

Introduction

In the beginning of Song of Myself, Walt Whitman declares:

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,

And what I assume you shall assume,

For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you. (1-3)

What is the self? No one can easily give a perfect answer to this eternal question. Walt Whitman, in his poem Song of Myself, offers a poetic interpretation of the mysterious human self. To the child's question "What is the grass?" the wise poet replied, "I do not know what it is any more than he. . . . Or I guess the grass is itself a child, the produced babe of the vegetation" (99, 105). Here he combines his nature-based (biologically-based) "guess" with the totally open-minded attitude of the philosopher, the attitude of "not-knowing" as something positive and healthy, a childish curiosity, an active "guessing" (rather than as a negative skepticism or agnosticism). Similarly, he (like us) could only guess what a human "self" is. For a human being has an "identity" in several senses of the term, including the biological, psychological and socio-cultural-political. Whitman is interested in all of these, and in other senses as well. But above all he is interested in the question: How does one see oneself? How does one define oneself, the nature of one's own existence, within the larger universe and larger culture-society, and within the flux of (natural and socio-cultural) phenomena?

Of course, in attempting to identify ourselves we all experience the process of being-a-self, for the self is for Whitman above all a process, a movement-through-time. At any given moment we may recognize ourselves as a human being, a female or male, a daughter or a son, a teacher or a student, a homosexual or a heterosexual, a believer (in some ultimate meaning of the universe) or a non-believer. There are

many possible dualities, possible choices here. One of Whitman's key points is that we include all the possibilities within ourselves, that is, all the dualities, choices, contradictions: "Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself, / (I am large, I contain multitudes.)" (1324-1326) In this thesis I intend to explore some of the "multiple identities" Whitman includes in his individual, socio-cultural-national, cosmic "Self" of Song of Myself, and in particular to focus on this idea of contradictoriness, that is, of inclusiveness, of including all the contradictions.

In this thesis I will look at the multitudes, the multiplicities encompassed by Whitman's "self" in terms of "multiple identities," with the stress on the process by which we inevitably must define or "identify" ourselves. In the first chapter I will focus on the mind-body duality in Song of Myself, more specifically the "material world" of physical nature and biology on the one hand and the divine or spiritual world, which for Whitman really means the "cosmos," on the other. In the second chapter I will focus more specifically on the sense we have of our own biological (physical, bodily) and psychological identity; here the issue of gender and sexuality will come to the forefront, as will the question as to whether (and if so then in what sense) we may see Whitman, who after all wants to encompass oppositions, as a "bisexual" poet. In the third chapter I will come to that level of the self which is concerned with the duality of one's own society, culture or nation as well as that which stands "outside" this—to other for whom we should feel compassion, and ultimately the "world" or "human society" of which we are one small part. In the fourth chapter I will return again to the mind-duality, seen now as psychological state or condition, and explore Whitman's positive philosophy of self-integration—of individual (as well as social) peace and harmony—as a means of overcoming any possibility of an "identity crisis," in spite of his many "contradictions."

Some critics tend to categorize the white-bearded, mid nineteenth-century American poet as a material man, a man of the “body”—which immediately introduces the mind-body or soul-body duality. It is true that we do see much approval and even praise of the body in Song of Myself and also in other poems in Whitman’s anthology Leaves of Grass. For example, the poet loudly proclaims his pursuit of physical pleasure in many parts of Song of Myself, and particularly in the explicit terms of sexuality. Yet sexuality itself is a matter of generation, procreation, which itself involves the fusion of opposites and the dynamic of “increase”:

Urge and urge and urge,
Always the procreant urge of the world.
Out of the dimness opposite equals advance, always substance and
increase, always sex,
Always a knit of identity, always distinction, always a breed of life.

(44-46)

Here sexuality, as the fusion of opposite sexes that has (potentially) a procreative force, is something trans-individual, trans-biological, something “natural” (as in the Nature of which Emerson and other transcendentalists speak), the “procreant urge of the world” itself. In other words the world, the cosmos is itself the force of desire, or is driven by that force. As dynamic force rather than thing, the world or cosmos is always changing, progressing forward through time: “But I do not talk of the beginning or the end. / There was never any more inception than there is now . . . (38-39).

However, we know from the opening lines of the poem that Whitman defines the self in terms of the soul as well as the body: “I loaf and invite my soul” (4). Here the soul as something to be “summoned” or “invited” may seem more distant in some

sense, that is, less immediate than the body. And yet once again the poet is really equating, if not precisely identifying, the two terms; or at least he is giving them an equivalent “quantity” or “weight”: “I have said that the soul is not more than the body, / And I have said that the body is not more than the soul” (1269-70); or (assuming that “the other” here means “the body”): “I believe in you my soul, the other I am must not abase itself to you, / And you must not be abased to the other.” (82-83) Here the soul and body have equal value or weight because they are two equal elements combined in one unified substance, the self.

Further, this soul-and-body, this self is something that is prior to the question of God: “And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one’s self is” (1271). Like the notion of world (cosmos) as a dynamic force of desire, such that there “is never any more inception than there is now” (in this moment), this “distancing” of God—if not actually granting to God of a status in some sense “beneath” that of the self—suggests that we are beyond the models of Plato and Christianity here. For in those models the divine or godlike, immortal soul transcends the physical body (Plato), is even created by God in His image (Genesis). Whitman is neither purely a materialist nor purely an idealist; perhaps like Aristotle he gives equal weight to, pays equal respect to, the necessity of the body and the divinity of the soul. In a sense he may even be identifying the two, in which case we could say the soul is something physical and the body something divine. This is because the ongoing, never-beginning and never-ending “procreant urge of the world” is the force of mind-body; desire is itself mind-body; the divinity of the body is nothing more nor less than its soul or mind-like dispersion throughout Nature: “I am in love with it, / . . . The smoke of my own breath, / . . . The sniff of green leaves . . . , / The play of shine and shade on the trees . . . , / The feeling of health” (18-28).

One question that emerges here, from amidst the numerous dualities encompassed by that body-mind (body-soul) which is the self, is this: if all dualities are included then is this self both male and female? Could this self that Whitman praises be androgynous? Obviously the sexual identity of Walt Whitman, the protagonist, is male. However, in Song of Myself Whitman describes everything and everyone around him as manifestations of the self of the poet, and clearly not all of these are “male” in gender. Insofar as we may distinguish sexuality from gender (or gender identity) then clearly sexuality is a crucial force in Whitman’s vision and in the poem Song of Myself: as already noted, the “Urge and urge and urge, / Always the procreant urge of the world” in effect “drives” the vision and the poem that expresses it. For the poem is clearly erotic; the descriptions of sexual desire and the metaphors for sexual intercourse are extremely bold when Whitman is compared with other poets of his time. While many critics have categorized Whitman, due to his interest in sexual love and in encompassing both genders, as a homosexual or bisexual poet, we do not exactly see him “coming out” in Song of Myself. I will tend rather to see him as open to the expansive possibilities of gender and sexuality rather than being specifically “gay” or “bisexual.”

If we identify ourselves in terms of our relation to our own body and soul (or mind), and our relation to the physical world around us (the world of nature) and to the larger universe, then we also define ourselves in terms of our families, villages, regional (local) cultures and nations. Thus in Song of Myself Whitman stresses that this universal self is also a socio-cultural self, a “national” self; and yet if we are really to encompass the duality within ourselves it means we must also be sympathetic, compassionate toward others (toward those who are not of our same ethnic group or culture), we must in effect include them within the larger sphere of our selves.

Interestingly, Whitman seems to think that this sort of universal compassion could replace the need for God (for religion), or perhaps God is this sense of compassion, which is again just a radial openness of the self: “And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one’s self is, / And whoever walks a furlong without sympathy walks to his own funeral drest in his shroud . . .” (1271-72).

Therefore in the poem Whitman describes the greatness, the vast expansiveness, optimism and hope of the American continent, the U.S.A.: in the Homeric tradition of epic listing or cataloguing he describes the American Indians, the wounded American soldiers, the Negroes and the Yankees, as well as this nation’s natural beauty, its sea and mountains, its wild animals, its country and city sounds. But then he expands this national self into a more universal self, one that might acknowledge the gods of the East as well as of the West, and this extension into the international sphere, the sphere of a “world-society,” is naturally extended further still into the cosmic sphere, the infinite universe. For besides the personal self and the national (American) self there is the cosmic self, and the poet indeed declares himself a “Kosmos.” Here then this “Kosmos” serves to emphasize an inclusiveness in which the smaller parts or levels—individual (body and soul), village, nation, world-society—are all contained. Whitman’s self is actually the concept of infinity and wholeness, the All; like the millions of stars surrounding us, every natural object, person and nation on earth are interconnected. And all parts are equal within this self that is also the universe.

Still, if Whitman does so clearly “contradict” himself and “contain multitudes” (1324, 1326), then is it not possible that he himself, or that the self he praises and promotes, will suffer an “identity crisis”? In fact there are two types of identity crisis: an individual may experience a lack of guiding commitments while struggling to establish personal goals and values (“motivation crisis”), or he may have too many

commitments and not know which one to choose ("legitimation crisis"). But in my discussion of this issue in Chapter four, I conclude that this level of discourse is not really relevant to the sort of poetized or idealized "self" that Whitman is talking about, any more than the issue of whether or not the poet is gay or bisexual is relevant—or even makes sense in the context of the poem itself. In a sense we may surmise that the poet was "well-integrated" psychologically in a more or less empirical sense of the term, but what we clearly see from the poem is that "he" (as author, narrator, speaker) is well-integrated on the level of abstract philosophical and metaphorical thinking, that is, well-integrated "poetically."

After all, as the speaker of this vast poem of the self, of his self, Whitman boldly exposes himself to readers, reveals to them his every side, his every aspect, dimension or "character." Thus he is constantly changing his "role" or "tone", speaking now as an ordinary farmer or workingman in the city and now as a great commander, now as a body and now as a soul. And yet, finally we feel this is an integrated and harmonious voice that we are listening to. It is above all the harmony or self-integration of this "plural voice" and of the plural self behind it that I wish to explore and elucidate in this thesis, by looking at the process of self-identification which is at work on various levels throughout the Song of Myself.

As for my research method in this thesis, I will mainly combine a New Critical close reading of the text(s) with more or less traditional psychological and Romantic critical approaches. In my opinion the actual language of a poem is the only means by which we may reach its soul, and this truism has here a particular force: the surface "contradictions," which are also those of poetic language itself (and most specifically of poetic paradoxes), point directly to the inner unity or unity "beneath." Of course psychological approaches are relevant when one is dealing with issues of personal

self-identity, gender and sexuality. Similarly, we can hardly avoid discussing this poem as a “Romantic epic,” making use of some of the insights of traditional Romantic critics. Song of Myself is filled with energy and passion, but also fantasy and beauty. We must touch the poem, as well as the self, directly and intuitively in order to “realize” it.



Chapter One

Self as Body and Soul

In section 6 of Song of Myself, Whitman writes:

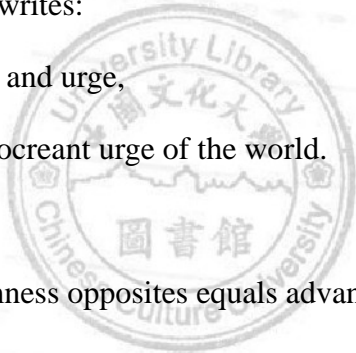
A child said What is the grass? fetching it to me with full hands;
How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is any
more than he. (99-100)

It is the beginning of the search for the self. Aristotle indicates that knowledge is derived from wonder. Whitman, with his innocent mind, enthusiastically observes the whole world of existence with the child. Throughout Song of Myself, we hear the narrator's voice praising both material and spiritual worlds. Whitman worships the body of human beings and of nature. He praises the human body not only because every woman and man is originally the child of the universe, the same to the grass, but also because it carries the seeds of life. Each body bridges the past and the future generations; it connects the potentiality and the actuality. Some critics tend to describe Walt Whitman as one materialistic poet because of his emphases on the tangible objects and flesh. Whitman, unlike many other poets and writers, tries to balance the exquisite values between body and soul; moreover, he offers equality as a bridge to connect the two sides spilt by René Descartes, a French philosopher.

In the eyes of Whitman, the material world of nature is the real existence for us to perceive. He tries to persuade the readers that everything he touches is part of the self which belongs to him. In the very beginning Whitman writes: "For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you" (3). According to such ideology, the whole existence, the self, is the unity of oneself and the others. The consequent question is: if such grand structure is merely a material mass, a purely spiritual being, or the combination of both?

Optimistically, Whitman overthrows some conservative attitudes and then sets up a new standard of value to the body. Unlike some old tradition, Whitman no longer regards the body as the inferior part to the soul. The self is strongly experienced by the body and it is through the body that human beings gain their entry to an understanding of the real nature of the existing world. The body in Song of Myself implies a new understanding of beauty. The body is healthy and energetic. Whitman considers health as a matter that involves the whole integrated self—the body, the soul, and the balance of both. Narcissistically, Whitman more than once writes about his fondness for his own body; he also compares the process of becoming to that of copulation.

In section 3, Whitman writes:



Urge and urge and urge,
Always the procreant urge of the world.

Out of the dimness opposites equals advance,
always substance and increase, always sex,

Always a knit of identity, always distinction, always a breed of life.

(43-46)

These words strongly force us to reflect our own thoughts toward our physical body and also enlighten a new page to the realistic hedonism. It is such sexual drive that completes the cycle of existence. It is the body that enables us to sense the natural world and to enjoy life. The life of the self is spiritual as well as physical. The nature meets its mystic union between body and soul by the sexual experience. And the identity is knitted rather than distinguished. Sexuality here offers the opportunity to unite the opposites to create life, physically and poetically. The body

is the source of creation. And we must not abase the body to others while the body itself is a true identity of the self. (“I am the poet of the body.”) Referring to the self as the body, Whitman identifies himself as different personal characters and natural objects and animals. In Song of Myself, Whitman can be a Congressman and a Cuff¹ at the same time. He also moves away the fence blocked the observer and the asker by answering the grass “is itself a child, the produced babe of vegetation” (105). The child is actually the old poet himself, and both are the leaves of the grass.

Whitman’s physicality implies an understanding of beauty based on the health and vigor of the body. Whitman represents every different figure written in Song of Myself including the criminal, the Indian, the hounded slave, the Southerner, the Yankee, and the fancy-man for “In all people I see myself, none more and not one a barley-corn / less, / And the good or bad I say of myself I say of them”(401-03). All the identities are not empty names; on the contrary, they are the true existence of flesh and blood within the plural self. In Whitman’s Poetry of the Body, M. Jimmie Killingsworth points out “Two voices predominate in Whitman’s poetry of the body. One is private — confessional, inward, at times self-indulgent and sentimental. The other is public — the voice of orator and journalist” (Killingsowrth 46). Except the human figures, Whitman pays lots of attention to the nature part of the oneness he himself constructs. He talks about earth, water, fire, and air. He regards all the nature elements as the manifestation of the self. Though he denies none and praises all, Whitman likes to write something “there is” than something “there is not.” Every single object in our environment is the holy creature Whitman sings for. The self can be the grass, the eye-expression of the oxen, and the great mountain.

¹. “Cuff” — a Negro.

In section 31, Whitman writes:

I find I incorporate gneiss, coal, long-threaded moss, fruits, grains,
esculent roots,
And am stucco'd with quadrupeds and birds all over,
And have distanced what is behind me for good reasons,
But call any thing back again when I desire it. (669-73)

Whitman realizes the perfection both in human beings and in nature objects. His song means for animals, mountains, and oceans. All the materialistic objects separated in our ideology have been reunited into the song of the beautiful self. Acceptance of the body would necessarily implies the acceptance of the physical world, or materialism. The aim of the poet is to transfigure, to purify, and to spiritualize the physical self. The senses of seeing, hearing, and feeling are the true miracles; those are faculties of the soul as well. The process of transfiguration is to be accomplished poetically through association of the physical world with the beauty, spirituality, and divine mystery of the self.

Whitman believes in soul and such belief is the starting point of one's self-respect. It is unfair to categorize Whitman as merely a poet of material while he always declares the equality between material and spirit; body and soul.

In the middle of section 46, Whitman writes:

And I said to my spirit When we become the enfolders of those
orbs, and the pleasure and knowledge of every thing in
them, shall we be fill'd and satisfied then?
And my spirit said No, we but level that lift to pass and continue
beyond. (1221-22)

Here, spirit turns to be an urging force or some mysterious principle guiding the

evolution of the becoming world. It is such principle which demands the soul to elevate itself to a better actualization. Whitman, influenced by the Oriental religions, believes the self is of the same essence as the universal spirit and each person reveals a divine self. By such perspective, the spiritual part of the self, the soul, leads the latent material self striving upwards to a transcendental level of existence.

As a matter of fact, it is unwise to separate the soul and the body while discussing Whitman's Song of Myself and the poet's ideology. For Whitman, the relationship between body and soul is always harmonious. They are both "clear and sweet" (51) and the two are equally co-existed, "Lack one lacks both, and the unseen is proved by the seen" (53).

In section 21, Whitman writes that "I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul" (422) and Whitman will never abase one to the other for they are simultaneously consisted in the beautiful self and the whole universe. The soul proves a necessary supplement to the body in a way that one cannot be actually realized without the other. Reading Whitman's Song of Myself reminds me of the German philosopher Leibniz. Leibniz's monade is both materialistic and spiritual. It represents the self and the wholeness, a complete world. The monade exists in a pre-established harmony. As to Whitman, he finds perfection in the self he observes and the self is both physical and spiritual. Furthermore, Whitman offers equality to body and soul. Altogether, he melts body and soul into the mysterious self. By the time we are singing the song of the self, we are singing the song of the body and the song of the soul.

In Whitman's world, the body and the soul both play important roles. While the French philosopher, René Descartes, separates the mind and the body into two different parts of the existing world, Walt Whitman doesn't draw a specific line

between the two. Unlike many other thinkers and writers, Whitman praises the body and regards it as one beautiful part of the existence. Body, for Whitman, is one important access for human beings to touch the real world. The desire for the body is the fuel of the activating soul. Therefore, Whitman never devaluates the body part or the need of sex. Sex is the food for the body as well as for the soul. Some critics describe Walt Whitman's Song of Myself as "the dramatic representation of a mystical experience". In this poem, not likely as other traditional mystical experiences, the self is highly celebrated and elevated. The senses and the body are glorified.

In A Critical Guide to Leaves of Grass, James E. Miller, Jr. indicates that "When the soul plunges his tongue to the 'bare-stript heart' of the poet, the physical becomes transfigured into the spiritual, the body from beard to feet is held in the grip of the soul, the body and soul become one"(Miller 10). How to bridge the body and the soul is a big problem in western philosophy after the modern age of Descartes'. In the East, some Buddhist gurus believe the "mindfulness" is the bridge between the body and the soul. In True Love: A Practice for Awakening the Heart, the Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh says:

Between the mind and the body, there is something that can serve as a bridge. The moment you begin to practice mindful breathing, your body and your mind begin to come together with one another. It takes only ten to twenty seconds to accomplish this miracle called oneness of body and mind. With mindful breathing, you can bring body and mind together in the present moment, and every one of us can do it, even a child. (Thich 8)

Whitman expresses the self by the lyrics of a song; therefore, the body and the soul ought to be sung and be transformed into some united harmony. Voice is an

important element in Walt Whitman's Song of Myself. Since the poem is a song full of lyrics, people should be able to sing it. The voice within Song of Myself represents not merely the poet's persona; it carries the messages of all the natural objects and social characters. These voices arise from the poet and to reverse the terminology of the body and soul. Voice is also a good means to bridge the body and the soul. Voice comes from the physical organ and the domination of the brain. Besides, the soul clarifies its ideas by the means of articulation. Not only Walt Whitman's voice but the voices of the universe are all combined in the beautiful song of the self. It is the music of the Nature. It is the music of the body and the soul.

Many writers who follow the Platonic trend devalue the body in their writings. Those writers tend to sing for the highest purpose of the soul and chant the cleanness of the divine being without matter. For them, body implies lust of the humankind and the corruption of the world. They proclaim that there is an independent soul outside the physical world. At the same time, they simplify all the human problems to the fallacy of the body. Walt Whitman, the poet who praises the value of equality, emphasizes the body part of the self as much as the soul part:

In section 3, Whitman writes:

Clear and sweet is my soul, and clear and sweet is all that is not
my soul.

Lack one lacks both, and the unseen is proved by the seen.

Till that becomes unseen receives proof in its turn.(51-54)

In section 5, Whitman writes:

I believe in you my soul, the other I must not abase itself to you,

And you must not be abased to the other.(82-83)

Some critics say that Walt Whitman celebrates his own divine body and soul in

order to help elevate the divinity of men and women. Whitman understands that body and soul must be equalized before a democratic religion could take over from the religions of the past. Instead of identifying certain religious tradition, or accepting the hierarchy of soul over body, Whitman sets up a democratic model of body and soul — one is equal to the other. Therefore, the movement of outer world is the mixture of body and soul. The beauty of the self that comes of the body is indeed soulful. William Birmingham points that “internal to Whitman’s soul is all that is not itself; exclusion would empty his soul’s existence . . . Walt- witnesses, waits, and remembers. He believes, he says, in his soul, experienced through unseen; and ‘the other I am must not abase itself to you, / And you must not be abased to the other.’ What he remembers is this: experiencing the union of self and soul, which he expresses through the metaphor of oral intercourse, and the awareness to which that union led” (Birmingham 178-79).

In section 24, Whitman writes:

Through me forbidden voices,
Voices of sexes and lusts, voices veil’d and I remove the veil,
Voices indecent by me clarified and transfigur’d.

I do not press my fingers 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,
Seeing, hearing, feeling, are miracles, and each part and tag of me
is a miracle.

Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or
am touch'd from,
The scent of these arm-pits aroma finer than prayer,
This head more than churches, bibles, and all the creeds.

If I worship one thing more than another it shall be the spread of
my own body, or any part of it (516- 27).

In section 48, Whitman writes:

I have said that the soul is not more than the body,
And I have said that the body is not more than the soul (1269-70).

In brief sentences, Walt Whitman identifies the self as the body and the soul in everything he senses. It is Walt Whitman's belief that the body and the soul are equal. The body is worth the celebration and should never be abased to the soul. The soul cannot be actualized without the body. If Whitman can find any object worth the worship, it shall be one's body. The greatness of the body and the greatness of the soul represent the two essential identities of the self. Through the senses, we are in contact with the world of the body; then we turn these sensational materials to constitute our thoughts. This mystic abstraction is always proceeding between body and soul. We are always transforming our body to the soul; soul to the body. The world of the self is the integration of the body and soul. The body and the soul coexist with each other; and the soul cannot be fully realized without the body. The Good Gray Poet sets up a democratic spirit of body and soul—one is equal to the other. Whitman projects himself to the world and becomes the world. He is the

trees, the woods, and the grass. He is the thoughts, the mind, and the soul. He is the wind, the rivers, and the sun. He is the animals, the divine, and the cosmos. The self is the boundless unity of body and soul.



Chapter Two

Gender Identity and Sexuality of the Self

Unlike some masculine and feminist poets, Walt Whitman discloses the liberal tone towards the issue of sexuality. Whitman seems deliberately to play the role as an advocator for the equal rights of the different sexes and different sexual orientations. Walt Whitman is the poet of the woman and of the man. He is the advocator of the homosexual and of the protector of the heterosexual. He declares “there is nothing greater than the mother of the men” (427). Whitman refreshes the old stubborn patriarchal framework of the human society; even more, he grants the higher status and nobility to the female, the mother of men. Some critics even mention that, in Whitman’s works, the detestable emotion towards the figure of father is obviously found while the poet repetitively praises the benevolence of the mother figure and the amiability of the female character.

In section 5, Whitman writes that “all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the women my sisters and lovers” (94) which clearly makes the statement of the unconditioned fraternity for both genders. In a wider sense, both men and women are Whitman’s sibling and lovers. Many other poems in Whitman’s Leaves of Grass also imply the author’s bisexual desire. Such bisexual impulse leads Whitman to be aware of the masculine and the feminine part of the poet’s soul. The dividing line between the two genders is frequently ignored in the phrases of Song of Myself. Take section 11 for example, the whole scene is exposed to a romantic and seductive atmosphere. Whitman draws the picture of a “she-figure” in contrast to the twenty eight young men. But then we wonder who the person is to suffer the twenty-eight years of womanly lonesome life. Is there one beautiful woman standing behind the window or is it the female personality reflected in the self of Walt Whitman? Later

on, the twenty-nine bather joins the joyful group and the rest of the men did not see “her.” The author creates a female character joint to the ecstasy of the male group. The female part is unseen while the males tend to exhibit almost every external part of the body. Then, the female character turns to be an “unseen hand” (212) to comfort all the flesh of the twenty-eight young men. I cannot help wondering if it is the poet’s hand to touch the twenty-eight young men. The gender identity in Song of Myself is somehow like the riddle offered by Sphinx. Whitman does not try to explain such riddle clearly; on the contrary, the poet tries to maintain his multitudes and the depths of the aesthetic attitude.

The critic Christopher Beach points out that “Whitman's poetry reflects both the more fluid socioeconomic relations involving male homosocial behavior and the high degree of division between the sexes. . . . Despite Whitman's contention that the poems of Leaves of Grass are meant to be ‘the poems of women entirely as much as men’ (Leaves 572), it is relatively clear from even a cursory reading of Whitman's poetry that his primary interest was in the lives and bodies of men rather than those of women. . . . Gender was one area in which Whitman was still willing to make both social and physical distinctions: in large part, Whitman shared the attitudes of the nineteenth-century culture in which women were the much studied and just as much misunderstood ‘problematic sex’. If Whitman's writings at times reflect typical societal attitudes about gender, at other times they promote a sexual equality that, like racial and social equality, is a necessary component of the more radical form of democracy he proposes” (Beach 283). After taking a deeper look of gender identity of ourselves, many people believe that we both have the male gender and female gender within. Like the Chinese ideas the qualities of Yin-and-Yang (陰陽), the femininity and masculinity, are all composed in every single human body by different

proportion. As a matter of fact, science also proves that every person has hormones of both sexes. Usually, a female will be more masculine after her change of life while a male will be more feminine after his male menopause. It is the issue of male and female combining but not opposing. There is no doubt that the self in Walt Whitman's song represents the genders of female and male. As a poet emphasizes democratic equality, Whitman does not regard male as some superior gender/sex; and he offers the greatest honor to all the mothers, the female character.

Whitman has a strong belief in the purity of sex when it is rightly treated. He promotes sex as natural, normal, and the center of the existence. In Song of Myself, Whitman's attitude towards sexuality is bold and bisexual. But that does not mean Whitman is for any kind of obscenity. He often writes the passion on papers and criticizes the erotic corruption in the society. In the book Walt Whitman, David S. Reynolds wrote:

In his (Whitman's) poetry he treated sex and the body in a physiological, artistic way as a contrast to what he saw as the cheapened, often perverse forms of sexual expression in popular culture. "Who will underrate the influence of a loose popular literature in debauching the popular mind?" he asked in a magazine article. Directly opposing the often grotesque versions of eroticism appearing in sensational romances, he wrote in the 1855 preface: "Exaggerations will be sternly revenged in human physiology . . . As soon as histories are properly told, there is no more need for romances". (Reynolds 107-08)

The poetic writing is pure, but Whitman pays attention to the morality of real life as well. Due to the relatively conservative age he lived in, Whitman's writing

shocked people's mind. People, however, tend to obey the social expectations and there is no exception to Walt Whitman. Still, Whitman was free in his writing career. More than once, Whitman writes the metaphor about the masculine organ and the simile of the semen in Song of Myself. In section 24, Whitman writes "You my rich blood! your milk stream pale strippings of my life!" (532) and furthermore he says that "Something I cannot see puts upward libidinous prongs, / Seas of bright juice suffuse heaven" (555-56). These shocking words express not only the extraordinary craziness of the poet, also the direct attitude that Whitman holds towards sexuality.

In section 3, Whitman writes:

Out of the dimness opposites equals advance, always substance and
increase, always sex,
Always a knit of identity, always distinction, always a breed of life.
(45-47)

These ideas are bold enough to challenge the social conventional morality. Besides, Whitman manifests his bisexual desire both for male and female. In section 24, Whitman writes, "Firm masculine colter² it shall be you! / Whatever goes to the tilth³ of me it shall be you!" These various "you" all indicate to the male sex and the masculine reproductive organ. In section 33, Whitman writes:

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. (817-19)

2. "colter" – In non-symbolic terms the colter is the prong which directs the plow into the turf.

3. "tilth" – Cultivation or tillage of the soil.

Such words completely overthrow the moral standard existed in a traditional society, yet it peacefully functions in Whitman's fancy ideal utopia. Whitman believes that "Copulation is no more rank to me than death is" (521). In other words, sex is as beautiful as life is. Whitman has normally been seen as a sexual rebel whose poetry stood in opposition to the conservative America. Whitman tries to open the readers' eye by offering some sensual excitement aroused by language and imagination. Then he forces us to re-establish our ideology and moral structure after the shock. Whitman's greatness in equalizing the value of both genders is with no doubt. His buoyant sexual attitude makes him a pioneer ahead all ages, but it also leads him into the land of dilemma which I will discuss about it later in the thesis.

Compared with many other masculine writers, Walt Whitman is a good fellow to the female character. Section 21 of Song of Myself would be an example:

I am the poet of the woman the same as the man,
And I say it is as great to be a woman as to be a man,
And I say there is nothing greater than the mother of men. (425-27)

By these simple sentences, Whitman declares some significant and outstanding points of view to initiate a new era for humankind. In the first sentence, "I am the poet of the woman the same as the man" (425), Whitman not only deliberately puts the female identity in the center of the sentence but makes the woman stand in front of the man. Unlike those traditional doctrines demanding women only to be obedient and to follow the social rules dominated by men, Whitman elevates the value of being a woman is as good as of being a man. In "I say it is as great to be a woman as to be a man"(426), Whitman again promotes his true belief in equality of both genders. Traditionally, women are often regarded as subordinate objects to men which causes a slave-to-master relationship between women and men. Therefore, the male role

takes the higher importance in most fields and gains the better advantage in society while the female role has been asked to sacrifice and to tolerate, even to ignore the identity of being a female. Whitman finds it a terrible mistake and he has to reform the inequality within our ideology. Whitman firmly believes that the female and the male share the equal value in existence; both genders own the equal rights to be human beings. No one is greater than the other; the female is as good as a male. Whitman ever said that “only when sex is properly treated, talked, avowed, accepted, will the woman be equal with the man and pass where the man pass, and meet his words with her words, and his rights with her rights” (Blodgett 21). Like some women’s rights activists today, Whitman pays attention to the right of woman and the equality of both genders. Whitman is the poet of people, not particularly for the man or selfishly for the woman. The song is not merely sung for men but for women also. Opportunities should be granted for every individual whether the person is a he or a she. The song of the self is for every individual. To be more advanced, Whitman elevates the female status higher in order to project a fresh exquisite perspective in the gender identity. Therefore, Whitman writes in the third sentence, “I say there is nothing greater than the mother of men” (427). Whitman bravely gives away the masculine sovereignty and transfers the supreme nobility to the female. According to the author’s biographic materials, Whitman maintains a good relationship with his mother and he often praises the mother role in his poems. As we may know, some of Whitman’s siblings suffered from different kinds of difficulty and Whitman helped to look after the other family members when they were in need. Furthermore, Whitman often expresses a higher affirmation to his mother than to his father both in real life and in his literary works. When Whitman declares the mother of men is the greatest, he overthrows the patriarchal system of the human culture structure.

In Christianity, God/Jesus Christ represents the dominating power of the existing world and the gender identity of God is always described as male, a Him. For that reason, Jesus' mother becomes a means or an organ to produce the divine creature. Although the Mother Mary is somehow divine and somewhat a virgin, she always stands on the lower level to the whole hierarchy of the divine roles; she must sacrifice herself in order to glorify her own divine son. We do not know how the world would be re-interpreted if there was a divine daughter born by the Virgin Mary; however, Walt Whitman, the best comrade for the feminists, steps down to the lower ground and grants the superiority to the female gender. Therefore, mother of the men not only creates all the identities and possibilities but also regains her own proper status of being a woman. Whitman's transcendental liberal words aren't meant to cause the war between the female and the male, neither to push women despising men. Women and men are equal. We have to learn the wisdom of being brave and humble at the same time. This is the mission for we human beings to achieve: to respect and to accept each other. Whitman destroys the traditional hierarchy of genders by his words and then reconstructs the whole value system with the idealistic equality presented in Song of Myself.

We are used to making one gender superior to the other. Many males love to believe that they are "naturally" better than the females. Those males do not give evidence but they simply love to believe it. The strange thing is that many females agree with it and they don't feel bothered by such quick conclusion. I wonder how we are able to compare the value of people when everyone is unique. Walt Whitman, as one true liberalist and humanist, manifests the meaning of equality of sexes and races. Whitman appreciates women's courage and he praises the brave behavior of the men. Whitman turns the self to be the tender mother, the soldier in a battle, the

woman behind the window, and the vital young men playing at the beach. All is the self and the self is male and female. Sometimes the gender identities do make differences in Song of Myself; but on some occasions, Whitman plays the game of gender identification with a neutral and androgynous attitude in order to develop the multitudes of the self.

In section 5, Whitman writes:

I mind how once we lay such a transparent summer morning,
How you settled your head athwart my hips and gently turn'd over
upon me,
And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your
tongue to my bare-stript heart,
And reach'd till you felt my beard, and reach'd till you held my feet.
.....
And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the
women my sisters and lovers. (87-90, 94)

We may regard it as a kind of confession. But the question occurs: such emotions are heterosexual? homosexual? bisexual? We are not sure the event is based on a true romance or something happens only in Whitman's imagination. The love of brothers and sisters vaguely implies that Walt Whitman offers the love to everyone around him. It might also be a trick to hide the impulsive homosexual desire of the Good Gray Poet. William Birmingham assumes that "Whitman's imagination is here remembering and re-creating an act of homosexual love, but that is besides the point I wish to make: in an erotic transport, Walt experiences the ensouled self and in peace and joy now perceives" (Birmingham 179).

Stephen A. Black, in his book Whitman's Journey into Chaos, writes that "the

regressive impulse underlying Whitman's cathartic experiences parallel a conscious poetic theme: the attempt to return to his origins and find a new way to understand himself" (Black 101). Again and again, Walt Whitman finds the mysterious self from all his ecstatic trances. Walt Whitman writes in section 24:

If I worship one thing more than another it shall be the spread of
my own body, or any part of it,
Translucent mould of me it shall be you!
Shaded ledges and rests it shall be you!
Firm masculine colter it shall be you!
Whatever goes to the tilth of me it shall be you!
You my rich blood! Your milky stream pale strippings of my life!
Breast that presses against other breasts it shall be you!
My brain it shall be your occult convolutions!
Root of wash'd sweet-flag! Timorous pond-snipe! Nest of guarded
duplicate eggs! it shall be you!
Mix'd tussled hay of head, beard, brawn, it shall be you!
Trickling sap of maple, fibre of manly wheat, it shall be you!(527-37)

These images give an expressive masculine organs and the passionate sexuality of males. Walt Whitman is never afraid of touching the subject of sex. The sexuality presented above is impossible to repress. It is the irrational but exciting part of the self. All is good and healthy for Whitman. He doesn't even try to repress the homosexuality within himself.

In section 3, Whitman writes:

I am satisfied— I see, dance, laugh, sing;
As the hugging and loving bed-fellow sleeps at my side through

the night, and withdraws at the peep of the day with
stealthy tread,

Leaving me baskets cover'd with white towels swelling the house
with their plenty,

Shall I postpone my acceptance and realization and scream at my eyes . . .

(59- 62)

In 1855's edition, Walt Whitman writes "As God comes a loving bedfellow" instead of "As the hugging and the loving bed-fellow" to fulfill his imagination. Stephen A. Black indicates that the passivity of Walt Whitman transforms its role into a female-like one when the poet specifies his lover as a male image. Quite extraordinarily, it is God who comes to make the poet "pregnant" and "satisfied." Cathartic experiences offer but a fleeting sense of satisfaction. Sometimes we cannot easily tell the gender identity of the narrator is a "he" or a "she" or neutral; what we can be sure of is that Walt Whitman grants equality to females, males and all the people with different sexual orientations.

Whitman's most famous description of a female figure occurs in section 11 of Song of Myself. Here we find the same story of unfulfilled female sexual desire in the form of a poetic parable which constitutes one of the most remarkable moments in the poem. In section 11, Walt Whitman writes:

Twenty-eight young men bathe by the shore,
Twenty-eight young men and all so friendly;
Twenty-eight years of womanly life and all so lonesome.

She owns the fine house by the rise of the bank,
She hides handsome and richly drest aft the blinds of the window.

Which of the young men does she like the best?

Ah the homeliest of them is beautiful to her.

Where are you off to, lady? For I see you,

You splash in the water there, yet stay stock still in your room.

Dancing and laughing along the beach came the twenty-ninth bather,

The rest did not see her, but she saw them and loved them.

The beards of the young men glisten'd with wet, it ran from their
long hair,

Little streams pass'd all over their bodies.

An unseen hand also pass'd over their bodies,

It descended tremblingly from their temples and ribs.

The young men float on their backs, their white bellies bulge to
the sun, they do not ask who seizes fast to them,

They do not know who puffs and declines with pendant and bend-
ing arch,

They do not think whom they souse with spray. (199-216)

From this section, we sense the desire of the lonesome woman and the impulse of the poet become a union through imagination. The subject "she" who is behind the curtain is also part of the self. The poet, like the woman behind the curtain, is the caresser of life and the admirer of the youth. Fantasy becomes the potential agent of

sexual drive to cause the woman behind the curtain yearning for the young men outside. As a woman, however, she is subject to gender restriction and social prejudice. The unseen hand which joins the boys' play at the beach is the hand of the poet himself. The twenty-ninth bather illustrates the poet's awareness of the power of sexual instincts to promote creative energy both in physical life and imaginative life. Some critics relate the number twenty-eight to the woman's period, and some even gives it a political meaning by representing the admitting of the twenty-ninth state, Texas, into the Union in 1845. They believe the political connection offers America "multitudes" as well as Whitman's bisexual model. Many researchers find homosexual or bisexual tendency of Walt Whitman from his literary works and his personal life. Such poetical language of section 11 represents a kind of bisexual desire of the search of the personal identity and sexuality. In The Figure of Echo, John Hollander records these echoes in Whitman's lines:

Whitman's beautiful fable of the moon becoming moonlight in order to make love to the twenty-eight days, the young men swimming in the ocean, seems strangely evocative when the lunar woman is described. . . A context of erotic danger for young men is provided by the famous parable of the harlot, Proverbs 7: 6 – 27, beginning "for at the window of my house I looked through the casement, and behold among the simple ones, I discerned among the youths, a young man void of understanding . . . in the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night." Whitman clearly identifies himself with the twenty-eight-year-old moon woman behind the blinds, and the separation of narrator and a harlot in the biblical passage is reconstituted in his figure of the watcher. (Hollander 122)

In one respect, the section 11 of twenty-eight bathers and the woman who “hides handsome and richly drest aft the blinds of the window” (203) tells the imaginative release of the female sexual desire for the men. But the most interesting feature is the peculiar positioning of the narrator. Some critics believe that Walt Whitman takes part in the feminine role and they are convinced that Whitman is in reality the lonesome young woman watching the young men bathing. The gender complex and the hetero/homosexual desire all gather in the mystic section. The voyeuristic woman then turns to be a fiction for the homosexual desire of the poet himself. Possibly, it is the personal reflection of Walt Whitman’s own lonely twenty-eight years, 1819-1847.

Christopher Beach has his discussion on this particular section:

Whitman's hesitation to make the woman in the poem a full participant in the sexual scene comes not primarily from an inability to imagine scenes of female homosociality, but rather from a desire to make a larger point about her status within a male socio-sexual network. She is only partially able to join in the social and sexual frolicking of the men. . . . Whitman formally enacts such a closure around the woman in section 11: within the passage itself, the woman's body is completely contained within the frame of the twenty-eight male bathers with which the section begins and ends. . . . Whitman also wrote on prostitution, and more specifically on the Sanger report which documented for the first time the social realities of prostitution in America, in his Daily Times articles of 1858-59. If the woman hiding behind the curtains in section 11 of Song of Myself represents the economic and cultural distinction possible among a sheltered elite whose sexual energies can

only join the fluid mix of the democratic "en-masse" via the imagination, the prostitute represents the anti-democratic principle in quite another sense." (Beach 290-91)

Whitman's adoption of the female role during sexual imagination indicates the tendency of the sexual experience to produce transcendence, to transform the self into the other. The true tolerance is that we ought to offer the equal right of sexuality both for females and males. We must admit that, even today, many people regard women as the dependent objects of men and the female race so often lacks their right to interpret the "history." Therefore, the female sexual desire and the female body rights are too often neglected. Women are expected to be "good mothers" and people do not like to see the mothers enjoy sex too freely while the moral standard is pretty loose for the father role.

Prostitution, a kind of work of long history in human society, is actively transacted but so often hypocritically condemned. In the poetry, Walt Whitman extended a friendly hand to all the prostitutes and embraced them to be part of the self. Not only the working prostitute but the sexual disease patients are all equal in participating the accomplishment of the self. From this point of view, Whitman operates the optimistic attitude towards sexuality. Whitman practices the democratic compassion and regards a prostitute as a person than merely a sex machine. And he does not exclude these figures out of the self; on the contrary, Whitman himself turns to be the characters who were traditionally despised. Whitman himself becomes the prostitute and the sexual disease patient.

Most of the time, males want to have exciting sexual life with many different females or males; however, most of them do not allow their partners or spouses to enjoy equal sexual freedom. A female who has too much sexual desire and has

liberal sexual life is often labeled as an anti-social figure. In section 14 of Song of Myself, Whitman writes that "What is commonest, cheapest, nearest, easiest is Me . . . Adorning myself to bestow myself on the first that will take me" (259, 261). These lines may be read in a number of different ways and their possible interpretation as a fantasy of either prostitution or female impersonation suggests that Whitman's relationship to both prostitution and to female sexuality in general maybe more complex than his writings would indicate. A prostitute is sometimes a symbol of "bad cheap woman" but, in Song of Myself, Whitman declares that he is the commonest and the cheapest. He enjoys the body and soul with all his brothers and sisters no matter they work as church people or prostitutes. Today, it is important for us to completely liberate our soul whether it is female or male in gender. Every individual has a right to decide the particular way of living and every single life has an integrate identity of the gender.

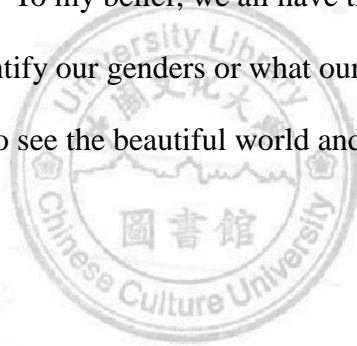
Walt Whitman also gives influences to some modern female poets. The American female poet Muriel Rukeyser was deeply influenced by Walt Whitman's poetry as well as his personal life. Rukeyser recognizes in Whitman's work are also her own and she describes Whitman "the poet of possibility." Since Whitman declares that we shall assume what he assumes, there is no doubt that the poetry of the good gray poet is the poetry of every individual, there is no exception to Muriel Rukeyser. Rukeyser, in her poetry, wakes up the body and the female consciousness. She deliberately shows respect to "it", the others, and to unite the "I" with "it." Rukeyser, similar to Whitman, not merely embraces the contradictions as "Very well then, I contradict myself," but recognizes that "my contradictions set me tasks, errands" (CP, 532). And these tasks are informed by Rukeyser's lifelong refusal to separate the personal from the political (years before "the personal is political" was to

become a feminist axiom). The soul of Whitman sings along with the soul of Rukeyser. And Rukeyser's seeing her poetic identity as one of possibility rooted in the physical is also the idea of Whitman "I am the poet of the body." Walt Whitman emphasizes the equality of both genders making him a good company to some feminist poets and writers.

I do love Whitman's open attitude towards gender and sexuality. In many parts of Song of Myself, Walt Whitman adopts sexual images in sensational literary words and transforms them into lovely metaphors of the joys of the self. For Whitman, the sexual impulse is both physical and spiritual. The sexual experience forms the basis for the mystical union with the nature. One day I read a book written in Chinese The United Nations of Sex Workers and there is an article about one transsexual prostitute whose name is Norrie from Australia. In this article, they add in one song written by Norrie and it talks about that she is everything and nothing; she is a man and a woman; she is homosexual and heterosexual; and everyone has a unique life and everyone is different. In Norrie's song, she sings for the courage to be oneself and she points out that we are all human beings and we are the self of multiple identities. It strongly reminds me of the value in Walt Whitman's thoughts and philosophy. Everyone is a unique soul and we must learn to respect each other. Whitman says that people around him are all kind to him. All the females, males, homosexuals, heterosexuals, bisexuals, and prostitutes are the different identities of Whitman and of the plural self.

The world is sometimes divided by our prejudice. And we make the wars between the female and male, the heterosexual and the homosexual, all sorts of dualities, and the so-called "conflicting opposites." As a matter of fact, the world is really big enough for us to coexist peacefully if only we spare a little more respect and

space for each other. During our childhood we might laugh at people who are different from us. When we grow up, we do not laugh at people in public but we say bad things about others behind their backs. We are taught to behave ourselves according to the social demands. We sometimes ignore that there are people who have different sexual orientations from us. We grow up and we try to find out who we really are. To know ourselves is a long journey. We can be females who adore males and we also can be the females who love females. I find the song of my personal self is both of male and female. I am happy to declare that I have a soul of male and female. Whitman is the poet of woman and man, the poet of praising sex, and the poet of celebrating life and joy. Sex illustrates Whitman's poetry and activates the life of the self. To my belief, we all have the equal right to live in the world no matter how we identify our genders or what our sexual orientations are. We have to open our hearts to see the beautiful world and to embrace the multiple identities of the self.



Chapter Three

Self as Whitman, America, and the Cosmos

Whitman launches Song of Myself by his personal experiences. In the poem, he tries to encompass everything he observes into the self. Whitman repeatedly uses the subject “I” from the first sentence to the last. In the first sentence, we know that this poem is a song to celebrate the self of Walt Whitman. In the last sentence, the subject “I” declares that he will stop somewhere and wait for us. Many critics describe Whitman as an egoistic poet who builds the whole world according to his will and by his own pleasure and imagination. If we look from a different perspective to understand the “I” in Song of Myself, we realize the “I” represents not only the singular identity of Whitman’s but every individual around. The self of Walt Whitman, therefore, is the self of everyone. The “I” in Song of Myself or the persona of Walt Whitman in the text is sometimes merely a representative figure. He stands for every American individual. But his really distinguishing feature is that he has been granted a vision, as a result of which he has realized the potentialities latent in every American and indeed in every living person.

From section 33, Whitman describes the natural objects as “western persimmon” and “yellow-crown’d heron” around him. He also writes about the people and the scenic spots of America. Near the end of section 33, Whitman mentions the brave fire fighters and the comrades of a battle. From section 34 to 36, Whitman writes how the bravery young men sacrificed themselves in a battle. Whitman makes himself a participant in these cruel battles happened in American history. In section 37 and 38, Whitman turns to be the prisoners and the one who suffers from the bloody crucifixion and finally revives again. Here emerges the image of Christ. It is somehow like, through all these sufferings, a new life of the

spiritual self has resurrected. The new self represents Walt Whitman and the whole America. It implies the new era of eternity, a new religion.

In section 6, Walt Whitman writes:

The smallest sprout shows there is really no death,
And if there was it led forward life, and does not wait at the
end to arrest it,
And ceas'd the moment life appear'd. (126 – 28)

Even death, unlike the threatening tone of Christianity, is supposed to be “luckier” in the new American Bible by the optimistic poet. In Song of Myself, Whitman is conscious of the traditional divinity but unwilling to admit its absoluteness; he offers the superiority to the self. To Whitman’s belief, the divinity is shared by and is within all human beings as well as natural objects. The self of Walt Whitman is so greatly stretched into the boundless cosmos and it reaches the state of wholeness as one complete union. In the article, William Birmingham indicates that “In Song of Myself, the self experiences the divine not as Other but as merged with the cosmos, with which the self merges as well” (Birmingham 177). And he continuously makes his statements that “There is more here than facile optimism, however, Song of Myself offers not an ideal self, realized or to come, but a delineation of what the empirical American self and its world may become if it follows the trajectory of the best in its democratic experiences” (Birmingham 177).

The critic William Birmingham indicates that Walt Whitman’s self, often integrated, experiences a divine presence that relates it intimately to humankind and the realization of the binding power of love, which embraces the trees and ants, the moss and weeds—in other words, the cosmos from the immanent God to the disregarded element of life. Walt Whitman embraces the divine and the trivial. He

makes the mixture to be part of the self. Neglecting the Christ image, Whitman actually intends to create an image of every human being. The self of Walt Whitman is also the self of everyone alive. Whitman represents the individual who exists in the world joyfully and independently. We can say that Walt Whitman is our voice and we are all Walt Whitman.

The critic Gayle L. Smith writes in his article and points out that Whitman “declared himself throughout section 16 to be a kind of American Everyman in every place and his place at the same time, when he opens section 17 by saying, ‘These are really the thoughts of all men in all ages and lands,’ he makes us reevaluate his statements in a new and broader light. A few lines later, however, his use of the demonstrative is more troubling: ‘This is the grass that grows wherever the land is and the water is, / This the common air that bathes the globe’. ‘These thoughts,’ plural and abstract, seem to have become singular and concrete. After section 18, in which he says that he plays for the dead and defeated, he suggests another meaning of “This is the grass” as he opens section 19 with a new list of demonstrative identifications:

This is the meal equally set, this the meat for natural hunger,

.....

This is the press of a bashful hand, this the float and odor of hair,

This the touch of my lips to yours, this the murmur of yearning,

This the far-off depth and height reflecting my own face,

This the thoughtful merge of myself, and the outlet again.”

(372, 378-81) (Smith 169)

We recognize that Walt Whitman’s efforts in identifying the self do not merely aim for some particular groups; Whitman speaks for everyone in America and anywhere else. Walt Whitman's deepest wish is that America would embrace him as

its great seer and most authentically American poet. In Whitman's best lines, he casts himself as the spokesperson for women as well as men, blacks as well as whites, the well-heeled and the downtrodden. All together, these separate parts add up to people of America. Whitman's poetry celebrates a muscular America large enough to include multitudes at the same time it insists that each constituency lovingly catalogued is a seamless part of the larger, often mystically imagined union. In this sense, poetry not only allows Walter Whitman, a fictionist of small distinction, to transmogrify himself into Walt Whitman, the swaggering persona of Song of Myself, but it also allowed him to transform the subject into the whole nation of America.

As to the country of America, Whitman writes in section 9:

The big door of the country — barn stand open and ready,
The dried grass of the harvest — time loads the slow-drawn wagon,
The clear light plays on the brown gray and green integrated,
The armfuls are packed to sagging mow.

I am there, I help. . . (166-71)

Walt Whitman is “One of the Nation of many nations, the smallest the same and the largest the same” (334). The self represents not only the New World but also the other areas and countries. Walt Whitman, by the magic of literary writings, bridges the individualistic self and the American self. Birmingham William expresses that Song of Myself is the story-song of the possible American self, Walt’s own and that of his countrymen. Whitman himself becomes the “Southerner soon as a Northerner . . . A Yankee bound my own way ready for trade . . . A Kentuckian walking the vale of the Elkhorn . . . a Louisianian or Georgian” (335-37). Here, the self of Whitman are the territory of America and the people of America.

James E. Miller Jr. describes Walt Whitman as a “lyric nationalist writer”. Much of Miller’s career has been devoted to developing the lyric-epic thesis. Miller writes that Whitman’s invention of the heroic national poem incorporates both the private confession and the public chant, the lyric voice and the epic vision. Lyric is the individual voice, defined in opposition to an epic of public language, and Whitman’s achievement is the fusion of the two. Such process invents a powerful recognition of national identity. A personal connection of reader to lyric poet is translated into the realm of epic and of national identification. It is not merely Walt Whitman that readers encounter in Song of Myself, it is themselves and something called “America.”

In “American Bards: James M. Whitfield, Eliza R. Snow, John Rollin Ridge, and Walt Whitman”, Edward K. Whitley wrote:

Song of Myself has made its way to the center of the Whitman canon because of the way it translates nationality into poetry. Since the United States is said to consist of autonomous individuals bound together in an expanding nation, its corresponding national poetry should presumably consist of private lyrics that first look inward to the self and then outward across an enormous nation. Embodying both the liberal self and the broad expanse of national borders, Song of Myself takes advantage of a lyric tradition that defines the poet’s relationship with his or her audience as an act of overhearing. (Whitley 309)

Walt Whitman makes his understanding of the identity of his poetic self necessary to the identity of America. He celebrates through paradoxes, contradictions, and opposites: America, world; country, city; country, industry; city,

individualism. Among these opposites and contradictions, Whitman freely reaches his multitudes. If we regard Whitman as an American bard, he naturally shares his identities with every individual around the New World. He is the mother and the soldier. He is America and the American. Some critics regard Leaves of the Grass as the New American Bible since it is such a loving transcendental book especially written for the people and nation of America.

Song of Myself, by a large proportion, is based on the scenery, story and the people of America. Throughout the poem Walt Whitman reveals in the wonders of the natural world outside the confines of urban areas. Whitman believes the soul of human beings is as likely to be found in the branches of a pine tree as all the great geographical parts in America. Walt Whitman might be the first artist to capture what James Dougherty calls “the dynamic and complex presence of expanding cities in the mid nineteenth-century American landscape.” Whitman effortlessly leaps from the description of the cities to the nature scenery of America. Besides, Walt Whitman also illustrates the constant motion and flux of all Americans’ activities as mirroring those of animals, people, soldiers and other things of the world. America, as a free and energetic country, is Whitman’s hometown and the beloved self. Walt Whitman sings for the people, for the freedom, for the nature, for the battle, for the justice, and for America. We can say that Walt Whitman loves the nineteenth century’s America and he regards America as an important projection of the self of the Good Gray Poet. For him, America stands for a model of the true democratic spirit. Walt Whitman is well-known as one poet who supports the spirituality of democracy. William Birmingham indicates that “Whitman’s poetic vision affirms, against self-hatred, a possible American self that is inclusive, other than exclusive, trusting rather than suspicious, equalitarian rather than hierarchical, relational rather

than individualistic” (Birmingham 176). The self of America, to Walt Whitman’s point of view, is not only a matter of subjectivity but a firm belief of democracy: a totally new religion which embraces the value of equality and celebrates everything existing here and now. Physically, in Song of Myself, Walt Whitman writes the mountains, rivers, and all sorts of natural objects in America to be the body of the nation. Walt Whitman absorbs the part of America into the self of the poet. Simultaneously, we can say that the famous declaration of Independence: “All men are created equal” is the spiritual part of the self of America.

M. Wynn Thomas, in the introduction to The Lunar Light of Whitman’s Poetry, shows Whitman to be the product of some particular cultural moment in America and Thomas wrote:

Instead of accepting that his poems embody the essential spirit of America, I have concluded that they are the products of what was for Whitman, as it was for the artisan class with which he was closely associated, a historically specific period of social crisis. In his own case not only did poetry surface in him under this pressure, his poems were also instrumental in enabling Whitman to adapt, or to temper his ideals (themselves partly historical in origin; the residue of an earlier period) to the sometimes harsh requirements of a new environment. At the same time, poetry was his indispensable means of stating his own requirements, allowing him to address the contemporary situation in terms and tones that were, not infrequently in one and the same poem, critical, celebratory, and visionary. (Thomas 2)

In section 34, Whitman talks about the murder of four hundred and twelve young men in Texas. And in section 35, Whitman writes about the captain who led

the group to fight against the enemy till the last minute. Their frigate was leaking and was on fire. They confronted the fierce attack but they did not give up. Finally, the enemy surrendered to the captain and the brave soldiers. There is failure and triumph in every war and Walt Whitman grants the equal value to the victors and the defeated. In the history of America and of any other countries, numberless people have been killed because of the cruelty of the war. Song of Myself is such an evidence to demonstrate the insistence of the States and the courage of the people. No matter it is to sacrifice oneself in the battle field or to gain the final victory at the war, the national spirit and the people shall never give up. This is the self of American beauty Walt Whitman tries to show to all the people living in the world. Those historical and cultural moments shall be in memorial by the people always.

"The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem", in the Preface to the first edition of Leaves of Grass Walt Whitman wrote. He began to give examples by introducing the life and personality of the common people: "the picturesque looseness of their carriage . . . their good temper and open handedness – the terrible significance of their elections – the President's taking off his hat to them not they to him"(Preface 2081). All these ordinary things all are contained in the land of America. Song of Myself proclaims the manifold vitality of the nation of America; it also celebrates the egalitarianism in democracy that can tolerate all the heterogeneity. William Birmingham points out that "Leaves of Grass, more than any of the decade of 1850-1855, addresses America as a geographical and cultural totality in the process of self creation. The Union was threatened; Whitman unity present. Greed was manifest; he supposes heroes 'pocketless of a dime' and originates delight in the common grass and air. American individualism was raw; he raises ego centricity to impossible heights on the one hand and affirms the inherently relational

nature of the self on the other. Democracy was, given the depredations of slavery and the deprivation of women, unrealized; he imagines equality of dignity and respect. He loves and finds hope in both city and countryside” (Birmingham 192-3) of America.

The self of America not only contains the land, the people, the history, but also the American spirits and the American dreams. Therefore, the true heroes and leaders of a democratic nation are not its presidents or its warriors, but those who have learned to think democratically, its poets. Near the end of the “Letter to Ralph Waldo Emerson” written in 1856, Whitman gave the evidence of making the States of America as a great self. Walt Whitman wrote:

Of course, we shall have a national character, an identity. As it ought to be, and as soon as it ought to be, it will be. That, with much else, takes care of itself, is a result, and the cause of greater results. With Ohio, Illinois, Missouri, Oregon — with the states around the Mexican sea — with cheerfully welcomed immigrants from Europe, Asia, Africa — with Connecticut, Vermont, New Hampshire, Rhode Island — with all varied interests, facts, beliefs, parties, genesis — there is being fused a determined character, fit for the broadest use for the freewomen and freemen of The States, accomplished and to be accomplished, without any exception whatever — each indeed free, each idiomatic, as becomes live states and men, but each adhering to one enclosing general form of politics, manners, talk, personal style, as the plenteous varieties of the race adhere to one physical form. (Leaves of Grass 2145)

It is the national identity of America. The words above manifest the ideals of the American self. They demand the country to be open-minded to every different

people and to be equal to every single state. Those varieties, conventionally or geographically, are all parts of the great self of the nation. They form the characters and give birth to a national identity. All through his life, Whitman knits the story for himself, for Americans, and for the national identity, America.

Furthermore, Whitman makes himself a fleshly “kosmos” who would speak for all the voices of the materialistic and spiritual worlds around him.

In section 45, Whitman writes:

Every condition promulges not only itself, it promulges what grows
after and out of itself,

And the dark hush promulges as much as any.

I open my scuttle at night and see the far-sprinkled systems,
And all I see multiplied as high as I can cipher edge but the rim
of the farther systems.

Wider and wider they spread, expanding, always expanding,
Outward and outward and forever outward.

My sun has his sun and around him obediently wheels,
He joins with his partners a group of superior circuit,
And greater sets follow, making specks of the greatest inside them.

There is no stoppage and never can be stoppage,
If I, you, and the worlds, and all beneath or upon their surfaces,
were this moment reduced back to a pallid float, it would

not avail in the long run,
We should surely bring up again where we now stand,
And surely go as much farther, and then farther and farther.
A few quadrillion of eras, a few octillions of cubic leagues, do not
hazard the span or make it impatient,
They are but parts, any thing is but a part.

See ever so far, there is limitless space outside of that,
Count ever so much, there is limitless time around that.
My rendezvous is appointed, it is certain,
The Lord will be there and wait till I come on perfect terms,
The great Camerado, the lover true for whom I pine will be there.

(118-200)

These sentences above explain well how Walt Whitman transforms the self into the magnificent cosmos. In Whitman's eye all humanity and natural objects is part of the self. Whitman himself is a cosmos and the cosmos is the poetry of inclusion. The universe is always in a state of becoming and motivating. The self is the sum of the parts while the poetry is the sum of the abstract experiences. We come to this world as a traveler and visit through the inward- and-outward cosmos by the vehicle of the self. Infinity, limitlessness in another word, is one indispensable dimension of Walt Whitman's cosmology: there is space outside the space, time beyond time. There are numberless suns spread over the cosmos and there is no ending in the active universe. For Walt Whitman, the universe continuously growing and expanding. And the eternal reoccurrences, the philosophical idea of Nietzsche, become the fundamental optimistic belief in the poem Song of Myself. Walt Whitman claims

that we will always come back to where we are now and will go farther. And we will surely reach the ultimate purpose and to meet our true lover and the “source”, the Self. The self of cosmos shows how Walt Whitman spreads his identities over the galaxy and beyond. The cosmos is a unity and every part, no matter it is the leaves of grass or the stars, dances within the unity. These beautiful parts all are different identities belonging to the self and to the whole human race. The little part can be an infinite one, a wholeness, for “Everything is but a part.” Walt Whitman also has similar concept to Leibniz’s philosophical hypothesis, the pre-established harmony of the universe. For Whitman, things always happen in the right place and at the best time. What we have here and now is always the best.

In section 3, Walt Whitman writes:

There was never any more inception than there is now,
Nor any more youth or age than there is now,
And will never be any more perfection than there is now,
Nor any more heaven or hell than there is now. (40- 43)

Whitman, in section 46, writes that “I know I have the best of time and space, and was never measured / and never will be measured” (1201). The identity of the individual and nation and cosmos coexist with each other. We may find that sometimes the poet leaps among the different identities and is seldom stable. The national poet and the cosmic poet sometimes are the two extremes of the literary categories, however, Whitman naturally fuses the two dimensions into the plural self. Walt Whitman holds his open attitude towards the existing cosmos. In Song of Myself Walt Whitman drew simultaneously on both mysticism and contemporary science. He advises us to “let our soul stand cool and composed before a million universes” (1277). In section 31, Whitman writes “I believe a leaf of grass is no less

than the journey-work of the stars” (663) and this can represent Walt Whitman’s attitude of cosmology. Everyone has one’s curiosity and we try to find the definition of the self by asking questions as “what is the grass?” The cosmos, as one organic body, keeps exchanging and interacting within Walt Whitman’s poem. The poem itself is the universe full of life. Walt Whitman’s self is constituted by every single subject. At the same time, the self is the wholeness of the being, the boundless cosmos. We are all independent and interconnected in the cosmos. As many poets do, Walt Whitman demands us to accept the imagined world of his poem. It is a fantastic world in which it is presumed that the self is able to be identical with all other selves in the universe, regardless of time and space.

We somehow sense the transcendental tendency in Walt Whitman’s cosmology. Whitman uses the language to join his visions of reality through a process of poetic unification. Whitman does not stop there, however, he allows the connections he draws from his experiences to inform his poetic speculations in Leaves of Grass. Other instances find Whitman unable to express his transcendental view of the universe in terms of the science of his time. In one respect, Whitman’s poetry can be seen as the process of certain poetic mysticism. Whitman finds evidence for the transcendental aspect of the universe in his own direct personal experiences with the natural world. In this way, the poet uses his imagination and gets in touch with every possible thing in existence. The All becomes the every being of the self. From the transcendental level to the mysticism, Walt Whitman set off his journey in finding the self. Science is never neglected, either. In Whitman’s cosmos, there are millions suns and stars. There is time beyond time, and there is space out of space. What is seen is as important as what is not seen. Through the mystic understanding, we come to realize the magnificent cosmos within the self of Walt Whitman.

As section 24 of Song of Myself manifests “Walt Whitman, a Kosmos, of Manhattan the son” (497), Whitman confidently lifts himself to a self-reliant world. Walt Whitman is no longer a name of one poet but the identity of every individual. The “Kosmos” is a symbolic unity within the macrocosm. By the poetical identification the “I” can range back and forth in time and space, thus in a sense free from the bondage of time and space. Walt Whitman not only personified the self in himself, but indeed exploited his personal identity in an indiscriminate, relentless, and buoyant manner. We can say the self is every man and woman. We are Walt Whitman and we are assuming what Whitman assumes. Through Song of Myself, Whitman praises his beloved country America. America is surely one important identity of the self that Walt Whitman sings for and, by Song of Myself, Whitman elevates the national status of America to an epic expression. From the individual to a nation, Whitman swifts among all the different identities he observes and touches. Whitman’s self somehow changes into a kind of internationality which would do away with single national identifications of America. It is the song for every nation. Moreover, it is the poem for the cosmos. The self is boundless as the universe. The self is the name of the poet, the nation and the cosmos. By the poetic mystic process, the poet and America and the beautiful cosmos are all united in the harmonious self. Therefore, Walt Whitman, the self, equally stands with all the Americans and individuals, with the nation of America and other nations, and with the infinite cosmos, the mysterious universe.

Chapter Four

Identity Crisis of the Self and Whitman's Solution

When Walt Whitman constantly claims that every different subject almost all over the universe is inclusive within himself, we see and read the world from the poet's eye and voice. In the very beginning, Walt Whitman says "what I assume you shall assume, for every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you" (1-3). But now the first crisis is: it is by Walt Whitman's writing we encounter the poem Song of Myself and why do we have to assume what Walt Whitman assumes? What if we do not want to be part of the self that Walt Whitman creates? Some modern poets and critics claim that there is obvious egotism in Whitman's poetry. However, it is like the old Chinese philosophical paradox: do I or do I not know if the fish swimming in the river is happy. Chuang Tzu(莊子), a Chinese Taoist philosopher, once had a debate with his friend Hui Shi(惠施). Hui Shi doubted that Chuang Tzu to say that the fish was happy while Chung Tzu himself was not the fish. Chung Tzu replied that since his friend was not he, how did his friend know if Chung Tzu knew that the fish was happy or not? In Song of Myself, Walt Whitman tries to use the means of intersubjectivity to make the whole world become one, including Whitman himself and all the others. Similar to Chuang Tzu, Walt Whitman makes no segregation from the fish or the nature but to be part of it. Walt Whitman is as happy as the fish and the two are actually the different identities of the same being. Walt Whitman, the same to Chuang Tzu, is the fish happily swimming in the river. We all share the same atoms of the universe whether "I" am a fish or Walt Whitman.

When referring to the nature, Whitman is always optimistic and cheerful. In section 32, Walt Whitman writes:

I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and

self-contain'd,

I stand and look at them long and long.

They do not sweat and whine about their condition,

They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins,

They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God,

Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with the mania of
owning things,

Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived thousands of
years ago,

Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth. (684-91)

Still, many people will think that such an idea is simply romantic and unrealistic. In section 33 in Song of Myself, Walt Whitman slept with the bride and kicked the bridegroom away. Was the groom able to accept Walt Whitman to represent himself to sleep with his wife? We can probably say that it is merely the imaginative metaphor by Whitman himself. Walt Whitman does not take useless pity for the ones who are suffering and are going to the jail because Walt Whitman himself turns to be the ones who are suffering and are going to the jail. There is no distinction between the others and the self of Walt Whitman. However, the happy bedfellow we mentioned above will altogether share the same identity as the one suffers or goes to the jail. What do they actually should assume?

Furthermore, though Walt Whitman tries to make everything around him included as the multiple identities of himself and to praise himself, there still seems to be some exceptions that are not the self of Whitman exposed in the poem. Some readers might have understanding conflicts when reading Song of Myself.

In section 4, Walt Whitman writes:

Trippers and askers surround me,
People I meet, the effect upon me of my early life or the ward
and city I live in, or the nation,
The latest dates, discoveries, inventions, societies, authors old and
new,
My dinner, dress, associates, looks, compliments, dues,
The real or fancied indifference of some man or woman I love,
The sickness of one of my folks or of myself, or ill-doing or loss or
lack of money, or depressions or exaltations,
Battles, the horrors of fratricidal war, the fever of doubtful news,
the fitful events;
These come to me days and nights and go from me again,
But they are not the Me myself. (66-74)

Here comes my inquiry: why not? Why does Walt Whitman split some changeable parts from the self? If Walt Whitman tries to imply that those “fitful events” which do not last are not the self to him, the readers might wonder which part Walt Whitman assumes is the real self written in the poem Song of Myself.

Occasionally, it is difficult to tell what really belongs to Walt Whitman from what does not; the situation differs by the will of Walt Whitman himself. The poet tries to persuade the listeners that we are all the leaves of the beautiful green grass. But who can really assume what Walt Whitman assumes except Whitman himself?

Besides, the benevolent Good Gray Poet has his own preferences indeed. Near the end of section 23, Walt Whitman writes that he makes “short account of neuters and geldings, and favor men / and women fully equipt” (495). Nowadays,

the gender issue is more complicated than ever. The neuters, the cross-gendered people, the transsexuals, and the “geldings” all share the equal rights as other human beings. We all have our dignity to be what we are even without any of Walt Whitman’s account. The two sentences sound like sarcastically despising some minority groups in the society. It contradicts the atmosphere of democratic equality through Song of Myself. It is also weird to connect the encouraging context with such interrupting inconsiderate narration. Soon, in section 24, the poet writes sentences like “Whoever degrades another degrades me, / And whatever is done or said returns at last to me” (503-4). Comparing the section 23 and 24, we find that Walt Whitman’s self meets its crisis and the self becomes quite an ambiguity. In Song of Myself, the crises sometimes occur in the contradictory semantics in different sections of the poem or the ambiguous logics in certain paragraphs.

The critic Richard V. Chase wrote in Walt Whitman Reconsidered that “Whitman is full of irony, wit, and lyric realism. His poems are concerned with particularity, point of view, separation, and doubt. They are written by a poet who does not pretend that he lives in a totally cognizable world, who does not pretend to know himself except by ‘faint clues and indirections,’ whose pretensions to know himself are mocked, indeed, by an ironical other self. They are written by a poet who knows, after all, that the people and events around him ‘are not the Me myself’ and who carefully stands ‘both in and out of the game and watching and wondering at it’” (Chase 21). From this perspective, Whitman plays the game of contradiction; and Whitman deliberately accepts the binary opposition, Me and not-Me, into the self that has multitudes. In Song of Myself, the separation between Me and not-Me is nothing to fear because “everything is but a part” and these parts will always exist within the self harmoniously. The self will always survive. Therefore, we are no

longer common people but the poets who dare to contradict ourselves. These so-called contradictions are the evidence of our multitude and freedom. The self encompasses the contradiction and goes beyond it. The crisis of the self is then the turning point to set oneself free.

Sexuality is a crucial part in Whitman's Song of Myself. Walt Whitman, as one famous homosexual writer and poet, plays with sexuality through Song of Myself.

In section 2, Walt Whitman writes:

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

I am mad for it to be in contact with me. (19-20)

From the sentences above, the images show that Walt Whitman is in the woods and enjoys his body being barely embraced by the nature and as well as being touched by himself. It is like the ceremony held by the ritual of masturbation.

In section 3, Walt Whitman writes:

Urge and urge and urge,

Always the procreant urge of the world.

Out of the dimness opposite equals advance, always substance and
increase, always sex,

.....

I am satisfied—I see, dance, laugh, sing;

As the hugging and loving bed-fellow sleeps at my side through
the night, and withdraws at the peep of the day with
stealthy tread,

Leaving me baskets cover'd with white towels swelling the house
with their plenty,

Shall I postpone my acceptance and realization and scream at my eyes,
That they turn from gazing after and down the road,
And forthwith cipher and show me to a cent,
Exactly the value of one and exactly the value of two, and which
is ahead? (43-45, 59-65)

The paragraph above is from the 1881 edition of Song of Myself. In 1855's edition, Walt Whitman directly invites God to be the poet's loving bed-fellow who satisfies Walt Whitman to a full point. The sexual desire is clear; but to whom the sexual desire Whitman devotes is vague. We are not certain about it represents Walt Whitman's impulse towards divinity, or the desire for a female partner, or it expresses simply Walt Whitman's lust for a male sexual companion. In the last sentence, the poet offers the question for himself: is it better being alone or with someone else? My personal opinion is that every different person finds different life styles and we must make our life worth living by experiencing the life in our own way.

In section 5, Walt Whitman writes:

I mind how once we lay such a transparent summer morning,
How you settled your head athwart my hips and gently turn'd over
upon me,
And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your
tongue to my bare-strip heart,
And reach'd till you felt my beard, and reach'd till you held my feet.

Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge that
pass all the argument of the earth,
And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,

And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,
And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the
women my sisters and lovers,(87-94)

From this paragraph above, we sense the obscure passion of bisexuality, or the homosexual love under disguise. Walt Whitman's style is thus what literary critic Wolfgang Iser calls "overdetermined." That is to say such style of writing lends itself to widely various interpretations. Those memories in the section above are sweet and romantic, yet we do not know Walt Whitman was playing with a male, a female, or some neuter that Walt Whitman makes short account of.

In section 11, Walt Whitman describes the twenty-eight young men and the lonely woman behind the curtain. Though there is no direct description about sex in this section, it strongly implies the sexual fantasy of some delirious orgy for the lady behind the curtain and all the young men at the beach. What a lovely self! In section 21, Walt Whitman writes "Prodigal, you have given me love — therefore I to you give love! / O unspeakable passionate love"(446-47). These words also show the strong passion within Whitman's body and soul. And the person Walt Whitman desires is highly possible a male.

In section 24, Walt Whitman writes:

I do not press my fingers 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.

.....

Firm masculine colter it shall be you!
Whatever goes to tilth of me it shall be you!
You my rich blood! your milky stream pale strippings of my life!

Breast that presses against other breasts it shall be you!
 My brain it shall be your occult convolutions!
 Root of wash'd sweet flag! Timorous pond-snipe! Nest of guarded
 duplicate eggs! it shall be you!
 Mix'd tussled hay of head, beard, brawn, it shall be you!
 Trickling sap of maple, fibre of manly wheat, it shall be you!

 Something I cannot see puts upward libidinous prongs,
 Seas of bright juice suffuse heaven. (519-21, 530-37, 555-56)

These words above all indicate the lusty sexuality of Walt Whitman's self.

Those symbols of masculine organs represent the desire of homosexuality of the poet. He celebrates and adores it. Some images are clearly projected by the description of the genital cultivating in the self of the poet's body. From time to time, the image of sperm appears in Song of Myself. All the seeds of life and passion fulfill the self to a better status. Perhaps it is unnecessary for Whitman to clearly introduce the person he desires is male or female. It is the sex brings all the joy to the Good Gray Poet and to the self that Whitman is singing for.

In section 28, Walt Whitman writes:

Is this then a touch? quivering me to a new identity,
 Flames and ether making a rush for my veins,
 Treacherous tip of me reaching and crowding to help them,
 My flesh and blood playing out lightning to strike what is hardly
 differently from myself,
 On all sides prurient provokers stiffening my limbs,
 Straining the udder of my heart for its withheld drip,

Behaving licentious toward me, taking no denial,
Depriving me of my best as for a purpose,
Unbuttoning my clothes, holding me by the bare waist,
Deluding my confusion with the calm of the sunlight and pasture-
fields,
Immodestly sliding the fellow-senses away,
They bribed to swap off with touch and go and graze at the edges
of me,
No consideration, no regard for my draining strength or my anger,
Fetching the rest of the herd around to enjoy them a while,
Then all uniting to stand on a headland and worry me.

The sentries desert every other part of me,
They have left me helpless to a red marauder,
They all come to the headland to witness and assist against me.
I am given up by traitors,
I talk wildly, I have lost my wits, I and nobody else am the
greatest traitor,
I went myself first to the headland, my own hands carried me
there.

You villain touch! what are you doing? my breath is tight in its
throat,

Unclench your floodgates, you are too much for me. (619-41)

The whole section expresses a lively scene of sexuality. It is the identity of

Walt Whitman's self. The referents of the pronouns and metaphors are not clear and somehow we sense the strong passion from the sentences. The lines may represent Whitman's imagination of what it is like to be a woman. It may also represent the homosexual desire of the poet himself. Another vague aspect of this part is the unknown referents of the pronouns. Who are "they"? These sentences above project some possible images of group sex which might represent Whitman's fantasies of playing in the orgy. The passion is so strong that it is like the flood out of control and must be free from the gate of reason and body. By writing these joyful activities, is it some kind of "coming out" for Walt Whitman or is it merely a way to release his fantasy? It is another riddle we encounter in this poem.

In section 45, Walt Whitman writes:

My lovers suffocate me,
Crowding my lips, thick in the pores of my skin,
Jostling me through streets and public halls, coming naked to me
at night,(1171-73)

We do not know the lovers of Walt Whitman are males or females or both. The language of the poet is obscure and beautiful. From all the paragraphs above, we find the sexual orientation of the active poet leaping among homosexual, heterosexual, and bisexual. Sometimes, Whitman's frequently avoids the use of gender words can be a tactic to develop the multitudes of the self which allows him to treat sexual issues in the poetry to various interpretations and to make the poetry somehow androgynous. For some people, such uncertainty can be a great identity crisis both for the self of a human being and for the morality in society. We do not exactly know, by the poem Song of Myself, which gender(s) of Walt Whitman's lovers is/are; but probably for a loving poet, he accepts almost all the people around to

be his lovers. In Whitman's world, the gender of the self also has its multitudes.

Is Walt Whitman the poet who contradicts himself? The critic Gayle L. Smith says: "Any one who has spent much time with Whitman's poetry can attest to the fact that reading it can indeed be the "gymnast struggle" that Whitman says it should be in 'Democratic Vistas' sounding like a twentieth-century reader critic, he goes on to say that the reader 'must himself or herself construct indeed the poem, argument, history, metaphysical essay—the text furnishing the hints, the clue, the start or framework'. Few poems so self-consciously demand the efforts at creation that Song of Myself does, at least until its final sections. Yet in his 1855 Preface, Whitman had declared, 'I will not have in my writing any elegance or effect or originality to hang in the way between me and the rest like curtain. . . . What I experience or portray shall go from my composition without a shred of my composition. You shall stand by my side and look in the mirror with me' " (417-418). Whitman tries to make the projections of the world written down as a poem to create a new American canon for every woman and man. To this point of view, the freedom is limited and the plan is well designed by the poet. Robert E. Abrams is true when he finds that Whitman's style all through Leaves of Grass is far more "marked" and difficult than his Preface would imply. The readers somehow cannot always be that free to assume what they like to assume while reading Whitman's Song of Myself.

Moreover, Gayle L. Smith writes that "For all his (Whitman's) apparent attempts to depict unmediated reality, to allow the reader to see for himself, his practice and occasionally his commentary suggest that he did not really believe this to be possible, that he accepted, refined, and finally celebrated his own altering, shaping, simplifying role as poet" (Smith 170). In the most parts of Song of Myself, Whitman was devouring everything and everyone into the song of himself. And at

times he asks the readers to “travel it for yourself” and “find out for yourself.” In the end of the poem, Walt Whitman reassumes that we, the readers, participate his role as the poet himself. Do I know if the fish swimming in the river is happy? Am I able to exactly assume what Whitman assumes? Perhaps it is time for us to open our mind and to grasp the knowledge around from our personal insight. We all are the poets by nature. We shall not take any second-handed knowledge but to experience the world by ourselves. Then, we shall assume the wonderful things the Good Gray Poet assumes.

As one conclusion, Gayle L. Smith writes in “Reading Song of Myself: Assuming What Whitman Assumes”:

The drama of Song of Myself involves complex, subtly shifting relationships among poet, experience, text, and reader, played out at many linguistic levels. Were it not for these changes, syntactic, stylistic, and rhetorical, the poem might well prove too demanding and overwhelming for most readers. It is almost as if the poet tests his readers through the earlier sections of the poem, demanding a great deal but controlling the nature of the reader's participation. In order to make good sense of the passages characterized by elipsis, anaphoric references, and suspended sentence structures, the reader must follow the poet and follow carefully. What the reader follows is the poet in the process of making the poem out of the variegated stuff of experience, assuming many roles, using and then abandoning that which he seeks to know when it has served his purpose. Like the teacher he says he is, however, the poet comes to afford more and more independence to the reader, stating himself more plainly, more arguably,

confessing his purpose to create "this song," and, finally, "bequeathing" himself not merely to the dirt but to the poets of the future. Now we can interpret Whitman's early challenge to the reader, "What I assume you shall assume" in two different ways. The grammar of approximately the first forty sections of the poem demands that we make the same assumptions the poet does, merely to make sense of the poem, line by line. By the end of the poem, however, we are invited to assume the role of the poet. (Smith 172)

Nowadays, more and more critics directly describe Walt Whitman as one gay poet and they find the tense and ambiguity in Walt Whitman's poem as well as in his identification. Nick Selby writes in his book The Poetry of Walt Whitman to say that:

More recently, critical debate about Whitman's sexuality has been used as a means of reevaluating his contribution to American poetry, as well as of opening up wider-reaching investigation into the ideological conditions of Whitman's America (and, interestingly, of the particular critic's own perspective). One of the first full scale studies to tackle head-on the fraught question of Whitman's sexuality and its relationship to his poetry was Roger Asselineau in his massive doctoral dissertation L'Évolution de Walt Whitman (1954). . . . Asselineau argues that Whitman's homosexuality is central to an understanding of his poetry. Whitman's poetry, Asselineau contends, emerges directly out of his struggle with his own homosexual desires. In fairly classic Freudian terms, then, Whitman's poetic impulse sublimates his homosexual desire into an act of aesthetic compensation. Asselineau

claims therefore that the turbulent passions of the poems are the product of Whitman's deeply repressed sexual drives. This leads Asselineau to a detailed and complex examination of the tensions and instabilities of Whitman's poetry, and furnishes us with a picture of Whitman as a profoundly troubled and fraught poet. Clearly this is a far cry from the simplistic image of Whitman as poet of American optimism and openness that was still – in the 1950s – begin propounded amongst critics and general readers alike. (Selby 116-17)

What exactly we should assume about Walt Whitman's sexual orientation? Should we understand him as merely a gay writer, a homosexual poet? Though Roger Asselineau tends to simplify the poetry of Whitman as the manifestation of the repressed homosexual impulse, I hold a different attitude. I believe that Walt Whitman's Song of Myself is dedicated for everyone. Heterosexual people may understand the beauty of Whitman's poetry as well as homosexual people. The segregation among the different sexual orientations sometimes causes the hindrance for the reader to intuitively realize the poem by oneself. Those so-called identification approach or literary theories will not offer the meaning to poetry. It might offer a new perspective, however, to my personal point of view, it needs poetical imagination to touch a poem. Therefore, it is the person with mind to appreciate the beauty of Whitman's Song of Myself, not a homosexual or a heterosexual. If Whitman claims himself as "the poet of the woman the same as the man," it is rational to say that Whitman is also the poet of the heterosexual the same as the homosexual, even bisexual. From the book The Homosexual Tradition in American Poetry in 1979, Robert K. Martin provocatively relates the poetry of Whitman to homosexuality; what is told in the book implies a partial implication that

only homosexual readers can fully understand Whitman's poetry. The critic Nick Selby responds that "such a critical methodology it is not at all clear what Whitman's poetry might offer to heterosexual readers, both male and female, or even lesbian readers. Martin's reductiveness is troubled by at least two ironies that reflect upon the ways we approach reading Whitman. First, by implying that only homosexual readers can (or, indeed, have) *really* understood Whitman's message, Martin all but dismisses a history of powerful and important readings of Whitman by heterosexuals. . . . A second irony lies in the fact that, of course, Whitman himself would simply not have understood the term 'homosexual'. . . . Martin's 'homosexual tradition', with Whitman as its representative starting point, is an ideological product of late-twentieth, rather than nineteenth-century, America" (Selby 123-24).

We human beings have many different identities to be named and be given. We seldom offer ourselves a chance to have a look at our inner side. Some people have serious problems in dealing all these conflicts and meet their identity crises. I myself have such crises for several times during my life. If homosexuality is the only methodology to exam Whitman's literary works, taking Song of Myself for example, we might have to re-exam all the literary works in the world. For those authors who did not announce themselves as heterosexuals are all possible the hidden Whitman. Is it worth while investigating? I do not have the answer. I want to return to the basic question: what is a human being? If a heterosexual doesn't have to come out of her/his closet by shouting herself/himself a heterosexual, why we push the people with different sexual orientations to stand up and be questioned? A heterosexual may be a homosexual in ten years and then his/her identity of sexuality will be bisexual. These identities are not fixed but can be differently interpreted from different perspectives and different time.

In “Homosexual Sign” Harold Beaver has cogently analyzed the term homosexuality:

“Homosexuality” is not a name for a preexistent “thing,” but part of a network of developing language, on the model of “male/female,” “man/beast,” “child/adult.” By the nineteenth century the matrimonial model needed, it seems, and so created its nonmarital counterpart in a seemingly unmotivated, non-procreative, complementary form called “perverse.” At the same time industrial society compounded the conceptual dualism of the child/adult relationship by inventing a further non-procreative, seemingly unmotivated sexual stage called “adolescence.” Neither term was so much descriptive as it was a prescriptive self-definition of an ever-narrowing, exclusively matrimonial culture. Just as the adolescence was neither wholly a child nor an adult, so the homosexual was neither wholly male nor female. (Beaver 103)

A person should be treated as a person; all the names of identities are the given signifiers, heterosexuality and homosexuality for example, to describe the world of phenomenon. One identity is merely a part of the individual, the self. Among all these different identities, a person is a being of wholeness, integrated with body and soul. It would be too shallow if we simply label someone as “homosexual” something then stops there. We are human beings with life and love. We are not machines with names and functions. We have a purpose to live like everything else. (For Whitman, everything has a purpose.) The quality of human value does not change no matter one is a homosexual, heterosexual, or a bisexual. In history, we finds many good homosexual writers as well as the heterosexual ones. The sexual

orientation is not a hindrance for a person to be great. Though we meet the conflicts of identity now and then, we will not stop looking for the true color of the self.

How to solve the problems of identity crises and contradiction? In one letter to Benjamin Bailey, the great English poet John Keats mentioned that “I have never yet been able to perceive how any thing can be known for truth by consecutive reasoning. . . if a sparrow come before my window I take part in its existence and pick about the gravel”(Keats 493). In another letter to George and Thomas Keats, John Keats wrote “The excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with beauty and truth . . . I mean negative capabilities, that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysterious, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason” (Keats 494). In one letter to Richard Woodhouse, John Keats wrote “As to the poetical Character itself . . . it is not itself—it has no self—it is every thing and nothing—it has no character—it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated . . . It does not harm from its relish of the dark side of things any more than from its taste for the bright one; because they both end in speculation. A poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity—he is continually in for—and filling some other Body—the Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women” (Keats 494). Here we sense John Keats’ philosophy: the beauty of poetry is beyond the ordinary reasoning or speculation. To appreciate the beauty of poetry is somehow like the process of imagination and abstraction. Therefore, a poet must possess the “negative capability” when confronting the clash between fact and poetic beauty. When Walt Whitman has everything existing in the universe into the self to be a harmonious song, John Keats declares that a poet has no identity in order to be everything. A poet is at

ease leaping in the world of nothing and everything at the same time. So what we think as self-contradictory is beautiful and natural for the poet as Walt Whitman or John Keats.

By Walt Whitman's ideology, we may have multitudes and we also can be an independent cosmos which connects each other. Compassion is one way to solve Walt Whitman's identity crises in Song of Myself. Through all the empathic experiences, Walt Whitman himself turns to be the prisoners, the sick, the wounded, and even the leaves of grass. Walt Whitman makes himself an integrated cosmos to unite all the existing identities by one articulate delicious song. In this cosmos, body coexists with soul; everything shares the merit of equality. The Good Gray Poet respects time and reality. Whether it is something happened or is happening or will happen, it is the case of lucky rhythm. Walt Whitman gains the multitudes of the self by being what is and what is not simultaneously. It is the poetic character. We can look at a vase from millions angles and infinite perspectives. The vase itself is still there. By empathic experience, there is no distinction between the viewer and the vase, nor the boundary between the object and the subject. We must see the picture of wholeness by our inner mind. We must not look to the world from others' opinions; we must look to the world by ourselves. Since every different element is part of the poet, a "Kosmos", therefore things represented in this phenomenon world are the various dimensions of the self, a beautiful song. It is the song of equality as well as of life. The self of Whitman is actually the All without segregation. As to the so-called sexuality problem, it is not a problem to Walt Whitman either. How do we translate our emotions and why do we have to tell love when love itself is the self-evident truth? The love of the poet is universal. The love of Whitman is passionate and sacred. John Keats says "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever". (Keats

55) It is the joy for the poets, the lovers, the heterosexuals, the homosexuals, the bisexuals, and the self. It is also the love for the people, for the children, for the grass, for America, for the mothers, for the neuters, for the genitals, and for the sex. The joy and love echo each other in the Song of Myself.

In section 51, Walt Whitman writes:

The past and present wilt—I have fill'd them, emptied them,
And proceed to fill my next fold of the future.

Listener up there! what have you to confide to me?

Look in my face while I snuff the sidle of evening,

(Talk honestly, no one else hears you, and I stay only a minute
longer.)

Do I contradict myself?

Very well then I contradict myself,

(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

I concentrate toward them that are nigh, I wait on the door-slab.

Who has done his day's work? who will soonest be through with
his supper?

Who wishes to walk with me?

Will you speak before I am gone? will you prove already too late?

(1319-30)

The multitudes of Walt Whitman cannot be compared with God. The

speaker's union with himself leads to a awareness of his unity with God and others. Everything the poet touches become divine and "the spirit of God is the elder brother of my own." The God is friendly to humankind and no longer a distant judgment-giver. The God is part of the self in this poem. In Song of Myself, Walt Whitman elevates the self to the supreme state and the Whitman does lightly mock the priests by mentioning his not laughing at them. The love of self, realized through the acceptance of the body, leads to the love of human-like God and a view of everyone around as brothers and sisters. Such poetical abstraction also leads the poet recognizing himself in the natural objects as the grass; it provides the poet with an awareness that results in his identification with the objects of nature. Unlike the dominating and controlling Christian God, the optimistic self that Walt Whitman celebrates in Song of Myself is free and is filled everywhere. The self of the poet accepts the multiple identities manifested in soul and body and love them. In some respect, we can say that the child is a god, and so is the grass. For all the contradictions within the identities, Walt Whitman accepts them all. Actually, there needs no correction or solution for the identity crises we mentioned above for all the so-called crises are contained within the multitudes of the self. The beautiful song goes on as reason and love and life goes on. The compassion and the contradiction unite the symphony of the self.

In section 48, Walt Whitman writes:

I have said that the soul is not more than the body,
And I have said that the body is not more than the soul,
And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is,
And whoever walks a furlong without sympathy walks to his own
funeral drest in his shroud.

And I or you pocketless of a dime may purchase the pick of the
earth,
And to glance with an eye or show a bean in its pod confounds
the learning of all times,
And there is no trade or employment but the young man following
it may become a hero,
And there is no object so soft but it makes a hub for the wheel'd
universe,
And I say to any man or woman, Let your soul stand cool and
composed before a million universes. (1269-77)

Walt Whitman sings for equality and sympathy to mend the identity crisis by some degree. It is such compassionate love brings the self to a harmonious state. No one is dismissed or ignored. It is the song of the All and the song of every individual being. In this song, Whitman asks questions as “what is the grass? What is reason? What is love? What is life?” and he does not try to answer them in a direct way. We can reach millions of different definitions for those questions. Still, Walt Whitman sings the Song of Myself and is content with everything around. He sings with a language of silence and he frankly declares there is no need to be curious about God. For those who have passed away will always resurrect by Whitman’s words.

In section 5, Whitman says:

What do you think has become of the young and old men?

And what do you think has become of the women and children?

They are alive and well somewhere,

The smallest sprout shows there is really no death,

And if ever there was it led forward life, and does not wait at the
end to arrest it,

And ceas'd the moment life appear'd." (123-28)

Life is an eternal process of becoming. And total extinction is unthinkable for Walt Whitman. Death does not prevent the beauty of life and it may be "luckier" than we suppose. The self is the eternal life, a cosmos. We are the universe of multitudes. We are ourselves a perfection here and now.

Walt Whitman believes that the self is of the same essence as the universal spirit. He believes that true knowledge is to be acquired not through the senses of the intellect, but through union with the Self. The true knowledge is available to every man and woman. Those so-called identity crises we mentioned are never a problem to Walt Whitman. Walt Whitman is Chuang Tzu, the Taoism philosopher melts himself into the Nature, of the western society. The empathic experiences are beyond words and reasoning. Walt Whitman empathizes the world around and celebrates himself into the vast nature and accepts the All to be good and happy. In Section 44, Whitman writes "I do not call one greater and one smaller, / That which fills its period and place is equal to any. . . . I am an acme of things accomplish'd, and I an encloser of things / to be" (1142-43, 1148). We may hardly find all the different multitudes within ourselves. We will change and we could be wrong. And the self is nevertheless beautiful and good. The self is like a whole-spreading picture unfolding as it should. A poem is to disclose the secret of life. It is a joy for ever. What matters is that one day we will realize the song of ourselves and encounter the Good Gray Poet in the end. We may not really see him though he says that he would stop somewhere waiting for us. The journey is a joy and we never feel disappointed whether we see Walt Whitman or not. We are all the children of the universe, the

leaves of the grass. Walt Whitman who contradicts himself is actually the one who realizes himself. The accomplishment is an eternal pilgrimage going on and on.

We must sing together and enjoy the journey with Walt Whitman.

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,

And what I assume you shall assume,

For every atom belonging to me as good as belongs to you. (1-3)



Conclusion

Walt Whitman praises the self in his famous poem Song of Myself. Here he assumes that this self already contains the other, whatever is outside of it—other people, the natural world, the cosmos; one's own society, culture, nation but also the whole world. The self then includes all dualities—body and soul, male and female, human and divine, life and death. This is a plural self, a locus of multiple identities, and in his long poem Whitman lists or catalogues the various emotions, desires, people, animals, aspects of everyday American life and historical events that he has himself directly experienced or “taken into himself.” This vast and self-completed, self-integrated cosmic self is then multi-dimensional, a kind of chaotic mixture, yet it is also the process of its own becoming, and as such is part of the cosmic process of becoming or desire. “I do not talk of the beginnings or the end,” the speaker says, but only of the “Urge and urge and urge, / Always the procreant urge of the world.”

Here the author will look at this all-encompassing self more specifically as a self of multiple identities, that is, as the multiple processes through which we identify (know, understand) ourselves. Thus we may identify ourselves as natural and physical but also as cosmic and divine beings, as bodies-and-souls; we may identify ourselves in terms of the society, culture and nation to which we “belong” and also in terms of the “world”; and we may identify ourselves in terms of what we feel is our own psychological and biological nature, including our sense of sexual orientation and gender identity, where now subsuming the duality means containing both genders. At each level various dualities are subsumed into Whitman's conception of the “universal self,” but at the level of the individual this means self-integration, a sense of completeness and harmony. The song the poet sings so eloquently is after all the song of every individual, not just in Whitman's own expanding nation but in the

world.

If Whitman's universal self is a plural self, a self containing many dimensions and multiple identities, then insofar as these identities are all integrated within the single whole of the Self we could also say that this self is love. For love is the force of integration, of unification. This is clear at the end of Dante's Paradiso, where the poet feels "my will and my desire impelled / by the Love that moves the sun and the other stars," and also near the end of Freud's Beyond the Pleasure Principle, where "Eros" is seen as the force of integration and combination—in sexual intercourse but also in the growth of the mother's egg into a human embryo—and "Thanatos" (the death-drive) as the force of disintegration or dissolution. Life is a vast encompassing unity and, like the force of Love or Eros that drives it, life even encompasses death which, Whitman tells us, "ceas'd the moment life appear'd"(128). To know this is to know the secret of our existence.

We sense love through the material world of the body but also through the spiritual world of the soul. Love is not divided but is multiple in its dimensions. It is male, female, homosexual, bisexual, heterosexual; it is a child who wonders, a mother who gives and nurtures, a great nation, an unfolding universe. Love is sexual inasmuch as it is also an integration or unification of two, of the god and goddess. As such love is also the mysterious self-enveloping process of creation, the "procreant urge of the world" that never begins or ends but is always happening, in each moment. All living identities are manifested in love and each identity itself is a spontaneity, a momentary spark of being and life. We are all of us free and bright, our song the song of body-and-soul, male-and-female, life-and-death, the never-yet-begun, never-to-be- concluded song of love.

The plural self in Walt Whitman's Song of Myself is the self with multiple

identities. The self represents the identities of body and soul; woman and man; heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual; individual, nation, and cosmos. With Song of Myself, Whitman offers a beautiful melody of the self to express what reason is, what love is, and what life is. It is not a song for Whitman only but for all the others. We all are the earth's wondering children, proliferating like leaves of grass. We are all part of the self. We are love. How do we translate the meaning of love? Life is like a journey stretching ahead and we have to look for its meaning by ourselves. Along this journey, Walt Whitman will remain my good companion. I would like to conclude the thesis with a poem I wrote by myself:

The Self is a Song of Love

Will I see you out there my dearest Good Gray Poet?

Your song inspires my life.

I am willing to follow.

Yet you tell me: you must travel for yourself.

Where to reach the boundless self?

How to see the true face beyond a thousand masks?

I assume what the child assumes, with no doubt.

The leaves are our face and the grass is the self,

The unspeakable mysterious self.

You show me your body and your soul,

Marvelous and delicious!

I embrace my dear You in return.

No one realizes the secret of sex unless one truly loves.

Our multiple-gendered souls twist the self into one.

The passion! The joy!

The present is always the best to come.

You send a kiss by wind and fare me well.

Prepared not, I fell into great despair.

Still, loss is a peculiar joy lasting for ever.

Would we be together again?

Could we be as happy as we used to be?

How do I tell my name when I need none?

You indeed know me well.

I give my all to you, the sweet land of peace and liberty.

You are the life of my living purpose,

You are the soul of my eternal living soil.

Independence is thy face.

Love is thy reality, my sweet Formosa.

The poet walking in the street is I.

The wind playing in the forest is I.

The one who is making love is I.

The infinite mystery is I.

My love, you are what I am.

I am the nation forgotten and abandoned.

The cosmos we ever stayed is gone, silently.

There is no way to save the best for the last.

I as well forget the joyful tone.

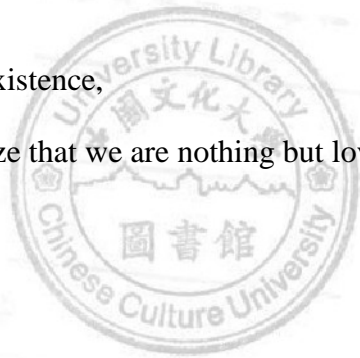
We shall sing again in the invisible corner.

We shall love again and compromise all the contradiction.

We are love.

Till the end of existence,

Will we recognize that we are nothing but love.



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