whitman knew of these precepts during the time he was publishing the second edition of Leaves of Grass with Fowler and Wells in 1856. The poet's knowledge of Dixon's thought and works is evidenced by his review of the doctor's book, Woman and Her Diseases, from the Cradle to the Grave. In the March 4, 1847 issue of the Brooklyn Daily Eagle, Whitman writes thus of Dixon's book:

> "To the pure all things are pure" is the not inappropriate motto of this work: and the mock delicacy that condemns the widest possible diffusion among females of such knowledge as is contained in this book, will receive from us no quarter. Let any one bethink him a moment how rare is the sight of a well-developed, healthy, naturally beautiful woman: let him reflect how widely the customs of our artificial life, joined with the ignorance of physiological facts, are increasing the rarity . . . and he will hardly dispute the necessity of such publications as this.[9]

In his notebook toward the second edition of Leaves of Grass, the year in which the first line, "I sing the body electric," was added to the "Poem of the Body," Whitman has noted the name and address of the editor of the

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[9]Whitman, Uncollected Poetry and Prose, I, 131.

popular medical magazine, The Scalpel, namely, Edward H. Dixon, 42 Fifth Avenue.[10]

Dixon's presentation of the "organic law of the sexes" may seem rather ridiculous in light of present-day knowledge of electricity, but one must remember that during the middle years of the nineteenth century little was known of that force's true nature. Thus, all sorts of bizarre powers were assigned to electricity, magnetism and related manifestations. As Joseph Beaver points out, even Faraday and Maxwell were a bit overzealous in this respect, believing light to be composed of electricity and magnetism specially intermingled.[11] No different from the rest, Dixon argues his point along the following lines:

> The sexual organs are electric; no part of the body is richer in nerves, . . . the male in health is positive; the female negative. All substances living or dead are either in a positive or negative condition of electricity. . . . Every organic atom can only take its place in the grand cosmogony by the law of sexual attraction. . . .[12]

With this concept in mind, one is able to come to a more complete understanding of why Whitman prefixed the

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[10]Whitman, An 1855-1856 Notebook Toward the Second Edition of Leaves of Grass, eds. William White and Harold W. Blodgett (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1959), p. 18.

[11]Joseph Beaver, Walt Whitman: Poet of Science (New York: King's Crown, 1951), p. 87.

[12]Edward H. Dixon, The Organic Law of the Sexes (New York: J. S. Redfield, 1861), p. 3.

word "electric" to his "Poem of the Body." "I Sing the Body Electric" is intended to be a hymn in praise of the power of sexual attraction in its function as a unifying force in man's existence. The "electric" body is that which burns with the energy of sex, that which leads to the essence of life, the "exquisite realization of health."[13] Just as Dixon believed that "our procreative power is the best evidence of immortality,"[14] Whitman asserts that through the body man realizes his soul--in fact, that there is no difference between the body and the soul. He asks, "And if the body were not the soul, what is the soul?"[15] Herein lies the potent message of this poem; Whitman uses the concept of sexual attraction not only for its own sake but also as a tool of thought by which to break down the dualistic view of man's nature, a view he considered destructive. To him the body does "fully as much as the soul."

Therefore, Whitman employs sex philosophically to illustrate what he believed to be a unifying power in the universe. When Beaver suggests that "the sexes throughout the poem seem to stand for the two kinds of charges,"[16]

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[13]Whitman, Leaves of Grass (1973), p. 101.

[14]Dixon, p. 1.

[15]Leaves of Grass (1973), p. 94.

[16]Beaver, Poet of Science, p. 89.

he does not realize how absolutely right he is, for Whitman believed he was figuring sex scientifically and not simply metaphorically. He portrays man in frantic search of his complement, the "female form," from which

> A divine nimbus exhales . . . from head to foot,
> It attracts with fierce undeniable attraction,
> . . . Mad filaments, ungovernable shoots play out of it, the response likewise ungovernable. . . .[17]

Man can never be whole until he experiences and gives in to the sexual power of the mother-woman: "after the child is born of woman, man is born of woman. . . ."[18] But Whitman does not confine the force of sexual attraction only to the realm of human existence. Like Dixon, he sees sex as a manifestation of the universal tendency of things to attract and become whole. He expresses this tendency symbolically by describing a sexual fusion between night and day in one of the finest passages in Leaves of Grass:

> Ebb stung by the flow and flow stung by the ebb,
> love-flesh swelling and deliciously aching,
> Limitless limpid jets of love hot and enormous,
> quivering jelly of love, white-blow and delirious juice,
> Bridegroom night of love working surely and softly into the prostrate dawn,
> Undulating into the willing and yielding day,
> Lost in the cleave of the clasping and sweet flesh'd day.[19]

Therefore, Cynthia Sulfridge is probably correct in

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[17]Leaves of Grass (1973), p. 96.

[18]Leaves of Grass (1973), p. 97.

[19]Leaves of Grass (1973), p. 96.

suggesting that Whitman used the adjective "electric" to describe something "having the forcefulness or power of the quintessential life experience," though she is on the wrong track in implying that he used the word for lack of a better one to describe the new world soul.[20] As usual he had a definite concept in mind, that of sexual electricity.

In 1855 Whitman might have encountered Dixon's latest theories through his dealings with the phrenologists Lorenzo and Orson Fowler. In that year a "phrenological portrait" of Dixon appeared in their American Phrenological Journal with which Whitman was surely familiar.[21] Another possibility is that he picked up the theory from Orson Fowler himself. In his comprehensive work on the subject of sexuality, Creative and Sexual Science, Fowler writes, "Love electrifies the nerves and brain. Electricity is the life agent."[22] Although Whitman's connection with the phrenological firm of Fowler and Wells has been thoroughly established,[23] the bearing upon him of their very important

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[20]See Cynthia Sulfridge, "Meaning in Whitman's Use of 'Electric,'" Walt Whitman Review, 19 (1973), 151-153.

[21]See [Anon.], "Edward H. Dixon," American Phrenological Journal, 21 (1855), 101.

[22]Orson Squire Fowler, Creative and Sexual Science (1870, rpt. Chicago: Follet, 1971), pp. 123-124.

[23]See Edward Hungerford, "Walt Whitman and His Chart of Bumps," American Literature, 2 (1931), 350-384; and Madeleine B. Stern, Heads and Headlines: The Phrenological Fowlers (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), pp. 99-123.

writings and theories about sex has inspired little scholarly interest or action. Perhaps this circumstance is due to the fact that Fowler and Wells terminated their publishing arrangement with Whitman in 1856, largely on account of Samuel Wells' concern over the moral rightness of some of the new poems added to their edition of Leaves of Grass, including "A Woman Waits for Me."[24] But it is interesting to note that Wells, who was the business mind of the outfit, was also responsible for the suppression of some of Orson Fowler's more candid writings about sex. Orson, the founder of the firm, was moved to resign from the partnership in 1854 and to continue his work alone because of Wells' actions.[25]

According to his biographer, Orson Squire Fowler was one of the most prolific and widely read sex educators of his day,[26] and Walt Whitman was among his fans. He reviewed the phrenologist's books favorably and apparently read them eagerly (among his papers in the Library of Congress is the cover of a copy of Fowler's Hereditary Descent). Like Whitman, Fowler boldly praises sexual energy and fulfillment in almost all of his writings. For example, in Creative and Sexual Science, he eulogizes

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[24]See Stern, Heads and Headlines, pp. 118-122.

[25]See Stern, Heads and Headlines, pp. 125-126.

[26]Stern, Heads and Headlines, p. 191.

as well as explains the sexual act:

> This love making, this incessant delicious agitation of the nervous pith in each, by the sexual electricity of the other, explains that modus operandi by means of which the action of all the physical and mental functions are thus wrought up, excited, exhilarated, disciplined, mobilized, thrilled in both.[27]

Like Whitman, Fowler understood a sexual power which pervades all of nature. In an article in the American Phrenological Journal he explains this power which he calls "amativeness," another word Whitman borrowed from phrenological sex literature. Refusing to "define and sentimentalize about love," he writes, "Propagation is the paramount function of universal nature. Everything that grows is ordained to reproduce its kind."[28] Compare these ideas to those of Whitman's 1856 poem "Spontaneous Me," in which his persona swears the "oath of procreation" and relates himself to the sexual function of nature as a whole:

> Earth of chaste love, life that is only life after love,
> The body of my love, the body of the woman I love, the body of the man, the body of the earth . . .
> The hairy wild-bee that murmurs and hankers up and down, that gripes the full-grown lady-flower, curves upon her with amorous firm legs, takes his will of her, and holds himself tremulous and tight till he is satisfied. . . .[29]

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[27]Fowler, Creative and Sexual Science, p. 124.

[28][O. S. Fowler], "Amativeness, I," American Phrenological Journal, 10 (1848), 241-243.

[29]Leaves of Grass (1973), p. 104.

This catalogue continues until the poet has listed a number of sexual associations convincing enough in themselves to prove his point about the universal nature of sexuality.

Whitman's emphasis on health may have also been fortified by his dealings with Fowler. In his prefatory remarks to Physiology, Animal and Mental, Fowler asserts that "power of mind depends on vigor of body."[30] Similarly, Whitman writes in "By Blue Ontario's Shore," "All comes by the body, only health puts you rapport with the universe."[31] Thus, seeing the body as the seat of the soul and every other perceptive function, both writers preached with great fervor the doctrine of health. Along the same lines they took an immense interest in the human anatomy. As a phrenologist, Fowler believed that external characteristics often indicate a person's internal character, hence his interest in physiology. Whitman, following Fowler's lead, treated poetically the parts of the human body with more freedom than any other writer of American belles lettres in the nineteenth century. Take, for example, his anatomical catalogue in

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[30]Orson Squire Fowler, Physiology, Animal and Mental (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1847), p. v.

[31]Leaves of Grass (1973), p. 342. See also Preface to 1855 Leaves, in Leaves of Grass (1973), p. 716: "All beauty comes from beautiful blood and a beautiful brain."

"I Sing the Body Electric," or his more successful metaphorical use of the sex organs in his unusual description of the creative process in "Spontaneous Me":

> The real poems, (what we call poems being merely pictures,)
> The poems of the privacy of the night, and of men like me,
> The poem drooping shy and unseen that I always carry, and that all men carry,
> (Know once for all, avow'd on purpose, wherever are men like me, are our lusty lurking masculine poems. . . .[32]

Just as Whitman's point of view towards sex lies somewhere between the traditionalists and the radicals, Fowler and the other writers of sex education literature also occupy this middle ground. Most of them were unwilling to give up the traditional institutions of marriage and family and some clung to prejudices involving certain sexual practices. But all of them expressed a new spirit, a new excitement about the human body, which they felt had been too long covered by cotton and broadcloth, too long subjected to the euphemisms of whispered gossip in parlor rooms. Their new enthusiasm found its literary counterpart in Walt Whitman's poetry and their magnificently inquisitive "scientific" spirit informed the curiosity and warmed the voice of the poet who proclaims:

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[32] Leaves of Grass (1973), p. 103.

This then is life,
Here is what has come to the surface after so
many throes and convulsions.

How curious! how real![33]

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[33]Whitman, "Starting from Paumanok," Leaves of Grass (1973), p. 16.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Walt Whitman, perhaps more than any other writer before Havelock Ellis and Freud, understood the overwhelming power of sex. He called this power the "life below the life"[1] and he expressed it more completely than any of his predecessors in the field of legitimate literature, thus opening the way for scientific and psychological writers as well as poets to come. Any study of Whitman's sex expression finds justification in the importance he attributed to the sexual drive. He once said to Traubel,

> Sex: Sex: Sex: whether you sing or make a machine, or go to the North Pole, or love your mother, or build a house, or black shoes, or anything--anything at all--it's sex, sex, sex: sex is the root of it all: sex--the coming together of men and women: sex: sex.[2]

E. H. Miller, in what has been the most thorough examination of the sexual significance of Leaves of Grass, correctly avers that Whitman saw sex as the source of art and life.[3]

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[1]Traubel, III, 453.

[2]Ibid.

[3]E. H. Miller, Walt Whitman's Poetry, p. 126.

In this thesis I have limited myself to a discussion of ethics, attitudes and ideas which were drawn directly from the field of American public thought in the nineteenth century and which were concerned specifically with the subject of sex. But keeping in mind Whitman's emphasis on the necessity of sex to all human endeavors, I realize that I have not covered all the possibilities offered by my subject. Consequently, I have planned a dissertation in which to present an expanded treatment. Some mention of possible areas of expansion are here in order.

In addition to an enlargement of the material presented in the three chapters of this thesis, especially of that in Chapter III as it related to Whitman's preoccupation with health, other topics are just as important to a complete critical approach. First on the list is a more direct consideration of Whitman's attempt to use sex as a basis for expressing ideas on subjects other than anatomy and psychology, other than the explicit manifestations of sex expression. A few critics have successfully dabbled in this area. Henry Warfel, for instance, illustrates the metaphorical value of procreation in "Spontaneous Me,"[4] and Henry Canby suggests that

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[4]Harry R. Warfel, "Structural Principles in 'Spontaneous Me,'" College English, 18 (1957), 190-195.

Whitman shocked his contemporaries by using sex symbolically.[5] Though the fact that Whitman approached sex directly and literally makes him unique among nineteenth-century writers, his figurative projections are just as interesting.

Another area of interest which falls outside the range of this thesis is the subject of homosexuality as it appears in Leaves of Grass. This topic is important not so much for its biographical suggestions as for its significance as another illustration of the poet's tendency to use sexuality in a symbolic or connotative manner. Whitman projected his political ideal by employing expressions of homosexual or manly love, just as he presented philosophical schemes in his celebration of the sexual attraction between men and women. Of course, politics do not constitute his only reason for such expression, for Whitman deemed the "manly love of comrades" worthy of a complete section of Leaves of Grass even before he decided to set the "Children of Adam" poems apart in a section of their own. Some of the "Calamus" poems are purely dedicated to the purpose of celebrating homosexual love. I have only briefly mentioned the ideas of "Calamus" because the veil of silence was still drawn over the subject of homosexuality during Whitman's time;

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[5]Canby, Walt Whitman: An American, p. 191.

there were no gay awareness movements in nineteenth-century America and few people even dared to speak critically of such a subject--as I have noted in my discussion of Thomas Wentworth Higginson's criticism of Whitman's poetry. There was a homosexual movement in England towards the end of the century and one of its leaders, Edward Carpenter, found in Whitman a source of courage and imitation. But the limits of my topic prohibit discussion of this foreign connection and others, such as the English free-love movement which had a great ideological impact upon American free lovers like David Goodman Croly. Therefore, a study of social and philosophical movements outside the United States will eventually provide an area for expansion.

Other possibilities include ideas related to sexuality though they may not be exclusively assigned to the subject. Love, for instance, is a very important ingredient in Whitman's most powerful poems and the relation of sex to love is very important in Leaves of Grass. Some interpreters have argued that for Whitman no love exists unaccompanied by sex.[6] Another related area is the subject of woman's place in society, which I have treated more fully than homosexuality but have not

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[6]See, for instance, Canby, pp. 162-163, and Haniel Long, Walt Whitman and the Springs of Courage (Santa Fe: Writer's Editions, 1938), p. 82.

exhausted. Whitman's relationship with the precepts of the women's movement has not been as fully examined as it deserves.

Finally, a problem which falls outside those designated in this thesis and which I am saving for my dissertation is that of relating Whitman's theory and expression of sexuality to the history of ideas in general. In the present study I have implied the significance of Leaves of Grass in this respect, but I see that two fuller critical processes are required for a complete treatment of this problem. First, Whitman's sex expression must be related to that of his contemporaries in American belles lettres. Sex figures significantly in the writings of many nineteenth-century poets and novelists, especially Melville and Poe, though it appears in a more subdued manner than in the writings of Whitman. Secondly, Whitman's sex theory must be related to that which has proceeded from his efforts--efforts which represent a pioneer spirit and which were thus important to later students of the sexual impulse as well as twentieth-century authors like D. H. Lawrence.

In conclusion, I offer praise for Leaves of Grass as a document of the human personality. Whitman's interest in sex is founded upon his belief in the ability of the self to absorb the power of the universe. The

body for Whitman is the vehicle through which this power is organized and generated into the field of moral action. Thus sex is a manifestation of universal power since it gives life to the body and energizes the experience of man's mature physical life. But Whitman's poetry is not in a strict sense psychological or philosophical poetry; it is human poetry, lyrical in the sense that it is the deeply felt expression of one man and his affections and desires. As a great and powerful force in this man's perception of his world, sex became part and parcel of the dynamic song of man's existence that Walt Whitman called Leaves of Grass.

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