UNIWERSYTET ŁÓDZKI

ACTA UNIVERSITATIS LODZIENSIS

FOLIA LITTERARIA

7

1982

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Wydanie I. Nakład 300+70 egz. Ark. wyd. 11,0.
Ark. druk. 14,0. Papier kl. V, 70 g, 70x100.
Zam. 139/894/82. F-4. Cena zł 110,-

Druk wykonano w Pracowni Poligraficznej
Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego

ISSN 0208-6085

PREFACE

The present study developed out of my unhesitating though by no means original recognition that the work of Dickinson and Whitman is the best there is in American poetry of the nineteenth century. From a historian's point of view, the fact that the two artists lived in approximately the same time and that both occupy major positions in the history of American poetry may be considered sufficient ground for a comparative study. Their sharing more or less the same historical and geographical space must have led to facing similar intellectual and aesthetic issues. Yet the relationship between Whitman and Dickinson has always seemed much more disturbing than the merely historical approach could justify.

Their names were brought together early. Already in 1891 Arlo Bates connected Dickinson with Whitman, and his argument was supported five years later by Rupert Hughes. Since then the association resurfaced consistently until in the introductory chapter of Harold Bloom's book on Wallace Stevens, published in 1977, Whitman and Dickinson figure as archetypes of "American poetic stances". Surprisingly, except for Albert Gelpi's exquisitely sensitive chapters in "The Tenth Muse. The Psyche of the American Poet" and Karl Keller's rather perfunctory section on Whitman and Dickinson in "The Only Kangaroo Among the Beauty. Emily Dickinson and America", no extensive comparative study of the two poets has been produced. I offer to fill the gap, somewhat daringly perhaps considering my remote linguistic background.

My approach is via Emerson. In the light of the scholarly work on American Romanticism since Matthiessen's "American Renaissance", such approach scarcely needs apology or even explanation. The debt of each of the poets to Emerson has been

pointed out and argued for, although more remains to be done, especially in the case of Dickinson. In the book on "Emerson and the Orphic Poet in America" R. A. Yoder gives what seems to me the most concise and clear outline of the Emersonian background of the two poets. While Emerson's inclusiveness stands behind the opposition of Whitman's public to Dickinson's private concerns, it also remains a source of their convergence. Like Emerson, the two younger artists structured their poetic experience by "the recognition of ME and NOT ME". Thus, they moved between "the hope of Orphic apocalypse" and the predicament of the mind "unable to pierce an inch into the central truth of nature" (p. 175).

My purpose is to investigate comparatively "the structure of each poet's imagination", to use Northrop Frye's helpful phrase, and to indicate some of the aesthetic consequences of their diverging responses to essentially one vision - that of the central consciousness, of the artist's mind as solely responsible for organizing the universe. The notion of the central consciousness, which I propose as my key, naturally associates with Henry James' postulate of a central intelligence as the organizing center of a work of art. The similarity lies in the recognition that it is the perceiving consciousness which ultimately structures what it perceives. The difference is that James treats such a central consciousness primarily as a compositional device, a principle of unity. It is this but also much more for both Whitman and Dickinson. For them the significance of the recognition remains first of all philosophical. If individual consciousness alone structures experience, the artist must become a quester for order - aesthetic of course, but more vitally - existential and metaphysical. The self thus appears as the main protagonist in the drama of the quest which makes the poem.

In the course of work I became indebted to many scholars who explored the territory earlier. Only a few can be mentioned. Albert Gelpi's analysis of "Song of Myself" and of Dickinson's poems in "The Tenth Muse" provided most needed encouragement, for his conclusions, though reached by an entire-

ly different method, corroborate my own. John Lynen's article "Three Uses of the Present: The Historian's, the Critic's and Emily Dickinson's" proved congenial and inspiring in its comparison of Whitman's and Dickinson's concept of time. Lawrence Buell's "Literary Transcendentalism. Style and Vision in the American Renaissance" remains my ideal of scholarly erudition and clarity of presentation. Among the monograph studies of Whitman, Gay Wilson Allen's work in toto was invaluable, as any student of Whitman knows. Howard Waskow's "Whitman: Explorations in Form" proved both stimulating and helpful. No Dickinson scholar can leave the debt to T. H. Johnson unacknowledged and, although his dating of the poems may be only roughly accurate, a more reliable chronology is not at the moment available. Neither can any serious work proceed without Jay Leyda's "The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson" and Richard Sewall's biography. As for practical criticism of Dickinson's poetry, I am grateful for Charles Anderson's, David Porter's and Robert Weisbuch's work. Roland Hagenbüchle's penetrating articles clarified many insights of my own. From the list of indispensable tools the concordances: Edwin Harold Eby's to Whitman and S. P. Rosenbaum's to Dickinson should not be omitted.

My more immediately personal debts are equally numerous. I cannot hope to put into words the gratitude I owe my family but I would like to thank friends and colleagues both in Europe and America who cheerfully xeroxed articles, sent books, invited me to poetry symposiums, answered my letters, generally encouraged me and particularly offered their homes and hospitality when I needed a larger library than I could find in Poland. Moreover, I incurred a debt to friends and colleagues who read the manuscript which can only be appreciated by those who themselves had profited from such services of friendship and knowledge. And, last but not least, the University of Łódź granted a timely leave of absence as well as assisted me financially. The book but inadequately testifies to much help, generosity and sympathetic interest on both sides of the Atlantic.

ABBREVIATIONS

Identified by the volume and page number (e.g. I, 88) are quotations from "The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson", Boston 1903-1904 (The Centenary Edition).

The notation LG followed by the page number and lines refers to "Leaves of Grass", Comprehensive Reader's Edition.

Dickinson's poems, quoted from "The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson" (1 vol.), ed. T. H. Johnson, Boston - Toronto 1960, are identified by their numbers in the Variorum Edition.

C - The Correspondence of Walt Whitman (6 vols), ed. E. H. Miller, 1961-1977.

CW E. A. Poe - The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe (3 vols), ed. Th. O. Mabbott, 1969.

D - The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman. Daybooks and Notebooks (3 vols), ed. W. White, 1978.

J - The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson (14 vols), ed. W. H. Gilman et al., 1960,

L - The Letters of Emily Dickinson (3 vols), eds. T. H. Johnson, T. Ward, 1958.

Letters - The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson (6 vols), ed. R. L. Rusk, 1939.

PW - The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman. Prose Works (2 vols), ed. F. Stovall, 1963.

Slater - The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle, ed. J. Slater, 1964.

Traubel - H. Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden.

UPP - The Uncollected Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman (2 vols), ed. E. Holloway, 1921.

Chapter I

WHITMAN, DICKINSON AND AMERICAN LITERARY INDIVIDUALISM

I

Since F. O. Matthiessen's monumental work[1] it has become a critical commonplace to say that American literature really begins in "the age of Emerson". Charles Feidelson has shown further how American artists of the period moved beyond the literary practices of contemporary Europe to usher in modes of expression characteristic of modern literature. They "anticipated modern symbolism because they lived in the midst of the same intellectual forces; mid-nineteenth century America was a proving ground for the issues to which the method of modern literature is an answer. They envisaged the symbolistic program to an extent that few of their English contemporaries ever thought possible..."[2]

Nevertheless, the student of American Romantic poetry finds his position somewhat embarassing since he must claim preeminence for the figures whose significance for their own times is problematic. Although Emerson enjoyed considerable popularity and, more importantly, exerted a profound influence upon his contemporaries, neither Whitman nor Dickinson were major forces in defining the aesthetic climate of their times.

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[1] F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance. Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman, London - New York, 1941.

[2] C. Feidelson, Symbolism and American Literature, Chicago 1953, p. 75-76.

Whitman's case is well known; his gigantic ambition and pathetic efforts at self-publicity seem only to have increased the bitter uncertainty of his later years. Dickinson, apart from a handful of poems, did not publish at all during her lifetime: so, in a sense, her work did not belong to her times. The contemporary poetic scene was unquestionably dominated by Longfellow, widely read and admired on both sides of the Atlantic.

Yet today Longfellow seems a poet of mostly historical importance, almost comparable in his fate to Freneau or Bryant. His affinity with the previous generation of American Romantics is also indicated by the title "the American Tennyson" often bestowed on him in analogy to the labels "American Wordsworth" or "American Walter Scott" given to Bryant and Cooper. Inaccurate critical shortcuts - as they are, these labels yet signal that the artists they sought to describe had looked back to an established way of writing and that an unambiguous derivative strain ran through their works. It is only too easy to speak of Whitman's poems as a concoction of assorted philosophical and political ideas expressed in the rhetoric of itinerant gospel preachers, but no unequivocal label of the sort mentioned above could be attached to his name. The very multiplicity of his alleged sources ranging from the neoplatonists to Hegel, to Italian opera and the Eastern religions puts in question the crucial significance of any of them. D. Mirsky expressed something of the bewildered attitude of an European intellectual facing the paradox of Whitman when he wrote in 1935:

> The individual quality of Whitman's poetry derives in good part from the strange and even weird combination that we find in it of originality and inspired daring, in a choice of themes never before treated by poets, with a provincial naivete that is utterly incapable of beholding itself through the eyes of others. Out of this provincialism comes a break with the culture of the past and the poet's obstinate depiction of himself as prophet and preacher. Such a provincialism obviously tinged by and akin to religious sectarianism, enabled Whitman to build up out of the illusions of American democracy a system which to him presented the same appearance as had that historic order which was based upon the religions of the past. If on the one hand Whitman is a brother spirit to Dante and Goethe, his other affinities would include such individuals as Brigham

Young, leader of the Mormon sect, and the founder of Christian Science Mrs. Eddy[3].

It was, of course, not the quality of his sources that made Whitman such an outstanding phenomenon. The difference between Longfellow's eclecticism and that of Whitman or Emerson cannot be explained by referring to the materials they had utilized but must be viewed in the context of their Weltanschauung and the aesthetic formulas developed to accomodate the vision.

Although Longfellow, Whitman and Dickinson were born within the span of little more than two decades (Longfellow in 1807, Whitman in 1819 and Dickinson in 1830), anthologies of modern American poetry, if they include the nineteenth century, begin with selections from Whitman and Dickinson[4], never from Longfellow. The dividing line of relevance for our own times seems firmly established between Longfellow and the two younger poets. Longfellow does belong to a different phase of American Romanticism and has more in common with Washington Irving than with either Whitman or Dickinson. Underlying his effort to give America its "usable" literary past (very much like Washington Irving's attempt in "The Sketch Book") in such poems as "Evangeline" (1847), "The Song of Hiawatha" (1855), "The Courtship of Miles Standish" (1858), or "The New England Tragedies" (1868) was a negative assessment of the native resources: the conviction that America lacked elements so important that no compensation by assets available on the spot was possible. If the United States was to have any literature of respectable standards, the artist had no choice but to import what was missing and graft it upon the texture of American life. Longfellow's conception of the American artist's role corresponds to the "negative" stage

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[3] D. M i r s k y, Poet of American Democracy, [in:] G. W. A l l e n (ed.), Walt Whitman Abroad, Syracuse, N. Y. 1955; rpt. F. M u r p h y (ed.), Walt Whitman, Harmondsworth 1969, p. 238-239.

[4] See e. g. R. E l l m a n n, R. O'C l a i r (eds.), The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry, New York 1973, p. 33.

of American Romanticism which seldom seems interesting to a critic today, except historically. Having as yet no sense of native values on which to base, American artists were first of all engaged in testing the relevance and adaptability of transatlantic impulses:

> Throughout the ante-bellum decades American artists were thus obliged by the influx of foreign books constantly to assess the relevance of dominant European practices to the American scheme. Through this process they formulated, as it were, a kind of negative definition of American literature; through it they were able to see what American literature might be by perceiving first of all what it could not and should not be. [...] The next desideratum was to discover American counterparts to which the imagination could legitimately respond[5].

Thus evaluates B. T. Spencer in "The Quest for Nationality. An American Literary Campaign"; in two chapters dealing with the period 1815-1860: "Transatlantic Realignments" (III) and "Cisatlantic Impulses" (IV), the author throws light on two processes continuing within American Romanticism: one - of sifting and selecting compatible European directives, the other - of tapping and assessing the native resources. The two processes were parallel in time and simultaneously came to a climax in what was aptly called "the flowering of New England"[6]. In American Romantic poetry, the work of Longfellow crowns the one while that of Whitman and Dickinson brings to fulfilment the other. We only need to remind ourselves that "The Song of Hiawatha" and "Leaves of Grass" came out in print in the same year. The important difference is that the poetry of Longfellow appears now an end product while that of Whitman and Dickinson constitutes both a peak and a new beginning.

Longfellow could draw from any corner of European literary tradition because he believed that in doing so he was on the one hand alleviating the poverty of American tradition, and, on the

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[5] B. T. S p e n c e r, The Quest for Nationality. An American Literary Campaign, Syracuse, N. Y. 1957, p. 89-90.

[6] The title of Van Wyck Brooks' book (1936).

other, reestablishing the sadly thin connection between the European heritage and his native culture. He spent his creative energy adding all he could to what must have seemed to him an almost empty store of American literary tradition, for his idea of culture was that of accretion. Culture, and literature with it, was a sort of treasury of accumulated values which it was each generation's duty to enrich. Mellowed by years and perhaps by the memory of Longfellow's kind visit, Whitman himself expressed understanding for the brahmin poet's aims: "I shall only say what I have heard Longfellow himself say, that ere the New World can be worthily original, and announce herself and her own heroes, she must be well saturated with the originality of others, and respectfully consider the heroes that lived before Agamemnon" (PW, 284)[7].

The liberating essence of Emerson's idea of culture was that he conceived of it as an emanation of the inner wealth of the individual. Where Longfellow thought the individual and society famished without a rich cultural tradition and considered such tradition essential for the nourishment of man's inner life, Emerson reduced the role of a cultural heritage to that of a catalyst useful only in releasing creative energies. Stimulated properly, man would proceed to build his own world, his own culture. Instead of relying on the resources accumulated in the past, everyone must build his own system of values: instead of adding to the treasury of literature, each generation must rewrite it for itself[8].

It is difficult to overestimate Emerson's role as "the liberating god" of national expression for with the publication of "Nature" (1836), "Essays" (1841), "Essays: Second Series" (1844) and "Poems" (1847), he certainly assisted in the birth of what today appears the classic period of American literature. He set

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[7] Longfellow visited Whitman most probably in the summer of 1879. See H. T r a u b e l, With Walt Whitman in Camden, vol I, New York 1908, p. 129, and G. W. A l l e n, The Solitary Singer, New York 1955, p. 486.

[8] See also chapter "The Failure of the Fathers" [in:] Q. A n d e r s o n, The Imperial Self, New York 1971, p. 3-58.

the American artist free from the subtly enslaving, humiliating power of the past when he declared: "Each age, it is found, must write its own books; or rather each generation for the next succeeding. The books of an older period will not fit this [...]. They are for nothing but to inspire" (I, 88). He laid foundations for a new concept of the literary form when he shifted emphasis from the perfection of the finished objet d'art to the redeeming value of the creative process: "Yet hence arises a grave mischief. The sacredness which attaches to the act of creation, the act of thought, is transferred to the record. The poet chanting, was felt to be a divine man: henceforth the chant is divine also. The writer was a just and wise spirit: henceforward it is settled, the book is perfect; as love of the hero corrupts into worship of his statue. Instantly, the book becomes noxious: the guide is a tyrant" (I, 88-89). Finally, and most basically, he helped the American artist to accept his surroundings as adequate nourishment for his art. "The American Scholar" implies no sense of handicap; on the contrary, it firmly asserts the American artist's resources: nature, books and the active life. While advising caution in the use of books for "genius is always sufficiently the enemy of genius by over-influence" (I, 91), the essay praises unreservedly the influence of untamed nature which Washington Irving wanted so desperately to "civilize" by filling it with legendary figures; it advocates the artist's engagement in the busy daily life whose materialistic narrowness offended Cooper. Throughout the essay Emerson demonstrates how ample the native influences are, yet he only mentions these three elements. But, and this is the crux of the matter, nature, books and the daily life was all there was for the American artist to fall back upon. That he could do so without a sense of privation was Emerson's concern and merit.

In 1831 Edgar Allan Poe wrote "Israfel" - a poem which is permeated with the feeling of frustration at the wide gap dividing the artist's ambition from his actual achievement. Disappointment seemed to Poe inevitable since the artist remained bound to a reality which was neither ideal nor even challenging.

Yes, Heaven is thine: but this
Is a world of sweets and sours;
Our flowers are merely - flowers,
And the shadow of thy perfect bliss
Is the sunshine of ours.

If I could dwell
Where Israfel
Hath dwelt, and he where I,
He might not sing so wildly well
A mortal melody,
While a bolder note than this might swell
From my lyre within the sky.

(CW E. A. Poe, I, 174-175)

Whitman's commitment to the American scene needs no demonstration. But the recluse Dickinson shares Emerson's program as well when she comes to deal with her cultural situation:

The Robin's my Criterion for Tune -
Because I grow - where Robins do -
[...]
Without the Snow's Tableau
Winter were lie - to me -
Because I see - New Englandly -
The Queen, discerns like me -
Provincially -

(285, c. 1861)

Like Poe, Emily Dickinson recognizes the artist's bond with her surroundings. The speaker of this poem, however, does not feel deprived or even limited as she notes what her particular environment has to offer: robins, buttercups, nuts in October and snows in winter - nature's bounty provided by the changing seasons. Taking full cognizance, and so possession of her world makes the speaker a queen in her province, equal to the British monarch. The difference is perhaps one of the extent of power but not of essence. The provincialism which Mirsky points to has been made into an aesthetic program as it was earlier made into a religious and political one[9].

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[9] See also S. B e r c o v i t c h, The Puritan Origins of the American Self, New Haven-London 1975, and A. S a l s k e, Wczesna poezja amerykańska na tle dążenia do niepodległości, Łódź 1972.

It is perhaps of some interest to learn that in 1827, the aging Goethe urged the Americans to create their own literature along Emersonian lines:

> Amerika, du hast es besser
> Als unser Kontinent, das alte,
> Hast keine verfallene Schlösser
> Und keine Basalte.
>
> Dich stört sich nicht im Innern,
> Zu lebendiger Zeit,
> Unnützes Erinnern
> Und vergeblicher Streit.
>
> Benutzt die Gegenwart mit Glück!
> Und wenn nun eure Kinder dichten,
> Bewahre sie ein gut Geschick
> Vor Ritter - Räuber - und Gespenstergeschichten[10].

Whether he knew the poem or not Emerson proclaimed the roads open for the American artist to travel in the direction indicated by Goethe. And Holmes recognized fully the weight of the 1837 Phi Beta Kappa address when he called "The American Scholar" "our intellectual Declaration of Independence".

II

Emerson's success as "the liberating god" should be measured by the remarkable achievements of the writers immediately influenced by him. Among others, the group included such, at first sight, glaringly opposed figures as Whitman and Dickinson. Seeking to place them within the same intellectual and aesthetic climate, we should take a closer look at the impulses stimulating the complexities of Emerson's vision. Calling the period "American Renaissance", F. O. Matthiessen addresses the analogy between the creative transformation of the classical tradition in European Renaissance and the way European heritage and influence were made use of in mid-nineteenth century American litera-

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[10] Quoted by H. M. J o n e s, Revolution and Romanticism, Cambridge, Mass. 1974, p. 198. The poem was entitled "Den Vereinigten Staaten" and sent to Zecter, July 17, 1827. See J. W. G o e t h e, Sämtliche Werke, vol. IV, p. 127.

ture. For connections with Europe and especially with European Romanticism remained multiple and vital[11]. They were, however, most effective in invigorating indigenous tendencies.

Romanticism as a period in the history of ideas and expression continues to escape all definitions. Numerous theories fail to help toward finding a common denominator among the notions and intellectual tendencies associated with Romanticism. Commenting on the fact, Howard Mumford Jones remembers a leading American historian of ideas, Arthur Lovejoy[12], advising to use the word only in the plural. The reminiscence reflects the despair of Arthur Lovejoy, Howard Mumford Jones and many other scholars of ever formulating an adequate definition of the phenomenon. On the whole, however, eminent students of the period incline toward locating its main significance in the changed view of the individual: "The human being became at once more lonely and more independent, more unpredictable and more filled with emotion, more likely to look for satisfactions of life here and now and less likely to be put off either by promises or by assurances that class and status were more blessed than self-fulfillment"[13]. Man is no longer identified with the sum of his history or the position in society he occupies but becomes an autonomous entity, an inviolable end in himself. In the corresponding philosophical context, the change is from a philosophy of being to a philosophy of mind, and on the literary level - from a poetry and poetics of imitation to one of exploration[14].

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[11] W. C h a r v a t, The Origins of American Critical Thought 1810-1835; New York 1961; R. W e l l e k, Confrontations, Princeton, N. J. 1965.

[12] A. O. L o v e j o y, On the Discriminations of Romanticism, PMLA 1924, vol. XXXIX, p. 229-253, enlarged and reprinted [in:] A. O. L o v e j o y, Essays in the History of Ideas, Baltimore 1948.

[13] J o n e s, op. cit. p. 260.

[14] I have borrowed this formulation from A. P. F r a n k' s paper "The Long Withdrawing Roar. One Hundred Years of the Ocean's Message to Man", delivered at a symposium on "Form as Method: Types and Patterns of Poetic Knowledge", held at the University of Wuppertal, November 1978.

Scholars of American literature have, for a long time now, pointed to the radical emphasis put by American Romantic writers on the centrality and heroic dimensions of the self. The approach underlies such classical studies of the period as F. O. Matthiessen's "The American Renaissance" or R. W. B. Lewis's "The American Adam" as well as later books in the cultural history, such as Quentin Anderson's "The Imperial Self" or Sacvan Bercovitch's "The Puritan Origins of the American Self". The important historical fact about American Romanticism is that it came to flourishment not in reaction to a previously dominant way of thinking, but as a climax in a relatively long and conscious effort to create both a national literature and a sense of national identity[15]. Thus it was little shaped in its tone and scope by defensive stances. As B. T. Spencer points out, the most significant criticism of neoclassical principles in America came not from a young, unknown and rebelious poet but was the work of Edward T. Channing - a Harvard professor of rhetoric and a teacher of both Emerson and Thoreau[16]. Romanticism in America did not have to spend energies fighting against previously established modes of thinking and expression. On the contrary, it was substantially reinforced in its nationalistic and individualistic tendencies by the native religious and political traditions. According to Lawrence Buell three factors account for the literary preoccupation with the self in America: the ideology of individualism which encouraged interest in the careers of single persons; a strong habit of religious self-examination which produced countless pious diaries and conversion narratives; and the influence of the Romantic movement "under whose auspices was first produced in America a literature worthy of the name"[17].

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[15] The story of this literary campaign is told in documents in R. S p i l l e r (ed.) The American Literary Revolution (1783-1837), New York 1969, and in S p e n c e r, op. cit. For the earlier period B e r c o v i t c h's, op. cit., is useful.

[16] S p e n c e r, op. cit. p. 82.

[17] L. B u e l l, Literary Transcendentalism. Style and Vision in the American Renaissance, Ithaca - London 1973, p. 265-266.

How radical in their formulations of the principles of individualism American Romantics could be is easily felt in Emerson's tone when he speaks of self-reliance. Confronted with the conflict between the demands of man's social existence and the imperative of self-reliance, Emerson affirms the pre-social man: the child and the youth, not because he is closer to "the intimations of immortality" but, first of all, because he remains free from the net of dependencies into which the adult unavoidably falls: "Infancy conforms to nobody; all conform to it; so that one babe commonly makes four or five out of the adults who prattle and play to it (II, 48). [...] The nonchalance of boys who are sure of a dinner, and would disdain as much as a lord to do or say ought to conciliate one, is a healthy attitude of human nature (II, 48). [...] Society is a joint-stock company in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion (II, 49-50). [...] Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind"(II, 50) and "No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature" (II,50). Emerson is ready, at least in his earlier years, to tear man out of his social and historical context[18], to establish him as his own purpose, authority and law. The center of his philosophy consists in an explicit and often extreme formulation of what Professor Jones judges to be the core of Romanticism, at least for our own times.

On the other hand, the peculiar blend of religious and political aspiration, of public and private concerns, has been widely and readily recognized as a characteristically American attitude - or: the kind of ambition in the light of which a saint was necessarily a leader of his community and the newly founded colonies were Israel led out of captivity into the Promised Land of America. Political and patriotic aspects of Puritan theocracy had been pointed out by Perry Miller[19]; more recently Sacvan

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[18] See A n d e r s o n, op. cit.

[19] P. M i l l e r, The New England Mind: From Colony to Province, Cambridge, Mass. 1953, especially chapt. XXVIII (Polity as a Form of Patriotism).

Bercovitch has shown how the growth of the American self involved centrally the fusion of religious and social virtues: "... the concept of »Americanus« (as reflected in the tradition of national biography) provides a distinctive pattern. Characteristically the American hero fuses the »universal« virtues with the qualities of national leadership, and together they define him as a prophetic exemplar of the country"[20].

It is largely the recognition in "Leaves of Grass" of a process conforming to the pattern outlined above that has firmly established Whitman within the context of national literature. It is the lack of even traces of such pattern that has consistently obscured Dickinson's place in it. And yet one cannot overlook Lawrence Buell's keen insight that each of the three traditions converging on American Transcendentalism, that is religious self-examination, Romantic self-consciousness and democratic individualism contained an ambiguous vision of the self in so far as each countered the purely individualistic impulse with its contradiction. Thus the tradition of the religious confessional valued the personal self only in relation to the paradigm of divine grace; the Transcendentalists tended to treat the individual as valuable, chiefly sub specie aeternitatis; and democratic individualism lent support to mass rule[21]. In the light of this observation it seems justifiable to view Whitman and Dickinson as, as it were, poles of the dilemma.

By and large Dickinson's criticism has treated her as a lonely figure, biographically as well as artistically[22]. From Klaus Lubber's extensive research on the growth of Dickinson's reputation[23], the conclusion clearly emerges that even while

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20 B e r c o v i t c h, op. cit., p. 149.

21 B u e l l, op. cit., p. 269-273.

22 A book attempting to trace Dickinson's connections with several American writers (Emerson, Hawthorne and Whitman among them) came out only in 1979 - K. K e l l e r's The Only Kangaroo Among the Beauty, Baltimore 1979. A first attempt of this kind, the study does not go deep enough.

23 K. L u b b e r s, Emily Dickinson. The Critical Revolution, Ann Arbor 1968. See especially chapt. IX and X.

"academic criticism" had recognized her stature and came to place her vis-a-vis Whitman, literary historians almost to this day have had trouble placing her within a systematic outline of American literature. A classic ilustration of the embarassment Dickinson has been causing is furnished by Chapter 55 of the standard and widely used "Literary History of the United States"[24], in which she is grouped with Lanier under the evasive title "Experiments in Poetry". Too obviously, the arrangement seems devised to bypass the question of relating the poet in a more significant way to her historical and intellectual milieu. The confusion in the recent past should be ascribed, at least in part, to the powerful impact of F. O. Matthiessen's book. In spite of the several mentions she receives, Dickinson is not counted there among the major artists of her time. And later studies of American Romanticism more or less follow suit concentrating on Matthiessen's canon of the great five: Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville and Whitman[25].

Perhaps the closest thing we have to a history of American poetry, Roy Harvey Pearce's "The Continuity of American Poetry", keeps contrasting her with three other major Romantic poets: Poe, Emerson and Whitman[26]. However, Pearce's idea of continuity in American poetry is intimately related to the antinomian impulse allowing thus the placing of each poet in his historical and cultural contexr on the basis of his very individuality. While Hyatt H. Waggoner in "American Poets" insists on Dickinson's debt to Emerson (as he does on Whitman's), his discussion of the poet's development from the early fascination with Emerson's new faith to her later "almost doctrineless, but existentially mean-

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[24] R. S p i l l e r et al., Literary History of the United States, New York 1946, but the same grouping is retained in the fourth, revised edition of 1974.

[25] See e. g. F e i d e l s o n, op. cit.; R. W. B. L e w i s, The American Adam, Chicago - London 1955; R. P o i r e r, The World Elsewhere, London 1966.

[26] R. H. P e a r c e, The Continuity of American Poetry, Princeton, N. J. 1961, p. 171-191.

ingful faith"[27] does not seem convincing. For, although both Emerson and Whitman develop from enthusiastic, radical attitudes to more subdued and sceptical visions of the self's possibilities[28], Dickinson's ideas do not really change with time. The dilemma of the experiential reality of doubt and the psychic necessity for faith so poignantly stated in 1859 in "These are the days when birds come back" (130) presents itself with equal or greater urgency in 1882 in a poem like "Those dying then" (1551). Thus Dickinson is much better viewed as a poet of "nows" shifting stances, alternating moods, arriving at only inconclusive conculsions[29].

On the whole, the recognition of Dickinson's artistic rank seems to have come earlier than the mapping of her position in her own times and in the history of American literature. So much so that her recent critic, Robert Weisbuch, feels it necessary to justify his conviction that Dickinson belongs into American Romanticism as "legitimately" as Whitman does. Characteristically, the difficulty in placing Dickinson in her proper intellectual context lies for Weisbuch in her non-conforming to the pattern described by Bercovitch:

> Dickinson's identity with the American Romantics is somewhat obscured by her own lack of historical concerns. She is far less concerned than her fellows with the idea of America and far less involved in the particular political issues of the day. Whitman's scorn of effete "foo-foos" is powered by his vision of America as a potential New Eden, a prelapsarian garden of bodily and spiritual health. Dickinson's scorn of "soft, cherubic ladies" is powered by a

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[27] H. H. W a g g o n e r, American Poets. From the Puritans to the Present, Boston 1968, p. 209.

[28] See S. E. W h i c h e r, Freedom and Fate: An Inner Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Philadelphia 1953; F. E. C a r l i s l e, in: The Uncertain Self: Whitman's Drama of Identity (Ann Arbor 1973), expresses the widely accepted view that as Whitman grew older he also grew less bold and more conservative, less concrete and more abstract (p. 45).

[29] This is the way D. Donoghue and R. Weisbuch see her; N. I. K h e r in: The Landscape of Absence: Emily Dickinson's Poetry, New Haven - London 1974, calls her work "one long poem of multidimensional reality" (p. 2).

> vision of potential existence in general, in which personal Edens are always possible. She nowhere speaks, as Melville does in the sunnier early years of his career of a new American literature, totally different from and greater than the literature of the European past. She never feels compelled, as Thoreau does, to spend a night in Concord jailhouse to protest unfair taxes, and she never writes tracts against slavery - she never writes tracts[30].

Among the scholars who recognize Dickinson's work as a counterbalance to Whitman's is Albert Gelpi with his "The Tenth Muse. The Psyche of the American Poet." Professor Gelpi applies the terms of Jungian psychology to their poetry and finds that the poets' creativity was defined by opposing yet complementary drives. Whitman was primarily moved by his sympathetic, receptive "anima"; Dickinson, by the active, intellectual "animus". In an excellent article, John Lynen compares and contrasts Whitman's and Dickinson's notions of time seeing them as directly reverse[31]. At the European Association of American Studies conference in Heidelberg, in 1976, Maurice Gonnaud read a paper on the treatment of nature by Whitman and Dickinson. According to Professor Gonnaud, the opposition between the poets should be traced to the ambivalence of Emerson's conception of nature. The paper's title, "Nature: Apocalypse or Experiment. Emerson's Double Lineage in American Poetry", points to the dialectic of faith and doubt relating their work: "And while I take encouragement largely from the recent work done on the two poets, I remain aware that there is little originality in the very idea of linking Whitman and Dickinson in a pattern of dialectic tension. For after all, I am but returning to George Whicher's insight of 1931: »These two writers defined the poles of national feeling in their time as Franklin and Edwards defined the cleavage in American thought a century earlier«"[32].

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[30] R. W e i s b u c h, Emily Dickinson's Poetry, Chicago-London 1975, p. 7-8.

[31] J. L y n e n, Three Uses of the Present: The Historian's, the Critic's and Emily Dickinson's, "College English", Nov. 1966, vol.28, No 2, p. 126-136.

[32] The quotation in Professor Gonnaud's paper comes from G. W h i c h e r, Emily Dickinson: Centennial Afterthoughts, "The Amherst Graduates Quarterly" Feb. 1931, No XX, p. 94; also quoted in L u b b e r s op. cit. p. 181.

In search for motivations underlying Dickinson's refusal to meet in art the public concerns of her day, dramatically emphasized by the seclusion of her life, it is necessary to remember how much Romantic individualism was nourished by the heritage of extreme Protestantism. In an important collection of essays, "Romanticism and Consciousness" Harold Bloom includes an excerpt from J. H. Van den Berg's "Metabletica" (a phenomenological theory of a historical psychology) in which the author discusses Luther's "About the Freedom of a Christian" (1520) as a recognizable step toward the development of that inner self, so crucial for Romantic poetry. Luther distinguishes there "the inner man" from the outward and physical man, and asserts the importance of the former at the expense of the latter provided the inner man, the soul, has faith. Luther differs from the radical romantic individualists only in so far as he insists on the condition of knowing the word of God as the sine qua non of salvation.

In a more directly literary context, Goeffrey Hartman reflects:

> The question, therefore, is why the Romantic reaction to the problem of self-consciousness should be in the form of an aggrandizement of art, and why the entire issue should now achieve an urgency and explicitness previously lacking.
> The answer requires a distinction between religion and art. This distinction can take a purely historical form. There clearly comes a time when art frees itself from its subordination to religion or religiously inspired myth and continues or even replaces these. This time seems to coincide with what is generally called the Romantic period: the latter, at least is a good terminus a quo. [...] If Romantic poetry appears to the orthodox as misplaced religious feeling ("split religion") to the Romantics themselves it redeems religion[33].

While it is difficult to speak about Romanticism in general without touching upon its religious connections, the fact that the roots of Transcendentalism in America are to be sought in

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33 G. H a r t m a n, Romanticism and Anti-Self-Consciousness, [in:] Beyond Formalism. Literary Essays 1958-1970, New Haven - London 1970, p. 305.

the religious heritage of the country is commonly recognized. "Transcendentalism, it must always be remembered, was a faith rather than a philosophy: it was oracular rather than speculative, affirmative rather than questioning"[34], observes Parrington. And summing up his discussion of the sources of Transcendentalism, Rod Horton points to the tradition of strong individualism in the history of religious dissention in America:

> Emerson's transcendentalism retained distinguishing characteristics of Puritanism - its moral earnestness, its belief that the chief function of nature is to confirm to man the beauty and harmony of God's universe, its call to the strenuous life and its insistence on man's obligation to glorify in his life the Power that creates him. [...] But however much of the moral force of Puritanism underlay Transcendentalism, the student should by now be able to distinguish some of the other strains in this hybrid pseudo-philosophy. In addition to the neo-Platonism already noted, we can detect the "inner light" of the Quakers, the belief in the divine nature of man as held by the Unitarians, and more than a touch of the antinomianism of Anne Hutchinson[35].

Talking about Whitman's debt to Emerson, Gay Wilson Allen reminds his readers that Whitman's parents were friendly with Elias Hicks, a schismatic Quaker, who expanded the doctrine of "inner light" to the widest religious freedom, claiming that no restrictions whatever should be placed on an individual's religious convictions. Allen concludes that "The Quakers were at least partly responsible for Whitman's belief that all physical life is dependent upon and sustained by an infinite spiritual realm about which a human being may have intuitive knowledge. It is not suprising that he later found Emerson a great stimulation to his development as a poet for Whitman was a "transcendental-

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[34] V. L. Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought, bk III, part III, New York 1930, p. 381; see also Buell, op. cit., especially chapter I where the peculiar combination of religious and aesthetic aspiration in Transcendentalism is discussed. Buell sees Transcendentalism as a continuation of rather than a breach with Unitarianism.

[35] R. W. Horton, H. W. Edwards, Background of American Literary Thought, New York 1967, p. 117.

ist by conviction before he had even heard of New England Transcendentalism"[36].

What happened between Cotton Mather's "Magnalia Christi Americana" and Emerson's "Nature" was a shift of emphasis from Scripture to nature as a source of revelation. "The land", writes Emerson, "is the appointed remedy for whatever is false and fantastic in our culture. [...] The land with its sanative influences is to repair the errors of a scholastic and traditional education". This might be Luther announcing the doctrine of sola scriptura, except that the source of divinity here is natura. Or it might be Wordsworth speaking of Grasmere, except that he would have applied the "sanative influences" to the kingdom within, as nourishment for the egotistical sublime. Emerson's land was uniquely sanative in itself, its influences counteracted (even as they completed) the traditions of the Old World, and it guaranteed regeneration for a people still to be formed. If nothing else, he declares, "One thing is plain for all men of common sense and common conscience, that here, in America, is the home of man", here the "new love, new faith, new sight that shall restore creation to more than its first splendor"[37]. Essentially, the demand put on man by the doctrine of Transcendentalism was the same as that made by Luther and all extreme Protestant dissenters after him-that man has faith so absolute that it alone becomes his salvation[38].

The difficulty in bringing together Whitman and Dickinson only superficially lies in her political indifference. More fun-

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[36] G. W. A l l e n, A Reader's Guide to Walt Whitman, New York 1970, p. 19.

[37] After B e r c o v i t c h, op. cit., p. 157.

[38] Compare e. g. this observation in B e r c o v i t c h, op. cit.: "For the humanist, whether he was a Manetti or a Montaigne, man was both means and ends. The Puritans went further than Montaigne in separating man from God, and further than Manetti in their homage to the divine absolute. The medieval and Counter-Reformation Catholic similarly polarized man and God, but he filled the gap, as it were, with the Church Militant. For the Puritan, faith alone could fill the gap" (p. 22).

damentally, it can be located in her acceptance of doubt as a legitimate state of mind: in the attitude that led her to waver whether nature was "Apocalypse" or "Experiment" and put the word "Experiment" as her final choice, after all[39]:

> But God be with the Clown -
> Who ponders this tremendous Scene -
> This whole Experiment of Green -
> As if it were his own!
> (1333)

The fusion of faith and politics was an outcome of the assertive confidence with which the Pilgrim fathers and their descendants accepted America as virtually the Promised Land, to be viewed and interpreted through the word of the Scripture. Religious doctrines became identical with political principles and political principles were sanctioned by the divine word. In such a context there developed a vision of the self as representative of the cumulative, communal potential, deriving its greatness from personal identification with the American cause. This conception of individual greatness constitutes for Bercovitch the essence of the cultural continuity from the Puritans to the Romantics: "Emerson's hero like Mather's Winthrop, derives his greatness from the enterprise he represents. [...] Emerson's exhortation to greatness speaks directly to the paradox of a literature devoted at once to the exaltation of the individual and the search for a perfect community. Self-reliance builds upon both these extremes. [...] The representative quality of American Romantic her-

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[39] M. Gonnaud comments on the variants in the manuscript: "Interestingly the variants concentrate on the fifth line, and ring the changes on the words »whole« and »experiment« with a thoroughness which betrays the author's earnestness and nearly insuperable perplexity. Of the various nouns tried in succession, only two, »apocalypse« and »experiment« had been underscored in the manuscript, as if to polarize Emily Dickinson's uncertainty in her first effort at clarification" M. G o n n a u d (Nature, Apocalypse or Experiment: Emerson's Double Lineage in American Poetry, Heidelberg 1976).

oism expresses the furthest reach of Mather's daring auto-American-biographical strategy in the "Magnalia"[40].

I do not, of course, overlook the fact that the relationship between politics and Romantic poetry was crucial both in Europe and in America. Nevertheless, the character of the American political scene at the time nourished rather than destroyed faith and the distinction is important. While, as M. H. Abrams points out, French political radicalism derived from the sceptical, even atheistic spirit of the Enlightenment, the main current of English political radicalism had its source in the dissenting tradition of Cromwell and the Civil War. The religious roots of political radicalism are common to England and America, yet for the European Romantics, English Romantics not excepted, the political fact of paramount importance was the degeneration and fall of the French Revolution. The hope that millenium was at hand collapsed with it: "The militancy of overt political action has been transformed into the paradox of spiritual quietism; under such banners is no march but a wise passiveness. [...] the hope has been shifted from the history of mankind to the single individual, from militant external action to an imaginative act; and the marriage between Lamb and the New Jerusalem has been converted into a marriage between subject and object, mind and nature, which creates a new world out of the old world of sense"[41].

For the American Romantics, the events which dominated the political scene were the triumph of masses under Jackson and the abolitionist campaign against slavery. Despite their proneness to crudity and insistent propaganda, both seemed to extend the promise of the birth of a new race and helped to preserve the continuity between the Puritan vision of America as the New Promised Land, and the involvement of Emerson, Whitman and other American Romantics with the idea of democratic America crowning the long evolution of mankind. The hope for revolutionizing social

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[40] B e r c o v i t c h, op. cit., p. 174, 176, 177.

[41] H. B l o o m (ed.), Romanticism and Consciousness, New York 1970, p. 110, 111.

and political structures, the hope for mankind in general, did not have to be given up until after the Civil War. On the contrary, only too frequently has critical attention focused on the fact that Whitman derived his ambition and strength from the conviction (or illusion) that he was privileged to witness the glorious change in progress and called to give his testimony[42].

All Abrams says about the English Romantic Bard of the early years of hope and enthusiasm can be referred to Whitman[43], practically throughout his career: "Whatever the form, the Romantic Bard is one "who present, past and future sees" so that in dealing with current affairs his procedure is often panoramic, his stage cosmic, his agents - quasi-mythological, and his logic of events apocalyptic. Typically this mode of Romantic vision fuses history, politics, philosophy and religion into one grand design, by asserting Providence - or some form of natural teleology - to operate in the seeming chaos of human history"[44]. In other words, the quality of the poetic design is vitally connected with faith: with "asserting Providence - or some form of natural teleology in the seeming chaos of human history". It is precisely the dependence which the juxtaposition of Whitman and Dickinson illustrates.

Before I turn to outline the common ground for the two poets, I should like to make clear that the dialectic of faith

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[42] See e. g. the essay by M i r s k y quoted earlier.

[43] It was a matter of a reciprocal relationship for Whitman: the political system gave the individual a chance to realize his potential greatness while the stature of its individual members justified the system. Only toward the end of his life did Whitman feel obliged to stress individual greatness not as corresponding to but as balancing the leveling effects of democracy. Though he could then clearly see the difficulty in maintaining the delicate balance, he still believed that democracy was, first of all, a way of thinking and feeling, and that it was the task of literature to evoke such a state of mind. See also L. T r i l l i n g, Sermon on a Text from Whitman, [in:] F. M u r p h y (ed.), Walt Whitman, Harmondsworth 1969, in which Trilling points to the affinity with Schiller because of the conception of art as mediating between the necessary authoritarian institution of government and the ideal of individual freedom.

[44] B l o o m, op. cit., p. 103.

and doubt as reflected in literature in itself forms a tradition going back to the Puritans. American writers, who, in the early period were as a rule public figures first of all, seem to have had persistent trouble with integrating the representative and the personal self. The difficulty polarized their writings into private diaries or lyrical poems and homiletic, didactic works meant for publication. Thus, the social self, the leader of the community its minister or lawyer became expressed in one kind of literature: sermons, theological treatises, histories etc. while the private individual, often humiliated and ridden with doubt, relieved his anxiety in a diary or a poem kept under lock. Cotton Mather furnishes a conspicuous example. Less conspicuously but perhaps more interestingly Edward Taylor, a minister to a frontier community, wrote learned sermons expounding the orthodox doctrine and, on the other hand, composed over two hundred intense religious lyrics in which he could privately express the emotional character of his relationship with God. Anne Bradstreet, an educated matron of her times, the wife of a governor of Massachusetts, had a collection of her poems published in London in 1650[45]. There is little of the personal element in them; they were first of all meant to instruct her readers and possibly she wrote them with the education of her children in mind. But poems unpublished in her lifetime reveal an affectionate, often frightened woman who could not be contained in the public persona of a polished lady, presiding over the instruction of her family and her community[46].

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[45] Under the title "The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung in America"

[46] The polarization of early American poetry along these lines is briefly discussed in my article: A. S a l e s k a, Budowniczy nowego społeczeństwa czy skazany na samotność? Podwójna wizja człowieka w poezji amerykańskiej ("Zeszyty Naukowe UŁ" 1972, ser. I, No 91, p. 85-94). Hawthorne, the artist of unsurpassed insights into the moral dilemmas of the Puritan mind, gave a poignant study of the divorce between the public and the private self in the character of Arthur Dimmesdale. The essence of Dimmesdale's tragedy is that vindication of the public self occurs at the cost of self-acceptance.

It is, I think, revealing to realize that Emerson's writings also fall within the polarized pattern. There is the Emerson of the essays and addresses - very conscious of his public role, holding himself responsible for the success of the national cause and the Emerson of the Journals" which though used a great deal as scrap books for the essays, contain most of the Emerson besieged by doubt, refusing to face squarely the facts in his biography for fear of losing faith: "If [...] the world is not a dualism, is not a bipolar Unity, but is two, is Me and It, then is there the Alien, the Unknown, and all we have believed and chanted out of our deep instinctive hope is a pretty dream" (J, VII, 200; quoted by Bercovitch, p. 179). In the concluding pages of his book Sacvan Bercovitch cites fragments of Emerson's "Journals" from 1840's and 1850's against fragments of his essays and lectures for the same period. Inevitably the private utterance testifies to anxiety and doubt while the public one calls for new hope and new faith:

> This ineffable life which is at my heart, he [Emerson] wrote privately in 1842, will not [...] enter into the details of my biography, and say to me [...] why my son dies in his sixth year of joy. In "Experience" he placed Waldo's death in the context of "the mighty Ideal before us". His "heart beating with the love of the new beauty, he proclaimed himself "ready to be born again into this new yet unapproachable America he had found in the West - unapproachable today, but tomorrow (Nature had whispered to him) the city of the lords of life". Over and again, during this period, his journals note that "we blame the past; we magnify and gild the future and are no wiser for the multitude of days". Over and again, his lectures ask us to "draw new hope from the atmosphere we breathe today", to "read the promises of better times and greater men", and above all to "believe what the years and centuries say, against the hours[47].

With Emerson, however, the assignation of the social and private self to essays and journals respectively cannot be unequivocal. The conclusion of "Experience", for instance, shows the speaker far removed from the representative ambition: in-

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[47] B e r c o v i t c h, op. cit., p. 179-180.

stead, his tone is one of growing estrangement and exclusiveness, if not disgust: "But I have not found that much was gained by manipular attempts to realize the world of thought. Many eager persons successively make an experiment in this way, and make themselves ridiculous. They acquire democratic manners, they foam at the mouth, they hate and deny. Worse, I observe that in the history of mankind, there is never a solitary example of success, taking their own tests of success. I say this polemically, or in reply to the inquiry, why not realize your world?" (III, 85). The passage goes a long way toward denying the relevance of the public, representative self. The faith can only be kept by postponing its success (that is the acquiring of "practical power" by the representative hero) indefinitely into the future. As for now, what remains is upholding the inner self - the only harbor of integrity and truth: "We dress our garden, eat our dinners, discuss the household with our wives, and these things make no impression, are forgotten next week: but, in the solitude to which every man is always returning, he has a sanity and revelations, which is his passage into new worlds he will carry with him" (III, 85). The shape of the future depends in this essay not on immediate action but on each man's fidelity to his inner vision, since only what is shielded and tended there can be extended beyond time.

Conversely, the journals often speak for the representative man. As early as 1835 Emerson resolves the dilemma into what seems clearly a Whitmanian pattern: "There are two facts, the Individual, and the Universal. To this belong the finite, the temporal, ignorance, sin, death: to that belong the infinite, the immutable, truth, goodness, life. In Man they both consist. The All is in Man. In Man the perpetual progress is from the Individual to the Universal, from that which is human, to that which is divine. »Self dies and dies perpetually«. The circumstances, the persons, the body, the world, the memory are forever perishing as the bark peels off the expanding tree" (J, V, 229).

The tension between the private and the universal (also public) self cannot be, for Emerson, schematized as the opposition of "Essays" to "Journals". Although critics by no means agree on

the subject of Emerson's development, they unanimously admit that the sceptical tone entered the ublic writings only with "Experience". Both Stephen Whicher and Jonathan Bishop ascribe the fact to a spiritual crisis Emerson must have undergone around 1840. Edward Wagenknecht, on the other hand, arguing for a more static conception of Emerson's personality, points to the pessimistic overtones abundant in the early "Journals", he maintains that "the compound vision" was almost as much a part of early Emerson as it was with him in the later years[48]. Nevertheless, the time came when the sceptic could no longer be confined to the privacy of the "Journals" but broke into the public utterances. Thus, one is inclined to accept Stephen Whicher's position. Undoubtedly, more effort to keep up faith went into the public writings, especially those of his early period. It would be interesting to inquire whether the infusion of the "Essays" with the pessimistic and personal element was parallel in time to the progressive formalization of the "Journals". The editors of "Journals and Notebooks" claim in the preface to volume VII that by 1838-1842 Emerson was taking interest in the "Journals" not only for the therapeutic relief they provided but because he began to recognize them as an art form. Making entries whenever he felt the need, Emerson was, in fact, writing a book of inner life which was to grow with its author and resembled, therefore, "Leaves of Grass" in its fundamental program. If the above is true, the question of Emerson's development might be also validly considered on the aesthetic plane - as genre experimentation[49].

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[48] W h i c h e r, Freedom and Fate: An Inner Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson; J. B i s h o p, Emerson on the Soul, Cambridge, Mass. 1964; E. W a g e n k n e c h t, Ralph Waldo Emerson: Portrait of a Balanced Soul, New York 1974.

[49] B u e l l in op. cit., discusses extensively the progressive infusion of the lyrical element into the Unitarian sermon and Transcendentalist essay (part II, chapt. IV). His aim there is "to examine Transcendentalist literature [...] as an attempt to develop lyric possibilities to the fullest within the confines of an essentially homiletic mode of expression..." (p. 105). On the other hand, in part IV, chapt. X he points out the parallel formalization of the diary (p. 274 ff): "As Alcott said of Emerson, Transcendentalist journals might better be called

Whitman's triumph is that he could move beyond Emerson's hesitant attempts and integrate the representative and the private voice so that each could complement and sustain the other within one literary form. Significantly, Whitman's "Daybooks and Notebooks" are rarely personally revealing and never intimate. They bear practically no relation to literature unless they contain drafts for later use[50]. Especially the early poems balance the prophetic and the confessional voice to the detriment of neither. The further in Whitman's career, the more doubt his reader may have whether the poet did not eventually neglect honesty to his inner self in the effort to achieve perfect identification with the cause. Opinions that his private life at Camden was fashioned to fit the prophetic image projected in the poems are frequent and familiar.

If despite some objections we can say that Whitman made his multifaceted, representative self adequately contain his private "I", Dickinson followed the opposite strategy. Self- acceptance and self-knowledge were the business of her life. She needed no support of the representative role to ensure heroic dimensions to her innermost "I". Not only did she accept the private self as central but claimed further that its greatness could neither be confirmed by the sublimity of any cause nor rest in the security of any faith. The test of the self's stature consisted for her not in the noble rage of its ambition but in the actual performance in confrontation with experience. Dickinson denied the relevance of social self for man's spiritual biography. Just as in her daily life she almost gave up the relations with the external world, she cut off the public aspect of self because it seemed distracting. If she can be compared to a Puritan diarist,

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»commonplace books«, if one extends that term to apply not only to passages culled from other authors but choice insights of the writer's own. Emerson's journals, as Alcott noted, »are full of elegant sketches of life and nature« [...]. He does not record the history of his facts but idealizes whatsoever he observes and writes his thought in this general form. He works like an artist from his sketches and models" (p. 280).

[50] See W. W h i t e (ed.), Walt Whitman: Daybooks and Notebooks, New York 1978. See also a review of the: Daybooks and Notebooks by P. Z w e i g in "New York Times Book Review" April 6, 1978.

she is a diarist absolutely convinced that only the inner man matters. The poems she kept writing practically throughout her mature life correspond in purpose not so much to Anne Bradstreet's domestic lyrics as to Whitman's "Leaves of Grass": they were written to record the complete man: the life and progress of a consciousness.

The Emerson texts most relevant for Whitman are the early writings: "Nature", "The American Scholar", "Self-Reliance", "The Poet". They are alive with belief in the immediate rapport, more, in essential unity of the individual mind and the universe: "In the hour of vision, there is nothing that can be called gratitude nor properly joy. The soul raised over passion beholds identity and eternal causation, perceives the self-existence of Truth and Right, and calms itself with knowing that all things go well. Vast spaces of nature, the Atlantic Ocean, the South Sea; long intervals of time, years, centuries, are of no account. This which I think and feel underlay every former state of life and circumstances, as it does underlie my present, and what is called life, and what is called death" (II, 69).

The texts against which to read Dickinson are those beginning with "Experience" through "Montaigne: or the Skeptic" to "Fate"[51]. Especially "Fate" reads in fragments like the theory of Dickinson's poems, for there, the balance between the Individual and the Universal can no longer be maintained through orderly progression. Instead, it becomes a duel-like confrontation. "If the Universe have these savage accidents, our atoms are as savage in resistance. We should be crushed by the atmosphere, but for the reaction of the air within the body. [...] If there be omnipotence in the stroke, there is omnipotence of recoil" (VI, 24-25). Consequently, all freedom is won within and is the prerogative of the inner self only: "The revelation of thought takes man out of servitude into freedom" (VI, 25).

Whitman gave his loyalty to the external, physical world far more radically than Emerson. Acknowledging the fact, "the Master"

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[51] "Experience" was published in Essays. Second Series (1844) but possibly written as early as 1842, after the death of Emerson's son Waldo. "Fate" came out in 1860 in The Conduct of Life.

could not help a note of regret: "Have you read the strange Whitman's poems? [...] He seems a Mirabeau of a man, with such insight and equal expression, but hurt by hard life and too animal experience. But perhaps you have not read the American Poem?" (Letters, IV, 531). This was written to James Eliot Cabott shortly after the publication of the first "Leaves of Grass"[52] but, as scandalized voices could be heard all around, Emerson's admiration mingled with distaste: "Our wild Whitman with real inspiration but choked by Titanic abdomen and Delia Bacon with genius but mad [...] are the sole producers that America has yielded in ten years"[53] (Letters, V, 87).

Emily Dickinson affirmed the other pole of Emerson's vision with a radicalism equal to or even surpassing Whitman's. In her view, the self's claim to heroism was only validated by the effort of the perpetually struggling mind. She agreed with Emerson when he said that "Forever wells up the impulse of choosing and acting in the soul. Intellect annuls Fate" (VI, 23). But, both through her art and through the life she chose to live, she denied the inevitability of his conclusion:

> One key, one solution to the mysteries of human condition, one solution to the old knots of fate, freedom, and foreknowledge exists; the propounding, namely of the double consciousness. A man must ride alternately on the horses of his private and public nature, as the equestrians in the circus throw themselves nimbly from horse to horse, or plant one foot on the back of one and the other foot on the back of the other. So when a man is the victim of his fate, has sciatica in his loins and cramp in his mind and a selfish temper: a strout in his gait and a conceit in his affection; or is ground to powder by the vice of his race; - he is to rally on his relation to the Universe, which his ruin benefits. Leaving the daemon who suffers, he is to take sides with the Deity who secures universal benefit by his pain.
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> (VI, 47)

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[52] The letter is dated Sept. 26, 1855, while the famous letter to Whitman in which Emerson greeted him "at the beginning of a great career" was written on July 21, 1855.

[53] To Caroline Sturgis, October 1857.

Dickinson would not belittle the poignancy of personal suffering by calling in aid the belief that it is for the benefit of the universal plan. Instead, loyal to the pained self, she set out to find "with narrow probing eyes" how much power the self can wield through mastering its limitations.

III

Self-reliance, the view of self as autonomous and, consequently, of individual consciousness as the creative center of universe constitutes the common starting point for Whitman and Dickinson. Even though they diverge from there to explore the far frontiers of the dialectical Emersonian vision, their respective routes come together at important intersections.

Like other Romantics, they tend to see poetry as replacing religion. Emerson's career, of course, is almost paradigmatic when it comes to redeeming religion through art. A Unitarian minister turned lyceum lecturer, a sermon writer turned poet and essayist, a few months before leaving the ministry, he confided in his journal: "I have sometimes thought that in order to be a good minister it was necessary to leave ministry. The profession is antiquated. In an altered age we worship in the dead forms of our forefathers" (J, IV, 27: June 2, 1832)[54]. This reflection shows how the development from Emerson the minister and son of ministers, to Emerson the essayist and artist aspiring to become the moral leader of his times, took shape in response to the deeply felt need for more adequate forms of answering the spiritual demands of his age. Recognizing this trait in Emerson, Carlyle wrote from Chelsea about "Essays. Second Series":

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[54] However, dropping out from the ministry for some sort of artistic career was a fairly common pattern among the Transcendentalists as is evident from the biographies of John Sullivan Dwight or Christopher Cranch (cf. B u e l l, op. cit., p. 42-43). V. C. Hopkins points out that Emerson habitually spoke of the creative act in religious language (V. C. H o p k i n s, Spires of Form: A Study of Emerson's Aesthetic Theory, Cambridge, Mass. 1951, p. 9-10).

> The work itself falling on me by driblets has not the right chance yet - not till I get it in the bound state, and read it all at once - to produce its due impression on me. But I will say already of it. It is a Sermon to me, as all your other deliberate utterances are; a real word, which I feel to be such - alas almost or altogether the one such, in a world all full of jargons, hearsays, echoes, and vain noises, which cannot pass with me for words! This is a praise far beyond any "literary" one; literary praises are not worth repeating in comparison.
>
> (Slater, 370)

Even more determinedly and with fewer reservations, Whitman installed himself in the role of the apostle of the new religion of man. A passage in the 1855 Preface to "Leaves of Grass" completes in inflamed rhetoric Emerson's private meditation of 1832:

> There will soon be no more priests. Their work is done. They may wait awhile [...] perhaps a generation or two [...] dropping off by degrees. A superior breed shall take their place [...] the gangs of kosmos and prophets en masse shall take their place. A new order shall arise and they shall be priests of man, and every man shall be his own priest. The churches built under their umbrage shall be the churches of man and women. Through the divinity of themselves shall the kosmos and the new breed of poets be interpreters of men and women and of all events and things. They shall find their inspiration in real objects today, symptoms of the past and future [...] They shall not deign to defend immortality or God or the perfection of things or liberty or the exquisite beauty and reality of the soul. They shall arise in America and be responded to from the remainder of the earth.
>
> (LG, 727)

It seemed obvious to Whitman at the beginning of his career, as it did later in "Passage to India", that the poet must replace the priest; that poetry must offer a new interpretation of man in the Universe. The announcement toward the end of his life in the Preface to "November Boughs" (1888): "Nobody will get at my verses who insists upon viewing them as a literary performance, or attempt at such performance, or as aiming mainly toward art and aestheticism" (LG, 574; 459-461) only confirmed the persistence of ambition which had spurred him throughout his creative years.

Dickinson never sounds programmatic, on any subject. She rejected the public aspect of religion just as she did the public self - as irrelevant. But already in her second letter to T. W. Higginson she wrote about the innermost motives of her poetry: "I had a terror since September - I could tell to none - and so I sing as the Boy does by the Burying Ground, because I am afraid" (L, II, 404). She turned to poetry as believers do to religion, for solace and sustenance in her hours of need. It was a necessary rather than enthusiastic turning. There is little sense of gain, of prospects opened in Dickinson's poems. Instead, they are pervaded with an acute sense of loss[55] and preoccupied with assessing the cost of the endeavour. Relatively early in her creative period (1859), she stated her predicament as the plight of an individual no longer capable of unquestioning faith but also desperately yearning for the comfort and security it provided.

These are the days when Birds come back -
A very few - a Bird or two -
To take a backward look.

These are the days when skies resume
The old - old sophistries of June -
A blue and gold mistake.

Oh fraud that cannot cheat the Bee -
Almost thy plausibility
Induces my belief.

Till ranks of seeds their witness bear -
And softly through the altered air
Hurries a timid leaf.

Oh Sacrament of summer days,
Oh Last Communion in the Haze -
Permit a child to join.

Thy sacred emblems to partake -
Thy consecrated bread to take
And thine immortal wine!

(130)

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55 The sense of loss pervading Dickinson's poems has been observed by many critics, most notably by C. A n d e r s o n in the chapt. "Evanescence" in: Emily Dickinson's Poetry. Stairway of Surprise (London 1963), by D. P o r t e r, especially in chapt. IV of The Art of Emily Dickinson's Early Poetry (Cambridge, Mass. 1966), by R. H a g e n b ü c h l e in Precision and

What begins as a description of Indian summer is resolved into a dialogue between the sceptical intellect supported by the evidence of the senses and the longing heart which wants to suppress the rational faculty, to become like a child for the reward of security and religious ecstasy which the union with nature can offer. Belief, however, is unmistakably stated as yearning, as only a prayer for a state desired but not necessarily attainable, while doubt is phrased in affirmative sentences bringing irrefutable testimony of the senses[56]. The feeling of loss is an essential element of the poem's mood. Dickinson turns to poetry not because it can become a new faith, reintegrating man in his reality, but because it is the last resource - the chance for immortality as "Costumless Consciousness" embodied in a poem.

It is not, therefore, surprising to find that when Whitman writes:

> I bequeth myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
> If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles,
>
> You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,
> But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
> And filter and fiber your blood.
>
> (LG, 89: 1339-1343)

and Dickinson:

> He ate and drunk the precious Words -
> His Spirit grew robust -
> He knew no more that he was poor,
> Nor that his frame was Dust -
>
> He danced along the dingy Days
> And this Bequest of Wings
> Was but a Book - what Liberty
> A loosened Spirit brings -
>
> (1587)

Indeterminacy in the Poetry of Emily Dickinson ("Emerson Society Quarterly" 1st Quarter 1974, vol. 20) and N. I. K h e r in The Landscape of Absence, especially in chapt. 2 (New Haven-London 1974).

[56] See A n d e r s o n's excellent discussion of this poem in: Emily Dickinson's Poetry ..., p. 146-149.

they both employ the ritual of the Holy Communion as their central image because they both conceive of their art as sacrament. The essential similarity of their attitude is not undercut by the fact that each picks a different aspect of sacrament to stress: for Whitman it means first of all a mystical union, dissolution in universal life; for Dickinson - personal spiritual nourishment. Both, however, expect their art to take over some of the functions performed by religion. The seriousness of their poetry and the dignity rest upon the expectation that art could and would rescue man from chaos.

For both Whitman and Dickinson, art takes the form of the spiritual journey of its maker. According to Harold Bloom[57], the internalization of quest romance was a development characteristic of High Romanticism in England. Nevertheless, for our poets, Emerson again provides the closest model. The idea of the artist as a spiritual and mental voyager becomes very pronounced in his writings. "Life consists in what a man is thinking all day" or "Our private theatre is ourselves", both formulations quoted by Matthiessen as unmistakably Emersonian[58], focus attention on the meandering of thought as defining the content and form of life as well as art. "Self-Reliance", whose first epigraph reads "Ne te quaesiveris extra", denounces the fetish of travelling in the world. The prejudice holding touristic experience essential for knowledge and culture must be abandoned. Man's real journeys are made within: "I pack my trunk, embrace my friends, embark on the sea and at last wake up in Naples, and there beside me is the stern fact, the sad self, unrelenting, identical that I fled from. I seek the Vatican, and the palaces. I affect to be intoxicated with sights and suggestions, but I am not intoxicated. My giant goes with me wherever I go" (II, 81-82). Emerson certainly wrote this with his own European trip in mind, during which his reactions must have been conditioned by the recent facts in his

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[57] H. B l o o m, The Internalization of Quest Romance, [in:] The Ringers in the Tower, Chicago-London 1971, p. 13-35.

[58] M a t t h i e s s e n, op. cit., p. 8.

biography[59], but his point is unambiguously made: it is within himself that one starts and ends. His efforts, however, were not undividedly dedicated to working out corresponding aesthetic formulas. Moving between essays, journals and poems, he only indicated directions in which to turn, the bulk of practical work he left to others.

Whitman's contribution in this respect has been recognized and argued about extensively. He himself insisted on treating the body of his poetry as a totality, including new poems in successive editions of "Leaves of Grass" and deciding that the 1881 edition was the final arrangement. Whatever the nature and purpose of his rearrangements within each successive edition, they first of all reflect his own preoccupations and preferences at the given point of his career. The successive books of "Leaves of Grass" constitute stages in the growth of the author's mind more clearly than they develop toward any final structural unity[60]. What constitutes the work's backbone did not change throughout. It was conceived as a spiritual journey through America so that discovering the resources of the self was simultaneous and identical with discovering the resources of the country, of mankind and the whole universe. As Charles Feidelson has observed, the poem itself became a road on which the traveller, the journey and the surrounding reality could become one[61].

Dickinson never worked on preparing her poems for publication. She did not put together a collection or selection of her poems, neither did she comment on her preference for arrangement. Instead, she sowed the fair copies into the famous packets and left the rest unbound. Despite attempts at interpreting the

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[59] Emerson went to Europe, depressed by the death of his first wife the previous year and exhausted by the crisis which culminated in his resignation from the Second Church in October, 1832.

[60] For discussions of "Leaves of Grass" as such "cathedral"-like structural unity see especially J. E. Miller, Jr., A Critical Guide to Leaves of Grass, Chicago-London 1957; T. E. Crawley, The Structure of Leaves of Grass, Austin-London 1970; and R. D. Del Greco, Whitman and the Epic Impulse, Urbana 1975, PhD.

[61] Feidelson, op. cit., p. 18.

packets as separate collections, each telling "a story"[62], it seems that since there is no hint from the poet herself, the best a critic can do is respect the poems as she left them, as life's work whose "inherent logic must disclose itself". The body of Dickinson's poems does not show consistency of argument or sequential development of themes, or a traceable narrative line, nor even major stylistic changes. And so, with Robert Weisbuch, I prefer

> to view Dickinson's lyrics as one long poem, to the same extent that Whitman's lyrics constitute a "Leaves of Grass". It is a key tenet of Romanticism, put forth by Emerson in the past century and by Yeats in ours, that a writer's work in totality should constitute a biography of his consciousness. [...] It is misleading to consider this poet's attitudes as if they were little kernels of hardened belief. The problem with saying where Dickinson stands (say, on the question of a Protestant God) is that she can be found in two or five places at once. Her concerns manifest themselves as continuing self-debates, as varied and often conflicting dramatizations rather than static position papers. The individual moment, linguistically translated into the nuances of chosen words, will determine a particular resolution. Inevitably that resolution will be challenged by another poem[63].

This is as much as to say that the essence of the total work is quest, regardless of the fact that it can never be completed since there is no final truth to be reached. Similarly Whitman's final truth always recedes beyond the horizon. Consequently, what matters for both artists is the journey itself, the effort of consciousness. Like Emerson, they sanctify the creative process rather than worship the finished form.

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[62] Cf. R. M i l l e r, The Poetry of Emily Dickinson, Middletown, Con. 1968, chapt. 10.

[63] W e i s b u c h, op. cit., p. XIII, cf. also Introduction to K h e r's, op. cit.

Chapter II

THE SELF AS PERSONA: IDENTITY

Whitman and Dickinson never met. There is no evidence that they read each other's work. Emily Dickinson's awareness of Walt Whitman is stated in her response to T. W. Higginson: "You speak of Mr. Whitman - I never read his book - but was told that he was disgraceful"[1] (L, II, 404). If the prim dismissal sounds amusing, one need only recall how far apart the two poets are in, for example, these "personal" introductions:

> Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son,
> Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding,
> No sentimentalist, no stander above men and women or
> apart from them
> No more modest than immodest.
> Unscrew the locks from the doors!
> Unscrew the doors themselves from their jambs!
>
> Whoever degrades another degrades me
> And whatever is done or said returns at last to me.
>
> (LG, 52: 497-504)

and

> I'm Nobody! Who are you?
> Are you - Nobody - Too?
> Then there's a pair of us?
> Don't tell! they'd advertise - you know!
>
> How dreary - to be - Somebody!

---

[1] The letter is dated April 25, 1862. In his excellent "Emily Dickinson's Reading" (Cambridge, Mass. 1966), J. C a p p s mentions Dr Holland's editorial in The Springfield Republican "Leaves of Grass - Smut in Them" (p. 139) which may have encouraged the poet to think Whitman "disgraceful".

How public-like a Frog -
To tell one's name - the livelong June -
To an admiring Bog!

(288)

Yet both poems are founded on the assumption that the self is central, and, therefore, whatever comes in experience can only be viewed subjectively. "Subjectivity, or self-consciousness", as Harold Bloom writes, "is the salient problem of Romanticism, at least for modern readers, who tend to station themselves in regard to the Romantics depending on how relevant or adequate they judge the dialectic of consciousness and imagination to be"[2]. In American nineteenth century literature Whitman and Dickinson are the two poets most vitally preoccupied with "the salient problem of Romanticism" - self-consciousness, the obvious consequence being that both use the self as persona. For both, too, the answers given to questions about the self's nature contain important aesthetic implications.

Introducing himself by the most specific but also socially standard identification - his name, Whitman proceeds to emphasize whatever joins the self to the world around, whatever makes him like others: his neighbors compatriots, mankind in general. The connections must establish the "I" of the poem as representative. Walt Whitman can speak for America by virtue of being "of Manhattan the son". Early in "Song of Myself", he firmly makes the same claim: "My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this air,/Born here of parents born here and their parents the same, and their parents the same" (LG, 29: 6-7). As the paradigm of human physiology and psyche, he can speak for mankind. Finally (and also to begin with), he is a kosmos and cosmos - a self-contained organic whole, equal to and comprising any other such whole. An even more radical phrasing of the microcosm idea comes later in the poem: "I am an acme of things accomplish'd, and I am encloser of things to be" (LG 80: 1148). The centrality of his experience is validated by the fact of its

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[2] H. B l o o m (ed.), Romanticism and Consciousness, New York 1970, p. 1.

being rooted not only in the experience of the nation and race, but in being immersed in the timeless flow of life. Similarly, the centrality of his consciousness is guaranted by its participation in the spiritual principle underlying the material existence of each and all, objects and bodies. It is as if having accepted subjectivity, Whitman was constantly looking for methods of alleviating the burden by pointing to its supra-personal dimensions.

The speaker of Emily Dickinson's poem, on the other hand, stresses that part in herself which is like no one else, and appeals to a similar sense of personal uniqueness in the reader. Her message, or rather the secret she wants to share, is precisely the realization that "I", whoever it denotes, is like nobody else - an isolated entity surrounded by the hostile "them" or by the contemptible "bog". The aristocratic exclusiveness of her tone is a strategy adopted to protect the sense of personal uniqueness[3]. So is her use of the first person pronoun - at once more impersonal because anonymous, and more intimate than Whitman's social introduction by name. The centrality of Dickinson's self and correspondingly of her consciousness is negative in its essence. Since nothing is like the self, nothing except the self is directly available to cognition. This negative approach must carry the weight of whatever contact she may be able or want to establish.

The "Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son" fragment of "Song of Myself" demonstrates how Whitman's persona derives the sense of identity first of all from the concrete, physical and environmental attributes of the self: the name, place of

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[3] Cf. also e. g. poems 303 and 664 where a similarly exclusive stance is adopted. Dickinson's "aristocratic" attitude has been noticed and commented on by several critics. C. A n d e r s o n contrasts her use of grass as a royal symbol (in 1333) with that of Whitman (Emily Dickinson's Poetry: Stairway of Surprise, London 1963, p. 101-102). W. R. S h e r w o o d calls her an "aristocratic poet" (in the Conclusion to his Circumference and Circumstance. Stages in the Mind and Art of Emily Dickinson, New York 1968).

birth, the body and its physiology. The doors of awareness are thrown open only as the next stage:

> Unscrew the locks from the doors!
> Unscrew the doors themselves from their jambs!
>
> Whoever degrades another degrades me,
> And whatever is done or said returns at last to me.
>
> Through me the afflatus surging and surging, through me the current and index.
>
> (LG, 52: 501-505)

The movement of the passage is clearly from the sensuous to conscious being, from a pre-conscious, appetitive existence to the awareness of spiritual ties between the self and the world. The physical concreteness of the body is the foundation from which the spiritual self develops. In an early notebook Whitman put down what to Gay Wilson Allen does not seem to be "a borrowed idea from his reading but a truly autobiographical confession": "I cannot understand the mystery, but am always conscious of myself as two - as my soul and I: and I reckon it is the same with all men and women"[4]. The striking aspect of this observation is not so much the intense self-consciousness it reveals. This, after all, is a common romantic phenomenon[5] - but the fact that the identifying "I" refers to the physical counterpart of the soul.

In "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" the self's individualization is explicitly connected with the moment of birth, when the nonindividual soul, "struck from the float", takes on a body to become a distinctive, separate "I":

> I too had been struck from the float forever held in solution,
> I too received identity by my body,
> That I was I knew was of my body, and what I should be I

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[4] G. W. A l l e n, The Solitary Singer, New York 1955, p. 138, Whitman's reflection is quoted from: E. H o l l o w a y, (ed.) Uncollected Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman, vol. II, Glaucester, Mass. 1972, p. 66.

[5] A l l e n in "The Solitary Singer" makes a comparison with Heine (note 140 to chapt. IV).

knew I should be of my body.
(LG, 162: 62-64)

Section Five of "Song of Myself" makes a similar point when the speaker addresses the soul:

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,
(LG, 32: 82-83)

Here too the body identifies. The voice in the poem speaks for the fusion of coequal though distinctive components of personality. "A kosmos", a full self, can only be realized through the complete merging of the carnal and the spiritual in man. Imaged as a sexual act, such union makes possible vision and knowledge:

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 men ever born are also my brothers, and the women my sisters and lovers,
And that a kelson of the creation is love,
And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the fields,
And brown ants in the little wells beneath them,
And mossy scabs of the worm fence, heap'd stones, elder, mullein and poke-weed.
(LG, 33: 91-98)

The union is a sine-qua-non of creativity. As the vision actualizes divinity within the self, all life and other men, creatures and humblest plants become infused with the same divine principle. The self returns to the physical and to the natural with a new awareness.

Reflecting on the intimate relationship of mysticism and sensuality in Whitman, Roger Asselineau points out that Whitman's originality lies in his "sharp consciousness of the purely sensual source of his mystical intuitions"[6]. Unlike Wordsworth,

[6] R. A s s e l i n e a u, The Evolution of Walt Whitman, vol. II, Cambridge, Mass. 1962, p. 4.

Shelley or Emerson, Whitman never forgets that his body is "the point of origin for his mystical states". "Even in religious fervor", he said, "there is a touch of animal heat"[7]. In his own words, he was "mainly sensitive to the wonderfulness and perhaps spirituality of things in their physical and concrete expressions"[8]. "And if the body were not the soul, what is the soul?" - asks the ending line of the first section in "I Sing the Body Electric".

Professor Asselineau formulates his observation cautiously saying that the acute awareness of the sensual origins of spiritual insights was true "at least" for the Whitman of 1855-1856 editions. However, the movement from the physical to the spiritual remains characteristic of Whitman's work throughout his life. In "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry", considered the best of the new poems in 1856 "Leaves of Grass", a loving tribute is paid to material objects, "dumb, beautiful ministers" for "great or small, you furnish your parts towards the soul". In "Passage to India", often regarded as Whitman's last great poem, the strategy for moving into the realm of the spirit remains very much the same: a technological achievement, the transcontinental railroad, serves as a vehicle for arriving at the certainty of spiritual communion of mankind across all time and space. The difference is that the poet does not dwell here on the "wonderfulness of things". He has another purpose than celebrating the boundless riches of the physical world:

> A worship new I sing,
> You captains, voyagers, explorers, yours,
> You engineers, you architects, machinists yours,
> You, not for trade or transportation only,
> But in God's name, and for thy sake O soul.
>
> (LG, 412: 36-40)

But he can only start his progress toward the spiritual by fully acknowledging the material and the physical.

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[7] PW, II, 415; 1669-1670, quoted by Asselineau.

[8] A letter to O'Connor, April 18, 1888, quoted by Asselineau.

In fact, as both "Democratic Vistas" and this letter to Tennyson show, Whitman's view of civilizational progress assumed that material plenitude was a necessary basis for spiritual enrichment:

> America is at present a vast seething mass of varied material human and other, of the richest, best, worst, and plentiest kind. Wealthy inventive, no limit to food, land, money, work, opportunity, smart and industrious citizens, but (though real and permanently organized by birth and acceptance) without fusion or a definite heroic identity in form and purpose or organization, which can only come by native schools of great ideas - religion, poets, literature - and will surely come, even through the measureless crudity of the States in those fields so far, and to-day.
>
> (C, II, 174)

Just as the self progresses from physical to spiritual consciousness, civilizations develop from material affluence to spiritual wealth. Floyd Stovall concludes: "The direction of his [Whitman's] evolution was always from the real to the ideal and from the material to the spiritual, and it was his conviction that such was also the direction of evolution in nature"[9].

The letter to O'Connor mentioning the poet's sensitivity to "the wonderfulness and perhaps spirituality of things" mainly "in their physical and concrete expressions" was written only four years before Whitman's death. Although in "Goodbye My Fancy" (1891)[10] the emphasis rests on the continuity of the creative imagination (fancy), as distinct from the physical self, still the identifying "I" belongs to the mortal body:

> Good-bye my Fancy!
> Farewell dear mate, dear love!
> I'm going away, I know not where,
> Or to what fortune, or whether I may ever see you again,
> So Good-bye my Fancy.
>
> (LG, 557: 1-5)

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[9] F. S t o v a l l, (ed.), Walt Whitman. Representative Selections, New York 1963, p. L II.

[10] Placed as the closing poem of the last Annex to 1891-1892 edition of "Leaves of Grass".

For Whitman, complete self-realization involves constant growth from sensuous to spiritual consciousness and, especially in the earlier poems, incessant interchange between matter and spirit. The progress toward the realm of the spirit can be thought of as a pilgrimage upward, or better, forward in time and as such it corresponds to Whitman's personal evolution. As his pride in exuberant health was curbed by the wartime illness and later complaints culminating in the paralytic stroke of 1873, his poems gave more and more emphasis to the spiritual dimensions of life.

The case is not, however, that Whitman juxtaposed body and soul for their various levels of awareness, as one critic has claimed[11]. The "either or" scheme is just not Whitman's way of thinking. His is a world of "liquid rims" and it does not follow in his view that because the soul is unlimited the body must be limited. Whitman's work, even when he became severely incapacitated, does not convey a sense of limitation through the body. It is only in conversations with Traubel that he complains of the painful bodily condition: "... my body is nowadays so easily shoved off its balance..." (Traubel, I, 232). But even then he makes a point of passing over it and is likely to dwell on the continuing agility of the mind: "...but I am feeling quite myself today - head, belly, all" (Traubel, I, 232), "I do not seem to lose my mental grip - I have myself that way well in hand: but the other me, the body has little to expect for itself in the future" (Traubel, I, 186).

The body does not impose restrictions or necessities on Whitman's poetic persona. On the contrary, it is a marvellous agent activating the soul and Whitman uses it to that end until it serves the purpose. When no longer capable of stimulating the soul, the body is tacitly dropped, much as the "gigantic beauty of a

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[11] F. E. C a r l i s l e, The Uncertain Self: Whitman's Drama of Identity (Ann Arbor 1973): "This initial distinction between the Soul and I is based on the degree of awareness or consciousness evident in the two aspects of identity. The awareness of the soul perceives unity where division previously existed. The I, of course, does not share this expanded consciousness; rather it is limited by time and space - in short by conventional human perceptions" (p. 53).

stallion" is dropped in Section Thirty Two of "Song of Myself". The emphasis shifts to the realm of spirit. The body simple grows progressively less important and so less and less distinctly present in the poems. There is no conflict or abrupt change, only gradual progression toward abstraction. Already in the 1872 Preface (to "As a Strong Bird on Pinions Free") Whitman insists on the religious motivation of his whole work: "When I commenced, years ago, elaborating the plan of my poems, and continued turning over that plan, and shifting it in my mind through many years, (from the age of twenty eight to thirty five) experimenting much, and writing and abandoning much, one deep purpose underlay the others, and has underlain it and its execution ever since - and that has been the Religious purpose" (LG, 742; 80-85). In the 1876 Preface to "Leaves of Grass" and "Two Rivulets", the note becomes even stronger: "It was originally my intention, after chanting in »Leaves of Grass« the songs of the Body and Existence, to then compose a further, equally needed Volume, based on those convictions of perpetuity and conservation which, enveloping all precedents, make the unseen Soul govern absolutely at last" (LG, 746; 30nff). In all honesty, however, the plan had to be confronted with the realization that "the full construction of such work (even if I lay the foundation, or give impetus to it) is beyond my powers, and must remain for some bard in the future". This is not only for reasons of health but because "the physical and the sensuous, in themselves or in their immediate continuations, retain holds upon me which I think are never entirely released: and those holds I have not only not denied, but hardly wish'd to weaken" (LG, 746; 40nff).

Although in "Goodbye My Fancy" the physical self is merely the "I" standing at the threshold of dissolution, in the poet's prime the ease with which the physical and the spiritual aspects of the self could be totally integrated became one of Whitman's most impressive characteristics. Moreover, it was the perfect harmony of body and soul that made all the self's journeys possible. Significantly, the mystic union of body and soul in "Song of Myself" precedes all subsequent identifications; it is the initial condition for the self's growth through experience. For Whitman's self grows not only in time from sensuous to spiritual

awareness; equally importantly it expands, so to say, outward, in contact with reality. In a helpful essay on Whitman Denis Donoghue points out that unlike most Romantic poets, Whitman was not troubled by the question of the self's nature because he had "set up a covenant with nature, governed by the energy that makes all things equal". That the energy was in fact that of his own faith seems hardly necessary to add.

> For him, life is - in Yeats' phrase - the fire that makes all simple, simple because equal. Hence he begins by saying, Let x equal the self. Then x equals A plus B plus C plus D plus E and so on, where each letter stands for a new experience contained and possessed, and the self is the sum of its possessions. This is the law of Whitman's lists. If you say that the self - x - is the sum of its possessions A, B, C, D and so on, then the more you add to the right-hand side of the equation, the more you enrich the left, and you do this without bothering about the nature of the x. You assume, as most Romantic poets did, that the self is not at any moment fixed, complete, or predetermined, and you then are free to develop or enlarge it at any time by adding to its experience[12].

The rationale of the self's journeys in Whitman is that they provide opportunities for its enlargement. The "me myself" can never be finally defined. The self must stay free to move on at any moment:

> 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:

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12 D. D o n o g h u e, Connoisseurs of Chaos, London 1965, p. 25. The essay is reprinted in F. M u r p h y (ed.), Walt Whitman, Harmondsworth 1969.

These come to me days and nights and go from me again,
But they are not the Me myself.

(LG, 32: 66-74)

The journey's goal - complete self-realization - is forever to be reached round the next bend of the road. The self's potential is as inexhaustible as its realization imperative:

This day before dawn I ascended a hill and look'd at the crowded heaven,
And I said to my spirit When we become the enfolders of those orbs, and the pleasure and knowledge of everything 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.

(LG, 83-84: 1220-1222)[13]

To arrive at the end of the road would mean that the self could not grow any more. But this must never happen as capability for growth, nothing else, is the self's essence for Whitman. The self is a promise and its lot is cast with the future. Thus no encounter on the way is ever final. A part of consciousness has to be withheld in every engagement, for the potential can never be finally exhausted.

The growth of the self through expansion in space, through endless incorporation of experiences met with on the road, postulates a boundless power of empathy. In fact, in "Song of Myself" the "I" is closer to a cosmic force than to a definable, therefore limited individual[14]. Yet the energy of empathy by

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[13] Compare also the fragment from 1847 "Notebook": "I think the soul will never stop, or attain to any growth beyond which it shall not go. - When I walked at night by the sea shore and looked up at the countless stars, I asked of my soul whether it would be filled and satisfied when it should become god enfolding all these, and open to the life and delight and knowledge of everything in them or of them; and the answer was plain to me at the breaking water on the sands at my feet: and the answer was, No, when I reach there I shall want to go further still-" (Unpublished Poetry and Prose, II: 66).

[14] For observations in this paragraph I am indebted to L. B u e l l, Literary Transcendentalism, Ithaca-London 1973, p. 324 ff. On Whitman's persona see also P. Y. C o l e m a n, Walt Whitman's Ambiguities of "I", [in:] R. P a r t l o w, (ed.) Studies in American Literature in Honor of Robert Dunn Faner, Carbondale, Illinois 1969; O. L. H e n s l e r, The Voice of the

which the self (and the poem) moves and grows, contains a destructive urge. Adhesiveness betrays the self into shame (in "Calamus") or into insufferable agonies of pain (in the crucifixion section of "Song of Myself" or in "The Wound Dresser"). It is significant and perhaps inevitable that, as Whitman grew older, his persona became less vigorously protean, often single and observing rather than powering transformations (cf. "Song of the Red-Wood Tree" or "The Prayer of Columbus"). The sense of weariness creeps in even before 1860 (cf. "Out of the Cradle" and "As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life") and becomes intensified as the poet's youthful bravado gives way to the humility of invalidism and old age. In short, Whitman's development, says Prof. Buell, epitomizes the climax and demise of American Romanticism as the Transcendentalist vision of the heroic possibilities of self becomes progressively undercut in his poems[15].

The energy of the expanding self not only reconciles body and soul, me and the world outside, it resolves as well the dichotomy between active and passive stances toward reality. The voyager is both active and passive. He chooses his road and moves along it but he also passively absorbs what he meets during the journey. The ambiguities involved in such position can perhaps be illuminated by the closing fragment of Section Thirty Two in "Song of Myself", in which the traveller stopped to enjoy "a gigantic beauty of a stallion, fresh and responsive to my caresses" but soon feels that he has no use for the animal:

> I but use you a minute, then I resign you, stallion,
> Why do I need your paces when I myself out-gallop them?
> Even as I stand or sit passing faster than you.
>
> (LG, 61; 707-709)

Unable to commit himself to any single experience without endangering the fluency of his journey, the traveller risks appearing

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Grass Poem "I"; Whitman's Song of Myself, "Walt Whitman Review" 1969, No 15, p. 26-32; B. R. McElderry, Jr, Personae in Whitman (1855-1860), "American Transcendental Quarterly" 1971, No 12, p. 25-32.

[15] It should be noted that Emerson developed along similar lines (see chapt. I of this study).

(or rather, becoming) callous. Paradoxically, the more energy that goes into keeping himself in motion, the more passive, emotionally and intellectually, he becomes. At the end of a long list of scenes he had witnessed, the voyager of "Song of Myself" catches himself in some such predicament:

> Enough! enough! enough!
> Somehow I have been stunn'd. Stand back!
> Give me a little time beyond my cuff'd head, slumbers, dreams, gaping,
> I discover myself on the verge of a usual mistake.
> [...]
> That I could look with a separate look on my own crucifixion and bloody crowning.
>
> (LG, 72: 959-962, 965)

In all his identifications Whitman's persona strives to resolve the opposition between active and passive stances. As lover, he assumes with facility male and female roles. As poet-sayer, he wants to be both the commanding leader: "Allons! whoever you are come travel with me! / Travelling with me you find what never tires" (LG, 154: 114-115) and the instrumental voice of the masses: "Through me many long dumb voices, / Voices of the interminable generations of prisoners and slaves" (LG, 52: 508-509). As prophet, he himself starts a new race of men "I am the teacher of athletes / He that by me spreads a wider breast than my own proves the width of my own" (LG, 84: 1233-1234) or becomes the medium through which the divine principle speaks: "Through me the afflatus surging and surging, through me the current and index. / I speak the password primeval" (LG, 52: 505-506).

The identity of Whitman's self eludes definitions because it is so cumulative. It is both infinitely active and wisely passive, commanding as well as yielding. It comprises equally body and soul. It is rational in so far as it appreciates and makes use of the achievement of science, but always pushes on from there to intuitive insights and spiritual illumination (cf. "Song of Myself", Section Twenty Three or "Passage to India", Section Two). As a living organism it is equal to and exchangeable with any other such organism. If anything can be designated as the supreme characteristic of this self, it is its

constant mobility. The joyful relish of the self's dynamism is made possible by an act of faith establishing strict correspondence between the fluidity of the "I" and the plastic nature of reality[16]. Just as in its social role the self is supported by the grandeur of the cause with which it identifies, in its metaphysical dimension it shares the inexhaustible variety and potential of nature. Emerson's conclusion to "Worship" sums up best the theory of Whitman's self: "Man is made of the same atoms as the world, he shares the same impressions, predispositions and destiny. When his mind is illuminated, when his heart is kind he throws himself joyfully into the sublime order, and does, with knowledge, what the stones do by structure" (VI, 240). Whitman's "I" is therefore always ready for ever new divisions along most unexpected lines while the act of faith removes the threat of losing identity in endless fluctuations. For nature cannot stop being what it is in all its particular manifestations, even though "what it is" may never be finally pin-pointed.

This is not to say that Whitman's identity is devoid of uncertainties. Fred Carlisle has extensively and convincingly shown, as has John Snyder[17], that uncertain, pessimistic, even tragic moods were very much a part of the Whitman persona throughout "Leaves of Grass", just as they must have been a part of the man, though this aspect need not concern us here. According to Carlisle, "the major tensions contributing to the problematic of identity in Whitman" inhere in the poems from the beginning of Whitman's career. Although "I Sit and Look Out" ("A Hand Mirror") was published only in 1860, it was originally written in the exuberant period of 1856-1857. And, if we want further confirmation of Carlisle's thesis, we may think of large sections

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[16] It is interesting to observe that when Allen Ginsberg, a poet whose direct relation to Whitman has been recognized by himself and others, denounces in Howl the deadly antagonism between the self and the modern world, he retains the image of self as fluid and mobile, opposing it to a reality congealed into an apocalyptic enclosure.

[17] C a r l i s l e, op. cit., J. S n y d e r, The Dear Love of Man. Tragic and Lyric Communion in Walt Whitman, The Hague - Paris 1975.

of "The Sleepers" published in the first "Leaves of Grass". Then come the great poems of the depression of 1859-1860 and the distressed Civil War poems. Finally, the disenchanted "Prayer of Columbus" follows the prophecies of "Passage to India". The most important fact, however, is that Whitman's concept of identity involves centrally the need to accomodate a state of mind into a wholistic design. Thus faith in the reality of an ultimately harmonious plan motivates the self in its growth. The progress toward the ideal, however remote, constitutes the self's essence and resolves its uncertainties. Carlisle recognizes this indirectly when he chooses to discuss "Song of Myself" as the conclusion to his book. For it is "Song of Myself" that offers the fullest realization of the inclusive, cosmic self of which other poems present but aspects to be fitted into the total design.

In an article on the originality of the concept of self in Emerson and his followers (from Hawthorne to Dickinson) James McIntosh says that the self as envisioned by Emerson becomes first of all "a fluid consciousness"[18]. Emerson tends to blur distinctions between various faculties of consciousness: he uses terms like reason, heart, soul, genius, or consciousness almost interchangeably, insisting on the unity of human psychic powers in their action. Though he suggests no hierarchy of faculties, he tends to put spiritual powers above man's "instinctive" or "sensual" ones. Except for the last distinction, Emerson's model of self may with equal accuracy refer to Whitman's. Whitman too insists on the wholeness of human powers in action. The term "soul" he most often uses to suggest consciousness comprises psychic and spiritual faculties, but we are kept sharply aware of how they are activated by sensuous impressions. And Whitman rigorously asserted bodily health as a sine-qua-non of spiritual poise. In this emphasis he differs from Emerson, but Whitman's consciousness, as Emerson's, works outward by the fluid energy of its identifications which help to blur distinctions between the inner and the outer world, between the poet and the reader, between art and life[19]. When the poet of "Song of Myself" is ready

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[18] J. M c I n t o s h, Emerson's Unmoored Self, "The Yale Review" 1976, vol. 65, No 2, p. 232-240.

[19] See the next chapter.

to depart in the last section, eternal mobility which is also mutability, has been established as the law of both nature and mind.

Something rather different happens in Dickinson. She tends to focus her poems on single moments and the isolation of an individual event in her poem corresponds to her sense of the self's ultimate loneliness. Here is a poem in which Emily Dickinson picks up, perhaps unintentionally, Emerson's stone. For him it served as a perfect illustration of unselfconscious accommodation into nature's grand design; Emily Dickinson is clearly amused with the Romantic fallacy:

> How happy is the little Stone
> That rambles in the Road alone,
> And doesn't care about Careers
> And Exigencies never fears -
> Whose Coat of elemental Brown
> A passing Universe put on,
> And independent as the Sun
> Associates or glows alone,
> Fulfilling absolute Decree
> In casual simplicity -
>
> (1510)

It is difficult to think the poem altogether unrelated to the passage from "Worship", but, even if no relationship was intended, the two utterances show well the divergence in philosophical position between Emerson and Whitman on the one hand, and Dickinson on the other. The Amherst poet stresses the gap dividing her speaker from the world of "the little stone". The human speaker feels perhaps jealous because, by implication, her world can never be as simple: she cannot associate or not, as she pleases; she must worry "about careers" and be ridden with other anxieties. This is the burden and privilege of a conscious creature. But certainly the world of a human individual is more complex than the "elemental brown" of the stone, even if brown is the color of universe. Moreover, the stone's contentment seems purely accidental, as the nicely ironic[20] use of "casual" indicates.

[20] Allen observes that there is "perceptibly little" irony in Whitman and comments: "Irony results from self-pity or loss of faith. The poet in this poem [i. e. To Think of Time] has com-

In another well-known poem, "I taste a liquor never brewed" (214), the ecstasy of mystic communion with nature is deceptive and short lived. The human intruder insists on participating in nature's mood but succeeds merely in becoming nature's clown - "the little Tippler/ Leaning against the Sun", a comic figure very much like the village drunkard leaning against the lamp-post. The amused and presumably contemptuous laughter of "seraphs in their snowy hats" and "saints at the windows" is well justified since neither intoxication nor ecstatic rapture seem "dignified" in a sensible human being. Charles Anderson thinks the poem may well be an intentional parody of Emerson's "Bacchus". In evidence he points to the close echoes in the language and to the contrastive conclusion[21]. Whether an intended parody or not, this poem too establishes the self as essentially alien to nature, though subject to moods of longing for the mystic communion.

The conflict between the psychic need to participate trustfully in nature's divine mystery and the intellectual compulsion to examine and question "nature's show" constitutes the center of "These are the days when birds come back", quoted in the previous chapter. In yet another early poem, the speaker lets the general mood of nature prevail upon her:

> The morns are meeker than they were -
> The nuts are getting brown -
> The berry's cheek is plumper -
> The Rose is out of town.
>
> The Maple wears a gayer scarf -
> The field a scarlet gown -
> Lest I should be old fashioned
> I'll put a trinket on.
>
> (12)

---

plete faith that underlying birth and death is a process grander than life itself" (A l l e n, op. cit.; p. 165-166). It is precisely "complete faith" that is absent in Dickinson's poems.

[21] A n d e r s o n, op. cit., p. 73-75.

If she does not want to be left out, the persona feels that she should "put a trinket on" in obedience to nature's gaudy fashion in the fall. The word trinket, however, suggests cheapness and implicitly condemns her for undiscriminating taste.

Similarly, no matter how much Dickinson yearns for a safe parent - child relationship with God, her poems repeatedly turn into denunciations charging Him with arbitrary decisions and with insensibility to individual suffering. The very idea of basing God's relation to man on the principle of payment for service rendered seems objectionable since the human heart seeks first of all love, not gain:

> Crowns of Life are servile Prizes
> To the stately Heart,
> Given for the Giving solely,
> No Emolument.
>
> (1357)[22]

The haughty, nearly sarcastic tone of the poem derives authority from the claim it makes for the dignity of human emotions.

After the death of her little nephew, the poet wrote bitterly:

> Apparently with no Surprise
> To any happy Flower
> The Frost beheads it at its play -
> In accidental power -
> The blonde Assassin passes on -
> The Sun proceeds unmoved
> To measure off another Day
> For an Approving God.
>
> (1624)

The instance of lawless execution or treacherous murder suggested by the imagery calls for justice, at least in human under-

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[22] The second version sounds even more rebelious:
"I will give" the base Proviso -
Spare Your "Crown of Life" -
Those it fits, too fair to wear it -
Try it on Yourself -
(the Variorum Ed., III, 938)

standing. Instead, it is met with the inscrutable indifference of nature and God. In fact, God's complicity in the crime is implied. Does God approve only of the Sun's indifference? or does He approve of the killing of the flower as well? In either case, the conduct of both baffles the mind, violates sensibility and contradicts human mores.

From the human point of view, the fact that eternal life has to be entered by the way of death looks very much like an unfair business transaction: the exchange of existence whose value we know for one we know very little about at the rate we do not know at all:

> For Death - or rather
> For the Things 'twould buy -
> This - put away
> Life's Opportunity -
>
> The Things that Death will buy
> Are Room -
> Escape from Circumstances -
> And a Name -
>
> With Gifts of Life
> How Death's Gifts may compare -
> We know not -
> For the Rates - lie Here -
>
> (382, cf.also 1461, 1732)

It is interesting to notice that what Dickinson singles out as life's essential quality is "opportunity", that is, possibility and expectation. In this she is rather like Whitman, though without Whitman's insistence on the fertile abundance. Compared with Whitman, Dickinson seems Spartan. But she has to have the essence. She does not need the outer crust, however gorgeous. "Opportunity" will do and each reader must decide what it means for him, rather than contemplate an all comprising list. Significantly, "the things that death will buy" are earthly things, known from experience this side of the grave: a private plot in the cemetery, freedom from life's painful circumstances and "a Name" - a name on the gravestone or a Name in the hall of fame? The two sets of values are neatly juxtaposed as the human mind attempts to work out how one converts into the other. But the rates of exchange are buried in the grave. Mystery prevents man

from consciously evaluating his position and making his own decisions.

Emily Dickinson's special regard for Christ is largely due to the fact that she sees Christ as co-victim of His Father's arbitrary plans:

> God is a distant - stately Lover -
> Woos, as He states us - by His Son -
> Verily, a Vicarious Courtship -
> "Miles", and "Priscilla", were such an One -
>
> But, lest the Soul - like fair "Priscilla"
> Choose the Envoy - and spurn the Groom -
> Vouches, with hyperbolic archness -
> "Miles", and "John Alden" were Synonym -
>
> (357, cf. also 1433)

Both Christ and the human soul have been deprived of the right of choosing or being chosen. The possibility of choice has been excluded by arrangements which cannot be argued and refuted because they are beyond comprehension. Emily Dickinson finds that God's arbitrary ways, constantly baffling human understanding, are as impossible to accept as the fallacy of perfect communion with nature. Her sense of separation from nature and God comes from two sources. In the first place, the indifference of both violates human sensibility:

> The Morning after Woe -
> 'Tis frequently the Way
> Surpasses all that rose before -
> For utter Jubilee -
>
> As Nature did not care -
> And piled her Blossoms on -
> And further to parade a Jay
> Her Victim stared upon -
>
> (364, cf. also e.g. 348)

and

> My Business, with the Cloud,
> If any Power behind it, be,
> Not Subject to Despair -
> It care, in some remoter way,
> For so minute affair

As Misery -
Itself, too vast, for interrupting - more -
(293, cf. also 1624)

Secondly, both nature and Divinity confront man with a mystery which defies the mind. Even as the poet recognizes how exposed the self is because of the vulnerability of emotions and the powerlessness of the mind, she refuses to adopt other criteria for evaluating experience than those of individual sensibility and understanding. In consequence, human interpretations of divine and natural mysteries are constantly juxtaposed with their impenetrable essences. The result is continuous doubt, while the tone varies from that of rebellious denunciation seen in, e.g. 1624, 293 or 364, to gentle amusement at man's presumptuous self-delusion:

But God be with the Clown -
Who ponders this tremendous scene -
This whole Experiment of Green -
As if it were his own!
(1333)

Self-deception, however, may be more serious than just a clown's phantasy: it may become a necessary strategy for survival, a consciously adopted defence:

We dream - it is good we are dreaming -
It would hurt us - were we awake -
[...]
Cautious - We jar each other -
And either - open the eyes -
Lest the Phantasm - prove the Mistake -
And the livid Surprise

Cool us to Shafts of Granite -
With just an Age - and Name -
And perhaps a phrase in Egiptian -
It's prudenter - to dream -
(531)

Dickinson's position in this poem echoes Emerson's journal entry already quoted: "If the world is not a dualism, is not a bipolar Unity, but is two, is Me and It, then is there the Alien, the

Unknown, and all we have believed and chanted out of our deep instinctive hope is a pretty dream". But she recognizes unambiguously a necessary strategy in what in Emerson's "Journal" is merely a suspicion, what in "Experience" seems a reluctance to face facts, and what in Melville's Captain Amasa Delano is clearly an intellectual deficiency[23]. Acceptance on trust is for Dickinson the easier way. When mere conformity, it may be cheap, as in "the trinket" poem (12), but it becomes deadly serious when turned into a prudent survival technique. In No 761, where the speaker's mental powers left her in consequence of extreme pain, she says resignedly: "'Twas lighter - to be Blind -".

Despite her recognition that the privilege of independent thought often becomes a burden too heavy to carry, Dickinson courageously persists in questioning even her own hopeful visions. Her persona's greatest problem, however, lies in the fact that just as God and nature demand that man accept their terms on trust or be left out, so man's own irrational impulses threaten to overthrow the mind's tenuous grasp of experience. Intense emotions or sensations such as joy, pain or fear repeatedly threaten to deprive her persona of initiative by submerging consciousness in an incomprehensible, therefore uncontrollable element (cf. e.g. 252, 281, 315, 378, 615, 618). The poem beginning "'Tis so appalling - it exhilarates -" furnishes a particularly interesting example of this process:

> To Scan a Ghost, is faint -
> But grappling, conquers it -
> How easy, Torment, now -
> Suspense kept sawing so -
>
> The Truth, is Bald, and Cold -
> But it will hold -
> If any are not sure -
> We show them - prayer -
> But we, who know,
> Stop hoping, now -
> [...]
> Others, Can wrestle -

---

[23] The fact remains that in Benito Cereno Delano survives precisely through his failure to inquire what lay beneath orderly appearances.

Yours, is done -
And so of Woe, bleak dreaded - come,
It sets the Fright at liberty -
And Terror's free -
Gay, Ghastly, Holiday!

(281)

There are, it seems, two stages of fear: the initial fear of death which can be controlled by "grappling" with the "ghost". Recognizing death as a fact helps to master the fear of it without supplicating God for assistance: "But we, who know,/ Stop hoping, now -". Ironically, though, the assertion of the power of reason in this life removes the possibility of any kind of certainty about the after life. Freeing the speaker from one kind of fear, the act of intellectual recognition only releases another kind of terror for which the mind has no remedy: "And Terror's free -/ Gay, Ghastly, Holiday!" Terror's ghastly freedom comes not so much from its "objective" strength as from the fact that the speaker's intellectual initiative stops: the mind can seize no fact "to grapple" with and is overcome.

The self's unconscious depth can appear equally ominous because, like the incomprehensible powers external to man, it works according to laws which defy the human mind[24]:

Ourself behind ourself, concealed -
Should startle most -
Assassin hid in our Apartment
Be Horror's least.

The Body - borrows a Revolver -
He bolts the Door -
O'erlooking a superior spectre -
Or More -

(670)

The Body" in this confrontation with itself resorts to rational action preparing a defense against the intruder. The "reason-

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[24] On Emily Dickinson's awareness of "the other" in external reality as well as within the self see G. Cambon's excellent essay: Emily Dickinson and the Crisis of Self-Reliance, [in:] M. Simon, T. H. Parsons (eds.), Transcendentalism and its Legacy, Ann Arbor 1966, p. 123-132.

able" precautions of bolting the door and having a pistol ready look ridiculously inadequate since "the assassin" is already inside, having, in fact, never left the apartment (the body). Even though the conflict remains unresolved, the self's helplessness in confrontation with itself is made sufficiently clear. This is the only kind of confrontation Dickinson's speaker thinks wise to avoid:

> What Terror would enthrall the Street
> Could Countenance disclose
>
> The Subterranean Fright
> The Cellars of the Soul -
> Thank God the loudest Place he made
> Is licensed to be still.
>
> (1225)

While her persona can afford refusing to rely on prayer in dealings with death, she feels compelled to invoke God's help against her own unconscious nature:

> The Loneliness whose worst alarm
> Is lest itself should see -
> And persih from before itself
> For just a scrutiny -
> [...]
> I fear me this - is Loneliness -
> The Maker of the Soul
> Its Caverns and its Corridors
> Illuminate - or seal -
>
> (777, cf. also 683)

The challenge which the confrontations within the self constitute is exhilarating but destruction hangs in the air. Robert Weisbuch sums up the problem succintly: "An electric reality lives within us and abroad. Survival depends on its denial, but a life of power depends on its actualization"[25]. When faced with the impossible dilemma, Dickinson's persona admits to helplessness:

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[25] R. W e i s b u c h, Emily Dickinson's Poetry, Chicago-London 1975, p. 134.

Me from Myself - to banish -
Had I Art -
Impregnable my Fortress
Unto All Heart -

But since Myself - assault Me -
How have I peace
Except by subjugating
Consciousness?

And since We're mutual Monarch
How this be
Except by abdication
Me - of Me?

(642)

Like Whitman's divisions of the self this poem presents us with the awareness of two inner principles. However, unlike in Whitman where ideally the different aspects of self fuse into identity, in Dickinson they are contending forces, forever locked in an unresolvable conflict. Her self is a compound of emotions, or better, of irrational impulses including subconscious and instinctive urges as well as affections which in this poem are specified as "Heart - the me of the first stanza, and intellect - "Consciousness" - the myself of the second stanza.

In poem 47 the self is divided in a similar way into "Heart" and "I" where "I" is the self's thinking part associated with light of knowledge and of memory. Yet, even as she calls the intellectual faculty "I" and singles it out for the identifying feature, she makes it absolutely clear that the life of the heart and the life of the mind are as inseparable as warmth and light. What is more, emotional, non-rational life seems to feed and define the life of the mind: if the heart will not forget the lover, the mind cannot either. She makes the dependence even more explicit in poem 1355: "The Mind lives on the Heart / Like any Parasite -"

Emotions uncontrolled, on the other hand, are mortally dangerous. One of her images to convey the power of primal impulses is that of a leopard (cf. e.g. 492), the choice of the animal expressing both attraction and fear. Another one is that of a volcano:

On my volcano grows the Grass
A meditative spot -
An acre for a Bird to Choose
Would be the General thought -

How red the Fire rocks below -
How insecure the sod
Did I disclose
Would populate with awe my solitude.
(1677)

In this poem, the self's condition is a state of precarious balance in which the rational "meditative" consciousness just keeps confined the eruptive energy of potentially destructive inner life.

Seemingly she lets her heart's desires play in the poignant "Wild Nights - Wild Nights!"(249), but the situation there is posited as a false condition: "Were I with thee/ Wild Nights should be/ Our luxury!" and "Might I but moor - Tonight -/ In Thee!" and is fully controllable because unreal. Even so, the sense of danger in the poem is nearly as strong as desire. The power of unleashed elements can only partly account for the feeling of insecurity pervading the poem. By giving up the guidance of the mind, "Done with the Compass -/ Done with the Chart -!", the speaker has deprived herself of the possibility of at least struggling to influence her position; and the situation fills her with apprehension. Leaving oneself open to the play of uncontrolled emotions results in passiveness, in numbness, an attitude both tempting and destructive.

Dickinson's fascination with the power of self measured in duels with the circumstances of experience can be seen in the frequency with which she poses the self in situations where it must resist attacks of prevalent, if not overwhelming forces. From "I'm Nobody! Who are you?"(288)through "I took my Power in my Hand -"(540)to the undated "No man saw awe" (1733), we could multiply examples of poems built on the same situational pattern, with the self confronting and resisting more powerful forces:

On a Columnar Self -
How ample to rely
In Tumult - or Extremity -
(789)

The duel situation is the poet's image for the human condition.

Heroic dimensions of the self can be confirmed only by performance in reaction to the overwhelming assault:

> There is a strength in proving that it can be borne
> Although it tear -
> What are the sinews of such cordage for
> Except to bear
> The ship might be of satin had it not to fight -
> To walk on seas requires cedar Feet.
>
> (1113)[26]

The power of faith may have enabled Peter to "walk on seas"[27] but Dickinson's persona feels better sustained by the power of lonely endurance.

The shaping and therefore identifying component of the self is for Dickinson consciousness - the faculty of being aware what is happening to oneself, the questioning and judging faculty. Sometimes she divides the soul into Soul and Consciousness, "her awful Mate"(894), or Soul and "a single Hound/ Its own Identity" (822). The distinction seems to be between Soul as spiritual existence and its "identity" or Consciousness as detached awareness of that existence. At other times she treats soul as equivalent of consciousness and imagines immortality as "Costumless Consciousness" (1454). Invariably, however, consciousness remains the supreme human faculty responsible for both human misery and heroic freedom (cf. 384, 383). Thus, while consciousness in Whitman equals perception or even being itself, the life principle, for Dickinson consciousness is far closer to awareness and knowledge; it is, in fact, intellectual power.

Dickinson never singles out as the identifying feature anything in her persona that is passive, yielding and soft. Neither her body nor heart alone is allowed to represent the whole self. The distinction is reserved for the struggling consciousness. When Robert Weisbuch says that she fears defeat of the self through "simply the battering of the nerves unto death"[28],

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[26] Cf. the following passage in Emerson's Montaigne (published 1850): "We want a ship in these billows we inhabit. An angular, dogmatic house would be rent to chips and splinters in this storm of many elements" (IV, 160).

[27] Cf. Matthew, 14: 25-33.

[28] W e i s b u c h, op. cit., p. 141.

he only tells the first part of the truth. The final horror is not the damage done to the physiological self but extinction of consciousness. While even the emotionally "numb" stages can be controlled by reporting how they "felt", the final disaster occure when the mind is vanquished. Dickinson's most powerful poems take us to the very brink of the catastrophe:

> And then a Plank in Reason, broke,
> And I dropped down, and down -
> And hit a World, at every plunge,
> And Finished knowing - then -
> (280)
>
> As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow -
> First - Chill - then Stupor - then the letting go -
> (341)
>
> And then the Windows failed - and then
> I could not see to see -
> (465)

Inarticulateness is the greatest danger she courts, inevitably, though, because her concern is with measuring the extent of the self's power in mastering overwhelming forces of experience through art. The self of Whitman is perfectly symmetrical, its symmetry based on complementation. For every single aspect there must exist a matching counterpart, equally valid, equally representative of the self: the body is matched by soul, active creativity by passive receptivity, sensuous perception by spiritual insight and so on. The list of correspondences can be extended indefinitely as the self expands in contact with experience. The chief concern for Whitman is providing opportunities for the self's unfolding. Possibilities of conflict have been practically excluded as Whitman's consciousness strives to abolish "the other". Since there is nothing that could not be incorporated within the self, Whitman's persona does not fear losing identity in the primal flux, just as it is seldom threatened by betrayal from within. Ideally, the self, like atmosphere, should become without a taste of "the distillation", "odorless" (cf. "Song of Myself", Section Two), that is all encompassing and wholly universal. Consciousness, for Whitman, is only stimulated from one

source: through the vision of ultimate oneness underlying the inexhaustible variety of life.

Dickinson's model of the self, on the other hand, is based on balancing the two carefully delimited principles of Heart and Mind, on balancing non-rational experience which is dynamic but lawless and potentially destructive and intellectual discipline which wrestles shape and meaning from sheer energy. Dickinson preserves "the other" respecting the mystery not only of nature and God but of the self's unconscious depths as well. Thus the grace of the unifying vision is possible for her but conflict - inevitable, and consciousness may be stimulated by either impulse. The balance within the self is not founded on complementation but on opposition. Consequently, precise adjustment of the contending principles becomes a matter of life and death: "The Brain, within its Groove/ Runs evenly - and true -/ But let a Splinter swerve - [...]" (556), "Let an instant push/ Or an Atom press [...] It - may jolt the Hand/ That adjusts the Hair" (889). The balance is felt as infinitely delicate (cf. already quoted 1677) and its fragility creates a constant sense of danger, another challenge for consciousness.

The respective vision of self in Whitman and Dickinson may be further illustrated by juxtaposing the following fragment of "Song of Myself" with poem 384:

> I know I have the best of time and space, and was never measured and never will be measured.
> I tramp a perpetual journey, (come, listen all!)
> My signs are a rain proof coat, good shoes, and a staff cut from the woods,
> No friend of mine takes ease in my chair,
> I have no chair, no church, no philosophy,
> I lead no man to a dinner-table, library, exchange,
> But each man and each woman of you I lead upon a knoll,
> My left hand hooking you round the waist,
> My right hand pointing to landscapes of continents and the public road.
>
> Not I, not any one else can travel that road for you,
> You must travel it for yourself.
>
> (LG, 83; 1201-1211)

For Whitman here as almost anywhere else, liberation of consciousness is identical with opening up of time and space. Freedom

of the mind is translatable into freedom of the body. Unlimited possibilities have been opened for complete man, that is body and mind. The essence of the new vision is its power to do away with enclosures and constraints, with contradictions and necessities. As traditions, institutions, creeds are left behind, no sense of loss arises. The prospects of the journey more than compensate for the initial rejection. The whole glory of the new man, "the friendly and flowing savage", lies ahead. He is to be celebrated as possibility.

The liberated consciousness means a very different kind of freedom to Dickinson:

No Rack can torture me -
My Soul - at Liberty -
Behind this mortal Bone
There knits a bolder One -

You cannot prick with saw -
Nor pierce with Scimitar -
Two Bodies - therefore be -
Bind One - The Other fly -

The Eagle of his Nest
No easier divest -
And gain the Sky
Than mayest Thou -

Except Thyself may be
Thine Enemy -
Captivity is Consciousness.
So's Liberty. (384)

Her persona achieves not so much freedom "from" as, rather, freedom "in spite of" necessity. The "mortal Bone" remains always exposed, so suffering, pain and limitation have terrible immediacy. Possibilities for freedom are exclusively psychic or, rather, imaginative, for Dickinson; her acute awareness of the vulnerability of body and heart makes her admire not the yet unrealized potential but the actual achievement: endurance and persistent effort. Emily Dickinson, as a matter of course, envisions the self as assaulted by external forces (in this poem signalled through the imagery of torture, in e.g. "I'm Nobody" pointed to as "them" or "bog"). To such a siege, the eagle-like ability of consciousness to take to regions higher than its bodily habitat can be successfully opposed. But things are never easy for Dick-

inson; the greatest danger resides within. Surrendering to circumstances, consciousness can make captivity as real as liberty. It is, therefore, Dickinson's constant quest to find out how invincible consciousness is, to test it for power and endurance. Supporting her in the quest may have been Emerson's admonition:

> Then first shalt thou know,
> That in the wild turmoil,
> Horsed on the Proteus,
> Thou rideat to power,
> And to endurance,
> (VI, 308)[29]

For Emily Dickinson, "power and endurance" won in confrontations with experience could only be made actual in her art.

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[29] This is a fragment of the poem used as epigraph to Illusions. The coincidence of my own phrasing with Emerson's was kindly pointed to me by Prof. J. McIntosh.

C h a p t e r III

THE CENTRAL CONSCIOUSNESS: MEDIATION VERSUS COMMAND

In the important essay already referred to, Geoffrey Hartman points out that in Romantic art "the traditional triad of Eden, Fall, and Redemption merges with the new triad of Nature, Self-Consciousness, and Imagination"[1] where the last term must remedy the alienating effects of the second. Whitman and Dickinson both fall within Hartman's pattern, for both recognize that poetry functions analogously to religion. Yet while both view art as capable of rescuing man from chaos, each devises a different practical strategy. It seems, therefore, necessary to trace and compare the relations which the redeeming poetic consciousness[2] develops with experiential reality in the work of both poets.

There have been many attempts at defining the structure of "Song of Myself"[3], certainly Whitman's most famous poem, but as

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[1] G. H a r t m a n, Romanticism and Anti-Self-Consciousness, [in:] Beyond Formalism. Literary Essays 1958-1970, New Haven - London 1970; rpt. in: H. B l o o m, (ed.), Romanticism and Consciousness, New York 1970, p. 46-56.

[2] I use the term "consciousness" rather than "imagination" first of all because neither Whitman nor Dickinson speaks much of imagination. Whitman's word is most often "spirit" or "soul" (in the last Annex to LG, it is "fancy"); Dickinson's words are "consciousness", "mind" or "soul". Whitman's terms bear strong religious connotations and seem closer to Emerson's "Oversoul" or even to Bergson's "l'elau vital" (cf. G. W. A l l e n, Solitary Singer, New York 1955, p. 359) while Dickinson's "transcendent consciousness" (J. L y n e n's formulation in: Three Uses of the Present: The Historian's, the Critic's, and Emily Dickinson's, "College English" Nov. 1966, vol. 28, p. 126-136) is more clearly related to imagination. Both poets, however, associate creativity with their respective terms.

[3] The poem was first published untitled and unsectioned in LG 1855. In 1856 it was given the title "Poem of Walt Whitman, an American"; in 1860 and the succeeding editions, it was simply called "Walt Whitman" and became "Song of Myself" in 1881. Revisions were made throughout until 1881 but they cannot be considered fundamental.

Malcolm Cowley observes: "In spite of revealing analyses made by a few Whitman scholars, notably Carl. F. Strauch and James E. Miller, a feeling still seems to prevail that it has no structure properly speaking; that it is inspired but uneven, repetitive, and especially weak in its transitions from one theme to another"[4]. Basically, two lines can be distinguished among the interpretations offered: one insists on the progressing pattern of thought (as Carl Strauch does) or a narrative sequence (as do James Miller and Cowley himself); the other, more wary of stressing the "forward" thrust of the poem, treats it as a "mosaic" (Roger Asselinau) or a symphony (Gay Wilson Allen), pointing to the repetitive, "circular" or "spiral" pattern of the poem (Allen and Davis). V. K. Chari puts even more emphasis on the static character of "Song of Myself", treating the whole poem as an expanded illustration of what he calls "the paradox of identity"[5]. The difficulty in interpreting the structure of "Song of Myself" seems thus to lie in reconciling the static, repetitive element in it with its equally strongly felt dynamism. The controversy, one might add, hits the very core of Whitman's own problems with structure.

My suggestion for overcoming the difficulty is by refferring to the pattern drawn by Emerson in "Circles": "The eye is the first circle; the horizon which it forms is the second; and throughout nature this primary figure is repeated without end. It is the highest emblem in the cipher world. St. Augustine described the nature of God as a circle whose centre was everywhere, and its circumference nowhere..." (II, 301), and "Every ultimate fact is only the first of a new series. Every general law only a particular fact of some more general law presently to disclose itself. There is no outside, no inclosing wall, no circumference to us" (II, 304). The pattern of concentric circles rushing outward until they dissolve seems an appropriate analogy for the structure of "Song of Myself"; more appro-

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[4] M. C o w l e y, Introduction to Leaves of Grass: The First (1855) Edition, rpt. in: F. M u r p h y, (ed.) Walt Whitman, Harmondsworth 1969, p. 347-352.

[5] V. K. C h a r i, Whitman in the Light of Vedantic Mysticism, Lincoln 1964, p. 121-127.

priate, in fact, than the widely accepted Emersonian spiral[6]. As effectively as the spiral, the circular figure recognizes the repetitive element in the poem and, more effectively than the spiral, joins it to the energy of expansion. Moreover, it helps to avoid the implications of hierarchic arrangement, which undoubtedly were very real for Emerson when he proceeded from nature as "commodity" to nature as 'spirit'. Whitman does not stress the movement upward. At the end of the poem he still asks to be sought "under your boot-soles". His is "the long journey"[7] outward in space and forward in time, with the thrust ahead strongly emphasized and with equally strong insistence on the perfect democracy of God, all men and women, "brown ants", "mossy scabs of the worm fence, heap'd stones, elder, mullein and poke-weed" (LG, 33: 98). Moreover, the circular pattern elicits the difficulties of transitions which the spiral conceals in its smooth coils.

The primary impulse, the stone dropped in water to start "the circles", is the self's desire to merge. The urge to union, mystical at the base, repeats itself throughout the poem in larger and larger contexts. Thus, somewhat like Malcolm Cowley, I see "Song of Myself" as "punctuated with chants of ecstasy"[8]. The ecstasies of contact, of being in communion, power the progressions in time, onward to the realm of spirit, and in space, outward to incorporate the cosmos. Both progressions are orderly. The advance in time is contained within the span of the speaker's life, from the birth of self-awareness to death. The journey in space is "graded" in stages from "the bank by the river" through "the populous city", the whole country, earth and outer space. Comparing the beginning and the end of the poem clearly demonstrates its radial expansion:

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[6] For discussion of the spiral figure as "the heart of Emerson's aesthetics" see V. C. H o p k i n s, Spires of Form, Cambridge, Mass. 1951.

[7] Cf. G. W. A l l e n, The Long Journey Motif, [in:] Walt Whitman as Man, Poet, and Legend, Carbondale 1961, p. 62-83.

[8] Also R. H. P e a r c e maintains that "the argument of the poem centers on points of psychic intensity" (The Continuity of American Poetry, Princeton, N. J. 1961, p. 74-75).

I celebrate myself, and sing myself
[...]
I loaf and invite my soul,
I lean and loaf at my ease observing a spear of summer grass. (LG, 28; 4-5)

and

I depart as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,
I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift in lacy jags.
I bequeth myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.
You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
And filter and fibre your blood.
Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
Missing me one place search another,
I stop somewhere waiting for you. (LG, 89; 1341 ff)

Whereas Section One is preoccupied only with the single "I" observing an isolated fact of life, in the closing section the "I" merges bodily into the eternity of organic life and spiritually into the continuous presence of all those who read the poem. In the beginning is Emerson's first circle of the eye, in the end, a boundless circumference of an immanent God suggested through sacramental imagery.

Within this open-ended but clearly structured pattern "Song of Myself" consists of a sequence of "movements" toward an ecstatic union. Each "ecstasy" enlarges the protagonist's consciousness and so the scope of the poem. Each "ecstasy" pushes consciousness outward to encompass a circle larger than the one just completed. The first ecstatic union occurs in Section Five and is prepared by Sections One to Four in which the speaker introduces himself[9]. An individual, consisting of body and soul, he must extricate himself from the past and society to reach his

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[9] Moreover, the sequence 1-4 announces the main themes of the poem very much like the argument of the traditional epic which it also evokes with the characteristic opening "I celebrate...", "I sing..."

essential, "naked" self. The ecstasy in Section Five is appropriately conveyed through auto-erotic imagery, for its outcome is the perfect fusion of the so far disjoined aspects of the self. Full acceptance of the complete "me"- body and soul alike - endows the speaker with the gift of sympathetic observation[10]. After the poem's central symbol has been established and explained in Section Six, the gift is put to use in the wanderings of Sections Seven to Sixteen. Toward the end of this sequence the observing protagonist begins to feel that he has grown into a powerful personality: an athletic body and an all-embracing soul. The culminating ecstasy of this realization comes in Section Twenty-Four in which the speaker is virtually blinded with the sense of joy and power of living. Section Twenty-Five poses the famous question: Walt you contain enough, why don't you let it out then? (LG, 55: 568). The answer is negative, for the speaker must proceed beyond observation to actual involvement, sensual as well as emotional. Other senses participate in experiencing in the subsequent sections to show that "my is no callous shell" (LG, 57; 614). The climax of this sequence comes in an actual sexual union (Sections Twenty-Eight and Twenty-Nine). The love relationship, even if expressed primarily in sensuous terms, "You villain touch! what are you doing? my breath is tight in its throat,/ Unclench you floodgates, you are too much for me" (LG, 58: 640-641), gives the protagonist the power of identification with others but also makes him vulnerable to pain. It allows him the cosmic vision of Section Thirty-Three as well as makes him a Christ figure, suffering for all humanity in Section Thirty-Eight. Yet in the agony of pain a new man is born with power to teach and prophesy before he finally loses himself in the eternity of organic and spiritual life.

Fragments of the poem dividing the ecstatic experiences record the progress of consciousness toward moments of transport. Consciousness actively seeks experience until in a culminating

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10 Cf. C. S t r a u c h, The Structure of Walt Whitman's Song of Myself, "English Journal" Sept. 1938, No XXVII, p. 597-607, rpt. in: J. E. M i l l e r, Jr., (ed.) Whitman's Song of Myself - Origin, Growth, Meaning, New York 1964.

moment it becomes wholly receptive when a new perspective reveals itself and the journey "to the horizon" can continue. Each moment of communion and each ecstatic contact endow consciousness with a new power, with new energy. The journey continues as long as consciousness expands while establishing contacts.

The alternating movements of reaching out toward a point of contact and then undergoing the revelation of the moment of communion are crucial for the whole poetry of Whitman. His two "shore odes"[11], like "Song of Myself", gather momentum from the progress of consciousness toward illumination. In "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking"[12], the protagonist, now a mature man, relives the central experience of his youth[13]. The first twenty-two lines of the poem, called Pre-Verse in the first version, form syntactically one giant of a sentence. Within it the narrative present of the poem is established and the three principal actors, the sea, the bird and the boy are introduced. The main part of the poem recreates a past experience: the young boy's

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[11] I use the term as defined by P. F u s e l l in Whitman's Curious Warble, [in:] R. W. B. L e w i s, (ed.)The Presence of Walt Whitman, New York 1962, where the "American Shore Ode" is a lyric of some length and philosophic density spoken (usually at a specific place) on an American beach; its theme tends to encompass the relationship of the wholeness and flux of the sea to the discreteness and fixity of land objects"(p. 31).

[12] "Out of the Cradle" and "As I Ebb'd" were published within a few months of each other. "Out of the Cradle" appeared in the Christmas (Dec. 24, 1859) number of the "New York Saturday Press". "As I Ebb'd" was printed in the "Atlantic Monthly" for April 1860. Both were finally revised for the 1881 edition and there given their present position in LG.

[13] In my discussion of "Out of the Cradle" I am most indebted to Prof. A. P. F r a n k's excellent paper "The Long Withdrawing Roar: One Hundred Years of the Ocean's Message to Man", first given at a poetry symposium at the University of Wuppertal in November 1978. Other notable discussions of the poem are: L. S p i t z e r's, Explication de Texte Applied to Walt Whitman's Poem Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking, ("Journal of English Literary History" Sept. 1949, No XVI, p. 229-249); R. C h a s e's Out of the Cradle as a Romance, and E. F u s s e l l's, Whitman's Curious Warble (both in: R. W. B. L e w i s, (ed.), The Presence of Walt Whitman, New York 1962). See also R. D. F a n e r, Walt Whitman and Opera, Philadelphia 1951.

nightly visits to the sea-shore, where through the summer he listened to the mockingbird's song of love and loss. In the reflection beginning with the line "Demon or bird" (LG, 251: 144ff) it becomes clear that the boy identifies with the bird. The bird speaks for the pained and bewildered man-child who, however, unlike the bird, is finally able to transcend his sense of loss and frustration, given the clue by the sea. Until the boy identifies exclusively with the bird's solitary song, nothing is clear to him: only vague disordered emotions are stirred: "The messenger there arous'd, the fire, the sweet hell within,/ The unknown want, the destiny of me" (LG, 252: 156-157). It is when he is ready to disengage himself from the plight of the bird and when he turns away from private suffering that knowledge may come to him. In his bewilderment he addresses the sea:

> O give me the clew! it lurks in the night here somewhere,
> O if I am to have so much, let me have more!
> [...]
> Are you whispering it, and have been all the time, you sea-waves?
>
> (LG, 252: 158-159, 163)

To someone actively seeking wisdom in her, the sea changes her aspect: no longer "the fierce old mother incessantly moaning with angry moans", she becomes the contact edge of "liquid rims and wet sands", the measured movement "delaying not, hurrying not", her voice friendly and seductive: " [the sea] Whisper'd me through the night, and very plainly before daybreak,/ Lisp'd to me low and delicious... (167-168), "Hissing melodious, neither like the bird nor like my arous'd child's heart" (169). The revelation occurs when the boy, with passive acceptance, lets the sea act upon him: "But edging near as privately for me rustling at my feet/ Creeping thence steadily up to my ears and lovingly laving me softly all over..." (171-172). At this point, with Armin Frank, I see the boy lying on the beach with his feet to the water rather than wading into it which is the more customary interpretation. The quiet conclusion asserts the importance of the illuminating moment transforming the pained and puzzled youth

into the poet. "A word out of the sea"[14] makes him capable of fusing the isolated experiences into the coherence of "songs".

"Out of the Cradle" is a "learning" poem; it tells how the boy - protagonist learned to transform emotion into art. Structurally the progress is rendered in five parts. The first is The Prologue (Pre-Verse) in which a man revisits the scene and experience of his youth. Second comes the actual experience recollected and relived. Now the narrator occasionally ignores the distance between the boy-persona and his older self[15] expressing his mature knowledge rather than adolescent intuitions. For example, when the boy addresses the bird directly, "Yes my brother I know,/ The rest might not, but I have treasur'd every note" (60-61), his sympathy with the bird seems to derive much more from the older man's experience than from the youth's innocence of heart. Third is a reflection on how the beach experience affected the boy. Again, although it is the youth who reflects, the distance between the mature narrator and his youthful double is often crossed so that what the boy says reveals the man's insights:

> Never more shall I escape, never more the reverberations,
> Never more the cries of unsatified love be absent from me,
> Never again leave me to be the peaceful child I was before.
>
> (152-154)

Fourth is the revelation and finally comes the concluding assessment of the revelation's importance.

The third and reflective section with its climactic moment of receiving the sea's message is the central, though not the longest, part of the poem's structure; there are other structure-content correspondences. For example, only the entire text offers the realization that the poem acts out what it says and thus identifies its reader with its speaker. From the midnight-

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[14] This was the poem's title in LG 1860 and 1867.

[15] Cf. also H. W a s k o w, Whitman: Explorations in Form, Chicago - London 1966, chapt. V.

sea-shore and the bird's song through the "yearning and love there in the mist", through the recognition of death - "the word stronger and more delicious than any" - to the final making of the poet and this poem in particular, "I chanter of pains and joys, uniter of here and hereafter/ Taking all hints to use them, but swiftly leaping beyond them/ A reminiscence sing" (20-23), the poem's total movement is comprised in its prologue. Yet this knowledge remains inaccessible to the reader until he has read the poem through: "... all data, all bits of information, all impressions are there, right from the beginning, but not yet understood: only when looking back from the end and, perhaps, re-reading, are we able to gather the full meaning. We realize in retrospect, that it was impossible to understand everything at first reading. [...] The very structure and texture incorporates the learning process of the speaker in a way which forces the reader to undergo a similar experience"[16].

The assertions in the text of the importance of the youthful experience for the whole life of the poet-narrator are reinforced because the man who revisits the scene of his youth is distressed and bewildered, while the man who has relived the revelation sounds quiet and accepting:[17]

> Which I do not forget
> But fuse the song of my dusky demon and brother,
> That he sang to me in the moonlight on Paumanok's gray beach,
> With the thousand responsive songs at random,
> My own songs awaked from that hour,
> And with them the key, the word up from the waves.
>
> (174-179)

The poem vindicates not so much "emotion recollected in tranquility" as the permanent healing power or the continuous inspiration of a moment of vision.

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16 A. P. Frank, quoted from a manuscript of the paper mentioned in note 13 above.

17 This is also Prof. Frank's observation.

On both time levels, the narrative present and the time of the recollected experience, the poem is a progress from ignorance and frustration to the realization of order. To achieve reconciliation the speaker must not center on personal loss but turn to look for a vaster, more primary law. The wisdom of acceptance has to be sought, the sea reached and implored, but the moment of revelation is granted only when the speaker yields himself completely to the sea's influence. The actual creative power, the inspiration, is contained in the "word out of the sea". Its knowledge is imperative for the realization of order incorporated in the poem. Although inherently there all the time, the order can only be made actual when the poet has been granted the illuminating vision. The poem is a "discovery" of order and makes the reader undergo a similar "exploring" experience.

"As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life" is structurally a simpler lyric. It operates on one time level as the speaker progresses from despair to a sense of at least partial reconciliation. The movement from disorder to order, even if incomplete and tentative, constitutes the underlying pattern the two poems share[18]. "As I Ebb'd" is perhaps Whitman's most disconsolate poem, his "Dejection: An Ode". Certainly, the poet's personal situation at the time it was written[19] influenced its tone, but the poem's dominant note is not strictly one of personal desolation. Rather, the poem recognizes self-doubt and frustration "the ebb of the ocean of life", as an integral part of the human condition, seeking to accomodate it within the universal design. The entire text is divided into four sections of fairly uniform lenght (16 to 21 lines). In the first one the scene is set for the

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[18] The poems, of course, share more than just the overall pattern. They are usually regarded as resulting from the same emotional crisis which the poet experienced around 1859. But as W a s k o w points out (op. cit., note on p. 124) the vision in The Sleepers published in 1855 is equally "crowded with fear and death".

[19] In 1859, when the poem was most probably written, Whitman was out of job, uncertain about either his poetic or his journalistic career, also, most probably, going through a personal crisis whose exact nature remains a mystery (cf. A l l e n, Solitary Singer, p. 216, 246).

shore ode with the poet-persona walking on a Long Island beach on an autumn afternoon by "the ocean of life", its inspiring power often acknowledged by Whitman[20]. In the poems stemming from the major crisis of his life, he instinctively relied on the beaches of Long Island for providing appropriately charged imagery.

The openinig section establishes the mood with images of late afternoon, of unquiet,"hoarse and sibilant sea", of the beach strewn with "chaff, straw, splinters of wood, weeds, and the sea-gluten"[21]. As in "Out of the Cradle", the introductory part contains all data to be elucidated in the course of the poem. The speaker wandering along the shore "thought the old thought of likenesses" while his eyes, "fascinated" followed "those slender windrows,/ Chaff, straw, splinters of wood, weeds, and the sea-gluten,/ Scum, scales from shining rocks, leaves of salt-lettuce, left by the tide" (LG, 254: 10-12). Thus the reader becomes prepared for the concluding identification made in a more loving and more hopeful mood. The "electric self", "seeking types", sounds depressed because it is "seized by the spirit that trails in the lines underfoot": in the final section the same identification anticipates the inevitable rise of the tide:

> Me and mine, loose windrows, little corpses,
> Froth, snowy white, and bubbles,
> (See, from my dead lips the ooze exuding at last,
> See, the prismatic colors glistening and rolling,)
>
> (LG, 256: 57-60)

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[20] Cf. e.g. "Specimen Days", "Paumanok, My Life on It as a Child and Young Man"; "Here and all along the island and its shores I spent intervals many years, all seasons, sometimes riding, sometimes boating, but generally afoot (was always a good walker), absorbing fields, shores, marine incidents characters, the bay-men, farmers, pilots [...] - went every summer on sailing trips - always liked the bare sea-beach, south side, and have some of my happiest hours on it to this day" (PW, I, 12).

[21] I find W a s k o w ' s reading of this section as reporting no seizure by "a sense of his (i. e. Whitman's) own pettiness" (op. cit., p. 204) unconvincing. The tone of desolation clearly seems struck from the very beginning of the poem. It deepens rather than "shifts" in its first part.

To acquire a sense of the range of moods from which Whitman's consciousness reaches out to embrace "the other" one should read this poem with "Song of Myself" in mind. The most vital assumptions of the earlier poem are being questioned here. In fact, "As I Ebb'd " can be viewed as a sort of anti-"Song of Myself" in which the "barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world" turns into "all that blab whose echoes recoil upon me"[22]. In place of unshaken faith in the resources of the self, frustration and self-doubt prevail. These moods result from a radical division within the self in contrast to "Song of Myself" which postulated harmony as the primary condition of creativity. The non-involved observing "I" not only stands detached but assumes mocking postures. Consequently, nature too becomes a jeering stranger while the crippling sense of disunion undercuts the very basis of creativity:

> I perceive I have not really understood anything, not a single object, and that no man ever can,
> Nature here in sight of the sea taking advantage of me to dart and sting me,
> Because I have dared to open my mouth to sing at all.
>
> (32-34)

The urgency of this "night of the soul" is reflected in the switch from the narrative use of the past tense in the first section to the immediacy of the present tense cancelling the distance between the speaker and the narrated experience. From a reported "action" the poem turns into dramatic enactment.

In Section Three the protagonist, aware that the evil consists in separation, attempts to recover the sense of contact with the world around him. Like in "Out of the Cradle", he turns from contemplating a private misery to the primary reality-this time of the land, the father - Paumanok:

> I throw myself upon your breast my father,

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[22] The editors of Comprehensive Reader's Edition of "Leaves of Grass" point to this particuler contrast (note to l. 27 on p. 255).

I cling to you so that you cannot unloose me,
I hold you so firm till you answer me something.

Kiss me my father,
Touch me with your lips as I touch those I love,
Breathe to me while I hold you close the secret of
the murmuring I envy.

(45-50)

This passage is analogous to the fragment of "Out of the Cradle" in which the boy implores the sea, hoping that the secret key word may be revealed to him and harmony restored in his world:

O give me the clew! (it lurks in the night here somewhere),
O if I am to have so much, let me have more!

A word then, (for I will conquer it,)
The word final, superior to all,
Subtle, sent up - what is it? - I listen;
Are you whispering it, and have been all the time, you
sea-waves?
Is that it from your liquid rims wet sands?

(158-164)

In both fragments the imploring figure lies prostrated on the beach, attempting to bridge the division of sea and land with his body and, correspondingly, imaginatively to embrace "the other", to leap across the gulf opened by the sense of separation from nature. In such a passive and receptive position, both protagonists await revelation. The sea obliges in "Out of the Cradle". No secret, however, is revealed to the frustrated man in "As I Ebb'd", so that he is left with the sense of the self's irremediable alienation. Yet the loving, sympathetic part of the self continues its search for a point of contact while the disengaged observer, the "phantom", is "looking down where we lead, and following me and mine". The phrase "me and mine" eventually establishes a love relationship with the humblest facts of nature: "loose windrows, little corpses/ Froth, snowy white and bubbles". The act of humble but loving union signals the simultaneous change of tide and the return of inspiration. There is no total restoration of harmony in this poem. Whatever hope there is, is based on trust in the inevitability of natural laws by which ebb must be followed by flow. We do not, however, wit-

ness the restoration of order, the return of fertility and plenitude. Though the poem ends on an accepting note, it is one of resignation rather than affirmation:

> Just as much for us that sobbing dirge of Nature,
> Just as much whence we come that blare of the cloud-trumpets,
> We, capricious, brought hither we know not whence, spread out before you,
> You up there walking or sitting,
> Whoever you are, we too lie in drifts at your feet.
>
> (67-71)

If the "you" of the penultimate line refers to God, the protagonist's ability to merge with nature depends in this poem on the introduction of a transcendent Deity, a practice not usual in the earlier Whitman[23]. If it refers to the reader, as at least one critic thinks[24], it is even more unusual, because nowhere else does Whitman assume such a self- deprecatory tone when addressing his reader. If the "you" still refers to the observing, mocking part of the self, as I believe it does, that self has become endowed with frightening superiority and remoteness. Regardless of the reading, the sense of estrangement stays. It has only been juxtaposed with the loving contact achieved with the humble "sea-drift". No sense of power or exhilaration accompanies this success of consciousness in incorporating a wholly passive, impotent world. Rather, the love relationship functions as a defense mechanism against the destructive feeling of isolation. Thus the poem's essential two-part pattern moves from the de profundis of self-doubt through the rising tide as the "I" attempts to transcend personal misery and to embrace if only the lowest aspects of reality. The poem incorporates in its structure the law of the tide of which it speaks. Like "Out of the Cradle", it too acts out what it says.

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[23] However, the last two great poems "Passage to India" (1871) and "Prayer of Columbus" (1874) are both marked by the speaker's desire for the sanction of divine authority for his work. The God invoked there is clearly a transcendent God.

[24] Cf. W a s k o w, op. cit., p. 209.

"Song of Myself", "Out of the Cradle" and "As I Ebb'd" are all organized by the movement of the speaker's consciousness outward to absorb "the other", whatever concrete form "the other" may for the moment take. It is important to realize that the direction of the movement remains the same while the mood in which the journey is undertaken may range from the near-arrogance of "Song of Myself", a parade of the self's prowess, to the defensive urgency of "Of the Terrible Doubt of Appearances" or "As I Ebb'd". In these two poems establishing the love contact, reaching the moment of identification with an aspect of "the other", becomes imperative for security or even for self-preservation. Thus, it is essentially a love impulse which lends shape to the central part of Whitman's poetry. For the essential Whitman, as Howard Waskow has extensively shown, is "above all a blender". "Standing at a position between removal from the past and involvement in it, between a stance as observer and a stance as experiencer"[25], he mediates between consciousness and reality, mind and matter, spirit and body, past and future.

The best metaphorical rendition of that formula is offered by Whitman himself in a short poem first published in the "London Broadway Magazine"[26]:

A noiseless patient spider,
I mark'd where on a little promontory it stood isolated,
Mark'd how to explore the vacant vast surrounding,
It launch'd forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself,
Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them.

And you O my soul where you stand,
Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space,

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25 Ibid. p. 128.

26 October 1868. The poem appeared there as the third of a cluster of five lyrics, all under the single title "Whispers of Heavenly Death". Composed around 1862-1863, its earliest version can be found in a Washington notebook for that period. It was considerably different from the one above as the spider's filament originally expressed the "Calamus" sentiment. The history of the poem's revisions, however, supports the thesis that the drive of Whitman's creativity was a love impulse, possibly first of erotic nature, then sublimated into an aestetic principle (cf. A l l e n, Solitary Singer, p. 341-342).

Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres
to connect them,
Till the bridge you will need be form'd, till the ductile
anchor hold,
Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my
soul.

(LG, 450)

The poem consists of but two stanzas, each describing a different creator, linked on the basis of analogy by the correlative "and". The relation of correspondence is stressed by the equal number of lines in both stanzas, by the syntactic similarities in the extensive use of repetitions and the echoing present participles. In the second stanza the lines are longer, as if less assured, when the simple activity of the spider "launching forth filament, filament, filament out of itself" is juxtaposed with more complex effort of the soul "ceaselessly musing, venturing throwing seeking the spheres to connect them", yet the analogy holds. The poem itself is a filament connecting the creating soul to the spinning spider, strong enough to make us accept analogy as equivalence.

The soul "detached" in the "measureless oceans of space makes bridges, throws anchors "till the thread catch somewhere" and in the process both grows in an orderly way and defends itself against immense, frightening loneliness. Whitman avoids insisting on the conquering, subsuming role of consciousness by treating the law of creativity as identical for the soul and the spider. For both, spinning the web of connections means growth in power as well as a means of survival. As the spider's activity is inseparable from his life and inherent in his nature, so is the soul's "seeking the spheres to connect them". Thus equating biological creativity of the spider with imaginative creativity of the "soul", the poem sees the mind as participating in the central natural process. And relations of equivalence are still possible for Whitman as the mind discovers its place within the life of nature[27].

[27] R. H a g e n b ü c h l e makes a similar observation in footnote 13 to his article: Precision and Indeterminacy in the Poetry of Emily Dickinson ("Emerson Society Quarterly" 1st Quarter 1974, vol. 20): "In Whitman's work, by contrast, relations

The active role of consciousness consists in travelling to the discovery of the mind's identity with "the other". When the needed bridge is built and the thread thrown, the vision of underlying unity comes as revelation. As consciousness embarks on its "connecting" mission the poem incorporates the journey. The voyage can be made in different moods. In "Song of Myself" and "Passage to India" it is pervaded with the exultant sense of proselyting for a new faith. In "Out of the Cradle" it becomes a healing pilgrimage at the end of which the lost balance is restored. It is a desperate dash for self-preservation in "As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life" and a poignantly resigned journey in "Prayer of Columbus", in which the protagonist feels so absolutely estranged that he can no longer rely for contact on this world but must turn for sympathy to the traditional and transcendent God.

About a year after Whitman first published "A Noiseless Patient Spider", Emily Dickinson employed the same image in her own poem on the nature of creativity[28]:

A Spider sewed at Night
Without a Light
Upon an Arc of White.

If Ruff it was of Dame
Or Shroud of Gnome
Himself, himself inform.

Of Immortality
His Strategy
Was Physiognomy.

(1138)

Like the poem by Whitman, this one is structured by analogy; but

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of equivalence seem still to be possible. The poet, not unlike the spider, tries to »connect« the world through his comparisons »till the ductile anchor [...] hold somewhere«. However, the adverb »somewhere« points at the element of growing indeterminacy" (p. 53).

28 I am far from indicating echoes of Whitman in Dickinson's poems although, as one reads both poets one becomes aware of coinciding images used with a different symbolic intention (cf. Dickinson's "grass" poem 333). They are best treated, it seems, as evidence of "the spirit of the times".

instead of a symmetrical relation between the referent and analogue, the poem's divisions are asymmetrical. Two stanzas are given to the activity of the spider and only one to the analogue - immortality. The two parts are not linked in any way, the sudden "leap" stressing the arbitrary character of the association. The analogy is further undercut by the fact that the speaker remains outside the poem: even as she makes the associative connection, she admits to ignorance. In Whitman's poem the speaker observes the spider and then relates directly to it, the crossing of the distance emphasized by the shift from the narrative past to the present tense. Here the speaker recollects having watched the spider and having related him to immortality. The preservation of the past tense in the third stanza, "Of Immortality/ His Strategy/ Was Physiognomy" carefully disclaims the validity of the analogy as a general law; rather, it gives it the status of a temporary proposition, valid only for the recollected moment. The analogy is also qualified by the speaker's bewildered preoccupation with mystery and by the explicit statement of her own ignorance of the nature of the spider's (and so of immortality's) work. The relationship of likeness established in the poem turns out to rely on mystery. Ultimately, nothing can be said about the essential nature of either of the creative agents. Only outward manifestations can be observed. Consistently, the poem devotes two of its three stanzas to describing the spider's work. In doing so the creatio ex nihilo situation is stressed: the spider works in darkness, without external light of any sort, upon the inscrutable whiteness of the "arc" of reality, according to the design known only to himself. Thus what Dickinson sees in the spider's work is almost directly opposed to Whitman's vision of the soul's forming bridges and throwing anchors to reach "somewhere" beyond itself. This poem emphasizes the absolute self-sufficiency of the creator be it spider, God, or, by implication, the maker of the poem. It is his inscrutable autonomy that makes him divine.

No claim, however, is made that the spider and "Immortality" work by identical law. The use of the word "physiognomy" effectively prevents analogy from becoming identity. Physiognomy is the art of reading the inner character from external features

or, simply, a set of such features. A guaranteed reading depends on who is the physiognomist, the spider or the speaker of the poem. If it is the spider, only faith can assure that he knows the secret correctly (and faith is reserved by Dickinson for special occasions, as discussed in the previous chapter). If it is the speaker, which seems more likely, she herself puts emphasis on mystery and ultimately admits to ignorance. The mystery of the creative essence cannot be penetrated by even the most careful attention paid to its outward manifestations. The poem questions, in fact, its own method and undercuts its own major device. Its world consists of three hermetic realms: the realm of nature as it is represented by the spider; the realm of God, only to be inferred from its natural "physiognomy"; and the realm of the human mind whose work the poem demonstrates. All three agents create but the only process we come to know is the associative, ordering work of the human intellect.

In Dickinson's vision, the stress on the effort of consciousness to reach out and embrace "the other" is replaced by the insistence on the mind's self-sufficiency and its Godlike power of creatio ex nihilo. The same fascination with the mind's autonomy can be illustrated by "This is a Blossom of the Brain" (945), "I Never Saw a Moor" (1052), "To make a prairie" (1755), and, perhaps best of all, by this poem:

I reckon - when I count at all -
First - Poets - Then the Sun -
Then Summer - Then the Heaven of God -
And then - the List is done -

But, looking back - the First so seems
To Comprehend the Whole -
The Others look a needless Show -
So I write - Poets - All -

Their Summer - lasts a Solid Year -
They can afford a Sun
The East - would deem extravagant -
And if the Further Heaven -

Be Beautiful as they prepare
For Those who worship Them -
It is too difficult a Grace -
To justify the Dream

(569)

More directly than the spider poem, this one juxtaposes the three separate domains of Nature, of God and of Poets. The speaker begins with the reservation that ordinarily she is reluctant to compare them at all. The remark, coming as it does before "the ranking", emphasizes the distinct character of the provinces brought together. In "the ranking" the poets come first because their creation can be most satisfying in human terms, more permanent than the transitory perfections of nature, more accessible than "the Heaven of God" which seems "too difficult a Grace -/ To justify the Dream"[29].

The detectable note of rivalry in this poem between the poet and the other two creators, nature and God, is more obvious in others. Competition with nature is explicitly the subject of the light-hearted poem 308; it is more seriously the theme of "Of Bronze - and Blaze -" (209)[30]; and it can be inferred from a whole series of late poems on sunset (1609, 1622, 1642, 1650, 1676, 1693). Dickinson never believes that her province is identical with or an extension of the province of nature. On the contrary, the different grounds and terms in which nature and the artist work are always kept in view. The day's sunset was "ampler" but "Mine - is the more convenient/ to Carry in the Hand" is her light-hearted distinction (308). In a more reflective mood, she juxtaposes the cosmic, inhuman splendors of an aurora borealis with the more limited but equally unique "competeless show" of her art.

Always insisting on her own terms, Dickinson emphasizes the active, commanding power of consciousness in its domain. Nowhere is this idea expressed more beautifully than in the lovely, balladic poem 520:

I started Early - Took my Dog -
And visited the Sea -

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[29] Compare a brief discussion of the poem by C. A n d e r s o n (Emily Dickinson's Poetry. Stairway of Surprise, London 1963, p. 93-94), and a different interpretation by R. . . W e i s b u c h (Emily Dickinson's Poetry, Chicago - London 1975, p. 174-175).

[30] For an excellent discussion of this poem see A n d e r s o n, op. cit., p. 47-54.

The Mermaids in the Basement
Came out to look at me -

And Frigates - in the Upper Floor
Extended Hempen Hands -
Presuming Me to be a Mouse -
Aground - upon the Sands -

But no Man moved Me - till the Tide
Went past my simple Shoe -
And past my Apron - and my Belt
And past my Bodice - too -

And made as He would eat me up -
As wholly as a Dew
Upon a Dandelion's Sleeve -
And then - I started - too -

And He - He followed - close behind -
I felt his Silver Heel
Upon my Ankle - Then my Shoes
Would overflow with Pearl -

Until We met the Solid Town -
No One He seemed to know -
And bowing - with a Mighty look -
At me - The Sea withdrew -

Whatever happened, and it is one of Dickinson's favorite techniques to blur the details of "the story" and deal only with what really matters to her - its psychic significance[31], the experience started as something menacing. The narrator casually, perhaps ignorantly, challenged a vast elemental force. The sea is Dickinson's usual image for the unknown, exhilarating but dangerous. As early as 1850 she wrote to Abiah Root: "The shore is safer, Abiah, but I love to buffet the sea - I can count the bitter wrecks in these pleasant waters, and hear the murmuring winds, but oh, I love the danger!" (L, I, 104)[32]. The effectiveness of the symbol, whether the force challenged was love, death or some other power, lies largely in its resistance to any close-ended interpretation[33].

[31] R. W e i s b u c h comments extensively on the scenelessness of Dickinson's poems in chapt. 2 and 3 of his book.

[32] Cf. also poem 249 discussed in the previous chapter.

[33] This is also R. W e i s b u c h's position: "If we wish to take account of all meanings of "sea", the symbol's definition must be less precise. It is simply the opposite of "home", the place of risk, or query, of changes of all kinds. It entices the wildness of the spirit to quest" (W e i s b u c h op. cit., p. 53).

Encroaching upon "the Sea's" territory, the speaker is reduced to "a Dew upon a Dandelion's Sleeve", the image conveying not only the disproportion between the forces of the opponents but also the fact that "the Sea" recognizes its own element, its own "wildness" in the speaker, and threatens self-destruction by appealing to it. She, however, rejects the confrontation on the sea's territory. Retiring to her own ground of "Solid Town" where the sea appears a complete stranger, she manages to reverse the situation. As soon as the initiative belongs to her, the experience loses its menacing aspect and the sea becomes a docile companion, finally withdrawing with a courteous, "civilized" gesture. "Shifting grounds", insisting on meeting experience on the artist's terms is, I find, Dickinson's key strategy (viz. next chapter). The speaker's triumph in this poem is by no means final as the "mighty look" sent by the sea at parting indicates. It is an achievement in a single confrontation (i. e., a single poem) and more encounters must be expected.

A somewhat similar mechanism of surviving in a critical confrontation is suggested in poem 1733, where the speaker is saved from giving in to "awe" by intelectually grasping her predicament.

> No man saw awe, nor to his house
> Admitted he a man
> Though by his awful residence
> Has human nature been.
>
> Not deeming of his dread abode
> Till laboring to flee
> A grasp on comprehension laid
> Detained vitality.

It is a narrow escape and mere survival must count as success. That Dickinson can treat such a hairbreadth escape as next to victory is only possible through her clear realization of how insufficient are the powers of the human mind and what formidable opponents they have to deal with. Her reverence for "awe" only increases her loyalty to the mind coping as best it can with forces vastly surpassing its compass.

Dickinson remains acutely aware of the limited possibilities of cognition. What can be known? - is a frequent question with

her and the answers are usually not very encouraging. Yet she recognizes the psychic need for holistic knowledge. The paradoxical plight of the mind yearning for comprehensiveness and certainty, but equipped with tools glaringly inadequate to the ambition, is the theme of poem 1602:

> Pursuing you in your transitions,
> In other Motes -
> Of other Myths
> Your requisition be.
> The Prism never held the Hues,
> It only heard them play -

At the urge of some imperative specified only as "you" (God perhaps, or the inner need, or some unifying principle, unidentified but intuited), man keeps following what he presumes is a whole, as opposed to "mote", and solid fact, as opposed to myth, in the evidence which is both fragmentary and esoteric. Not only are the data insufficient: the urge to pursue "other motes of other myths" may very likely be a false clue, for the phrase involves the gospel reproach of "And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?" (Matthew, 7,3) with its implication that the most substantial material for investigation can be found within the self. The more so, that "the prism" of consciousness, incapable of synthesis, can only break experience into componants. To concatenate the image, in the process of perception, the perceived material becomes transposed into altogether different categories: "the prism" cannot actually "see" the light it analyses, it "hears" it instead[34].

Other related puzzles of cognition are the subject of the grimly humorous "Split the Lark - and you'll find the Music -" (861). The sceptic in the poem sets out to find the source of the bird's song but succeeds only in turning the live creature into "gushes of blood". The mystery of life and creativity escapes him; it cannot be located through the "scarlet experiment"

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[34] For another comment on the complexities of perception cf. 1071.

of dissection and cannot be comprehended through a scientifically rational approach. In both poems the whole appears not only greater than the sum of its parts but also as different in kind as light is from sound, or the lark's song from its bleeding flesh.

In the world of Emily Dickinson it is impossible to claim that "He ahold of my hand has completely satisfied me" (LG, 120: 16) because "he" can neither be reached nor fully admitted into the mysteries of the self:

I had not minded - Walls -
Were Universe - one Rock -
And far I heard his silver Call
The other side the Block -

I'd tunnel - till my Groove
Pushed sudden thro' to his -
Then my face take her Recompense -
The looking in his Eyes -

But 'tis a single Hair -
A filament - a law -
A Cobweb - wove in Adamant -
A Battlement - of Straw -

A limit like the Veil
Unto the Lady's face -
But every Mesh - a Citadel -
And Dragons - in the Crease -

(398)

The poem is organized by syllogism. All the images in the major premise point to monolithic structures (one rock), corresponding desires (her tunneling answered by his silver call), and definite directions in which to act (tunnel, push'd thro'). In such reality a happy ending comes as a natural reward of persistent effort. When the partners come together, their physical closeness is accompanied by spiritual communion, eyes being "windows of the soul". In the kind of reality presented in the minor premise the solid qualities of universe are altogether absent. Instead, reality appears infinitely elusive - a hair, a filament, a cobweb - but also infinitely forbidding - a law, a battlement, a citadel. Its nature is incongruity and paradox - "A cobweb wove in Adamant", "A battlement - of Straw", "every Mesh - a Citadel". In this reality no action can be effective, no silver

call - heard while all sense of direction is lost. Tunneling a straight groove was a course of action adequate to deal with the solidity of the rock but there seems to be no efficient way of getting past the uncountable mesh-citadels. The speaker's confidence and resourcefulness are gone. She hides behind the conventional feminine role of a "beauty in distress" relying on her "knight" for deliverance. Yet while in the solid universe of the rock he cooperated with the "silver call", in the complex reality of "cobwebs wove in adamant" no signal comes from him, no meeting of the eyes is possible.

Emily Dickinson knows about the elusive nature of reality and about the insufficiency of methods and tools of perception; she knows too that there is practically no possibility of breaking out of the magic enclosure of the self. However, giving up the claim that reality can be directly apprehended, she manages to convert the severe limitation into the chief asset of consciousness. She sets out to find about life in her own "slant" way through investigation of the inner world. The "properties" of consciousness and its "adequacy" must do as the basis of whatever certain knowledge is accessible to man:

> This Consciousness that is aware
> Of Neighbors and the Sun
> Will be the one aware of Death
> And that itself alone
>
> Is traversing the interval
> Experience between
> And most profound experiment
> Appointed unto Men -
>
> How adequate unto itself
> Its properties shall be
> Itself unto itself and none
> Shall make discovery.
>
> Adventure most unto itself
> The Soul condemned to be -
> Attended by a single Hound
> Its own identity. (822)

This poem, dated by Thomas Johnson c. 1864, was written by the mature artist at the height of her creative powers with an already confirmed view of her vocation and as clear an idea of what

she was trying to do as she would ever have. The proposition that "Adventure most unto itself/ The Soul condemned to be" comes, on the one hand, as a conclusion to her recognition of the limited scope and illusory certainty of all knowledge directed outward. On the other hand, it results from the conviction that the way consciousness deals with the overwhelming forces of chaos and the unknown is the only measure of the heroic stature of the self.

In his excellent essay on Emily Dickinson, Denis Donoghue penetratingly observes that "It might be almost said that Emily Dickinson did not suffer loneliness; she commanded it. She commanded everything she needed. When she needed a relationship she commanded it"[35]. Donoghue's observation offers a key to Dickinson's poetry. Her starting point is the refusal to take life, nature, even God on their own terms, so that poems become a continuous struggle to make experience meet the poet on her grounds. The opponent is always powerful:

> I took my Power in my Hand -
> And went against the World -
> 'Twas not so much as David - had -
> But I - was twice as bold -
>
> I aimed my Pebble - but Myself
> Was all the one that fell -
> Was it Goliah - was too large -
> Or was myself - too small?
>
> (540)

Not recognized as one of her best, this poem nevertheless is an explanation of the core of her poetry: poems are battles between the poet and those larger powers against which creativity measures itself in order to make an experience meaningful. Humanly speaking, in so many instances the battle has been lost: love remains unfulfilled; God and nature, inaccessible; pain and death, unvanquished. However, it is not the human failure which counts but even the heroic willingness to fight and risk defeat, though the constant endeavor is the basic principle of life[36]. The

[35] D. D o n o g h u e, Emily Dickinson, Minneapolis 1969, p. 10.

[36] Characteristically, even immortality can become for Dickinson yet another chance for endeavor:

most important result is the poem which has crystallized in the struggle to testify to a larger triumph founded on the mind's ability to endure the experience and order it.

While Dickinson celebrates the imaginative possibilities of the mind, she also insists on the necessity of an intense emotional life as the condition for the mind's activity. The emphasis on the mastering function of consciousness in its confrontation with the intensity of experience incurs something which I call psychological violence. Consciousness needs to be tested constantly for power and endurance in situations of extreme tension. It is in the moments of trial that poetry is made, when consciousness has to rise up to the challenge of the intense moment and cope with it:

> The Frosts were her condition -
> The Tyrian would not come -
> Until the North - invoke it -
>
> (442)

The purple beauty of the poem will not blossom until forced by the severity of circumstances. Quite suitably too, the exotic "tyrian" is also the color of martyrdom. The authority of the poem is the authority of heroic consciousness resisting overwhelming experience.

The triumph of shaping consciousness over chaotic experience requires that always new violent moments (real or imaginary) be mastered in new poems, yet in a different order, no less logically and truly, a poem becomes an act of psychic salvation in crisis (cf. 755). It is unnecessary and impossible to decide which aspect of Dickinson's art is primary. The circle closes. A poem is both salvation and an act of defiance of all those

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> Each Life Converges to same Centre -
> Expressed - or still -
> Exists in every Human Nature
> A Goal -
> [...]
> Ungained - it may be - by Life's low Venture -
> But then -
> Eternity enable the endeavoring
> Again.
>
> (680)

forces that threaten to subdue awareness to render it inactive or inarticulate, that is, to render it non-existant. Art is treated as order - aesthetic, psychological and moral:

> The Martyr Poets - did not tell -
> But wrought their Pang in syllable -
> That when their mortal name be numb -
> Their mortal fate - encourage Some -
>
> The Martyr Painters - never spoke -
> Bequething - rather - to their Work -
> That when their conscious fingers cease -
> Some seek in Art - the Art of Peace -
>
> (544)

By rejecting more immediate reliefs and by dedication to their art, "the poets" and "painters" turn ordinary human suffering into purposeful "martyrdom". This is their personal "designing" achievement. But beyond the "biographical" level, their art has a further moral dimension when the reader can be "encouraged" or can find "peace". Characteristically, no didactic "message" is mentioned. The message, one suspects, is unimportant: what really matters is the work of "conscious fingers", the triumph of skill and order[37]. Thus, one could almost say, technique replaces revelation.

Dickinson's poems about the creative process are full of images of effort and conscious craft: a gymnast wrestles with an angel until he proves stronger than God (59), essential oils of poetry are wrung from the raw material of emotions symbolized by the rose (675), the poet distills amazing sense from ordinary meanings (448), or he becomes a blacksmith beating the "vivid ore" of language and experience into the "designated light" of the poem:

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[37] Cf. Introduction to D. H i g g i n' s, Portrait of Emily Dickinson. The poet and Her Prose, New Brunswick, N. J. 1967, where Higgins convincingly argues that Dickinson's letters, let alone poems, were conscious compositions often executed over a period of years since she kept "the scrap basket" of choice phrases to be used later according to her need. The argument shows Dickinson as a very conscious crafteman indeed, observing the rigors of composition even in the informal art of letter writing.

Dare you see a Soul at the White Heat?
Then crouch within the door -
Red - is the Fire's common tint -
But when the vivid Ore
Has vanquished Flame's conditions,
It quivers from the Forge
Without a color, but the light
Of unanointed Blaze.
Least Village has its Blacksmith
Whose Anvil's even ring
Stands symbol for the finer Forge
That soundless tugs - within -
Refining these impatient Ores
With Hammer, and with Blaze
Until the Designated Light
Repudiate the Forge -

(365)

The introductory question, invitation, takes the reader to the door-step of a village forge to watch the making of "the designated light". The poem ends when the product, ready to "repudiate the forge", acquires an autonomous existence. It clearly falls into two parts, each period presenting a distinct stage in the making of the final product. The first part contrasts the ordinary "red tint" of the flames with the "white heat" prevailing at the moment in the soul - forge. It is important to observe that the "white heat" is not a given or accidental condition; it had been striven for, as the word "vanquished" suggests. In the striking phrase "when the vivid Ore/ Has vanquished Flame's conditions", the causality of "white heat is reversed. Instead of appearing a passive outcome of the "flame's conditions", "the white heat" is presented as a triumph of "the vivid ore" - sensibility subsuming and intensifying common circumstances. Action and effort have been put into achieving the state of "unanointed blaze". Only at that point the blacksmith appears. His delayed entrée removes what had happened earlier into the background as but a preliminary process. The blacksmith applies his skill: he works "with hammer" and "with blaze" and the two combine to produce "the designated light".

The poem depends for its central meaning upon the juxtaposition of the two products of the two stages on the process: "the unanointed blaze" and "the designated light". Both are imaged as light but "blaze" suggests elemental qualities of energy vio-

lent outburst, bright display, glow of color. "Light", in turn, suggests clarity and vision. Light makes sight possible, it implies the state of being visible or revealed (as in the expression "bring to light"). Finally, light is illumination, also divine illumination or revelation. "Unanointed" means first of all unsanctified, but also not chosen, unmarked, not even distinct (as it is still confined to the forge). "Designated", on the other hand, suggests in the first place that it is specified, but also appointed (for a purpose), marked, distinct and defined. The stage of "unanointed blaze" requires effort but no craftsmanship, "the designated light" needs the skill of the blacksmith. The one belongs within "the forge"; the other, finally, becomes independent of it.

The essential difference between "unanointed blaze" and "designated light" seems to be one between sensibility and art. The first transforms common circumstances intensifying their ordinary qualities; the second comes into being when craft is applied to the raw energy of the first. Interestingly enough, both demand active effort. Throughout the poem the pattern of exertion obtains: first the strain to "vanquish" the common condition, then the labor "with hammer" to give heightened emotions the "designated" quality.

The poem makes it clear that in the final count, art, for Dickinson, consists in conscious craft. It is through technique that experience can be shaped and put at a distance so that, eventually, it "repudiates the forge". It is also technique that makes vision possible. More explicitly than in the poem 544, art here equals making one's own light, as it were, constructing revelations. Even when, like Emerson, Dickinson associates creativity with a visionary moment, her revelation comes in terms of the release of energy through intellectual ordering:

> The Thought is quiet as a Flake -
> A Crash without a Sound,
> How Life's reverberation
> It's Explanation found -
>
> (1581)

"Life's reverberation" the response to experience, must be "ex-

plained", must be ordered through understanding; this is revelation. The stress is not on the message in the vision but on the vision's shaping effect.

Dickinson emphasizes the active role of consciousness in enforcing patterns of order. Her artist is not a man who "has seen the light" or moves toward it and, therefore, relies through faith on some "external" gift of knowledge which makes order possible. Her poet is, first of all, a skilled craftsman who can release through aesthetic discipline the accumulated emotional energy, at whatever personal cost. The question of personal cost is never lost sight of. The poet well realizes that the inner force, when activated is mortally dangerous while its orderly discharge - imperative for sanity. This willful psychic risk undertaken to provide the necessary energy potential invests Dickinson's poetry with an aura of violent intensity. Ruth Miller points out that Dickinson treats her poetry "as a means of release"[38]. This seems to be the idea behind what she wrote Higginson: "I had a terror since September - I could tell to none - and so I sing as the Boy does by the Burying Ground, because I am afraid" (L, II, 404, April 25, 1862). And again, not quite two months later: "I felt a palsy, here - the Verses just relieve" (L, II, 408, June 7, 1862).

Lest, however, Dickinson's poetry be erroneously viewed as the outcome of instinctive activation of defence mechanisms, attention must be paid to the amount of conscious strategy that went with her into ensuring the constant supply of emotional energy - "the ore" of art. In "Dare you see a Soul at the White Heat?" she presents the initial stage of achieving inner intensity as the result of an active effort. Similarly, the narrator of "I Years had been from Home" (609) seems to have fled from the doorstep not exclusively in fear of the anticipated confrontation but, first of all, in a strategic attempt to protect the emotional intensity inherent in yearning[39]. Some poems deal with situa-

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[38] R. M i l l e r, The Poetry of Emily Dickinson, Middletown, Con. 1968, chapt. VII.

[39] Cf. also e. g. 421, 1413.

tions in which desire, hunger or craving have been satisfied but in which there is no exhilaration in consummation. Satiety removes emotional intensity needed to challenge intellectual powers (cf., e.g. 439, 579). Unfulfillment and failure, as Richard Wilbur has beautifully shown[40], enlarge consciousness:

> Good, without alarm
> Is a too established Fortune -
> Danger - deepens Sum -
>
> (807)

Energy is equally crucial for Whitman but with him there is no sense of separation between "the sheen" and "the disk" (1550), that is between the energy principle and the shaping principle. Ideally, there is no division of consciousness into sensibility and intellect; when it occurs, as in "As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life", the speaker senses that he is in trouble. What is even more important, he gives initiative not to the intellectual, critical "I" but to the empathic self, denouncing the dispassionate observer. The empathic consciousness provides in Whitman both energy and order because it is the energy of reaching out to "the other" with an inbuilt sense of direction. It constantly pushes outward to a moment when the self becomes united with the divine essence in any of its manifestations. To realize the fundamental unity of each and all, men, creatures and objects, is the ultimate triumph of consciousness on its journey. The essence and meaning of all life are telescoped into a single moment when such a vision has been obtained. The poet straddles, exultant, the Cartesian abyss. Emerson's entry in the "Journal" for October 28, 1836 provides a theoretical statement of the nature of Whitman's quest: "Man stands on the point betwixt the inward spirit and outward matter. He sees that one explains, translates the other: that the world is the mirror of the soul. He is the priest and interpreter of nature thereby" (J, V, 103). And Whitman echoes in the 1847 "Notebook":

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[40] R. W i l b u r, Sumptuous Destitution, [in:] Emily Dickinson: Three Views, Amherst, Mass. 1960; rpt. in: R. S e w a l l, (ed.) Emily Dickinson, Englewood Cliffs, N. J. 1963.

I am the poet of the body
And I am the poet of the soul
I go with the slaves of the earth equally with the masters
And I will stand between the masters and the slaves.
Entering into both,so that both shall understand me alike.

(UPP, II, 66)

In the 1891 "Annex" to "Leaves of Grass" ("Goodbye My Fancy"), Whitman restored to life a poem originally published in the "Centennial Edition" of 1876 but excluded from the 1881 "Leaves of Grass" which thus, at the end of his life, again expresses the conviction that the true poet is first of all a "blender" and "uniter":

When the full-grown poet came,
Out spake pleased Nature (the round impassive globe, with all its shows of day and night), saying, He is mine;
But out spake too the Soul of man, proud, jealous and unreconciled, Nay, he is mine alone;
Then the full-grown poet stood between the two, and took each by the hand;
And to-day and ever so stands, as blender, uniter, tightly holding hands,
Which he will never release until he reconciles the two.
And wholly and joyously blends them.

(LG, 550)

The journey which Whitman embarks upon is not to establish the dominion of mind over experience but to mediate between the two. When consciousness and nature operate by the same law, the question whether the order man sees in the universe is of the mind or of nature can be left unanswered. As in "A Noiseless Patient Spider", the important thing is that the filament of the poem provides the needed bridge.

The nature of creativity and the character of the artist's work are ambivalent in Whitman. Whether what the poet does is transposition or only transcription of "natural" order is kept deliberately indistinct. Tracing Whitman's development from early mysticism to increasing awareness of form, Roger Asselineau finds that the poet could write within the same year, 1871, that

is, quite late in his creative period: "In these »Leaves« everything is literally photographed. Nothing is poetized, no divergence, not a step, not an inch, nothing for beauty's sake, no euphemism, no ryme". And, on the other hand: "No useless attempt to repeat the material creation by daguerrotyping the exact likeness by mortal mental means"[41]. The contradictory view of the nature of poetic composition resulted in the posture of "spontaneity imitator", to use Paul Zweig's apt phrase[42]. Whitman himself told Traubel that "The style is to have no style" (Traubel, I, 105). Mistrusting art as artificiality, the poet constantly undercut the controlling, designing aspect of composition striving for the effect of artless transcription. "In spite of his growing respect for art, all discipline seemed to him a useless constraint and any convention a dangerous artifice which risked raising a barrier between his thought and the reader. To art he opposed what he called simplicity, that is to say, strict adherence to nature [...] . In fact, of course, he had to transpose, but he was not any less convinced that he had remained completely faithful to nature"[43].

The purpose of Whitman's poetic quest, then, is to make a discovery[44] and the phrase conveys well the mediating, active-passive role that becomes assigned to poetic consciousness. By comparison, for Dickinson the effort of conciousness establishes an "ennobling" order where no inherent order can be discovered, only an energy potential:

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[41] R. A s s e l i n e a u, The Evolution of Walt Whitman, vol. II, Cambridge, Mass. 1962, p. 220-221. The first quotation is a manuscript fragment, the second comes from Democratic Vistas (PW, II, 419; 1770-1771).

[42] P. Z w e i g, Spontaneity Imitator, A Review of Whitman's Daybooks and Notebooks, vols. I, II, III (New York 1978) in the "New York Times Book Review" Apr. 16, 1978.

[43] A s s e l i n e a u, op. cit., p. 220-221.

[44] A. P. F r a n k in the paper "The Long Withdrawing Roar" makes the following distinction: the classical poet is a maker of imitations, the romantic poet - a maker of discoveries while the modern poet - a maker of revelations. This view puts Dickinson close to the modernists, an opinion shared by e. g. D. D o n o g h u e who brings together Dickinson and Wallace Stevens in his "Connoisseurs of Chaos".

For Pattern is the Mind bestowed
That imitating her
Our most ignoble Services
Exhibit worthier.

(1223)

Charles Feidelson has already called Ahab and Ishmael artist figures and has associated Whitman with Ahab[45]; I have compared Dickinson to Ishmael[46]. The relation between Ahab and Ishmael may serve as a further illustration of the attitudes underlying the work of both poets. Whitman is like Ahab in that his art is a pursuit of the cosmic unity of life. To touch "the other", name it and declare one with the idea in mind is his poem's-journey's purpose. Notwithstanding the buoyant self-assurance of his early years, the attempt to reach with art beyond art presented considerable risks, for example the necessity to reject the questioning self demonstrated in "As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life". It had some embarassing consequences, too. When Mrs. Gilchrist, encouraged perhaps by the poet's insistence that "Who touches this touches a man" (LG, 505; 54)[47] decided that her love for the book really belonged to its author, Whitman responded: "Dear friend, let me warn you somewhat about myself - and yourself also. You must not construct such an unauthorized and imaginary ideal Figure, and call it W. W. and so devotedly invest your loving nature in it. The actual W. W. is a very plain personage, and entirely unworthy such devotion" (C, II, 170). Obviously, the man and the persona of the book did not stay one, even if they came close to perfect unity when the poems were being written.

Even more poignantly, in the long run, the insistence on using poetry as a sort of "Brooklyn Ferry" made art excessively dependent on circumstantial reality. Paradoxically, the more successful the poem was as a connective, the more limited its au-

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[45] C. F e i d e l s o n, Symbolism and American Literature, Chicago 1953, p. 27, 184-186.

[46] A. S a l s k a, Emily Dickinson's Commanding Consciousness, "Zeszyty Naukowe UŁ" 1977, ser. I, No 20, p. 47-55.

[47] The poem was placed as epilogue to 1860 LG.

tonomy as a work of art. In his late years, when nature painfully curbed his pride in exuberant health, beaten by critical opinion and largely ignored by the public, he must have felt bitterly that there was little use anymore for his mediating art and that the connections he had established no longer held, and reality was bypassing him as well as his poems. "Also it must be carefully remember'd", he wrote in "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads", "that first class literature does not shine by any luminosity of its own; nor do its poems. They grow out of circumstances, and are evolutionary. The actual living light is always curiously from elsewhere - follows unaccountable sources, and is lunar and relative at the best"[48] (LG, 565: 126-129). This indeed is the end of the Pequod's journey; this is the admission that art powered by a desire to reach beyond itself will finally lose autonomy and will depend upon accidental circumstances for its worth.

Dickinson is the poet - Ishmael who has questioned all truths and found them but momentary and subjective. There are no certainties for Dickinson as there are none for Ishmael. Instead, both proceed "to tell the tale" in order to survive. Art alone must become man's and its own salvation. For Dickinson, the artist's consciousness is neither fluctuating nor enveloping; it never yields passively to an external principle. Despite its limitations, it is central, radiating its own meanings:

> The Poets light but Lamps -
> Themselves - go out -
> The Wicks they stimulate -
> If vital Light
>
> Inhere as do the Suns -
> Each Age a Lens
> Disseminating their
> Circumference -
>
> (883)[49]

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[48] A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads helps to realize how much Dickinson's attitude of consistently uncompromised power was helped or even made possible by her choice not to compete on the public scene. Non-involved in the general concerns of her times she could stay independent. Aspiring to be in the center of the major issues of his age Whitman ended doubting his art.

[49] This poem is dated by Johnson c. 1864; cf. also 365 discussed earlier in the chapter.

A poem is not a connecting filament, its existence instrumental and relative. As "Costumless Consciousness" incorporating the victory of the poet's mind and skill over accidental circumstances of her life, it stays a central existence in its own right, far superior to the human life of its maker.

Chapter IV

THE DESIGN OF MEDIATION

Students of American Romanticism generally point out that the stylistic hallmark of the period consists in the resourceful, often daring use of analogy. Whether, like Charles Feidelson[1], they point to the ways in which the American Romantics heralded the advent of modern symbolism, or, like Sacvan Bercovitch[2] and Lawrence Buell[3], they trace the connection backward to the heritage and evolution of Puritan typology, the broad agreement remains that the new lease of life which the ancient idea of correspondence[4] was given by the Transcendentalists, encouraged explorations of the limits of analogy.

Under the heading "analogy", Preminger's "Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics" sends the inquirer on to "symbol" where the following formulation appears as part of the definition: "... a literary symbol unites an image (analogy) and an idea or conception (the subject) which the image suggests or evokes -"[5]. Clear-

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[1] C. Feidelson, Symbolism and American Literature, Chicago 1953.

[2] S. Bercovitch, The Puritan Origins of the American Self, New Haven - London 1975.

[3] L. Buell, Literary Transcendentalism: Style and Vision in the American Renaissance, Ithaca - London 1973, see esp. part II, chapt. 4 and part III, chapt. 5.

[4] For a concise discussion of the characteristics of correspondential vision in American Transcendentalism see C. Collins, The Uses of Observation. A Study of Correspondential Vision in the Writings of Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman, The Hague - Paris 1971.

[5] Preminger, Warnke, Hardison, Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, Princeton, N. J. 1965.

ly, the meaning of analogy here is restricted by the structural theory of symbol. The definition isolates an object or image, and makes it static as the analogy becomes inseparably fused with the particular idea. When Thrall, Hibbard and Holman stress the rhetorical use of analogy as a method of exposition or argumentation, the relationship between the analogy and idea is less fixed: "Analogy - a comparison of two things, alike in certain respects: particularly a method of exposition, by which one unfamiliar object is explained by comparing it in certain of its similarities with other objects or ideas more familiar. In argumentation and logic analogy is also frequently used to establish contentions, it being argued, for instance that since A works certain results, B, which is like A in vital respects, will also accomplish the same results"[6]. This definition admits of a dynamic use of analogy as a link in the mental process illustrating or incorporating rather than actually being the idea itself.

It is under such an aspect that the term is more usefully applied in the discussion of either Whitman or Dickinson. The famous catalogues in Whitman's poems, long lists of things, places, occupations, etc., which in themselves acquire almost magical significance, furnish the most striking example of such dynamic use of analogy. In his earlier article[7] as well as in his later book[8], Lawrence Buell sees the catalogue technique as a stylistic device characteristic not only of Whitman but inseparable from the correspondential vision underlying the whole philosophy of Transcendentalism: "...the habit of conveying ideas by means of a barrage of linked analogies is distinctly transcendental. It is the end product of transcendendalism's cardinal tenet: that the Oversoul is immanent in all persons and things, which are thereby symbols of spirit and conjoined by analogy in an organic universe"[9]. Buell argues further that al-

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[6] T h r a l l, H i b b a r d, H o l m a n, A Handbook to Literature, Revised and Enlarged, The Odyssey Press, New York 1960.

[7] L. B u e l l, Transcendentalist Catalogue Rhetoric: Vision versues Form, "American Literature" 1968, No 40, p. 325-339.

[8] B u e l l, Literary Transcendentalism...

[9] B u e l l, Transcendentalist Catalogue Rhetoric...

though the catalogue as a literary device is as old as Homer and "the principle of plenitude almost as hoary", in no other period "are the technique and the Weltanschauung fused so closely as they are in the American renaissance". "All thinking is analogizing, and it is the use of life to learn metonymy" - says Emerson, or, as Professor Buell adds, "the intersubstitution of images for the same principle". Emerson grounds his judgement in the nature of the universe, "the endless passing of one element into new forms, the incessant metamorphosis"(VIII, 15)[10]. Asserted here is not only the inseparability of the metonymic technique from the correspondential vision but also the necessary correlation between the dynamics of nature, dynamics of the mind, and the flow of images in the poem.

Predictably, when Vivian Hopkins analyses Emerson's theory of the symbol, she finds it wanting on account of its fluidity: "Emerson thinks of the symbol as having effect not so much through perfect fusion of idea with image, as through the expression given to the object by the idea, in the moment of flowing through it. The idea may remain in the reader's mind, or the object may be put to fresh uses by the poet; but the idea and image are not considered as inseparably fused in a new unity. The material object has only temporary value in objectifying spiritual intuition [...]. Emerson's theory of the symbol is, then, ideal rather than structural"[11]. Similarly, Charles Feidelson finds Whitman fluid to the point of formal anarchy: "... »When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd« is a successful poem only because it does not fully live up to the theory which it both states and illustrates. The poem really presupposes a static situation, which Whitman undertakes to treat as though it were dynamic; in the course of the poem the death of Lincoln, of which we always remain aware, is translated into Whitman's terms of undifferentiated flow. His other long poems generally lack this

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[10] B u e l l, Literary Transcendentalism..., p. 175. Quotations from Emerson, ibid.

[11] V. C. H o p k i n s, Spires of Form: A Study of Emerson's Aesthetic Theory, Cambridge, Mass. 1951, p. 130-131.

stabilizing factor. Whatever the nominal subject, it is soon lost in sheer »process«..."[12]

Yet, Lawrence Buell argues, "it is ironic that Emerson's critics have found so much to praise in his theory of the symbol, but so little in his idea about the dynamics of symbolism, the »metamorphosis«, or the »flowing« which is what really excited him [and, one would like to add, Whitman even more - A. S.]. Such a reaction is in effect a step backward in the direction of typological rigidity, a tightening up of the formal requirements"[13]. This partial response to Emerson's and Whitman's kind of symbolism may very well lie, as Professor Buell suggests, in the philosophical difficulty we experience in accepting the universe as a catalogue. No longer able to participate in the act of faith which both artists made the corner stone of their vision, we tend to forget that the universe (and so the literary universe too) remained for them a catalogue with an inbuilt sense of direction. For coupled with Whitman's vision of nature as a seething principle is his sense of orderly unfolding and progression of the divine plenitude. Whitman, as Emerson, wants "to overwhelm us with the multiplicity of instances but at the same time impress us with the design inherent in these"[14].

Tying Whitman's catalogues only to the vision of democratic equality of all life forms leads to focusing on the particular items, the images, which, for whatever reason, seem striking to the reader[15]. But the catalogue's adaptability to Whitman's purposes lies, even more centrally, in its fitness for demonstrating patterns of progression and growth inherent in life's abun-

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[12] F e i d e l s o n, op., cit., p. 25.

[13] B u e l l, Literary Transcendentalism..., p. 175. It might be a propos to remember at this point that when E. Pound, impatient with the static quality of imagism, opted for the dynamism of the "vortex", he was also able to make "a pact" with Walt Whitman.

[14] B u e l l, Transcendentalist Catalogue Rhetoric...

[15] R. J a r r e l l's justly celebrated essay: Some Lines from Whitman, [in:] Poetry and the Age, New York 1953, provides an example of a sensitive reading in this vein.

dance. Mattie Swayne suggests that structures of growth underlying Whitman's catalogues can be inferred even from their syntactic characteristics. The lists range from enumerations of bare words through sequences of items elaborated by descriptive words and phrases, catalogues of larger grammatical units to catalogues consisting of whole stanzas: "There seems, indeed, no limit to the possible methods of expansion or diminution of catalogue items. The ennumerative form is found in the phrases, sentences or cadences of lyrics, in the lists of episodes or movements of narratives, and in the adjectives or separate descriptions"[16].

And, of course, the catalogue expansion is not lawless. It is "directed" by being envisioned as a progression in time and space. In fact, the concept of unfolding in time and space is as crucial for Whitman's sense of form as is his notion "of cosmic consciousness". Denis Donoghue's observation (quoted in chapter II) that Whitman's self grows in time by adding experience to experience ad infinitum implies that poems grow by adding image to image with corresponding open-endedness. When Charles Feidelson says that Whitman's greatest discovery is the view of the self as a traveler and explorer, not as a static observer, he adds immediately that "the shift of image from the contemplative eye of »establish'd poems« to the voyaging ego of Whitman's poetry records a large-scale theoretical shift from categories of »substance« to those of »process«"[17]. In other words, the road along which the voyaging self moves is not only a symbol however central but becomes the poem's most fundamental structural principle.

Roger Asselineau quotes an illuminating fragment found among Whitman's papers which shows how the poet systematically cultivated his natural "cosmic" sense of space:

> First of all prepare for study by the following self-teaching exercises. Abstract yourself from this book: realize where you are at present located, the point

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[16] M. S w a y n e, Whitman's Catalogue Rhetoric, "The University of Texas Studies in English" 1941, No 21, p. 162-178.

[17] F e i d e l s o n, op. cit., p. 17.

> you stand that is now to you the centre of all. Look up overhead, think of space stretching out, think of all the unnumbered orbs wheeling safely there, invisible to us by day, some visible by night [...]. Spend some minutes faithfully in this exercise. The again realize yourself upon the earth, at the particular point you now occupy. Which way stretches the north, and what countries, seas, etc? Which way the south? Which way the east? Which way the west? Seize these firmly in your mind, pass freely over immense distances. Fix the direction and the idea of the distances of separate sections of your own country, also of England, the Mediterranean Sea, Cape Horn, the North Pole and such like distant places"[18].

Long inventories of things, place names, and occupations which Whitman drew up in his poems show how such spiritual exercises, prompted by the poet's mystical predispositions were methodically turned into aesthetic rules and how efforts to attain a state of grace defined the structural principles.

"My right hand is time, and my left hand is space - both are ample - a few quintillions of cycles, a few sextillions of cubic leagues, are not of importance to me - what I shall attain to I can never tell, for there is something that underlies me, of whom I am part and instrument (UPP, II, 80)[19]. According to Gay Wilson Allen, Whitman had made here not only a philosophical discovery but also a very important aesthetic one. "Let him now create a cosmic »I« that can travel through time and space like a Greek god - or soul freed of all finite limitations - and he will have found a new literary technique"[20]. This seems a very accurate formula for Whitman's sense of poetic form. Indeed, analysing even a simple catalogue poem like "There Was a Child Went Forth", it is easy to isolate two distinct progressions of imagery[21]. One is organized by seasonal advance which also suggests

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[18] R. M. Bucke, (ed.) Notes and Fragments, London - Ontario, privately printed, 1899. Quoted in R. Asselineau, The Evolution of Walt Whitman, vol. II, Cambridge, Mass. 1962, p. 101-102.

[19] Quoted in G. W. Allen, The Solitary Singer, New York 1955, p. 142.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Compare discussions of the poem in Buell, Literary Transcendentalism..., p. 172-173 and in H. Waskow, Whitman: Explorations in Form, Chicago-London 1966, p. 130-135.

a corresponding growth in the boy; the other - by expansion in space: from the child's conception, through family influences, outward to city scenes and outward again to the "horizon's edge". The two progressions, we might add, serve to render poetically the same process - the natural course of the child's maturation. He grows in wisdom as he grows in years and as he becomes increasingly aware of the people and the land around him. The two progressions are developed by counterpoint to demonstrate their interchangeability. Both work upon the child to the same effect, and so are reducible to identity.

Translating movement in time into movement in space to show their essential equivalence is Whitman's persistent practice. He uses the device brillinatly in the Eighth Section of "Song of Myself". The Section opens with three vignettes arranged within the frame of a life span:

> The little one sleeps in its cradle,
> I lift the gauze and look a long time, and silently brush away flies with my hand.
>
> The youngster and the red faced girl turn aside up the bushy hill.
> I peeringly view them from the top.
>
> The suicide sprawls on the bloody floor of the bedroom,
> I witness the corpse with its dabbled hair, I note where the pistol has fallen.
>
> (LG, 35-36: 147-152)

The three scenes offer close-ups of life's major events as they follow its course from the cradle to the grave. The slow advance of time can be felt in the unhurried diction, in the extending length of lines (the third scene consists of two long lines instead of one short and one longer one, as in the two earlier vignettes; also, the last line is the longest in this part of the section), even in the way each vignette is separately spaced[22]. The temporal, single life, perspective is emphasized by the repetition of the first person pronoun each time the observer moves to a new scene.

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[22] They were so spaced already in the 1855 LG.

The second part of the section changes both the tempo and the perspective. Time becomes compressed in a single glance as the observer takes in a busy street scene:

> The blab of the pave, tires of carts, sluff of boot-soles, talk of the promenaders,
> The heavy omnibus, the driver with his interrogating thumb the clank of the shod horses on the granite floor;
> The snow-sleighs, clinking, shouted jokes, pelts of snow-balls,
> The hurrahs for popular favorites, the fury of rous'd mobs
> The flap of the curtain'd litter, a sick man borne inside to the hospital,
> The meeting of enemies, the sudden oath, the blows and fall,
> The excited crowd, the policeman with his star quickly working his passage to the centre of the crowd,
> The impassive stones that receive and return so many echoes,
>
> (LG, 36: 153-160)

In such an instant of simultaneous perception the speaker-observer is bombarded with events of life and overwhelmed by life's teeming energy:

> What groanes of over-fed or half-starv'd who fall sunstruck or in fits,
> What exclamations of women taken suddenly who hurry home and give birth to babes,
> What living and buried speech is always vibrating here, what howls restrain'd by decorum,
> Arrests of criminals, slights, adulterous offers made, acceptances, rejections with convex lips,
>
> (LG, 36: 162-165)

In the last line, however, the speaker regains his composure:

> I mind them or the show or resonance of them - I come and I depart.
>
> (LG, 36: 166)

recognizing that the plenitude he is witnessing can contain neither more nor less than the fullness of human experience whose skeletal pattern has been drawn in the first part of the

section. Appropriately, it is redrawn in essence in the final simple sentences "I come and I depart".

Like in "There Was a Child Went Forth", progress in time and expansion in space are interchangeable because they are reducible to the same basic principle. In the complete poem as well as in the fragment, the two movements combine to reveal the progress of consciousness. For growth of consciousness coincides for Whitman with the "natural" advance of biological and social life. The psychic or spiritual content can only be talked about in terms of biological and social patterns in which it manifests itself. These patterns are seen as cyclic and repetitive, and Whitman insists on exposing their "representative", archetypal dimensions. Thus, though the poems contain enough details for the reader to realize that they are firmly anchored in personal experience[23], neither can properly be called a private utterance.

Of the two, "There Was a Child" seems more personal, even though, technically speaking, its narrator is only a voice telling the story of the child "who went forth every day, and who now goes, and will always go forth every day". Not only do we feel that the child persona objectifies the speaker's private experience but, as readers, we recognize that the child projects our own progress within the poem. Through this "double facing", as it were, back to the author and forward to the reader, the poem generalizes personal experience into a "representative" pattern. In fact, by the end of the poem the reader is made aware that through his reading experience he has reenacted the child's progress and so himself has completed the educative cycle of which the poem speaks.

From its very beginning the poem insists on turning private experience into a timeless reality:

> There was a child went forth every day,
> And the first object he look'd upon, that object he became,

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[23] The pictures of mother and father in There Was a Child Went Forth seem to correspond to the images Whitman had of his own parents. Moreover, both poems follow the way from quiet rural surroundings to the scenes of "populous city" - Whitman's own progress as a child and young man.

> And that object became part of him for the day or a certain part of the day,
> Or for many years or stretching cycles of years.
>
> (LG, 364: 1-5)

The open-ended conclusion asserts the archetypal nature of the child's journey:

> These became part of that child who went forth every day, and who now goes, and will always go forth every day.
>
> (LG, 364: 39)

Finally, and most subtly, the reader confirms by autopsy the general validity of the poem's law.

The fragment of "Song of Myself" seems more public in tone, although its speaker is the "I" persona, mostly because the reader is not asked to identify directly with the experiences narrated. Instead, he participates in the detached narrator's "learning" process. What is being observed functions as scientific material with which the narrator's consciousness works. But except for rather perfunctory sympathy, the speaker, and the reader with him, keeps his distance. The scope of the observed material as it enters the field of vision, either through progression in time or through a God-like act of simultaneous perception, ensures cosmic applicability of the discovered pattern. Moreover, as in "There Was a Child", the reader confirms the law in his reading experience as he participates in the speaker's progress to knowledge. The same ordered movement reveals itself in the succession of images from birth to death, in the coming and departing of the poet-speaker, and in the reader's progress to the poem's meaning: a cyclic development from beginning to fulfillment.

The patterns of movement from conception to maturity, from birth to death, from ignorance to knowledge, serve a two-fold purpose. On the level of "message", the cyclic progressions are shown to inhere in every manifestation, every sphere of life. They organize eruptive life forces into orderly processes. They are instrumental, and even more, decisive in discovering unity

in variety, the one-in all. For the poems themselves, they act as structuring devices allowing to organize the radical, "open road" procession of items into coherent units so that a poem or its section can be recognized as a completed whole. On the other hand, however, they keep the form open since we are always encouraged to expect a renewal of the cycle, and, in the act of reading, we ourselves accomplish such a renewal. The patterns of cyclic unfolding are perhaps best seen as structural analogies bringing together the living world of organic reality and the artefact world of the poem. They become the vital common ground which both worlds share. In addition, since those "regularities" can be observed at work in organic life and confirmed in individual reading experience, they persistently impress the reader as having been "incorporated" into, rather than "made" for, the poem, "discovered" in the course of the poem's composition just as they are discovered in the course of its reading. Thus, they work to hide technique, to blur the distinction between the "artificial" nature of the poem and the organic nature of reality. They emphasize, instead, the poem's participation in the spontaneity of life.

For reasons of economy I have used a short poem and a fragment in a more detailed analysis but it is not difficult to recognize similar structures in the longer poems as well. "As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life" is organized by the undulating movement of the tide. In the course of the poem its central structuring principle acquires symbolic extensions of meaning. The law of the turn of the tide becomes analogous to the law of life and death, to the changing psychic moods, and the inscrutable ebb and flow of poetic inspiration. Even as we recognize that the poem completes a cycle from the last of the ebb to the beginning of the rise, its overall frame is kept open by insisting on the regularity of the sea's undulations incessantly repeating the same unit of movement.

"Song of Myself" begins with the awakening of the poet - persona's self-awareness and ends with his physical and spiritual dissolution in the universe. And while the time progression follows the span of the speaker's conscious life, Whitman takes every opportunity to turn this individual progress into an ar-

chetype; the persona's "representative" character is firmly established, religious imagery suggests further that the "poem of Walt Whitman, an American"[24] should be read as a kind of exemplum, and the central grass symbol, especially when it becomes "the beautiful hair of graves", points to cyclic renewal as does the final stanza which projects another cycle.

The outward movement in space is equally pronounced. The protagonist starts "undisguised and naked" in the seclusion of "the bank by the wood" but in Section Forty Six the endless vistas beyond the horizon become perpetually available to all who dare live on the road. By the final lines, the whole earth and atmosphere are turned into the self's natural abode. Progressions in time and space combine to unfold the limitless prospects of self-realization.

Just as Whitman's temporal progressions tend to follow biological cycles of human life, in dealing with America or humanity in general, the course of the poem may evoke the course of history from remote, perhaps legendary beginnings (as in "Passage to India" or "Starting from Paumanok") far ahead into the glorious future. The "organic", "evolutionary" nature of such progressions may be stressed by a significant number of stanzaic units. For example, "Song of Myself", undivided in 1855 version, in the final, 1881 arrangement consists of 52 sections corresponding to fifty two weeks in the year. And both "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" and "Passage to India" suggest the period of human gestation with their arrangement into nine stanzas.

Progressions in space begin in a concrete "here" and move outward. Invariably, they start from "the point you stand that is now to you the centre of all". Beginning on the grassy "bank by the wood", in the parental home, on Paumanok, they proceed to include larger and larger "circles", often achieving extraterrestrial point of view. Direction is never a problem. It inheres in the movement. Thus, although the ultimate destination remains forever unattainable[25], Whitman's progressions are clearly direc-

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[24] The poem's title in the 1856 LG.

[25] And, correspondingly, Whitman's poems, properly speaking, "do not end". Cf. J. L y n e n, Three Uses of the Present: The Historian's the Critic's and Emily Dickinson's, "College English" Nov. 1966, vol. 28, No 2, p. 126-136.

ted. They are shaped by the cyclic character of temporal processes and by "graded" expansion outward.

Even so, many critics have felt, as did Charles Feidelson, that "long poems generally lack [a] stabilizing factor" and "that whatever the nominal subject, it soon becomes lost in sheer process". Those critics usually prefer one or more from among the four poems: "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry", "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking", "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" and "Passage to India", though the latter poem's reputation has been somewhat marred because we tend to object to its insistently prophetic tone. The four poems come from different periods in Whitman's career: "Brooklyn Ferry" was the most outstanding of the new poems in the 1856 edition: "Out of the Cradle" first appeared in 1860, "When Lilacs Last" - in 1865, and "Passage to India" - in 1871. Yet, somehow, they seem close. What brings them together is perhaps first of all their thematic affinity. All four are poems about death, and they are about death in a similar way; each seeks to accept and transcend the fact of individual mortality. On the other hand, read in the chronological order, the four poems outline their author's evolution from a more personal, even confessional to an increasingly prophetic and nationalistic stance. "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" and "Out of the Cradle" are private in their concerns and intimate in tone: "When Lilacs Last" and especially "Passage to India" bring to the foreground national and universal considerations, and their tone is public.

Each of the four poems, however, is firmly anchored to a particular occurence; each is, in fact, occasional. In "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" and "Out of the Cradle" the occasion is strictly private, and the immediacy of the poem's appeal derives from the sense of personal urgency of the occasion. The point in both poems is to achieve perfect reader - speaker identification, to make the reader accept the emotional intensity of the occasion. The scene for the central event is, in both poems, firmly grounded in Whitman's biography. In "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" the detailed landscape, evoked with lingering affection itself becomes a major character, a co-protagonist in the poem. The sea in "Out

of the Cradle" takes its powerful, symbolic presence directly from Whitman's intimacy with the beaches of Long Island. The occasions for "When Lilacs Last" and "Passage to India" are furnished by important public events whose historical significance alone provides the needed sense of weight. Even so, in the case of the Lincoln elegy the importance of the public event combines with an intensely personal note, made possible, no doubt, by Whitman's involvement in the Civil War.

In all four poems then, a significant moment is isolated from time's undifferentiating flow and held suspended for contemplation. On the other hand, the reader is never allowed to forget the law of mutability. Like in the poems discussed earlier, however, the flow is not left formless. Its rhythm is carefully established through the familiar device of stressing its cyclic, repetitive nature. The shuttlelike course of the ferry between the banks of the East River provides a pattern of crossing into immortality and into the world of each future reader. The undulations of the sea in "Out of the Cradle" punctuate cycles of destruction and creativity, frustration and sublimation. The journey of the coffin through the country in spring affirms a similar cycle and the essential unity of death love and new life. Encircling the earth with facilities for communication fulfills and projects the direction of general, historical evolution.

Against those rhythmical but open-ended patterns of movement kept in the background, a set of interrelated images is arranged so that they acquire distinctly symbolic dimensions. The mechanism of converting such symbols into "stabilizing factors" has been perhaps best explained by John Lynen in his discussion of "When Lilacs Last":

> The most striking technique is that of giving the symbol an exaggeratedly "symbolic" character. This is mainly achieved through naming the symbol frequently and in more or less identical language. Thus lilac star and bird not only function as symbols but seem to announce themselves as such, so that we are certain of their symbolic character long before we can discover what they symbolize. The effect is to make the symbol persist as something we are constantly perceiving. It becomes a static point of reference which conceals the

poem's real progression by anchoring all its phases to the first phase of experience[26].

And, while the individual symbols interact, often in a triadic configuration[27], toward transcendence of oppositions, for the final resolution their static quality must be seen against the dynamic background. The ultimate unity can be effected only if we refer the symbols to the inclusive, dynamic frame.

The four poems are perhaps equally satisfying in the way they balance the foreground prominence of their symbolic images against the inclusive movement in the background. A closer look at "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry"[28] reveals yet another progression which is crucial for Whitman: the progression toward identification with the reader. Recognizing its importance in Whitman's poetry, Howard Waskow[29] speaks of poems of "reader engagement" but he tends to see the engagement Whitman requires from his reader as imaginative or intellectual rather than emotional. Thus, I think, Waskow would be hard pressed to point where precisely Whitman is more special than any poet who succeeds in the imaginative and intellectual involvement of his reader, who, to put it simply, does not fail in the use of the method of indirection. Whitman, however, is special in that he demands a vicarious love relationship with his reader.

The emotional progression in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" has been sensitively brought into focus by James E. Miller[30]. Clearly, the movement defines the poem's structure: the first three sections establish physical basis for identification - the scene

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[26] J. L y n e n, The Design of the Present, New Haven - London 1969, p. 322-323.

[27] See A. H. M a r k s, Whitman's Triadic Imagery, "American Literature" March 1951, No XXIII, p. 99-126.

[28] The poem first appeared in the 1856 LG as Sun-Down Poem, but it is possible that Whitman began it even before the first edition went to press (see: H. W. B l o d g e t (ed.), An 1855-1856 Notebook Toward the Second Edition of Leaves of Grass).

[29] W a s k o w, op. cit., chapt. VII.

[30] J. E. M i l l e r, A Critical Guide to Leaves of Grass, Chicago-London 1957, p. 80-89.

and experience of crossing the East River by ferry: the next three sections insist on sharing common humanity, vice and sin included, and, finally, the last three sections mount toward a mystical union through love. This construction is foreshadowed in the manipulation of tenses within the three opening sections. First, the present tense is the speaker's present in his time; in the Second Section the speaker looks forward to the future which is the reader's present, and in the Third - he actually moves into what was the future in Section Two, so that the future becomes present - the reader's as well as speaker's. The approach of the speaker in time in the first part of the poem projects thus the whole's development.

Behind the poem's ostensibly philosophical theme, there hides an urgent personal need to face and transcend the fact of death[31]. The problem turns into a paradox because the speaker who confronts death loves the earthly, sensuous life almost too much. He loves it so unconditionally that he must find ways of accepting its inevitable termination[32]. The paradox in which he is caught becomes visualized in the image of the crowded ferry crossing the river at sunset. The ferry, both subject to the river's currents and pursuing its own course, constitutes a perfect vehicle for conveying the speaker's desire to linger and "loafe" among the glories of sensual life together with his realization that all the time he is being hurried "with the swift current". The full meaning of the scene unfolds in the course of the poem until the revelation of cosmic order comes in the final section. There everything falls in place. Material objects, details of landscape so lovingly dwelt upon, so much in the foreground from the beginning of the poem are now regarded in relation to the "flood-tide", as "appearances", "dumb, beautiful min-

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[31] The poem's first title, "Sun-Down Poem", indicates that death was indeed Whitman's main preoccupation here, and that he was not, perhaps quite clear as to what he was doing. The final title shifts emphasis from death as termination to death as transcendence and focuses on the poem's proper intention.

[32] Cf. G. W. A l l e n, C. T. D a v i s, (eds.). Walt Whitman's Poems. Selections with Critical Aids, New York 1955, p. 27.

isters" deriving their significance from the flowing spirit they reveal. The speaker, elated, celebrates the beauty of the grand design, totally reconciled to personal transience. As always with Whitman, the progress is from matter to spirit, from here to hereafter, from now into the future and from sensuous enjoyment to emotional and intellectual acceptance.

All data and all conditions needed for the illumination in Section Nine are inherently there from the very beginning. Section Two makes the fact sufficiently clear:

> The impalpable sustenance of me from all things at all hours of the day,
> The simple, compact, well-join'd scheme, myself disintegrated, everyone disintegrated yet part of the scheme,
> The similitudes of the past and those of the future,
> The glories strung like beads on my smallest sights and hearings, on the walk in the street and the passage over the river,
> The current rushing so swiftly and swimming with me far away,
> The others that are to follow me, the ties between me and them,
> The certainty of others, the life, love, sight, hearing of others.
>
> (LG, 160; 6-12)

The poem must "discover" or "unfold" their full meaning and make it personal for both the speaker and the reader. The reader must not be told truths; he must discover them for himself. The poem's line of development toward illumination is thus strengthened.

All Whitman's progressions are calculated to include the reader. When he stretches his temporal progressions infinitely into the future and turns them into spatial arrangements, when he asserts the timelessness of the present moment at the cost of disregarding the possibility of Brooklyn Ferry being discontinued[33], his ultimate goal is to draw the reader within the scope

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[33] Hart Crane's Bridge (where Brooklyn Bridge replaces the Ferry as symbol) and Allan Ginsberg's delightful "A Supermarket in California" (where the disappearance of Brooklyn Ferry measures the gulf between Whitman's vision of America's future and Ginsberg's perception of its reality) stand as evidence of the continuing reality of Whitman's Ferry.

of envisioned continuities. Only then "time nor place - distance avails not" and "I am with you, you m n and women of [...] so many generations hence". In the same way Whitman´y progressions of "emotional intensification"[34] strive to bring the reader and the speaker together. The notorious closing of "So Long" shows how miserably the strategy can fail:

> I spring from the pages into your arms - decease calls me forth.
> [...]
> Dear friend whoever you are take this kiss,
> I give it especially to you, do not forget me,
>
> (LG, 505; 57, LG, 506; 64-65)

But, when successful, the emotional identification will make the reader see "steamers steaming through poems" and exultantly "haste on", to the next vision.

Similarly, in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry", when the reader has himself followed its emotional progression, the revelation in Section Nine becomes his own. The "crossing" is accomplished proving Whitman´s art resistant to time´s changes, and proving complete Whitman´s triumph over mortality:

> What is more subtle than this which ties me to the woman or man that looks in my face?
> Which fuses me into you now, and pours my meaning into you?
> We understand then do we not?
> What I promis´d without mentioning it, have you not accepted?
> What the study could not teach - what the preaching could not accomplish is accomplish´d, is it not?
>
> (LG, 164; 96-100)

And the incantation which follows may celebrate the universal flow of life on behalf of both the speaker and the reader. The reader´s emotional engagement in the poem´s progress is as indispensable for Whitman as the presence there of his own powerful personality. The two are co-makers of the poem. It is, therefore, of crucial importance that a Whitman poem would not be

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[34] A l l e n, D a v i s, op. cit., p. 9.

judged on the intellectual level alone. Denying the poem a chance to work upon him emotionally, the reader cancels its aesthetic impact. Vision and design simply cannot be separated in Whitman.

It has become sufficiently clear, I suppose, that my view of Whitman's art tends to coincide with those critics[35] who emphasize the mystical qualities of his poetry. Seen as progressions toward a moment of contact, an illumination or reconciliation, the poems resemble religious meditations as they strive to attain a state of grace; though grace may come in shockingly secular guises - as a sexual (even homosexual) union or as a political vision of perfect democracy. The visionary climax of a Whitman poem constitutes its structural climax as well, whether of the whole poem or of its distinct unit. Opposition and variety become resolved into unity both on the plane of vision and on the plane of compositional strategies. Not only do we perceive that particular catalogue items are interchangeable because fundamentally equivalent but we are also forced to recognize that all progressions temporal spatial and emotional, inevitably and inextricably come together as they do in, for example, the closing section of "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry".

Whitman's chief province is "the road", the striving for moments of perfect fusion. But, at various points in his career, he also wrote poems which omit the meditative progression altogether. Such poems deal only with the lucid moment, with the vision itself, when the scene or object becomes alive with spirit. They are imagistic in the modern understanding of the term. They present "an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time"[36] and provide ground for speculations whether T. S.

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[35] Compare e. g. A s s e l i n e a u, op. cit., vol II, chapt. X (Style: From Mysticism to Art); J. E. M i l l e r, Jr, Song of Myself as Inverted Mystical Experience, [in:] J. E. M i l l e r (ed.), Whitman's Song of Myself - Origin, Growth, Meaning, New York 1964; J. L y n e n, The Design of the Present, chapt. 5 (esp. p. 308-333).

[36] E. Pound's definition of image, A Few Don'ts in Retrospect, [in:] E. P o u n d, Literary Essays, ed. with an Introduction by T. S. E l i o t, New York 1968.

Eliot's famous "objective correlative" may not have origin also in Whitman[37].

Many of the imagistic poems are to be found in "Children of Adam" and, first of all, in "Drum-Taps", "Cavalry Crossing a Ford" furnishing a justly celebrated example:

> A line in long array where they wind betwixt green islands,
> They take a serpentine course, their arms flash in the sun - hark to the musical clank,
> Behold the silvery river, in it the splashing horses loitering stop to drink,
> Behold the brown-faced men, each group, each person a picture, the negligent rest on the saddles,
> Some emerge on the opposite bank, others are just entering the ford - while,
> Scarlet and blue and snowy white,
> The guidon flags flutter gayly in the wind.
>
> (LG, 300)[38]

An overview of the cavalry unit approaching a ford is subsequently decomposed into separate, opposing and complementary, elements ("each group, each person a picture") and the whole is reassembled again in terms of blending colors of guidon flags. The flags, "scarlet and blue and snowy white" draw together the various components, as they finally dominate the scene. The overall design is a familiar one: the main theme is stated at the begin-

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[37] S. M u s g r o v e, T. S. Eliot and Walt Whitman, New York 1953. The author writes on p. 78: "Eliot's conception of the »objective correlative« is that of a situation such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked. The whole passage (in Hamlet, T. S. Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 145), with its discussion of adolescent »bafflement«, »disgust [...] occasioned by his mother«, »the baffoonery of an emotion [...] which can find no outlet in action«, should be read in conjunction with Whitman's From Pent - up Aching Rivers, which has these lines:

> [...] O resistless yearning!
> O for any and each the body correlative attracting!
> O for you whoever you are your correlative body!"

[38] It is perhaps of some interest that, while the whole poem was first published in 1865 and remained unchanged in all subsequent versions, line six, with its blending of national colors, was only added in 1871.

ning, then elaborated in detail and restated with new lucidity. But the effect of progression is absent. It is only vestigal in such similar poems as "A Sight in Camp at Daybreak" or "By the Bivouac's Fitful Flame". Lost with the dynamism is obviously the scope of vision. Less obviously, but perhaps more importantly, lost is the dynamic quality of the poem and a good deal of the reader engagement as he becomes a decoder rather than a fellow traveller on the road which is the poem.

For, if Whitman's poems are dramatic[39], the drama resides totally in the oppositions and counterpoints of the progression while the final vision inevitably reconciles the various elements and resolves everything into harmony. The ultimate unity remains a certainty, a matter of faith and a constant for Whitman. He does not change in this respect. But he can travel to his destination by so many different routes and see his ideal incorporated in so many different forms. Eventually, the physical world seems valuable to Whitman because it reveals the living idea. He loves and uses objects as means of access to spiritual unity. His analogies are, in fact, equivalencies tending to identity. Identity is precisely the effect of the imagistic poems, a perfect fusion of object and idea. Paradoxically however, even as he attains his philosophical and aesthetic goal, Whitman loses much of his poetic power. His forte is striving and progression with the road always stretching ahead and the journey's end forever receding. Possibility, not achievement, is Whitman's domain.

Although it is tempting to view the sweep of "Song of Myself" as a tour de force opening of Whitman's career and the del-

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[39] Some critics regard Whitman's poems as "monodramas", cf. e.g. A l l e n, D a v i s, Introduction to op. cit., or W a s k o w, op. cit., chapt. VI; L y n e n, however, (Three Uses of the Present) maintains that, in contrast to Dickinson's talent, Whitman's gifts are "lyric and bardic"; "Whitman's poetic plot is essentially the enactment of the discovery of this fact (i. e. that the substance of ego is universal spirit) through spiritual merging. We are shown how the poet, by observing the way objects of his experience become part of him, moves toward the realization that he is at one with God" (p. 133).

licate vignette of "Sparkles from the Wheel"[40] as its graceful but subdued closing, one cannot claim without too many qualifications that such was the consistent line of Whitman's poetic development. "Children of Adam"[41] contains enough imagistic poems while "Prayer of Columbus"[42] is still a poem of progression though its protagonist, no longer capable of powering transformations, remains a reviewer of experience. On the other hand, grouping Whitman's poems into those structured mainly by progressions, then, poems balancing patterns of progression against "stabilizing factors" (such as insistent symbols or a distinct sense of the occasion), and finally, into basically static, imagistic poems, helps to elucidate problems of design with which the artist had been struggling throughout his creative years. Further light upon his experiments may be cast by paying attention to the perhaps less accomplished poems, such as "Song of the Open Road" or "Song of the Broad-Axe" which still reveal a lot about the poet's search for his own form: a form, that is, which could combine the flexibility and dynamism of life with the shapeliness of an artefact, a form, which, in Ezra Pound's later phrase, would be "as water poured into a vase"[43].

"Song of the Open Road"[44], as the title suggests, centers on the image of life as journey. Its pattern is thus radically open, for Whitman's journey, unlike "Pilgrim's Progress", has no specific destination. The symbol of the open road intertwines two themes: one - of life as "the long journey", the other - of comradeship on the road. The urge to push forward is balanced with the necessity to carry "my old burdens" of emotional rapport with other human beings already in Section One:

> Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road,
> Healthy, free, the world before me,

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[40] First appeared in 1871 (in Passage to India).

[41] First published as Enfants d'Adam in the 1860 LG.

[42] First printed in Harper's Magazine for March 1874, included in Two Rivulets (1876), and finally placed in LG 1881.

[43] P o u n d, op. cit., p. 9.

[44] First published in the 1856 LG.

> The long brown path before me leading wherever I choose,
> [...]
> (Still here I carry my old delicious burdens,
> I carry them, men and women, I carry them with me wherever I go,
> I swear it is impossible for me to get rid of them,
> I am fill'd with them, and I will fill them in return.)
>
> (LG, 149: 1-4, 12-15)

As in other Whitman's characteristic openings, all the main themes, all data are present from the outset, and their full implications will be developed in the course of the poem. Consequently, Sections Two through Five celebrate the open road as the site of freedom and limitless vistas, as the principle of creative life:

> O public road, I say back I am not afraid to leave you, yet I love you,
> You express me better than I can express myself,
> You shall be more to me than my poem.
>
> I think heroic deeds were all conceiv'd in the open air, and all free poems also.
>
> (LG, 151: 46-49)

Sections Six to Eight, on the other hand, elaborate "the gospel of adhesiveness". The turning point comes in Section Five in which free life on the road has endowed the speaker with the authority to lead and teach:

> I am larger, better than I thought,
> I did not know I held so much goodness.
>
> All seems beautiful to me,
> I can repeat over to men and women You have done such good to me I would do the same to you,
> I will recruit for myself and you as I go,
>
> (LG, 151: 60-64)

It is important to notice that the "you" in this section refers generally to "men and women" who "have done such good to me". In the course of the next section, however, the "you" becomes progressively more specific. It may still be generic or, perhaps, ambiguous in this line: "The past, the future, majesty, love - if they are vacant of you, you are vacant of them" (LG, 153: 87), but it sounds direct and specific in the closing questions of Section Six:

Do you know what it is as you p[illegible]s to be loved by strangers?
Do you know the talk of those turning eye-balls?

(LG, 153: 92-93)

When after further exposition of the doctrine of "adhesiveness", the speaker exclaims with growing urgency:

Allons! whoever you are come travel with me!
Travelling with me you find what never tires.

(LG, 154: 114-115)

the "you" refers individually to each reader, "whoever he is", reading the poem at the moment. Through the manipulation of the second person pronoun, the speaker, as it were, approaches the reader travelling from the remoteness of his abstract reflections to the active, concrete realization of human solidarity in camaraderie with the reader. The strategy works only if the reader cooperates, if he is able and willing to respond emotionally. For neither rational argumentation nor aesthetic impressions can serve as adequate common ground between the reader and the speaker. The appeal is made to the emotional recognition of the human bond stemming from the simple fact of being: "I and mine do not convince by arguments, similies, rhymes,/ We convince by our presence" (LG, 155: 138-139). The sense of community through travelling the same road of life is enlarged in Sections Twelve and Thirteen to include the sharing in common human guilt, however secret the knowledge and recognition of it may be.

After the confiteor of Section Thirteen the last two sections sound again the double call to endless journeying and striving and to faithful comradeship on the road. By the time the reader reaches the final invocation, the distance between him and the speaker has been cancelled:

Camerado, I give you my hand!
I give you my love more precious than money,
I give you myself before preaching or law:
Will you give me yourself? will you come travel with me?
Shall we stick by each other as long as we live?

(LG, 159: 220-225)

Preceded by the exclamatory "camerado", the "you" is made both more direct and more affectionate while the following lines postulate a ritual of blood brotherhood, a thoroughly human Holy Communion.

The theme of "adhesiveness", stated in general terms in the introductory section of the poem, is thus developed toward a climax of communion with each particular reader. While the theme of "the long journey" remains open, the movement toward identification with the reader constitutes the poem's closed principle. The progressive anchoring of the poem's action in the reader functions as the main structuring device, indispensable for the poem's success. The poem fails if the reader refuses to supply the "stabilizing factor" of his emotional involvement, if he rejects the part of the "camerado".

Whitman resorted to a similar device in many poems, most successfully, perhaps, in "Starting from Paumanok"[45] and, as we have seen, in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry". In both poems, however, the progressive intensification of emotions became enriched by patterns of temporal progression and, in the case of "Starting from Paumanok", by a more specified progression in space[46].

In "Song of the Broad-Axe"[47] the background pattern is formed by evolutionary progression of civilization from the natural fertility of the wilderness (even if it seems "a sterile landscape" that "covers the ore, there is as good as the best, for all the forbidding appearance") to the spiritual energy of "a great city" ("that which has the greatest men and women"). The pattern is evoked, reflected, and epitomized in the progress of America from "the log at the wood-pile", "the sylvan hut", "the space clear'd for a garden" to "the constructor of wharves, bridges, piers" and "stays against the sea". Both universal progress of mankind and historical development of America, are to be

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[45] The poem was apparently begun immediately after the publication of the 1855 LG. A notebook of 1856 contains many first draft lines. The first manuscript title (Barrett) was "Premonition". When published, in LG 1860, the poem was titled "Proto-Leaf". The present title appeared in LG 1867 and the poem was finally placed following "Inscriptions" in the 1871 LG.

[46] In "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" the particular landscape acts as the main stabilizing element.

[47] First published in LG 1856.

crowned in "shapes of Democracy total, result of centuries". Interwoven, the two progressions establish the background rhythm of ordered, if turbulent, march ahead while the "stabilizing factor" is provided by the returning image of the broad-axe.

The poem falls into two parts, each consisting of an equal number of sections. The first - Sections One through Six - is dominated by the motif of individual deeds, and by progression in space. The second - Sections Seven through Twelve - concerns itself chiefly with progress "en masse" in time. The division is marked by the return of the initial image of land covering the ore - the beginning of the axe. The axe, then,provides a symbolic centre from which associations and meanings expand, and yet, always return to the basic solidity of the tool. In the course of the poem the broad-axe becomes a material realization of the law of evolution. Its various uses, peaceful, military, constructive, and destructive, reflect multiple aspects of the "law of Nature" whose essence - progress - remains sharply in focus. The axe stands as the embodiment of the evolutionary law itself, and, at the same time, it anchors the overall process to its "thingness".

I hope that enough has been said to allow for the conclusion that central for Whitman's concept of poetry as mediation, as "the liquid rim" between the living sea of natural forms and the firm land of the artefact, is the problem of striking balance between the principle of spontaneity, capable of transmitting life in its seething energy, and the demands of art for definite and therefore, petrifying forms. Just as Whitman's conception of the self singles out growth as the property which consciousness and nature share, so his poetic designs incorporate patterns of temporal, spatial and emotional progressions as permitting to hide technique beneath the ostensible spontaneity of their movement. Late in life, he still admired the structural simplicity of the Bible and held it for his ideal: "Compared with the famed epics of Greece, and lesser ones since, the spinal supports of the Bible are simple and meagre. All its history, biography, narratives, etc., are as beads, strung on and indicating the Deific purpose and power" (PW, II, 546). Believing himself in the purposeful evolution of the universe, he wanted to make the sense of its procession "the spinal support" of his

poems. Yet all through his career Whitman felt the need to search for ways in which evolutionary "flows" could be stabilized into art forms without losing their spontaneity. And he was more aware of his problem than he is usually given credit for: "The Play of Imagination, with the sensuous objects of Nature for symbols, and Faith-with Love and Pride as the unseen impetus and the moving-power of all, make up the curious chess game of a poem" (PW, I, 292).

The reader's preferences within the Whitman canon will ultimately depend on individual sense of balance between the dynamic and the static elements of a poem. There are those who prefer Whitman - the imagist, although they are relatively few; and those, perhaps most numerous at the moment, who delight in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry", "Out of the Cradle" and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd"; and there are those who, like Richard Chase, let themselves be carried away by the energy and sweep of "Song of Myself", feeling that they have been given enough guidance not to drown in its swift current.

Chapter V

THE DESIGN OF COMMAND

> The world of difference between Emily Dickinson's art and Whitman's is the result of their having made alternative responses to the same problem, of their having organized the same sort of time in exactly opposite ways. The goal of the Whitman poem is to bring a timeless process into view, to comprehend the import of such a statement as "I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring". The cyclic return of sorrow is seen as the cyclic movement of seasons, and time is opened up by projecting this process into indefinitely remote past and future. But Emily Dickinson undertakes to crystalize event into circumstance [...], the distinction between now and always becomes irrelevant, because the "time" proves to be an experience which is interchangeably that perceived by the self in its narrow moment or that of the transcendent spectator[1].

Accounting for the difference between Whitman's and Dickinson's poetry exclusively in terms of their opposite response to time may seem an oversimplification. However, essential is the recognition that whereas Whitman insists on revealing an unbroken continuity, Dickinson shatters it by juxtaposing "now" with "always" without offering a discernible route from one to the other.

Thus Robert Weisbuch misses, perhaps, the point when he claims that "when the images which organize the world become dire, when the grass of Whitman's "Song of Myself" is replaced by the "chaff, straw, splinters of wood, weeds and the sea-gluten", "the few sands and dead leaves" of his "As I Ebb'd with the

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[1] J. Lynen, Three Uses of the Present. The Historian's, The Critic's and Emily Dickinson's, "College English" Nov. 1966, vol. 28, No 2, p. 126-136.

Ocean of Life", we are fully prepared for Dickinson's second world"[2]. For, ultimately, the difference lies not in the quality of vision, pessimistic or optimistic, but in its deep structure, so to say. Whether in a celebrating or despairing mood, Whitman seeks to incorporate his vision within a unifying law. Hence the ebb and flow of the ocean lends the authority of a natural cycle to fluctuations of mood. At no point does Dickinson feel a comparable need to "legitimize" experiental and psychic vicissitudes by referring to an inclusive, external principle as her structural analogy. The conflicting views, the tensions and contradictory moods are there in her poetry as aspects of consciousness, not as diverse manifestations of cosmic continuity. The unity is gone, or rather it remains beyond comprehension, - the challenging unknown, "the largest need of the intellect" (L, II, 559).

Neither time nor space is patterned into cycles or "graded" for Emily Dickinson. Unlike the road which, "starting from Paumanok", leads, seductively familiar, to everywhere and forever, Dickinson's images of "degreeless" (287) or "perpetual" (1056) noon, of "the ocean too silver for a seam (328) or "seamless grass" (409) emphasize the absence of cognizable markers in the expanse of time and space. Dickinson's characteristic method, in Ruth Miller's words, is "a leap or a swirl up and out beyond the real world to some realm of infinity"[3]. This "realm of infinity", however, is not a direct extension of "home". Instead, it is the vast region of "supposition" where amid "acres of perhaps" (696) one is distinctly not "at home" or where access is bluntly denied.

When Dickinson contemplates a bird which "came down the walk" in her garden, the poem (328) naturally divides into two contrasting scenes. In the first one, the speaker observes the bird on her own territory. The scene is full of movement and humor. In a characteristic Dickinsonian manner, the bird becomes "domesticated" and has to behave like a polite guest:

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[2] R. W e i s b u c h, Emily Dickinson's Poetry, Chicago--London 1975, p. 10.

[3] R. M i l l e r, The Poetry of Emily Dickinson, Middletown, Con. 1968, p. 130.

And then he drank a Dew
From a convenient Grass -
And then hopped sidewise to the Wall
To let a Beetle pass -

Although the bird's "strange" habits are noticed, at first they are treated as only eccentricities which add to the quaintness of his presence:

He did not know I saw -
He bit an Angleworm in halves
And ate the fellow, raw,

But as her guest is leaving the garden and the speaker's eyes follow his flight, infinity of space opens in sharp contrast to the playful domesticity of the previous scene:

And he unrolled his feathers
And rowed him softer home -

Than Oars divide the Ocean,
Too silver for a seam -
Or Butterflies, off Banks of Noon
Leap, plashless as they swim.

More ominously, in poem 287, the contrast between life and death is conveyed through juxtaposing sound, movement and transience, all implied in the image of the working clock, with the grotesque unfamiliarity of absolute stasis[4]:

A Clock stopped -
Not the Mantel's -
Geneva's farthest skill
Can't put the puppet bowing -
That just now dangled still -

An awe came on the Trinket!
The Figures hunched, with pain -
Then quivered out of Decimals -
Into Degreeless Noon -

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[4] D. Porter talks about "the fundamental disjunction of experience into motion and stasis" in Emily Dickinson's poems (D. P o r t e r, The Art of Emily Dickinson's Early Poetry, Cambridge, Mass. 1966, p. 131). Particularly chapt. V of his book is worth consulting on the contrast between motion and stasis, transience and permanence in Dickinson's poetry.

There seems to be no perceptible connection between motion and its absence; the distance is not quantitatively "graded" but seen as a radical, qualitative change:

> Decades of Arrogance between
> The Dial life -
> And Him -

In the celebrated poem "I heard a Fly buzz-when I died -" (465), the ebb of life is rendered in terms of progressive failure of senses. The contrast between "the stillness in the room" and the sound of the fly thrusts itself upon the speaker's ear when the poem opens. But as it moves on, the buzzing becomes "uncertain" and "stumbling" and blends into silence. Similarly, at first the speaker is able to look around the room where people gathered "for that last onset". Then her vision grows narrower and narrower until the eyes fix on the fly alone:

> And then the Windows failed - and then
> I could not see to see -

The poem, thus, equals life with perception as well as with motion. As long as the waning motion continues, whether of the eyes or of the fly, life is there. When it ceases, the change cannot be accomodated in the continuity of decline. The quality has altered and its nature remains a mystery. "I could not see to see" is all that can be said.

The strategy of exploring the moment when the known is abruptly brought into the presence of the unknown may be further illustrated by a poem employing the Whitmanesque image of life as journey:

> Our journey had advanced -
> Our feet were almost come
> To that odd Fork in Being's Road -
> Eternity - by Term -
>
> Our pace took sudden awe -
> Our feet - reluctant - led
> Before - were Cities - but Between -
> The Forest of the Dead -
>
> Retreat - was out of Hope -
> Behind - a Sealed Route -

Eternity's White Flag - Before -
And God - at every Gate -

(615)

Unlike Whitman, Dickinson concentrates not on the journey's course but on its termination, on the moment when change is bound to occur. As in "A bird came down the walk" or "A Clock stopped" or "I heard a Fly buzz", nothing can be said about the reality beyond the turning point. Despite the assurance that "before - were cities", the view is blocked by "the forest of the dead". This poem, too, ends in the sudden confrontation with the unknown: "Eternity's White Flag - Before -/ And God - at every Gate -"

As a rule the balance of a Dickinson poem is "tipped" (see the discussion of the poem on the spider in Chapter III). It progresses by intense, meticulous exploration of the known, then "leaps" into infinity of the unknown. The change occurring at this point can no longer be accomodated in any continuity. It is qualitative and absolute. While we employed the figure of concentric circles whose perimeters expanded gradually in order to visualize the structure of "Song of Myself", a Dickinson poem may be imagined as consisting of "center" and "circumference" with the rings in between missing. The "center" provides a springboard for "the leap", and, consequently, receives more attention. It anchors eternity to "here and now" and mystery to the familiar. Nevertheless, it is the freedom of "the leap" that counts most. One suspects that the ability or inability to "leap out and beyond" the limiting center of immediate reality was precisely what the poet had in mind when she insisted that "Captivity is Consciousness -/ So's Liberty" (384). The way consciousness operates for Dickinson brings to mind Emerson's meditation in "Circles" on St. Augustine's definition of God as "a circle whose center was everywhere and its circumference nowhere" (II, 301). Except, her center could not easily be everywhere. It was necessarily limited by the accidental circumstances of the poet's experience, by the "nows" out of which "forever" could be composed (624). The haunting image offered in poem 378 visualizes the appalling predicament of the mind rent

between the alternatives of claustrophobic enclosure within the center and absolute alienation upon circumference:

> I saw no Way - The Heavens were stiched -
> I felt the Columns close -
> The Earth reversed her Hemispheres -
> I touched the Universe -
>
> And back it slid - and I alone -
> A speck upon a Ball -
> Went out upon Circumference -
> Beyond the Dip of Bell -

Dickinson's vision is in itself dramatic. Its essence is conflict and confrontation. Not only does she pose the self against the world and experience but she thinks in oppositions all the time: home to measureless space and far away places, the present, fleeting moment to the forever of eternity, the motion of ordinary life against the stasis of any overwhelming emotion, but, most of all, against the final stillness of death. Just as there seems to be no property or attribute which the self could unquestionably share with nature, the polarities of Dickinson's oppositions do not gradually blend into each other. Instead, they are locked in an unresolvable confrontation.

The discontinuous character of such a vision is reflected even in the brevity of individual poems. Although this particular feature of her art has sometimes been ascribed to the fact that Dickinson "was personally incapable of logical, not to say theological, thought", that "system and argument [...] were too hard and frigid for her"[5], it seems more rewarding to view it with Roland Hagenbüchle as integrally related to the nature of her vision:

> The concentration on the "critical" moment is a crucial element in Emily Dickinson's poetry and is close-

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[5] A. G e l p i, Emily Dickinson. The Mind of the Poet, Cambridge, Mass. 1965, p. 60; cf. also R. C h a s e, Emily Dickinson, New York 1951, especially chapt. V. In chapt. VII of this book (p. 192), Chase makes the following statement: "It would never have occurred to Emily Dickinson that a poem might have a primarily metaphysical origin, or that anyone would write a poem out of a desire to create a finished and formal object of art".

> ly connected with the shift from analogue to digital thinking - itself responsible for the experience of life as a discontinuous or "Angled Road" (910). It finds expression, first, iconically, in the epigrammatic shortness of her poems, second thematically, in the numerous descriptions of unstable phenomena in nature such as the rising and setting of the sun or its precarious poise at the meridian hour of noon, the changing of the seasons at the solstices, and certain fleeting effects of light in general. It can further be observed in the elliptical and often ambiguous syntax (inculding the hyphen), and finally in the use of polysemantic and therefore unstable words and expressions[6].

Where Whitman seeks to place each event within a continuum, Dickinson excludes and isolates for analysis. She does not share Whitman's gift for familiarizing time by exposing its recurrent patterns. Instead, she looks hard at a single moment for whatever meaning it may yield unsupported by its location within an archetypal cycle. "The myth is reduced to an act of pure consciousness", to use again Roland Hagenbüchle's apt formulation. The way the mind crystalizes moments into aspects of eternity is what her poetry is about. The "critical moment" of Roland Hagenbüchle's observation or "a conflict compressed into a transient moment" (which is Ruth Miller's expression[7] and as good a definition of crisis as any) constitutes a metaphor as well as a structural analogy for such vision.

"Webster's Dictionary of the English Language"[8] defines crisis as "1) the point of time when it is decided whether an affair or course of action shall proceed, be modified or terminate, decisive moment turning point; 2) an unstable state of affairs in which a decisive change is impending; 3) a psychological or social condition characterized by unusual instability caused by excessive stress and either endangering or felt to endanger the continuity of the individual or his group". "The Amer-

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[6] R. H a g e n b ü c h l e, Precision and Indeterminacy in the Poetry of Emily Dickinson, "Emerson Society Quarterly" 1st Quarter, 1974, vol. 20, p. 38-39.

[7] M i l l e r, op. cit., p. 129.

[8] Third edition, 1971.

ican Heritage Dictionary of the English Language"[9] adds a succint explanation of the literary application of the term: "the point in a story or drama at which hostile forces are in the most tense state of opposition".

The poet's own definitions of crisis focus on two aspects, both underlined in Ruth Miller's formula "a conflict compressed into a transient moment", that is - on crisis as a moment of infinitely precarious balance:

> Crisis is a Hair
> Toward which forces creep
> Past which forces retrograde
> If it come in sleep
>
> To suspend the Breath
> Is the most we can
> Ignorant is it Life or Death
> Nicely balancing.
>
> (889)

Significantly, if crisis occurs when the mental faculties are at rest, one is left helpless at the mercy of unspecified but powerful "creeping" forces. For, in most general terms, crisis interests Dickinson as the meeting point between what has been and therefore appears dear and familiar, like life, and what is yet to be, which looms large and terrifying because it cannot be known, like death or, better, like the unpenetrable mystery on the other side of dying.

> Crisis is sweet and yet the Heart
> Upon the hither side
> Has Dowers of Perspective
> To Denizens denied
>
> Inquire of the closing Rose
> Which rapture she preferred
> And she will point you sighing
> To her rescinded Bud.
>
> (1416)

Crisis as a turning point provides a perspective upon "the hither side", upon what has been, which invariably involves an acute sense of loss. As each moment is unique, each is irrevoca-

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[9] The edition of 1970.

bly lost when it recedes into the past. Present only to the mind, it becomes "memory and desire", "the landscape of absence" as opposed to Whitman's timeless reality in the collective human experience. Its participation in or contribution to the design of "the whole" is negligible compared to the psychic impact it effects.

For Dickinson, the unknown remains "the largest need of the intellect", not in the sense of providing space for imperialistic expansion of the self but because it demands confrontations in which creativity is released. No matter how fascinated with the beckoning "other", Dickinson never hopes for its smooth incorporation. There remain points everywhere beyond which the mind, deprived of the certainty of faith, cannot progress. "Nature's show" can only be watched but not penetrated in essence. The other side of the grave invariably proves the ultimate in mystery. There are mysteries, too, which, like the soul's subconscious "caverns" are better left "sealed". If Dickinson constantly courts self-destruction in critical encounters with the unknown, it is because failure enlarges awareness[10] but also, and perhaps first of all, because the commanding power of aesthetic consciousness must be tested. Aesthetic - not in the sense of frivolously cultivating art for art's sake but redemptive, capable of imposing its own order, of "making revelations". The unknown is "the largest need of the intellect" because it provides a constant challenge to the mind. Converging upon the known, the unknown teaches the value of security in the familiar. On the other hand, however, exposing the provisional character of any order, it yet forces the mind to struggle for maintaining poise.

Crisis is thus an encounter between the disorderly, eruptive forces of the unknown as it comes in experience and the assaulted consciousness which must react so as not to be submerged. The confrontation is unresolvable for the contending principles are, in fact, mutually supportive. Neither can win. The point is to keep the contenders tautly poised. Dickinson explains the

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[10] See R. W i l b u r' s beautiful essay: Sumptuous Destitution, [in:] Emily Dickinson: Three Views, reprinted in: R. S e w a l l, (ed.) Emily Dickinson. A Collection of Critical Essays, Englewood Cliffs, N. J. 1963.

relationship casually, with the sort of grim humor that often characterizes her most striking utterances:

A Bomb upon the Ceiling
Is an improving thing -
It keeps the nerves progressive
Conjecture flourishing -

(1128)

The moment of suspense becomes "a capsule" of energy demanding release, and is therefore conducive to creativity.

The poet's most extensive comment on the way conditions of extreme stress stimulate to performance comes in this early poem:

A Wounded Deer - leaps highest -
I've heard the Hunter tell -
'Tis but the Ecstasy of death -
And then the Brake is still!

The Smitten Rock that gushes!
The trampled Steel that springs!
A Cheek is always redder
Just where the Hectic Stings!

Mirth is the Mail of Anguish -
In which, it Cautions Arm,
Lest anybody spy the blood
And "you're hurt" exclaim!

(165)[11]

As the opening line makes it clear, the speaker of the poem is chiefly interested in the action-reaction relationship of wound and leap. To draw attention to the cost of the impressive performance "the Hunter" is introduced. He seems expert in the symptoms of death and points to the imperfect, because momentary, quality of the achievement. The hunter can think the leap insignificant when compared to its brevity and cost. His interest focuses on the existential or the "biographical" sequence of wound - death. The first speaker, however, is obviously fascinated with the way the inevitable ebb of life has been arrested, if only momentarily, by the energy of the leap. It is on this aesthetic sequence of stimulus and performance that the remaining part

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[11] T. Johnson dates this poem c. 1860. Compare also e.g. 442, 525, 770, 1355.

of the poem concentrates. The second stanza piles up instances of achievement under stress as if to discredit the hunter's slighting remark. On the other hand, the hunter's observation has made the reader aware that as the deer must die, the rock will be crushed, the spring will burst and fever will eventually consume life. All sense of heroic power displayed in the reaction to assault derives from that knowledge. As long as the "Mail of Mirth" can cover "Anguish", consciousness remains unvanquished and in control of the predicament. The triumph of sheer performance over most acute existential pain testifies to the commanding power of consciousness[12].

It may be of some interest to remember at this point that Emerson, in the emotional crisis following the death of his first wife, felt a similar need to balance the pain of his bereavement with the discipline of art. The overwhelming intensity of emotions defied formal control. The poem breaks down in the middle with the direct, painful cry "dearest Ellen, dearest Ellen":

> O pleasant, pleasant in my eye
> The grave is become
> And with all this green majesty
> 'Twill be a sweeter home
> The hours of... [her]?
> may not [?] dearest Ellen dearest
> Ellen can we not yet meet on
> the midnight wings of dreams.
>
> (J, III, 230)[13]

General reflection of the philosophical-sentimental kind is used in the first part of the fragment as a means of distancing experience. When the poem breaks down, it is because the unique character of personal emotion refuses to be relieved through generalizations. Emerson, however, as the inclusion of the poem in

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[12] See also A. S a l s k a, Emily Dickinson's Commanding Consciousness, "Zeszyty Naukowe UŁ" 1976, ser. I, No 20, p. 47-55.

[13] My attention to this effort of Emerson's was drawn by remarks made by the editor of the Harvard edition of "Journals in the Preface" to vol. III.

"Journals" implies, was not interested in pursuing the aesthetic problems underlying the poem's failure. The poem was not intended as anything more than emotional therapy.

There is much evidence for the statement that a similar emotional need lay at the roots of Dickinson's poetry, and she had to resolve for herself precisely the aesthetic questions which Emerson had left unanswered. That concentration on the way pain is borne became her method of distancing personal misery is indicated by another poem:

> [...] - yet to me
> A piercing Comfort it affords
> In passing Calvary -
>
> To note the fashions - of the Cross -
> And how they're mostly worn -
>
> (561)

Paying attention to the aesthetics of suffering, to the "how" rather than "what" of experience is the core of her strategy of "shifting grounds". Particular poems are resolutions of particular "critical" encounters with experience not on the "biographical" or, generally, existential but only on the aesthetic plane. The characteristic "scenelessness" of Dickinson's poems, observed by Jay Leyda, Ruth Miller and Robert Weisbuch[14], is, I believe, chiefly the outcome of this strategy.

On the "biographical" level, confrontations remain mostly unresolved (especially confrontations within the self cf. e.g. 642, 640, 777) or even failure is openly invited (cf. e.g. 540, 509, 791) in order, one suspects, to maintain the condition of extreme stress which, in turn, necessitates release in a poem. The "piercing virtue" of "renunciation" (745) ensures power, becomes almost a device (if it is not too insensitive a word) for staying in command. The drama of the critical moment becomes a metaphor for the way consciousness operates, while the poem records the moment in which the mind succeeds in drawing a design "upon the arc of white". If Dickinson's poetry can be called the

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[14] J. L e y d a, The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson, New Haven 1960, p. XXI; M i l l e r, op. cit., p. 129-130; W e i s b u c h, op. cit., p. 16.

poetry of release[15], it is a "slant" release, deliberately transferred onto the aesthetic plane. Emersonian in identifying creativity or inspiration with intense moments of consciousness, Emily Dickinson uses, at whatever personal cost, crisis situations deliberately, to will the recurrence of the heightened moments of consciousness; an achievement which Emerson always felt was beyond his power[16].

The intensity of a critical moment cannot be continuously sustained. Dickinson knows that truth as well as Emerson. The death-like, "numb" stages following crisis are the necessary intervals between the heightened moments. These "hours of lead remembered if outlived" keep the threat of annihilation real to the mind and measure the human cost of the violent confrontation. Time, then, consists of isolated moments of achievement incorporated in individual poems. Whatever sense of continuity can be rescued derives not from any continuous principle to be "discovered" in organic reality but, emphatically, comes from the untiring effort of consciousness to control and organize experience:

> Each Life Converges to some Centre -
> Expressed - or still -
> Exists in every Human Nature
> A Goal
>
> Embodied scarcely to itself - it may be -
> Too fair
> For Credibility's presumption
> To mar -
>
> Adored with caution - as a Brittle Heaven -
> To reach
> Were hopeless, as the Rainbow's Rainment
> To touch -

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[15] Cf. M i l l e r, op. cit., p. 166. In support of the thesis, prof. Miller quotes from Dickinson's letter to T. W. Higginson (June 7, 1862) "I felt a palsy here - the Verses just relieve". The same point was made by M. T. B i n g h a m in: Emily Dickinson. A Revelation, New York 1954, p. 5.

[16] See especially the chapter "A Few Herbs and Apples" in F. O. M a t h i e s s e n' s, American Renaissance, London - New York 1941. Also P. C. S m i t h' s dissertation: Momentary Music: The Problem of Power and Form in Emerson's Poetry, The University of Nebraska, Lincoln 1974, PhD.

Yet persevered toward - sure - for the Distance -
How high -
Unto the Saints' slow diligence -
The Sky -
Ungained - it may be - by a Life's low Venture -
But then
Eternity enable the endeavoring
Again.

(680, cf. also e.g. 1081)

Immortality in this poem is not given; it must be earned through "the Saints' slow diligence". Persistent effort, even if assessed a failure in life's temporal dimension, will survive into eternity. It seems, therefore, only logical that the poet should conceive of immortality as "Costumeless Consciousness" (1454) and, at times, practically identify it with the life of the poem as consciousness encapsulated (as in e.g.) "The Poets Light but Lamps" (883) or "He ate and drank the precious Words" (1587).

The pattern of confrontation in Emily Dickinson's poetry is described on the stylistic level by David Porter: "To express her vision with finality she was compelled not to make her own minute feelings reveal a general truth for others, but rather to take what others had also seen and felt and expressed (in the hymn, for example) and refine that to suit her own purposes"[17]. Roland Hagenbüchle expands: "Generally speaking, some established pattern (hymn, rhyme, level of style, intellectual, social and religious structures) functions as background or expectation horizon in the reader whom Dickinson strategically disappoints in rhythmic, phonetic, semantic and even philosophical respects"[18]. It is important to realize that the "established pattern" does not correspond to any organic design but is insistently a mind-made construct. It derives from the intellect's "rage for order" for "Pattern is the Mind bestowed" (1223). In a Dick-

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[17] P o r t e r, op. cit., p. 136. The "strategic" imbalance of her style was also noticed by N. F r y e in his excellent essay: Emily Dickinson, [in:] Fables of Identity, New York 1963.

[18] H a g e n b ü c h l e, op. cit., p. 40.

inson poem the "established pattern" forms a hold of the known resisting the unknown and therefore chaotic. Yet the necessity of final yielding to the mystery is never lost from sight.. The "established pattern" is only provisional, the exhilaration of the achievement cannot last, the triumph of order is but momentary. Instability of the achieved poise limits the commanding power of consciousness in the same degree in which existentially man is limited by the fact of his mortality (cf. 1238).

Each crisis situation is, then, a prefiguring of death, an exercise preparing for the ultimate encounter with the mystery:

> The Science of the Grave
>
> No Man can understand
> But He that hath endured
> The Dissolution - in Himself -
> That Man - be qualified
>
> To qualify Despair
> To Those who failing new
> Mistake Defeat for Death - Each time -
> Till acclimated - to -
>
> (539)

Conversely, like any crisis, death can be a potential for consciousness, "Death is potential to that Man/ Who dies - and to his friend -" (548), since in the event both are given a chance to realize unsuspected resources in themselves. To put in briefly, the essence of Dickinson's strategy is that, while all the time exposing the mind's insufficiency in confrontations with the unknown, she yet asserts it as the only tool and authority in dealing with chaos.

Rather than expositions of "truths", her poems are demonstrations of the mind's prowess in enforcing order. Approaching a poem like the widely-anthologized "Because I could not stop for Death" (712) the reader is most likely to be first impressed with its ingenuity. The poem is explicitly oriented toward a shock effect. We are not expected to accept the truth of a discovery and the image of death as a civilized gentleman calling on his lady to take her for a ride does not familiarize the thought of mortality in the same way as do Whitman's incorporations of death in the process of constant renewal of life. What we are meant to admire here is, first of all, the performance,

the feat of imagination which, spurred by the terror of the moment, enforces, even if precariously, a wholly domestic order upon the ominous unknown.

In such moments, Dickinson is closest to the metaphysicals. She too relies on the conceit for intellectual control of an intensely emotional moment. Images like:

> The Sweeping up the Heart
> And putting Love away
> We shall not want to use again
> Until Eternity.
>
> (1078)

or the one where the sexton is

> Putting up
> Our Life - His Porcelain -
> Like a Cup -
>
> Discarded of the Housewife -
> Quaint - or Broke -
>
> (640)

though not conceits in the sense of providing controlling images for the poems in which they appear, are oriented toward surprise and used for their intellectual energy rather than for visual richness.

"Because I could not stop for Death" is rescued from mere cleverness by the speaker's vivid realization that the order established is infinitely fragile, the "mail of mirth" - poignantly insubstantial:

> The Dews drew quivering and chill -
> For only Gossamer, my Gown -
> My Tippet - only Tulle -

Eventually, however the panic defying performance allows to hope that "the Horses' Heads/ Were toward Eternity -".

Extravagant images abound in Dickinson's poems on nature, early and late. In "The Grass so little has to do -" (333), the controlling image is that of common grass occupied with royal activities, e.g. threading "the Dews all night, like Pearls". The day "undresses Herself" in 716, taking off "her Garter - of Gold", "Her Petticoat - of Purple plain -" and "Her Dimities -

as old/ Exactly - as the World -". The bat is a "fallow Article", "his small Umbrella quaintly halved" (1575). After the storm is over (1397), the first courageous men leave their shelters to find nature "in an Opal Apron,/ Mixing fresher Air". Surprise with the familiar, as Charles Anderson has extensively shown[19], is Dickinson's constant practice and a source of much delight for her readers. But the images quoted above (and countless other) also demonstrate the facility with which she imposed imaginative order upon various natural phenomena. "Her warning to the clown - as Maurice Gonnaud says - [...] may very well originate in an almost irresistible inclination on her part to treat »This whole Experiment of Green/ As if it were [her] own« (1333). And the poem itself comes off because of the tension between the orthodoxy of a tradition which insists on Nature's distinct existence as a source of inspiration, and her personal experience, in which she feels that Nature responds all too submissively to her moods"[20].

Dickinson's use of conceit constitutes an important element in her strategy of shifting grounds". It provides a way of retreating onto her own territory where the unknown can be met on the poet's terms. Poem 585, occasioned by the opening of Amherst - Belchertown Railroad (in which her father was greatly instrumental) furnishes an almost symbolic illustration of the procedure. The train's domestication (the controlling image is that of a horse) came in a way naturally as the new railroad's terminal was built on the Dickinson Meadow, land formerly owned by her grandfather[21]. Indeed, she could feel on her own territory there. And once the initiative belonged to her, the performance demonstrating the mind's virtuosity mattered most. The more surprising her images, the more obvious the mind's control but also - the more precarious, the more provisional. She needed the

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[19] C. Anderson, Emily Dickinson's Poetry. A Stairway of Surprise, London 1963.

[20] M. Gonnaud, Nature, Apocalypse or Experiment: Emerson's Double Lineage in American Poetry, a paper delivered at the EAAS conference in Heidelberg in 1976.

[21] I am indebted to C. Anderson's discussion of this poem (Anderson, op. cit., p. 14-16) for the information.

tension, though, for, ultimately, it is on this paradox that the tragic dimension of her art depends and not on the exploitation of any personal disappointment.

Significantly, when the achievement came too easily, the poet was most likely to lapse into her sentimental and childish postures, as in this poem:

I went to Heaven -
'Twas a small Town -
Lit - with a Ruby -
Lathed - with Down -

Stiller - than the fields
At the full Dew -
Beautiful - as Pictures -
No Man drew.
People - like the Moth -
Of Mechlin - frames -
Duties - of Gossamer -
And Eider - names -
Almost - contended -
I-could be -
'Mong such unique
Society -

(374, cf. also e.g. 248, 413)

Many of Dickinson's poems focus on the process of intellectual ordering of experience because they are organized by paradigms of formal reasoning. In her longest single poem, "I cannot live with you" (640), the circumstance of separation from the lover challenges the mind to rationally master the predicament. The whole poem is virtually a duel during which the heart-breaking intensity of the experience at any moment threatens to burst through the inexorably logical pattern of argumentation. The incredibly condensed feeling disciplined with excruciating effort endows the poem with the quality of psychic violence on the one hand, and, of intellectual toughness, on the other. "I cannot live with you because that would be heaven; I cannot die with you because one of us must stay to shut the other's eyes; I cannot go to heaven with you, nor can I be in hell with you..." Alternatives are neatly considered one after another and when all have been duly exhausted, the conclusion comes as much as a triumph of reasoning consciousness as it remains an imposed circumstantial necessity:

So We must meet apart -
You there - I - here -
With just the Door ajar
That Oceans are - and Prayer-
And that White Sustenance -
Despair -

"I had not minded - Walls -" (398) is built on the negated syllogism: "If the world were a monolithic rock, I could reach you, but the world is something quite different and therefore [...]". Though not stated expressis verbis, the conclusion must follow inevitably as it is contained in the formal pattern. Numerous poems are constructed as definitions: "Exultation is the going/ Of an inland soul to sea" (76). "Hope is the thing with feathers" (254), "Delight is as the flight/ Or in the Ratio of it" (257), "Fame is a bee" (1763). The tendency to view poems as a form of argument is one more characteristic Dickinson shares with the metaphysicals. The possibility of direct influence notwithstanding[22], affinities certainly result from the shared loyalty to intellect as the ordering faculty.

Significantly, an early poem by Emily Dickinson can look more like an exercise in stretching logic to the extremes of paradox than like an effort to discipline emotion:

If recollecting were forgetting,
Then I remember not,
And if forgetting, recollecting,
How near I had forgot.
And if to miss, were merry,
And to mourn, were gay,
How very blithe the fingers
That gathered this, Today!

(33, c. 1858)

The poem parades intellectual nimbleness at the cost of emotional depth, and the absence of this tension is always a flaw in a Dickinson poem.

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[22] For a discussion of Emily Dickinson's reading in metaphysical poets see: J. L. C a p p s, Emily Dickinson's Reading, Cambridge, Mass. 1966, chapt. III. Also, D. S a n d e r, Compound Manner: Emily Dickinson and the Metaphysical Poets, "American Literature", 1961, No 32, p. 417-433.

In poem 511 one conclusion follows a succession of images constituting an extended premise:

If you were coming in the Fall,
I'd brush the Summer by
With half a smile, and half a spurn,
As Housewives do, a Fly.

If I could see you in a year,
I'd wind the months in balls -
And put them each in separate Drawers,
For fear the numbers fuse -

If only Centuries, delayed,
I'd count them on my Hand,
Subtracting, till my fingers dropped
Into Van Dieman's Land.

If certain, when this life was out -
That yours and mine, should be
I'd toss it yonder, like a Rind,
And take Eternity -

But, now, uncertain of the length
Of this, that is between,
It goads me, like the Goblin Bee -
That will not state - its sting.

The chain of images in the premise part of the poem turns a particular situation into existential dilemma. The development away from the specific toward increasingly abstract meaning is signalled by the time-span extending in each successive stanza. First the lover's meeting is expected in the fall; then, - postponed till the next year; then, - becomes a matter of "only centuries" and, finally - of eternity. The uncertain erotic situation acquires progressively dimensions of metaphysical doubt, so that "he", whom at first we take for a human lover, may well be God. What is more, we also come to recognize that it is not separation from "the lover" which is the main problem but suspense and lack of certainty. Appropriately, the conclusion drops "him" altogether and focuses exclusively on the haunting doubt. In retrospect, the succession of provisional situations presented in the first part of the poem seems invented to "design" a void, a tauntingly indefinite reality. The multiplied conditions form stages in the mind's effort to cope with cosmic doubt.

Much to the point here seems Robert Weisbuch's observation that "Even in metaphysical poetry the primary scene is fixed. The language characteristically keeps one arm of its compass on the

situation of lovers' parting while the other arm circles in search of a definitive simile. Most often, the boundary of a Dickinson poem is not a particular scene or a situation but the figure of analogy as it moves from scene to scene. Dickinson gives us a pattern in several carpets and then makes the carpets vanish"[23]. For, apart from their ostensible themes. Dickinson's poems have a more vital if less obvious subject: they map the road by which the mind travels to meet the unknown, and show the process by which events along the way are turned into "designs".

Most simply, the process is one of moving from statement to its illustration (or vice versa) and, possibly, restatement in more general terms:

> A Charm invests a face
> Imperfectly beheld -
> The Lady dare not lift her Veil
> For fear it be dispelled -
>
> But peers beyond her mesh -
> And wishes - and denies -
> Lest Interview - annul a want
> That Image - satisfies -
>
> (421)

It should be noticed that whereas the initial statement of the general law leads to the illustrating analogy by specifying the object of desire ("a face"), the concluding restatement employs such a broad term as "image". Even in this short poem progress toward abstraction is clearly discernible.

The simplest pattern can be complicated by multiplying the illustrative analogies (as in 511) and the technique is comparable to Whitman's catalogues. Such poems (Robert Weisbuch calls them analogical collections) develop by a series of perceptions or stories, each at least partially analogous to the others[24]. Their "general laws" can be left entirely implicit as in e.g. 213[25]. Nevertheless, the process of inferring the ordering ab-

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[23] W e i s b u c h, op. cit., p. 16. Weisbuch offers the best study so far of Dickinson's use of analogy, especially in chapt. 2 and 3 ("Analogical Poetics and Anti-Allegory").

[24] See: ibid, p. 14-15 for illustrations.

[25] "Did the Harebell loose her girdle/ To the lover Bee" which Weisbuch analyses with greatest sensitivity.

stract principle remains their unifying frame. Thus, instead of pushing analogy in the direction of equivalence, as Whitman does, Dickinson chiefly employs it as illustration. She uses analogy not as microcosm but as a subordinate element in a larger pattern of thought.

Even in Dickinson's ostensibly "reportorial" poems it is the mental process of "arranging" experience which is brought to the foreground. I cannot think of a better way of demonstrating this than by comparing Emily Dickinson's most "imagistic" poem[26] - the one on the humming bird - with Whitman's kind of imagism as seen in for example "Cavalry Crossing a Ford".

A Route of Evanescence
With a revolving Wheel -
A Resonance of Emerald -
A Rush of Cochineal -
And every Blossom on the Bush
Adjusts its tumbled Head -
The mail from Tunis, probably,
An easy Morning's Ride -

(1463)

If both poems are compared to pictures, Whitman's is a realistic scene executed with loving care for the detail while Dickinson's - an impressionistic view in which the object becomes decomposed into elements of color and movement. It is replaced on the canvas by the analysis of the effect produced on the artist's mind[27]. In the end the subject is dropped entirely, as the concluding two lines do not, expectedly, reassemble the object but

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[26] A. Lowell quoted this poem admiringly in her lectures on imagism at The Brooklyn Institute in 1918. She regarded Dickinson as a forerunner of imagism because of her "unrelated method" of "describing a thing by its appearance only without regard to its entity in any other way" (A. L o w e l l, Poetry and Poets: Essays, Boston 1930, p. 107).

[27] Although H a g e n b ü c h l e (op. cit.) associaties Emily Dickinson with Edgar Allan Poe because of the shared concentration on effect, it is difficult to accept the association without reservation. Dickinson's concern is with analysing the effect of experience while Poe's emphasis rests on reproducing the desired effect. Thus, with Dickinson, the chief effort goes toward precision essential for understanding experience but Poe strives first of all, to impress the reader and the honesty of his art may seem suspect (as it did to Emerson when he called Poe "the jingle man").

move away from it to present the reader with a literary association. The seemingly arbitrary allusion to "The Tempest"[28] offers a synthesis of the observer's reaction as well as juxtaposes her garden with infinite distances, and the fleeting moment of beauty - with the permanence of Shakespeare's art. Again Dickinson "shifts grounds". She would not trust the scene, as Whitman does, to convey perfectly her emotional and intellectual response. Instead, the scene is used to activate the mind and dropped when it has served the purpose.

Dickinson cannot believe, as Whitman does all the time, that the idea inheres in physical reality to the point where the craft's role is simply to demonstrate the truth. She could not agree that "To elaborate is no avail, learn'd and unlearn'd feel that it is so" (LG, 31: 47). In her view, it is always individual consciousness "Where the Meanings are" (258):

> The Fashion of the Ear
> Attireth that it hear
> In Dun, or fair -
>
> So whether it be Rune,
> Or whether it be none
> Is of within.
>
> The "Tune is in the Tree -"
> The Skeptic - showeth me -
> "No Sir! In Thee!"
>
> 526, cf. also 1223)

Consequently, her poetry shows routes by which the mind moves away from the concrete object toward abstraction. If Whitman was called a "spontaneity imitator", "Dickinson's poems present us with a second spontaneity, with an over-the-shoulder view of the »later« process by which a poet's mind attempts to make sense of experience by acts of concentrated language"[29]. Where Whitman's whole art goes into hiding technique, Dickinson consistently and deliberately exposes her craft. For, ultimately, in her vision, it is achievement, not faith, which ensures salvation.

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[28] F. D a v i d s o n first noticed (in: A Note on Emily Dickinson's Use of Shakespeare, "New England Quarterly", Sept. 1945, No XVIII, p. 407-408) that the allusion is to "The Tempest", II, l. 246-248,

[29] W e i s b u c h, op. cit., p. 20.

Chapter VI

THE TOOL: LANGUAGE

In the much quoted section of Nature, Emerson makes his most explicit statement about what he believes is the essence of language:

1. Words are signs of natural facts.
2. Particular words are symbols of particular spiritual facts.
3. Nature is the symbol of spirit.

(I, 25)

Language, therefore, is on the one hand grounded in physical reality: "Every word which is used to express a moral or intellectual fact, if traced to its root, is found to be borrowed from some material appearance. Right means straight; wrong means twisted" (I, 25). Other examples press the point. On the other hand, language participates directly in the spiritual essence of all nature which is "put forth" by the spirit "as the life of the tree puts forth new branches and leaves" (I, 64).

Fifty years later Whitman expressed a similar view[1], and his examples show that he had kept Emerson's argument in mind:

> Language in the largest sense [...]is really the greatest of studies. It involves so much; is indeed a sort of universal absorber, combiner, and conqueror. The scope of its etymologies is the scope not only of man and civilization, but the history of Nature in all departments, and of organic universe... (PW, II, 572; 3-8, examples - 573; 35-40). Language, be it remember'd, is not an abstract construction of the learn'd, or of dictionary-makers, but is something arising out

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[1] In: Slang in America, "North American Review" Nov. 1885, No CXL, p. 431-435.

> of the work, needs, ties, joys, affections, tastes of long generations of humanity, and has its bases broad and low, close to the ground. Its final decisions are made by the masses, people nearest to the concrete, having most to do with actual land and sea.
>
> (PW, II, 573: 46-51)

Whitman is interested in slang because he recognizes it to be the level at which language comes closest to the elemental life force:

> Slang profoundly consider'd, is the lawless germinal element, below all words and sentences, and behind all poetry, and proves a certain perennial rankness and protestantism in speech [...]. Slang, too, is the wholesome fermentation or eructation of those processes eternally active in language, by which froth and specks are thrown up, mostly to pass away; though occasionally to settle and permanently to chrystallize.
>
> (PW, II, 572: 12-14, and 573: 26-30)

What fascinates Whitman are the qualities of language which make words share in the essence of nature: its tangibility, its sensuous richness and, above all, its primal energy.

That language, especially poetic language, not only participates but originates in the non-conscious life is Emerson's belief as well, though Emerson more explicitly joins the living base of language with rhythm:

> Meter begins with pulse-beat, and the length of lines in songs and poems is determined by the inhalation and exhalation of the lungs. If you hum or whistle the rhythm of the common English meters - of the decasyllabic quatrain or the octosyllabic with alternate sexisyllabic, or other rhythms, - you can easily believe these meters to be organic, derived from the human pulse, and to be therefore not proper to one nation, but to mankind... (VIII, 46) and human passion, seizing these constitutional tunes, aims to fill them with appropriate words, or marry music to thought, believing, [...] that for every thought its proper melody or rhyme exists...(VIII, 47)

When Emily Dickinson asked Higginson for criticism, she, too, wanted to know first of all if her verses "breathed" (L, II, 403). Language which is life is the ideal to which all three artists aspire. Where they differ is in their assumptions about how language lives.

The striking thing in the passage from "Poetry and Imagination" is that language seems to preexist not in the form of meanings from which the poet chooses, not as an intellectual system, but as sensation, as primal energy which demands wording. Words fill a preexisting rhythmic pattern. Emerson believes, at least in this essay, that in the beginning there was pulse or beat rather than word, motion rather than thought: "The nature of things is flowing, a metamorphosis. The free spirit sympathizes not only with the actual form but with the power or possible forms" (VIII, 71).

"Poetry and Imagination" is a late essay, as far as publication date is concerned[2], and it must be that Whitman arrived more or less independently at the idea or intuition that language is first of all rhythmic motion. In important studies of his prosody, Pasqualle Jannaccone and Sculley Bradley have both shown that Whitman returns in his metrical principles to the "periodic", as opposed to syllabic, rhythmic units characteristic of primitive oral poetry. Sculley Bradley concludes: "...one finds that the organized rhythmic recurrence is even more fundamental and more universally applied than logical parallelism, not only in the single line, but in longer passages as well"[3]. Jannaccone goes further in his recognition of the affinities of Whitman's prosody with metrical principles of all primary poetry such as the Bible, Greek hymns, the early poetry of India, China and Arabia. Sound seems to this scholar the basic generative principle of Whitman's poetry: "From the repetition of verses and words, then parallelism, that is to say, the repetition of thought is generated. The analysis we have made of Whitman's poetry follows the whole progression of these forms step by step, not in the direction of evolution, however, but of involution, showing how one form attaches itself to another or is gen-

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[2] Published in: Letters and Social Aims, Boston 1876, but written between 1870-1872 from earlier manuscript notes (see: Preface to the First Edition, rpt. in vol. VIII, The Centenary Edition).

[3] S. B r a d l e y, The Fundamental Metrical Principle in Whitman's Poetry, "American Literature", Jan. 1939, No 10, P. 448.

erated by it"[4]. Jannaccone's findings support the argument that in his effort to renew the poetic language, Whitman instinctively recognized that the primary layer of language is sensory, and, in his prosody, attempted to penetrate to that very level.

Critics who pay less attention to the sound qualities of Whitman's poetry acknowledge too, though in more general terms, the fundamental role of the categories of motion and process for Whitman's conception of language. In a memorable statement, Charles Feidelson insists: "His new method was predicated not only on the sense of creative vision - itself a process which renders a world in process - but also, as part and parcel of that consciousness, on the sense of creative speech [...]. Since Whitman regards meaning as an activity of words rather than an external significance attached to them, language turns out to be a process, the pouring of the flood"[5]. This observation focuses not on language as a sensuous experience but on language as energy. It is, however, important to realize that Whitman's interest in language as flow goes precisely in these two directions. On the one hand, it stresses language as sensation, on the other - language as energy, because the energy of Whitman's language is bound inseparably with its ability to reproduce - not to report but to enact - the actual seething life: "A perfect writer

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[4] P. J a n n a c c o n e, Walt Whitman's Poetry and the Evolution of Rhythmic Forms, transl. by P. M i l i t i n e o s, NCR Microcard Edition, Washington, D. C. 1973, p. 104. The astonishing thing about Jannaccone's study is that it appeared in the original in 1898 ("La Poesia di Walt Whitman e L'Evoluzione delle Forme Ritmiche"), and yet in many ways its perceptions went deeper than the argument of most later American critics who ascribe Whitman's parallelisms to the influence of rhetorics or of oratory and saw them primarily in logical terms. Other studies of Whitman's prosody are: W. S c o t t, A Note on Whitman's Prosody, JEGP 1908, No 7; R. M. W e e k s, Phrasal Prosody, "English Journal" Jan. 1923, No 10; A. N. W i l e y, Reiterative Devices in Leaves of Grass, "American Literature", May 1929, No 1, p. 161-170.

[5] C. F e i d e l s o n, Symbolism and American Literature, Chicago 1953, p. 18 and 20. On language as process in Emerson see R. H a g e n b ü c h l e, Sign and Process: The Concept of Language in Emerson and Dickinson, "Emerson Society Quarterly" 3rd Quarter 1979, No 25, p. 137-155, also Proceedings of a Symposium on American Literature, Poznań 1979, p. 59-88.

would make words sing, dance, kiss, do the male and female act, bear children, weep, bleed, rage, stab, steal, fire cannon, steer ships, charge with cavalry or infantry, or do any thing that man or woman or natural powers can do" (D, III, 742). The postulate is grounded, of course, in the doctrine of correspondence which guarantees that "A perfect user of words uses things" (D, III, 740), and that experience brings with itself commensurate language: "Language follows events and swallows them to preserve them. - Conquests, migrations, commerce, etc. are fossilized in language (D, III, 718)[6].

Whitman's one and constant worry is the "fossilizing" property of language. Language immobilized is dead and he admonishes himself: "Do not forget that what is now fixed was once floating and movable" (D, III, 720). To prevent language from "fossilizing" life the artist must rely upon the dynamics of his experience. And, for Whitman experience is always sensual rather than conceptual:

> Latent, in a great user of words, must actually be all passions, crimes, trades, animals, stars, God, sex, the past, night, space, metals, and the like - because these are the words, and he who is not these, plays with a foreign tongue, turning helplessly to dictionaries and authorities.
>
> (D, III, 742)

Ultimately, it is the quality of experience which determines the quality of language, and language is validated by its immersion in active life. In Whitman's view, the power of language is evocative and its energy - one with life force.

The other center of Whitman's interest in language is his delight in words vocalized, in language as pure sensation. In crucial moments of ecstasy it is not the significance of words which is important but the primary simplicity of sound. The experience recorded in Section Five of "Song of Myself" transcended

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[6] On Emerson's preoccupation with Nature as text see: S. B e r c o v i t c h, Emerson the Prophet: Romanticism, Puritanism, and Auto-American-Biography, [in:] D. L e v i n (ed.), Emerson: Prophecy, Metamorphosis and Influence, New York 1975, p. 1-27, and H a g e n b ü c h l e, Sign and Process, [in:] Proceedings of a Symposium...

intellectual comprehension; its most treasured part was conveyed in inarticulate murmur: "Not words, not music or rhyme I want, not custom or lecture, not even the best,/ Only the lull I like, the hum of your valved voice" (LG, 33; 84-86). Whitman's fascination with the sensuality of sound shows not only in his well documented and much commented on love for the opera[7]. It is equally evident in his convalescing reports from Timber Creek in which he comes back insistently to the delight of sounds: birds, crickets, the wind[8], and in his comments on Tennyson's poetry[9]. But more than anywhere else, the hypnotizing power of sound, its primal appeal, is celebrated in the sea poems and in the recollections of the beach escapades of his youth[10]. Also in his old age, with the senses supposedly less responsive, Whitman returns again to the magic of "the perfect human voice":

> Beyond all other power and beauty, there is something in the quality and power of the right voice (timbre the schools call it) that touches the soul, the abysms. It was not for nothing that the Greeks depended, at their highest, on poetry's and wisdom's vocal utterance by tete-a-tete lectures - (indeed all the ancients did).
>
> (PW, II, 674; 13-17)

Viewed from this point, language is at its core a rhythmic continuity of sound, an elemental power which to touch means to touch the very marrow of life and, thus, to attain highest wisdom. The position may seem uncouth for a poet but a Whitman student should be able to see beneath surfaces. As Gay Wilson Allen

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[7] See especially R.D. F a n e r, Walt Whitman and Opera, Philadelphia 1951.

[8] See "Specimen Days".

[9] "To me, Tennyson shows more than any poet I know (perhaps has been a warning to me) how much there is in finest verbalism. There is such a latent charm in mere words, cunning collocations, and in the voice ringing them, which he has caught and brought out, beyond all others -" (PW, II, 571).

[10] One thinks first of all, of course, about "Out of the Cradle" and "As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life" but see also reminiscences in "Specimen Days" and "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads".

remarks: "Some critics have thought Whitman an atavistic savage who believed in the magic of words. Actually, however, he worships neither words nor images, but the mystic powers which they feebly signify"[11]. In other words, Whitman's conception of language is at one with his religious stance. There is a large dose of mystical abrogation of the self in Whitman's concept of language. At times, in fact, he is ready to yield to its power so completely that he believes himself to be only a transmitter which the divine medium uses:

> Through me the afflatus surging and surging, through me current and index.
> I speak the pass-word primeval,
> [...]
> Through me many long dumb voices,
> Voices of the interminable generations of prisoners and slaves,
> Voices of the diseas'd and despairing and of thieves and dwarfs,
> Voices of cycles of preparation and accretion,
> And of the threads that connect the stars, and of wombs and of the father-stuff,
> And of the rights of them the others are down upon, of the deform'd, trivial, flat, foolish, despised,
> Fog in the air, beetles rolling balls of dung.
>
> (LG, 52: 505-506, 508-515)

Here, Whitman, the practising poet, seems to realize perfectly the assertions Emerson made in the early "Journals": "No man can write well who thinks there is any choice of words for him" (J, III, 270-271) and "No choice. Self abandonment to the truth of things makes words things" (J, IV, 428).

However, Whitman could not have been the artist he was had he not had an experimenter's curiosity about the workings of language. His passion for collecting quaint expressions, provincialisms, particularly apt idioms, his fascination with names may be easily linked with the catalogue technique but there is more to Whitman's interest in language than mere collector's impulse or a craftsman's anxiety to secure ample materials. His comments on grammar and his criticism of Murray's handbook make his attitude clear:

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[11] G. W. A l l e n, Walt Whitman Handbook, New York 1946, p. 432.

> Drawing language into line by rigid grammatical rules, is the theory of the martinet applied to processes of the spirit, and to the luxurant growth of all that makes art (D, III, 666). The fault that he [Murray] fails to understand those points where the language is strongest, and where the developments should be most encouraged, namely in being elliptic and idiomatic. - Murray would make of the young men merely a correct and careful set of writers under laws. - He would deprive writing of its life - there would be nothing voluntary and insociant left.
>
> (D, III, 666-667, Whitman's emphasis)

Whitman's position here, as everywhere else, is that language is - like life - organic. In further notes we can observe the poet looking at the laws by which this organism proliferates:

> pantaloons - "pants" - trowsers - breeches - Do not these words illustrate a law of language, namely, that with the introduction of any new thing, (as the pantaloons) the word, from the same land or source, is introduced with them?
>
> (D, III, 673)

Words, as it were, inhere in things and travel with them. One cannot have the thing without the word nor the word without the thing. In the same "Notebook" on words the poet affirms: "Language expresses originally objects only, and leaves the understanding to supply the connecting form - afterwards facilitating and improving the connections and relations by degree" (D, III, 721). The remark (proceeded by a note "Von Humboldt") validates the theory that language grows by stringing on ever new nouns, that the principal mechanism of its growth is accretion. On the other hand, it lends support to "indirect" mode of writing, to metonymic expression as working <u>with</u> the primary law of language. Whitman's irritation with Murray's grammar stems from his conviction that instead of energizing the natural development of language, he would arrest its growth.

Also behind the "American Primer"[12] there is not only the

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[12] I quote from the manuscript version of "The Primer of Words for American Young Men and Women, For Literats, Orators, Teachers, Musicians, Judges, residents" etc. in vol. III of "Daybooks and Notebooks". The Primer was edited by H. T r a u b e l and posthumously published as "An American Primer by Walt Whitman", with Facsimiles of the Original Manuscript, Boston 1904.

compillatory effort of one who needs effective words but an ambition no smaller than to analyse the nature of language:

> A great observation will detect sameness through all languages, however old, however new, however polished, however rude. - As humanity is one, under its amazing diversities, language is one under its. - The flippant, reading on some long past age, wonder at its dead costumes, its amusements, etc.; but the master, understands well the old, ever-new, ever-common grounds, below those animal growths. - And between any two ages, any two languages and two humanities, however wide [apart?] in Time and Space marks well not the superficial shades of difference, but the mass shades, of a joint nature.
>
> (D, III, 731-732)

Balancing the law of changeless unity is the weight of individual words: "To me, each word [...] has its own meaning, and does not stand for anything but itself - and there are no two words the same any more than there are two persons the same" (D, III, 736). The two passages from the "Primer" indicate the range of Whitman's linguistic curiosity. At the one extreme is his fascination with language as a living force whose seething energy can be penetrated to the simplicity of a primary law, a desire which the practices of his prosody well illustrate. At the other pole is his delight in the fertility, in the inexhaustible hoard of words, mirroring the inexhaustible wealth of natural forms. On this level each word is individual, unique, and stands only for itself. For, ultimately, Whitman's analysis of language does not differ from his analysis of society or of natural life. Language, too, is "democratic yet en-masse".

Whitman's ideals of poetic language form the material of "A Song of the Rolling Earth"[13] which, as a poem, is mainly interesting for just that reason. The central image of Mother Earth revolving imperturbably through Time and Space, holding a mirror to all, "inviting none, denying none", unites the two aspects of Whitman's concept of language: individual words are evocations of individual objects, and words are process, eternal

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[13] First published in 1856 LG as "Poem of the Sayers of the Words of the Earth". Underwent no significant revisions except for the changes in title.

motion at the core of all reality. On both levels, Whitman as poet moves in the direction of undercutting intellectual qualities of language. When he postulates that true language is not text or conversation but pictures and gestures:

> Were you thinking that those were the words, those upright lines? those curves, angles, dots?
> No, those are not the words, the substantial words are in the ground and sea,
> They are in the air, they are in you.
>
> Were you thinking that those were the words, those delicious sounds out of your friends' mouths?
> No, the real words are more delicious than they.
> Human bodies are words, myriads of words.
>
> (LG, 219: 2-7)

and when he calls for the use of such "inaudible" words in poems:

> The workmanship of souls is by those inaudible words of the earth,
> The masters know the earth's words and use them more than audible words.
>
> (LG, 220: 15-17)

Whitman not only argues for a poetics of images but treats words as hieroglyphics[14]. Because objects are mysterious symbols, words signifying them share in the mystery. A similar approach underlies the view of language as a continual collective utterance:

> Underneath the ostensible sounds, the august chorus of heroes, the wail of slaves,
> Persuasions of lovers, curses, gasps of the dying, laughter of young people, accents of bargainers,
> Underneath these possessing words that never fail.
> To her children the words of the eloquent dumb great mother never fail,
> The true words do not fail, for motion and reflection does not fail,
> Also the day and night do not fail, and the voyage we pursue does not fail.
>
> (LG, 221: 38-43)

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[14] For an excellent discussion of the interest in the Egyptian hieroglyphic writings and its influence on the American Romantics see; J. T. I r w i n, The Symbol of the Hieroglyphics in the American Renaissance, "American Quarterly" 1974, No 26, p. 103-126.

Beneath the surface of jarring sounds, there are depths where primary meaning resides as certain as the earth's laws of motion and reflection.

Practically, then, Whitman the poet believes that language is first of all suggestive: that its main function lies not in crystallizing meaning but in opening vistas, in leading the reader to where truth may be grasped intuitively.

> The words of the true poems give you more than poems,
> They give you to form for yourself poems, religions, politics, war, peace, behavior, histories, essays, daily life, and every thing else,
> ...
> Whom they take they take into space to behold the birth of stars, to learn one of the meanings,
> To launch off with absolute faith, to sweep through the ceaseless rings and never be quiet again.
>
> (LG, 170: 75-76, 82-83)

The conviction favors a conscious strategy of "indirection", that is of using language to emphasize what is left unsaid rather than to bring into focus what is being said:

> I swear I begin to see little or nothing in audible words,
> All merges toward the presentation of the unspoken meanings of the earth,
> Toward him who sings the songs of the body and of the truths of the earth,
> Toward him who makes dictionaries of words that print cannot touch.
> I swear I see what is better than to tell the best,
> It is always to leave the best untold.
>
> (LG, 224: 98-103)

The strategy of leaving "the best untold" is justified by the recognition that words fail to convey the sensual, intuitive knowledge which gives superior wisdom:

> When I undertake to tell the best I find I cannot,
> My tongue is ineffectual on its pivots,
> My breath will not be obedient to its organs,
> I become a dumb man,
>
> (LG, 224: 104-107)

Yet, of course, the artist has to go on attempting the impossible, uttering words in a process parallel to or identical with

the eternal rolling of the earth. For, like the Great Mother, he, too, is paradoxically "eloquent and dumb". The depth of his art is inextricably bound with the depth of his reader's sympathetic insight.

Among Whitman's problems with language there seems to be no question how to wrest power from words. This is because Whitman seldom feels that he has to fight with language, that he must wring his meanings by force. On the contrary, he may be most often seen inquiring how to intensify what he takes to be the natural operations of language. This intention, I suggest, lies behind Whitman's somewhat notorious borrowings from other languages and behind his neologisms. Words like camerado, libertad, originatress, eclaircise do not appear in their contexts because no other word can express quite the same meaning: liberty and libertad have, after all, almost the same sound value, not to mention identity of meaning. Such words are borrowed or made up because language is creative and absorbant, "a sort of universal combiner and conqueror", because words multiply, sounds fascinate and the growth can never be stopped. Some of Whitman's coinages, are awkward, some are awful but the poet is not afraid of gaucherie. Language, like nature, cleans itself. Words, die, other words come into use; the organism perpetually renews itself throwing up "froth and specks" in healthy fermentation.

Without being as picturesque as Whitman, Emerson observes the same process: "Every age gazettes a quantity of words which it has used up. We are now offended with Standpoint, Myth, Subjective, the Good and the True and the Cause" (XII, 293). The organic ability of language to regulate its growth encourages the artist's linguistic freedom. The medium itself provides the creative impulse.

If, for comparison, we look at Dickinson's coinages, the first surprising discovery is that they are comparatively few. Dickinson's reputation as an idiosyncratic poet cannot be supported by claims to unusual vocabulary. William Howard's helpful investigation shows that "at least two thirds of the words in the Dickinson vocabulary were sufficiently common to be used by one or more of the three poets who were approximately contemporary with

her (i.e. Keats, Lanier and Emerson)"[15]. Eventually, Howard finds that out of her total vocabulary, only 159 are words not recognized by the dictionaries of her time:

> Seven of these are verbs formed with the prefix re-, e.g. redeck, rewalk; 9 are adjectives formed with the prefix a-, e.g. achirrup, a'lull, asailing; 19 are words formed with the prefix un-, e.g. unbared, unerudite, unpretension; 34 are words of her own coining, e.g. addings, gianture, heres, incognite optizan, russetly; 43 are compound words, e.g. by-thyme, co-eternity, egg-life, goer-by, To Come, wizzard fingers; and 47 are adjectives formed with the suffix -less, e.g. arrestless, conceiveless, findless latitudeless reportless, vital-less.

The counting permits to conclude that, because in fact coinages account for only slightly more than 2% of Dickinson's total vocabulary, they must be considered a minor rather than a major characteristic of her language[16].

Howard's findings remain in keeping with Dickinson's general tendency to base on conventions and to work out her meanings by playing off the familiarity of an "established form" against the unexpected "slant" she gives it[17]. A further look at Dickinson's neologisms reveals that more often than not she coins her own word where language does not supply one, quite consistently with the laws of morphology. The prevalence among her neologisms of words formed with the usual prefixes and suffixes is striking. As for her own coinages such as "gianture", the context shows how she made the word because she needed an abstract noun to correspond to the concrete one:

> Size circumscribes - it has no room
> For petty furniture -
> The Giant tolerates no Gnat
> For Ease of Gianture -
>
> (641)

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[15] W. H o w a r d, "Emily Dickinson s Poetic Vocabulary", PMLA March 1975, No 72, p. 229.

[16] Ibid., p. 229-230.

[17] See for example D. P o r t e r's article: Emily Dickinson: The Poetics of Doubt ("Emerson Society Quarterly" Summer 1970, No 60, p. 86-93), where the author demonstrates how Dickinson's poems open with confident, almost complacent repetitions of established beliefs which are then subtly subterfuged.

Similarly, when she turns the adverb here into a plural noun: "Here! There are typic »Heres« -/ Foretold Locations -" (1515), the generative mechanism seems to be the need for a generalization corresponding to the concrete word.

Some of Dickinson's liberties with grammar illustrate the same process. "I often wish I was a grass", she wrote to Mrs. Holland (L, II, 324), and repeated the indefinite article with a collective noun in the poem on grass: "The Grass so little has to do/ I wish I were a Hay -" (333). The two formulations do not occur close enough in time to suppose that she merely repeated a surprising word combination because the effect pleased her. Johnson dates the letter January 1856 and the two existing manuscripts of the poem - early 1862. In both contexts, however, the writer is preoccupied with the possibility or rather impossibility of reconciling organic life, like that of grass, with the fact of self-consciousness. The striking grammatical "error" serves as an appropriate linguistic rendering of the main philosophical paradox of her times.

Even such a limited look at Dickinson's linguistic inventiveness confirms the impression that her language follows rather than generates thought. Moreover, she repeatedly admits to an acute sense of separation between thought and language. While Whitman fears, first of all, the "fossilizing" of life through language, Dickinson worries over the inadequacy of words to the processes of the mind. Thoughts and words appear autonomous and show a frustrating tendency to go their separate ways. "I hardly know what I have said - my words put all their feathers on - and fluttered here and there" (L, II, 336). "The old words are numb - and there a'nt any new ones - Brooks - are useless - in Freshet-time -" (L, II, 395). "While my thought is undressed - I can make the distinction, but when I put them in the Gown - they look alike, and numb" (L, II, 404). All three observations, made to the Hollands, to Samuel Bowles and to Higginson respectively, focus on the difficulty of making language adequate to the vividness, intensity or clarity of mental experience. Somewhat like Whitman, who feels that language cannot ultimately do justice to the variety and profundity of experience, Emily Dickinson finds that words fail in confrontation with the depth of emotion: "If I

could tell how glad I was/ I should not be so glad" (1668, cf. also 1750). At the same time, however, she tries again and again to "tell" how it felt to have been pained beyond words because articulation controls intensity. Although the intensity of experience defies language and "It is the Ultimate of Talk -/ The Impotence to Tell -" (407, cf. also 581), the relation is one of loss and gain. In the process of "telling how it felt" lost is the most intimate core of experience, gained is the power of control. Articulation saves the artist from drowning in her own intensities[18].

In several poems Dickinson takes the attitude of an observer of her own mental processes and the poems reflect on the bewildering necessity of having to admit the inscrutable autonomy of the life of the mind:

> . . .
> A Thought went up my mind today -
> That I have had before -
> [...]
> It just reminded me - 'twas all -
> And came my way no more -
> (701)

Between these ostensibly quiet statements, the poem contemplates the mystery of the origin and the seeming lack of direction in the processes of the mind:

> Nor where it went - nor why it came
> The second time to me -
> Nor definitely, what it was -
> Have I the Art to say -

The poet takes us to the very brink of subconsciousness and leaves us there to face yet another aspect of "the challenging unknown". For the essence of thought like the essence of nature remains a mystery:

> The Capsule of the Wind
> The Capsule of the Mind
>
> Exhibit here, as doth a Burr -
> Germ's Germ be where?
> (998)

---

[18] Compare chapt. III, p. 99-100 and chapt. V where the conception of poetry as release is discussed.

If the processes of thought show disquieting autonomy, language in its own right posses equal independence. First of all, it does not inhere in the variety of natural forms, as it ideally does for Emerson and Whitman. Words are not things or gestures but inhabit "an autonomous symbolic realm"[19]. Interested as Dickinson was all her life in birds, bees, flowers and seasons, they never ceased to be her "competeless show" (290). For words to deal with the spectacle she went to her Lexicon (cf. L, II, 404) and searched Philology (1126). The fact does not mean that she viewed language as a dry convention; on the contrary, language was or should be "vital" (cf. 883, 1039). The first question she put to Higginson was: "Are you too deeply occupied to say if my Verse is alive?" (L, II, 403). And to Samuel Bowles she remarked: "Some phrases are too fine to fade - and Light but just confirms them -" (L, II, 419). When she considered the pleasures of reading an old book, she personified the volume as a gentleman with whom her mind could be shared[20].

Facts Centuries before
He traverses -familiar -
As One should come to Town -
And tell you all your Dreams-were true -
He lived - where Dreams were born - (371)[21]

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[19] See H a g e n b ü c h l e, Sign and Process, [in:] Proceedings of a Symposium on..., especially p. 63-73.

[20] Compare Emerson's statement in "Nominalist and Realist": "The modernness of all good books seems to give me an existence as wide as man" (III, 233) and the entry in "Journal" made in 1839: "Plutarch fits me better than Southey or Scott, therefore I say, there is no age to good writing. Could I write as I would, I suppose the piece would be no nearer Boston in 1839 than to Athens in the fiftieth Olympiad. Good thought, however expressed, saith to us »Come out of time: come to me in the Eternal!« (quoted in III, 346, note 1 to p. 233). Characteristically, Emerson makes no distinction between writing and thinking. Good writing has no age and good thought is eternal. Dickinson shows much more awareness that how things are said makes essential difference.

[21] The phrasing of the stanza quoted (Johnson's dating - ca. 1862) echoes a comment Emily Dickinson is reported to have made on Emerson's visit to Amherst in December 1857: "It must have been as if he had come from where dreams are born!" (L, III, PF10). There is no evidence that the poet either heard Emerson lecture or met him when he stayed at the Austin Dickinsons'.

In another poem (1212) she claims that only articulated language can really live that is - endure. The power of words to stay fascinated Dickinson (cf. 1467) and the hope she expressed in a letter to Higginson that "If fame belonged to me, I could not escape her -" (L, II, 408) must have been based on her belief in the permanence of language[22].

The enduring and nourishing (cf. 1587) power of language is offset for Dickinson by its destructive potential. Words are not to be treated lightly and their resilience to time makes linguistic choice a matter of grave responsibility. Words do harm (cf. 479) and "infect" across "centuries" (1261). Quoting poem 1537, Charles Anderson observes that "false words are inequity, both in the theological sense of wickedness and in the Latin root sense of being »unequal« to the meaning they intend to convey. For a poet the latter is indeed original sin"[23]. But beyond those questions of the writer's craft and ethics, language constitutes a threat to the artist's very existence. She asks Higginson to tell her frankly her fault "for I had rather wince, than die" (L, II, 412) and the death she wants to escape with his help is clearly artistic death from faulty language. In one of the Master letters so charged with emotion that the language nearly breaks down completely, she becomes frightened of the destructiveness of words: "You say I do not tell you all - Daisy confessed - and denied not. Vesuvius don't talk - Etna - don't - one of them - said a syllable a thousand years ago, and Pompeii heard it, and hid forever -" (L, II, 374). Thoughts, experience in general is made final by language, and the finality terrifies: "Around the Words I went -/ Of meeting them afraid -" (734). In this sense language may be as overwhelming as emotions let

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[22] Emerson commented on the permanence and autonomy of language as well. And he noticed that words offer resistance to the efforts of an innovator: "Language is a quite wonderful city, which we all help to build. But each word is like a work of nature, determined a thousand years ago, and not alterable. We confer and dispute and settle the meaning so or so, but it remains what it was in spite of us. The word beats all the speakers and definers of it and stands to their children what it stood to their fathers" (J, XI, 232).

[23] C. R. A n d e r s o n, The Conscious Self in Emily Dickinson's Poetry, "American Literature" Nov. 1959, No 31, p. 294.

loose. She fears being flooded by words as she fears drowning in the wild sea of her emotional intensity. The poet Dickinson would not let language speak for her which Whitman is sometimes too willing to do. Instead, she concentrates on choosing the proper word and is likely to overburden it with concentrated meaning.

Dickinson's central problem with language is one of power and form[24] which is also the central problem in "Experience" and the main concern of Emerson - the poet[25]. In the poems and, to a lesser extent, in letters we see Dickinson struggling for the most precise rendering of thought. She is not eager to inquire into the nature of language. In fact, she is quite prepared to declare it a divine mystery. What interests her is how to win for herself the blessing of this angel, how to "distill" personal meanings from the established medium. Neither new experience nor new reality can redeem language for Dickinson as they promise to do for Whitman. Language can only be redeemed through a new use of it. She may have found her attitude confirmed in "The Poet":

> Why covet a knowledge of new facts? Day and night, house and garden, a few books, a few actions, serve us as well as would all trades and all spectacles. We are far from having exhausted the significance of the few symbols we use. We can come to use them yet with a terrible simplicity. It does not need that a poem should be long. Every word was once a poem. Every new relation is a new word.
>
> (III, 18)[26]

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24 Cf. A. R i c h, Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson. "Parnassus: Poetry in Review" Fall-Winter 1976, No 51, p. 49-74. Also J. M a n n in: Emily Dickinson, Emerson, and the Poet as Namer ("New England Quarterly" Dec. 1978, No 51, p. 467-488) succeeds in bringing Emerson and Dickinson together mainly with the view to their shared interest in power through language.

25 "Human life is made up of two elements, power and form" (III, 65). On Emerson's theory of poetry see C. P. S m i t h, Momentary Music: The Problem of Power and Form in Emerson's Poetry, The University of Nebrasca, Lincoln 1974, PhD (Xerox University Microfilms, AnnArbor, Michigan 1975).

26 J. Capps finds that this passage was pencil-marked in the Dickinson family copy of Essays: Second Series (J. C a p p s, Emily Dickinson's Reading, Cambridge, Mass. 1966, p. 116).

The problem is not one of cumulative effect but of power through compression. The mastery of language holds for Dickinson the promise of mastering experience. For Whitman, the promise lies in the prospect of regaining the unfallen condition of harmony with the universe.

All through Dickinson's correspondence with Higginson the question of control, of acquiring perspective on her own work runs like the main color thread in the weaver's design:

> The Mind is so near itself - it cannot see distinctly -
> (L, II, 403)
>
> You think my gait "spasmodic" - I am in danger - Sir.
> You think me "uncontrolled" - I have no Tribunal [...]
> If I might bring you what I do - [...] and ask if I told it clear - 'twould be control, to me.
> (L, II, 409)
>
> I had no Monarch in my life, and cannot rule myself,
> (L, II, 414)

On the other hand, even as she asks Higginson's advice, the poet makes it known that she will not take anyone's word and must find out for herself:

> When much in the Woods as a little Girl, I was told that the snake would bite me, that I might pick a poisonous flower, or Goblins kidnap me, but I went along and met no one but Angels, who were far shyer of me, than I could be of them, so I haven't that confidence in fraud which many exercise.
> (L, II, 415)

The childhood recollection is preceeded by an impatient remark in answer to Higginson's querry about the meaning of her poems: "All men say What to me, but I thought it a fashion -" and followed by the complying assurance "I shall observe your precept - though I don't understand it, always". Thus, by August 1862 (and their correspondence started in April of that year) Dickinson seems to have sensed that although she indeed needed Higginson, she wanted from him mainly an opportunity to clarify her own standards. Perspective was crucial for control, as she confided to Bowles: "It is easier to look behind at pain" (L, II, 416). And, as Emerson, too, realized in "Fate":

> The whole circle of animal life - tooth against tooth, devouring war, war for food, a yelp of pain and a grunt of triumph, until at last the whole menagerie, the whole chemical mass is mellowed and refined for higher use - please at a sufficient perspective.
>
> (VI, 36)

Dickinson's ideal poet compresses everyday "meanings" into "Attar so immense [...]. We wonder it was not Ourselves/ Arrested it - before -" (448). What strikes the reader as natural only seems natural. Poems do not bud "as unerringly and loosely as lilacs or roses on a bush" (LG, 714: 192-193), they are not "expressed by Suns - alone" but are "the gift of Screws" as well (675). If the ideal poetic effect is that of stunning revelation:

> To pile like Thunder to its close
> Then crumble grand away
> While everything created hid
> This - would be Poetry -
>
> (1247)

He who would produce such powerful impression must masterfully calculate his strategies:

> He fumbles at your Soul
> As Players at the Keys
> Before they drop full Music on -
> He stuns you by degrees -
> Prepares your brittle Nature
> For the Etherial Blow
> By fainter Hammers - further heard -
> Then nearer - Then so slow
> Your Breath has time to straighten-
> Your Brain - to bubble Cool -
> Deals - One - imperial - Thunderbolt -
> That scalps your naked Soul -
>
> When Winds take Forests in their Paws -
> The Universe - is still -
>
> (315)

The last two lines of the poem offer analogy between the effect of a conscious performance and that of an elemental upheaval. Both exhibit extremities of power but there the similarity ends. How nature produces her effect cannot be known. How the master

performer achieves his is analysed in detail so that the full range of his calculating craftsmanship may be admired. It is how things are said that makes them significant (cf. 1545).

"Nature is a Haunted House but Art a House that tries to be Haunted" (L, II, 554). Dickinson's poetry aspires to be like nature only in the intensity of its effect while it is the procedures of trying to be "haunted" which concern the poet most. Her interest in language centers not on documenting the proposition that the principles of nature and principles of language are identical. Neither does she want to devise strategies by which to intensify the assumed organic workings of language. Her question is how to achieve effects comparable to those of the natural phenomena with the tool taken out of her dictionary: how to evoke sensations using an intellectual medium. She knows, in other words, that the power of her language must be transformative.

Whitman's (and Emerson's) marriage of thought and object involves a return to natural innocence, to the unfallen condition of language and of man[27]. It is a re-attaching of words to their primary sources, an "involution" as Jannacone puts it. Dickinson's marriage of thought and word is a sudden influx of grace, a revelation. Her images for such a union are invariably sacramental: of communion (cf. 1452) and illumination (cf. 1126, 1581). The quest for the right word becomes identical with religious quest for the State of Grace. When Dickinson talks about it, her metaphors employ images of clothing (as in the letters to the Hollands and to Higginson quoted above) because in the union of thought and word the spirit takes on visible form. "She insists upon the reifying capacity of words, and readers as a result would do well to disengage themselves from the notion that specific Dickinson poems spring from precise and proximate circumstances in her life and to recognize the priority of language in her poetry"[28].

If the poet succeeds in marrying thought to the proper word, two distinct natures become one and the miracle is only comparable to Divine Incarnation:

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[27] See chapter on language in Nature (I, p. 29-32).

[28] P o r t e r, op. cit., p. 88.

A Word that breathes distinctly
Has not the power to die
Cohesive as the Spirit
It may expire if He -

Made Flesh and dwelt among us
Could condescension be
Like this consent of Language
This loved Philology
(1651)

The miracle brings into existence a realm out of time, self-sufficient and secure in its permanence. Poems become "a fearless, sleepless, deathless progeny, which is not exposed to the accidents of the weary kingdom of time" (III, 23).

There is a Zone whose even Years
No Solstice interrupt -
Whose Sun constructs perpetual Noon
Whose perfect Seasons wait -

Whose Summer set in Summer, till
The Centuries of June
And Centuries of August cease
And Consciousness - is Noon.
(1056, cf. also 657)

Linguistic and, generally, aesthetic excellence comes so close to immortality of the soul that the two can no longer be distinguished.

Dickinson shares with Emerson, Whitman and other Romantics the conviction that art's ultimate dimension is religious but she removes nature from the center of her aesthetic considerations. Although it depends on nature for providing the standard of achievement, a Dickinson poem becomes as intellectual adn linguistic performance whose order is not verifiable by the order of nature. The effects, too, though comparable, are hardly identical, as she warns herself (and the reader) in, for example, the poem on the splendors of an aurora borealis:

Of Bronze - and Blaze -
The North - Tonight -
So adequate - it forms -
So preconcerted with itself -
So distant - to alarms -
An Unconcern so sovereign
To Universe, or me -
[...]

My Splendors, are Menagerie -
But their Competeless Show
Will entertain the Centuries
When I am long ago,
An Island in dishonored Grass -
Whom none but Beetles - know.

(290)

Both the aurora borealis and the poet's "menagerie" are spectacles, performances to be admired. While nature's production impresses with its "sovereign" self-sufficiency and its majestic "Unconcern", the poet's "Show" possesses a uniqueness of its own. Presumably less autonomous as well as subject to "alarms", the poet's art resists time more effectively than the supreme but brief spectacle of the northern lights.

Whitman's language is generated by sensory experience preceding though and aims at taking words back to where they touch a primary, "unfallen" reality. Despite the declaration to Traubel that he thought "Leaves of Grass" "only a language experiment"[29], the existence of his poems as purely linguistic constructs seemed to him at all times less vital than the need to make poems partners in living relationships. The hope that "distance avails not, and place avails not" and "who knows but I am as good as looking at you now" motivated his self-revelations to a large extent. Moreover, the disconsolate stanzas of "As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life" as well as the remark in "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads" that "the actual living light of poems is always curiously from elsewhere" (LG, 565: 127-128) show how, in a moment of doubt if language indeed participated in the primary reality, he also had to doubt the relevance of his art.

Dickinson's words neither start with objects nor aim at them as their final destination. The creative impulse, "Germ's Germ", is contained in "the Capsule of the Mind". All activity starts with thought:

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[29] Traubel's Introduction to: An American Primer by Walt Whitman.

A Deed knocks first at Thought
And then - it knocks at Will -
That is the manufactoring spot
And Will at Home and well.

It then goes out an Act
(1216)

At the other end of their journey words take off into "circumference" and move toward abstraction[30] as the poet attempts to wrest "staying power" from the perishable forms of experience. Gestures and objects come into Dickinson's poems instrumentally, because they serve in that more important quest for a "House of Possibility" (657), for "Estate perpetual" (855). When words are no longer validated by physical reality, language, freed from its representational function, becomes a "condition of being"[31] rather than a means by which man may repossess his place within the harmonies of the universe.

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[30] Among the critics who notice how Dickinson's language moves away from the concrete object are: R. Hagenbüchle (see especially "Precision and Indeterminacy in the Poetry of Emily Dickinson"), R. Weisbuch, and S. Cameron. This is S. Cameron's comment on poem 675, "Essential Oils - are wrung -": "Whether the oils are perfume from the rose or speech from the lyric, to arrive at their essence, life must be pressed to the thinness of its own immemorial finish, must be condensed and, in the condensation, lost to the extract that will symbolize it" (S. Cameron, Lyric Time. Dickinson and the Limits of Genre, Baltimore, 1979 p. 195).

[31] The phrase comes from Adrienne Rich's tribute to Emily Dickinson:

you, woman, masculine
in single-mindedness,
for whom the word was more
than a symptom -

a condition of being.

(rpt. in M. Harris (ed.), Emily Dickinson: Letters from the World, Corinth 1970. Also quoted by A. J. Gelpi in: Emily Dickinson, The Mind of the Poet, Cambridge, Mass. 1965).

Chapter VII

CONCLUSION

Despite their ostensibly opposing attitudes as a "public" and a "private" poet[1] Whitman and Dickinson respond to fundamentally the same philosophical and aesthetic problems. Emerson provides for both the frame of reference when he postulates the ideal of "the whole soul"[2] and struggles to maintain "the equilibrist perspective"[3]. For, as Jonathan Bishop observes Emerson's "whole soul" is much more "a criterion for judgement than a description of a possible protagonist. It can never be seen in its entirety except through instances that symbolically demonstrate the style of the whole in one or another partial context"[4]. This aspect of Emerson's vision provides the key to both Whitman's and Dickinson's style. Because totality is only available to perception in fragments and under aspects, metonymy becomes the chief characteristic of style. "The raid on the inarticulate" is only possible through focusing on the partial, and the method constitutes the common ground for both Whitman and Dickinson.

To demonstrate further the inclusive power of the soul Emerson avails himself of the strategy of polarity: "Polarity allows Emerson to stress first one aspect of the Soul, then another, the pair appearing, to the understanding mutually opposite but, to

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[1] See W. P a r k s (ed.), "The Public and the Private Poet, "South Atlantic Quarterly" 1957, No 56, p. 480-495, and L. L. M a r t z, Whitman and Dickinson: Two Aspects of the Self, [in:] The Poem of the Mind, New York 1966.

[2] See J. B i s h o p, Emerson on the Soul, Cambridge, Mass. 1964, esp. p. 77-81.

[3] R. A. Y o d e r, The Equilibrist Perspective: Toward a Theory of American Romanticism, "Studies in Romanticism" Fall 1973, vol. 12, No 4, p. 703-740.

[4] B i s h o p, op. cit., p. 80.

the reason, complementary parts of a whole"[5]. Similarly, Whitman uses the partial in the faith that the cumulative effect of stringed details will make the flowing unity accessible to reason that is to intuitive or imaginative comprehension. Making the inclusive unity his ideal Whitman is released from the necessity to probe its nature. Instead, his main concern remains with multiplying particular instances in which totality manifests itself. Thus, for example, aspects of the self proliferate endlessly in "Song of Myself" while the self's essence resides in its very ability to sympathetically enter "the not me". The partial images are analogical and aim at revealing identity beneath diversity of forms and continuity beneath apparent fragmentation.

However, and the fact became with time more and more disturbing to Emerson himself, implied in the polarized pattern is a yawning discontinuity, if reason finds itself unable to transcend the perceptions of understanding. For Dickinson, the particular and the fragmentary are the only unquestionable data. The rest is "conjecture" (cf. 399, 1128, 1221). In Dickinson's vision, perceptions of understanding do not, as a rule, coalesce into unity by virtue of reason's superior insight. Instead, they are patterned into designs by the mind's method. It is an imperative of the mind that the nature of the whole be mapped, just as it lies in the nature of "the not me" that it defies total apprehension. The two are thus locked in perpetual confrontation and the mind multiplies meanings as it strives to reach "circumference". Individual perceptions serve as anchoring, concretizing illustrations in the process of progressive abstraction.

Both Whitman and Dickinson insist, as does Emerson, on "seeing the universe in the light of human needs"[6], both posit the centrality of the artist's consciousness. The difference is that Whitman's projection is affective and sympathetic. He is Adam naming for himself a whole new world into being. Dickinson has experienced the intellectual fall. She can but watch herself cre-

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[5] Ibid, p. 80.

[6] S. P a u l, Emerson's Angle of Vision, Cambridge, Mass. 1952, p. 2 (see also the concluding chapt. "Prospects").

ate a world of meanings. Constructing analogies, detecting correspondences are the ways of both human perception and human emotional need while the "Single Hound" of consciousness must forever question the truths of its own making.

The common ground and the divergence between the two poets may be further determined by considering the way in which each concentrates on the illuminating experience. Both acknowledge the immense importance of such a moment yet for Whitman it is usually located in the future, always to be reached. The moment when doubt is transcended constitutes the poem's destination. Experiences along the way are treated as instrumental in bringing about the final insight. The intense moment comes as a climax to the preparatory efforts. In this respect Whitman's poems repeat the essential structure of all religious meditations with the reservation that his preparatory strategies emphasize sensual and affective rather than intellectual receptivity. This basic pattern, repeated sequentially, as in "Song of Myself" or abbreviated to the lucid moment itself, as in the imagistic poems, conveys a sense of form as inherent in experience and opens up the poem's temporal frame. Whitman is the poet of the present tense in whose works the perspective always opens expectantly into the future, even in such despondent poems as "Prayer of Columbus".

For Dickinson the inspiring moment is invariably located in the past. An experience as brief as it was powerful, it is viewed as both stimulating and shattering, essentially creative and potentially destructive. The past moment, lost but present as the memory of a ravishing visitation, challenges the mind. Thus, poems permeated with a sense of loss move away from the actual experience into the regions of abstraction: "But are not all Facts Dreams as soon as we put them behind us?" (L, III, 915; PF, 22). Again and again we find Dickinson's speaker positioned after the major event. After death, after pain, after summer, after the lovers' meeting - in so many poems she tries to make sense of her "afterward" condition[7]. The act of creation becomes radical-

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[7] See D. Porter's excellent essay: The Crucial Experience in Emily Dickinson's Poetry, "Emerson Society Quarterly" 1974, vol. 20, p. 280-290. Similarly, S. Cameron concludes:

ly split into the initial inspiring experience and the later process of "ex-pressing" its essence. Dickinson's poems show how the mind feeds on what has already occurred and finds meaning not in the experience itself but in the very process of analyzing it. Her intense moment, though charged with potential significance, does not disclose it. Order has to be "distilled" in the later process of looking back on the lost moment and arranging it in a design which permits only tentative inference of the general law from the particular event.

While for Whitman the intense moment clarifies meaning, for Dickinson it supplies the necessary energy; it activates the mind. Her vision is characterized by polarities ("the me" versus "the other", heart versus mind, inspiration versus conscious craftsmanship) which are not dialectically resolved within an inclusive wholeness of the soul or the universe, but are held suspenden for contemplation. Ultimately, their resolution is transferred onto the symbolic plane. In other words, they are resolved by her faith in language and in the power of art to establish an autonomous realm where immortality is possible[8].

The extent of Dickinson's faith in language is perhaps best indicated by her use of the word "experiment". One of the most strikingly employed items in her vocabulary, in its contexts the word always refers to natural and existential phenomena: Faith is "The Experiment of Our Lord" (300); nature - "This whole Experiment of Green -" (1333, cf. also 1080, 1084). "Experiment to me/Is every one I meet/ If it contain a Kernel?" (1073, cf. also 902). Death, too, presents itself as the "most profound experiment / Appointed unto Men -" (822, cf. also 1770). It is experience which seems problematic to Dickinson, language does not. Experience is experiment, language - finality.

"Language is what has the power of being in the absence of being - that which can still stand for something in the empty space, whose task it is to sound with the inscrutable sweetness of its plain meanings" (S. C a m e r o n, Lyric Time. Dickinson and the Limits of Genre, Baltimore 1979, p. 200).

[8] On Dickinson's strategy of opposing time through art see esp. C a m e r o n, op. cit.

The word "experiment" is not one of Whitman's favorites in the poem. Eby's "Concordance to Leaves of Grass" lists "experiments" only once, used in the sense of a method for scientific investigation: "The past entire, with all its heroes, histories, arts, experiments" (LG, 512; "To-day and Thee"). The words "experiment", "experiments", "experimental" appear more frequently in the prose writings. In "Democratic Vistas" they refer to the novelty of American political system: "For my part, I would alarm and caution even the political and business reader, and to the utmost extent, against the prevailing delusion that the establishment of free political institutions, and plentiful intellectual smartness, with general good order, physical plenty, industry, etc., (desirable and precious advantages as they are) do, of themselves, determine and yield to our experiment of democracy the fruitage of success" (PW, II 369, 225-230, cf. also PW, II, 380, 577 and PW, II, 387, 778).

In the 1872 Preface, Whitman asks, somewhat like Emily Dickinson: "But what is life but an experiment? and mortality but an exercise?" (LG, 740; 13). And, by the time he was writing the 1876 Preface, his poems too appeared to him first of all experimental.

> The arrangement in print of Two Rivulets - the indirectness of the name itself, (suggesting meanings, the start of other meanings, for the whole Volume) - are but parts of the Venture which my poems entirely are. For really they have been all Experiments, under the urge of powerful, quite irresistible, perhaps wilful influences, (even escapades,) to see how such things will eventually turn out - and have been recited, as it were, by my Soul, to the special audience of Myself, far more than to the world's audience.
>
> (LG, 749-750; 99-105)

In "A Backward Glance" the view of his work as basically "an experiment" is confirmed: "Behind all else that can be said, I consider "Leaves of Grass" and its theory experimental -" (LG, 562; 39-40).

The above quotations show how, in the course of time, Whitman's sense of reality as tentative grew to cover ultimately also his own art. This never happened to Dickinson. Having commited herself to writing poetry she never came to question its

absolute reality. Resolutely, she went on about her business of "singing" (L, II, 413) regardless of Higginson's uneasy comments and his evasive opinion that she should "delay to publish" (L, II, 408). Because poetry was her one raison d'être, she elevated language, or, more generally, the symbolic realm of the poem to the status of transcendent reality. Her faith in "the sufficiency of the creative word", as Roland Hagenbüchle has observed, saved her from despair comparable to Melville's[9].

The last recognition leads, in turn, to questions about Whitman's and Dickinson's place in literary history. Acknowledging the precursor role of Emerson for both poets, it seems justifiable to claim that while Whitman asserts Transcendental faith with a radicality surpassing that of Transcendentalism's chief exponent, Dickinson, in Glauco Cambon's terms, presents her reader with a later phase, with "a kind of critical Transcendentalism" which followed "Puritan rigor" and "Transcendentalist exuberance"[10]. The historical process providing Cambon's chronological criterion is that of the desintegration of institutionalized religion and, with it, of orthodox belief. Indeed, in Dickinson's vision faith is but "the Pierless Bridge/Supporting what We see/ Unto the Scene that We do not -" (915), unless it is the faith in the mind's creative power.

A similar interpretation of literary history underlies Bernard Duffey's "Poetry in America". Duffey divides the history of American poetry into three principal stages determined by progressive questioning of coherence in reality and its transference to the mind. Duffey, however, fails to see Dickinson's poems as more than "terminations" to the Whitmanian stage which he calls "Fictions of Incoherence"[11].

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[9] R. Hagenbüchle, Sign and Process: The Concept of Language in Emerson and Dickinson, [in:] Proceedings of a Symposium on American Literature, Poznań 1979, p. 81 (first printed in "Emerson Society Quarterly" 3rd Quarter 1979).

[10] G. Cambon, Emily Dickinson and the Crisis of Self-Reliance, [in:] M. Simon, T. H. Parsons (eds.), Transcendentalism and Its Legacy, Ann Arbor 1966, p. 132.

[11] B. Duffey, Poetry in America. Expression and Its Values in the Times of Bryant, Whitman and Pound, Durham, N.C. 1978.

Roland Hagenbüchle, on the other hand, argues:

> If one agrees that discontinuity is at the very roots of modernity, then it is not Emerson and Whitman who stand at the threshold of modern poetry, but Dickinson. Emerson is a classic, to be quoted but rarely followed; Dickinson thought rarely quoted is often followed, even when disliked, as by Eliot for example. While Emerson [...] should be read within the Romantic tradition, Dickinson - although profoundly indebted to Romanticism - can fully be understood as a post-Romantic whose anti-lyrical poetry springs from the very experience of disharmony and loss[12].

Dickinson does posit a fragmented universe. How far her sense of incoherence takes her is easily seen when Whitman's declaration opening the Lincoln elegy: "I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with ever returning spring" is juxtaposed with a Dickinson poem on spring's return:

> When they come back - if Blossoms do -
> I always feel a doubt
> If Blossoms can be born again
> When once the Art is out -
>
> When they begin, if Robins may,
> I always had a fear
> I did not tell, it was their last Experiment
> Last Year,
>
> When it is May, if May return,
> Had nobody a pang
> Lest in a Face so beautiful
> We might not look again?

For Whitman, the lilac blossoms returning every year have a secure place within the immemorial cycle of nature. For Dickinson no continuity is certain. The advent of spring has to be confirmed each time by personal experience. Thus she ends the poem:

> If I am there - One does not know
> What Party - One may be
> Tomorrow, but if I am there
> I take back all I say -
>
> (1080)

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[12] Hagenbüchle, op. cit., p. 83.

Without belittling the argument for Dickinson's presence in modern poetry, all claims to "greater" or "lesser" modernity of either poet should be qualified by the recognition that the tension between Whitman and Dickinson cannot be adequately defined in exclusively historical terms. That there exists a synchronic dimension to their relationship is proved by the fact that both have been invoked as parent figures of modern poetry. Without producing tedious lists of names, among affinities claimed for Dickinson are those with existentialism, with the symbolists, and with such American modernists as Wallace Stevens[13]. Whitman has been claimed for the twentieth century by a number of practicing poets: William Carlos Williams, Hart Crane, Allan Ginsberg, to name only the most conspicuous instances of kinship. Also scholars and critics have been conscious of Whitman's "long shadow", especially on the American epic poetry[14].

In the context of the history of American poetry, Albert Gelpi schematized the Whitman - Dickinson polarity as follows:

> When it came to specific matters of approach and technique, when it came to writing a poem and practicing her craft, she [Dickinson] did not belong to the prophetic or Dionysian strain of American poetry which derived palely from Emerson and descended lustily

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[13] See esp. Z. T h u n d y i l, Circumstance, Circumference, and Center: Immanence and Transcendence in Emily Dickinson's Poems of Extreme Situations, "Hartford Studies in Literature" 1971, No 3, and N. I. K h e r, The Landscape of Absence: Emily Dickinson's Poetry, New Haven-London 1974, K. O p p e n s', Emily Dickinson: Überlieferung und Prophetie, "Merkur" Jan. 1960, No XIV, contains extensive comparison of Dickinson and Rilke. On Dickinson and Stevens see esp. H. B l o o m, W. S t e v e n s: The Poems of Our Climate, Ithaca-London 1977, chapt. I, and D. P o r t e r, Emily Dickinson: The Poetics of Doubt, "Emerson Society Quarterly" Summer 1970, No 40. Porter relates her also to H. Crane. Dickinson's most unambiguous affinity seems to be that with R. Frost; see e.g. G. M o n t e i r o, Emily Dickinson and Robert Frost, "Prairie Schooner", No 51, p. 369-386, and chapt. 10 in K. K e l l e r's, The Only Kangaroo Among the Beauty. Emily Dickinson and America, Baltimore 1979.

[14] See esp. R. H. P e a r c e, The Continuity of American Poetry, Princeton, N. J. 1961, chapt. 3 and J. E. M i l l e r, The American Quest for a Supreme Fiction. Whitman's Legacy in the Personal Epic, Chicago-London 1979.

> through Whitman to Carl Sandburg and Jeffers, and more recently to Jack Kerouac and Brother Antoninus. If for the moment's convenience American poetry may be divided broadly into opposing tendencies, the deliberate and formalistic quality of Dickinson's verse associates her rather with the diverse yet Apollonian tradition which proceeds from Edward Taylor through her to Eliot, Stevens, Frost and Marianne Moore, and thence to Robert Lowell and Elizabeth Bishop[15].

Shunning restricting labels, one would like to point out, however, that the answer to the question who is more relevant for modern poetry, if such questions must be asked, does not lie entirely in chronological considerations. It depends crucially on asserting one or the other of the traditionally recognized aspects of the creative process, that is intuition or composition. Upholding non-conscious principles of creativity leads to the assumption that the form inheres in reality. Whichever aspect of reality the artist chooses to focus upon: the inclusive wholeness of the universe, the subconscious psychic processes or some biological life force, he will expect its inherent laws to provide the formal principles of his art. Thus Whitman shows affinities with Bergson[16], with the vitalists[17] expressionists and surrealists as well as with the projectivists[18]. On the other hand, if the emphasis is transferred to deliberate composition, the order the poem reveals belongs to the mind. The poem is organized by imagination alone and must be viewed solely as "the act of mind". Its order can supply little help in showing man his place in reality and - even less in rendering it cognizable.

The two principles of creativity have been variously stressed in the twentieth century both in American poetry and in

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15 A. G e l p i, Emily Dickinson. The Mind of the Poet, Cambridge, Mass. 1965, p. 146.

16 See S. F o s t e r, Bergson's Intuition and Whitman's Song of Myself, "Texas Studies in Literature and Language", Autumn 1964, No VI, p. 376-387.

17 The two Polish poets who most strikingly represented the trend in Polish poetry of 1920-ies - Wierzyński and Tuwim, both expressed their admiration and acknowledged their debt to Whitman.

18 See M. S i e n i c k a, The Making of a New American Poem, Poznań 1972.

Western literature in general. Thus, the respective "modernity" of Whitman and Dickinson depends, and will perhaps always depend, on which is at the moment the dominant emphasis. For, although the terms of the discourse have changed many times, the dilemma of the modern mind which lay at the heart of Emerson's writings, is still very much with us.

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POEZJA CENTRALNEJ ŚWIADOMOŚCI: WHITMAN I DICKINSON
(streszczenie)

Praca powstała z głębokiego, choć niezbyt oryginalnego przekonania autorki, że twórczość Emily Dickinson i Walta Whitmana stanowi szczytowe osiągnięcie poezji amerykańskiej XIX w. Dla historyka literatury sam fakt, że oboje artyści żyli w mniej więcej jednym okresie i że są kluczowymi postaciami w dziejach literatury amerykańskiej, może stanowić wystarczającą przesłankę dla podjęcia studium porównawczego. Wspólnota przestrzeni historyczno-geograficznej musiała przecież powodować wspólnotę problemów intelektualnych i estetycznych. Niemniej jednak, wzajemny stosunek twórczości Whitmana i Dickinson zawsze wydawał się badaczom poezji amerykańskiej o wiele bardziej niepokojący niż mogłoby to wynikać z czysto historycznego podejścia.

Whitmana i Dickinson połączył już w 1891 r. Arlo Bates i odtąd skojarzenie to wypływało na tyle konsekwentnie, że na przykład we wstępnym rozdziale książki H. Blooma o Wallace Stevensie wydanej w 1977 r., Whitman i Dickinson uosabiają archetypy "amerykańskich postaw poetyckich" (American poetic stances). Mimo to, poza dwoma znakomitymi rozdziałami w studium A. Gelpiego "The Tenth Muse. The Psyche of the American Poet" i jednym, raczej powierzchownym, w "The Only Kangaroo Among the Beauty. Emily Dickinson and America" K. Kellera, nie otrzymaliśmy jeszcze monografii poświęconej relacji twórczości Whitmana i Dickinson. Celem niniejszej pracy jest uzupełnienie tego braku w miarę skromnych możliwości autorki.

Za podstawę rozważań porównawczych i punkt odniesienia przyjmuję twórczość Emersona. W świetle badań nad romantyzmem amerykańskim od czasu ukazania się klasycznego opracowania F. O Matthiessena "American Renaissance" (1941), takie podejście nie

wymaga usprawiedliwień ani nawet wyjaśnień. Wielokrotnie też wskazywano na dług jaki oboje poeci zaciągnęli u Emersona. W pracy R. A. Yodera "Emerson and the Orphic Poet in America" (1978) znajduję najtrafniejsze i najzwięźlejsze określenie emersonowskiego "zaplecza" Whitmana i Dickinson. Otwarta filozofia Emersona stanowi ramy, w których mieszczą się przeciwieństwa między ich twórczością. Zasadniczo jednak oboje polaryzują swój świat poetycki według schematu JA i NIE JA (ME nad NOT ME). W ten sposób ich doświadczenie poetyckie oscyluje między nadzieją "orfickiego objawienia" (Orphic apocalypse) a świadomością całkowitej izolacji ludzkiego umysłu, "niezdolnego do penetracji tajemnicy wszechświata" (s. 175).

W pracy pragnę przedstawić porównawczo "strukturę wyobraźni" obojga poetów i wskazać niektóre konsekwencje estetyczne ich różnej reakcji na w gruncie rzeczy tę samą wizję, wizję świadomości artysty jako kreującego centrum świata. Mój główny klucz, koncepcja "centralnej świadomości", w naturalny sposób kojarzy się z Jamesowską "centralną inteligencją" (a central intelligence) traktowaną jako ośrodek organizujący dzieło literackie. Podobieństwo leży w uznaniu, że wszelki porządek jest subiektywny, ponieważ postrzegająca świadomość narzuca swoją strukturę temu co postrzega. Różnica leży w fakcie, że dla Jamesa prawda ta ma znaczenie przede wszystkim kompozycyjne, stając się źródłem jedności dzieła literackiego. Dla Whitmana i Dickinson jej znaczenie jest daleko szersze. Jest to prawda przede wszystkim filozoficzna. Jeżeli wszelki ład wywodzi się z porządkującej pracy świadomości, artysta musi stać się pielgrzymem poszukującym ładu estetycznego, to oczywiste, ale również metafizycznego i egzystencjalnego. Własne JA odgrywa rolę bohatera w dramacie - pielgrzymce, którą jest wiersz.

W rozdziale I pracy koncentruję się na indywidualistycznej filozofii Emersona. Jej przeciwstawienie stanowi Longfellow ze swoim, jakże innym, eklektyzmem. Porównując koncepcję literatury i kultury w ogóle u tych dwóch najpopularniejszych pisarzy swoich czasów, pragnę pokazać istotę rewolucyjnego charakteru myśli Emersona. W dalszej części rozdziału poszukuję "korzeni" Emersona w starszej tradycji amerykańskiego indywidualizmu, przede wszystkim religijnego i politycznego. Wreszcie, ostatnia część

rozdziału wyodrębnia te aspekty myśli Emersona, które stanowią płaszczyznę wspólną dla obojga poetów. Jest to religijna "sakramentalna" koncepcja roli własnej twórczości. Oboje też traktują swoją poezję jako obraz "pielgrzymki życia" i mają świadomość, że cel takiej pielgrzymki jest właściwie nieosiągalny. Cenią zatem nie nieskończenie odległy ideał - zamknięte dzieło, doskonałą formę, ale aktywne poszukiwanie, sam proces twórczy.

Rozdział II poświęcony jest rozważaniom istoty własnego JA w ujęciu każdego z poetów. U obojga JA występuje jako główny bohater poetyckiej wędrówki. Odpowiedzi na pytania o naturę JA mają więc zasadnicze znaczenie dla estetycznych założeń poezji. Najkrócej można powiedzieć, że Whitman definiuje swoje JA przez to wszystko co łączy jego, Walta Whitmana, z otaczającymi go ludźmi, z ludzkością w ogóle, z całym życiem organicznym i ze wszechświatem. JA Whitmana nieustannie poszukuje dróg "wyjścia z siebie" i połączenia się z zasadą świata, dróg wchłonięcia całej różnorodnej, oszałamiającej rzeczywistości. JA Dickinson określa się przez to co w nim wyjątkowe, unikalne, różne od innych ludzi i wszystkich from bytu. JA Dickinson wciąż na nowo przeżywa swoją osobność przy pełnej jednak świadomości psychicznej potrzeby "przynależenia".

W rozdziale III analizuję związki, w jakie kreująca świadomość artysty wchodzi z otaczającą rzeczywistością. Whitman dąży do stworzenia przez swoją sztukę swoistego "płynnego brzegu" (a liquid rim) między stałym lądem materii i faktów a oceanem wyobraźni. Jego posłannictwo poetyckie polega na pośredniczeniu między materią i duchem, życiem i sztuką, przez nieustanne wskazywanie, że rządzi nimi w istocie to samo prawo. Odbiciem takiej koncepcji funkcji poezji jest charakterystyczna struktura większości wierszy Whitmana. Zwykle składają się one z dwu członów: "progresji" do punktu kulminacyjnego i samej kulminacji, kiedy JA nieodmiennie doświadcza poczucia łączności z jakimś aspektem rzeczywistości. Ta podstawowa jednostka strukturowa może być w dłuższych wierszach (na przykład w "Song of Myself") kilkakrotnie powtórzona, przy czym obszar wizji poszerza się od ekstazy do ekstazy na kształt koncentrycznych kół rozbiegających się na powierzchni wody. Na początku wiersza whitmanowskie JA wyrusza w podróż do momentu "komunii" stanowiącego punkt lub jeden z sek-

wencji punktów kulminacyjnych. Istotny jest przy tym fakt, że taka podróż może odbywać się w głęboko tragicznych nastrojach. Wizja Whitmana nie musi być i w bardzo wielu wierszach nie jest związana z optymistyczną oceną możliwości i pozycji JA we wszechświecie. Najważniejsze jest to, że nawet tragiczne doświadczenia stają się przy końcu wiersza częścią większego, "naturalnego" planu (jak na przykład w "As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life") i ich sens nie może być kwestionowany.

Rola poety dla Whitmana polega na budowaniu pajęczyny połączeń między świadomością artysty a światem zewnętrznym (patrz "A Noiseless Patient Spider"). Dickinson także przyrównała artystę do pająka snującego swoją nić ("A Spider sewed at Night"). Jednak jej metafora akcentuje nie łączącą funkcję pajęczyny, ale fakt, że pająk wysnuwa ją wyłącznie z tajemnicy swego wnętrza, a zatem jej związek z rzeczywistością zewnętrzną jest czysto subiektywny i niesprawdzalny. Rzeczywistość zewnętrzna jawi się Dickinson jako "biały łuk"(an Arc of White) w istocie swej niepoznawalny. Co więcej, wszelkie analogie między twórcą natury - pająkiem a twórcą - Bogiem czy twórcą - człowiekiem nie mogą być niczym więcej jak tylko asocjacjami umysłu artysty. Wizja Dickinson podkreśla całkowitą autonomię wyobraźni w dziele tworzenia, a także niepoznawalność obiektywnego świata. Rola świadomości artysty nie polega dla Dickinson na pośredniczeniu między sztuką i życiem, abstrakcją i faktem, ale na narzuceniu subiektywnego porządku wyobraźni obiektywnie niepoznawalnej rzeczywistości. Struktura wierszy Dickinson zwykle zakłada sytuację pojedynku między świadomością artysty a groźnym NIE JA. JA tryumfuje na tyle, na ile potrafi chaosowi przeciwstawić heroiczny wysiłek porządkującej wyobraźni. Stosunkowo liczne wiersze Dickinson na temat procesu twórczego nieodmiennie prezentują obrazy celowego wysiłku i rzemieślniczego kunsztu, przy czym akt twórczy rozpada się w jej interpretacji na dwa etapy. Stadium początkowe to stan nagromadzonej energii, napięcia, które musi być rozładowane pod groźbą unicestwiającego wybuchu. Właściwe tworzenie, moment kiedy rodzi się sztuka, jest aktem świadomej dyscypliny i umiejętności. Bez techniki światło i ład nie są możliwe. Poeta Dickinson to nie mistyk doznający olśnienia, ale przede wszystkim artysta-rzemieślnik, który nagromadzoną energię potrafi bez-

piecznie i celowo użyć. Z drugiej strony ma on całkowitą jasność co do tego, że niebezpieczny ładunek stanowi tworzywo, surowiec, bez którego jego umiejętności są martwe. Stała obecność tej zależności sprawia, że w poezji Dickinson płynie nurt wykalkulowanego psychicznego ryzyka, niemal psychicznego gwałtu. Im bowiem potencjalnie niebezpieczniejsza jest sytuacja, tym większy w niej ładunek energii i tym większych umiejętności wymaga jego opanowanie, tym więc pełniejszy jest tryumf porządkującej świadomości nad pierwotnym chaosem doświadczenia.

Podsumowując, o ile celem poetyckiej pielgrzymki Whitmana jest "odkrycie" prawdy, o tyle Dickinson u końca swej poetyckiej podróży "konstruuje" prawdę. Porządek wiersza Whitmana aspiruje do rangi prawdy estetycznej i filozoficznej zarazem. Porządek "skonstruowany" w wierszu Dickinson jest tylko prawdą artystyczną, ale jednocześnie poetka wskazuje, że inna prawda jest ludzkiemu umysłowi niedostępna. Koncepcja Whitmana wiąże jego twórczość nierozerwalnie z rzeczywistością, z której wyrosła i w konsekwencji naraża na przemijanie wraz ze światem, który tak chciwie wchłaniała. Koncepcja Dickinson dąży do uwolnienia sztuki od więzów rzeczywistości, która ją stymulowała i przeniesienia jej na ponadczasową płaszczyznę symboliczną.

W rozdziałach IV i V zajmuję się problemami kompozycyjnymi w twórczości obojga poetów. Podstawową trudnością dla Whitmana w tym względzie było pogodzenie zasady spontanicznej dynamiki wiersza z zasadą stabilnych struktur, jakich z konieczności wymaga dzieło sztuki. W rozwiązaniu sprzeczności Whitman posługiwał się przede wszystkim analogią. Jego sławne "katalogi" przedmiotów, ludzi, nazw i scen, realizują z jednej strony zasadę spontanicznego "wzrostu", z drugiej dążą do wykazania równoważności poszczególnych elementów "łańcucha" wskazując na stabilizujące jądro tożsamości w powodzi różnorakich form. Swoje "wyliczenia" Whitman porządkuje według prawa postępu, "procesji" w czasie i przestrzeni oraz dodatkowo stabilizuje tak radykalnie otwartą formę przez organizowanie wiersza w jednostki cykliczne według, na przykład, biologicznych cykli wzrostu-dojrzewania-śmierci albo astronomicznych cykli pór roku czy też rytmów przypływu i odpływu. Otwarty charakter wiersza zostaje zachowany, ponieważ cykle są nieskończenie powtarzalne. Z drugiej jed-

nak strony nadanie im wymiarów archetypu wzmacnia element statyczny. Jednocześnie struktury cykliczne same stanowią analogię do praw organicznych i podkreślają uczestnictwo wiersza w organicznej strukturze wszechświata.

W poematach często uważanych za jego szczytowe osiągnięcia, takich jak "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry", "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking", "When Lilacs Last" i "Passage to India", Whitman zastosował jako czynniki stabilizujące obrazy-symbole: prom brooklyński, ocean i nocny śpiew ptaka, kwitnące bzy czy kolej transkontynentalną. Obrazy te powracają w ciągu wiersza, zazwyczaj w tych samych zwrotach, tak, że czytelnik ma od początku jasność, co do ich symbolicznego znaczenia. W efekcie kontrastują swoją "stałością" z dynamicznym charakterem cyklicznych "procesji" obecnych w tle wiersza.

W "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" szczególnie dobrze widać jeszcze jeden chwyt używany przez Whitmana dla rozwiązania dynamiczno-statycznej sprzeczności. W sposób bardzo dla siebie charakterystyczny Whitman "postępuje" ku czytelnikowi, ku emocjonalnej identyfikacji czytelnika z bohaterem poematu. Efekt "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" i wielu innych poematów Whitmana zależy w dużej mierze od gotowości czytelnika do podjęcia roli towarzysza, a nawet kochanka protagonisty. Jeżeli czytelnik odmówi takiego uczuciowego "zakotwiczenia" wiersza we własnych przeżyciach podczas lektury, jeżeli sam nie "odegra" roli głównego bohatera, wiersz musi wydać się estetycznie chybiony, a nawet żenujący.

Niewątpliwie główną domeną Whitmana jest właśnie "postępowanie", pielgrzymka ku "komunii", ale w różnych okresach swego życia poeta pisał wiersze, które pomijają progresję ku wizji i zajmują się tylko momentem olśnienia. Wiersze te są właściwie całkowicie statyczne i prezentują swego rodzaju "obiektywny korelatyw" intensywnych stanów emocjonalnych. W porównaniu do największych osiągnięć Whitmana ginie w nich przede wszystkim dynamika "procesji", ginie nacisk na postępujące zaangażowanie czytelnika i wreszcie ginie dramatyczny charakter wiersza. Jeżeli bowiem wiersze Whitmana można w ogóle nazwać dramatycznymi, ich dramatyzm leży wyłącznie w sprzecznościach i konfliktach etapu pielgrzymki, które kulminacyjna wizja rozładowuje i godzi. Podróż, dążenie do celu, otwarta możliwość - stanowią domenę Whitmana.

Dla porównania twórczości Whitmana i Dickinson zasadnicza wydaje się obserwacja, że wszędzie tam, gdzie Whitman akcentuje ciągłość i płynne przechodzenie jednych form w drugie, Dickinson prezentuje opozycje: teraz - zawsze, życie - śmierć, dom - nieznane, nie stawiając drogowskazów na drodze od jednego członu do drugiego. Wiersze Whitmana koncentrują się na całym procesie wędrówki. Dickinson najczęściej wyłuskuje zeń moment przełomu, ten fragment drogi, kiedy za zakrętem ma się ukazać zupełnie nieznany widok. Jej wizja zakłada radykalne rozdarcie świadomości między uwięzieniem w akcydensach "teraz i tutaj", które choć ograniczają, dają jednak poczucie bezpieczeństwa, a nieprzepartym dążeniem do "skoku" w "zawsze i wszędzie" który, choć potwierdza nieograniczoną wolność umysłu, grozi także tragicznym wyobcowaniem w nieludzkich rejonach czystej abstrakcji.

Punkt krytyczny, gdzie następuje gwałtowne zetknięcie tego co znane i tego co nie jest znane i gdzie ciągłość doświadczenia zostaje brutalnie przerwana, stanowi dla Dickinson analogię samego procesu twórczego. W konfrontacji między świadomością a nieznanym jedną ze skuteczniejszych broni Dickinson jest "koncept" (conceit), niezwykły, często ekstrawagancki obraz, za pomocą którego wyobraźnia może zapanować nad chaosem doświadczenia. Zaskakujące porównanie śmierci do zalotnika w "Because I could not stop for Death" (712) "obłaskawia" przerażającą obecność, ale również uświadamia, jak dalece efemeryczny jest taki wyczyn. Czytelnik otrzymuje w wierszu nie prawdę, w którą mógłby ewentualnie uwierzyć, ale sposób, metodę pokonywania strachu wyobraźnią. Strategia "konceptu" pozwala Dickinson toczyć pojedynek z nieznanym na własnym terytorium. Zawiesza poszukiwanie rozwiązań filozoficznych czy egzystencjalnych na rzecz rozwiązań estetycznych.

Wiele wierszy Dickinson ilustruje zasadę nadrzędności intelektu przez stosowanie jako ram kompozycyjnych schematów logicznego myślenia. Przy końcu wiersza 640 ("I cannot live with you"), kiedy wszystkie możliwości zostały rozważone i odrzucone, okoliczność rozłąki z ukochanym jawi się nie tylko jako zewnętrzna konieczność, ale głównie jako logiczny wniosek - tryumf świadomości nad przypadkiem.

Wiersze Dickinson z reguły organizowane są w strukturach

intelektualnych wcale nie pretendujących do uczestnictwa w organicznej naturze świata. W konsekwencji, choć Dickinson używa analogii niemal równie chętnie jak Whitman, jej analogie nie są wzajemnie wymienialnymi równoważnikami. Funkcjonują jako podporządkowane człony, ilustracje w nadrzędnym procesie dochodzenia do ogólniejszego prawa. Stąd wiersze Dickinson mają tendencje do odchodzenia od konkretu ku abstrakcji. Pokazują drogi, na których świadomość usiłuje uwolnić się od ograniczającej dosłowności faktu. Whitman starannie maskuje rzemiosło w dążeniu do zapewnienia sztuce spontanicznych cech życia. Dickinson przeciwnie, eksponuje procesy, w których świadomość artysty wznosi konstrukcję estetyczną z niespójnych elementów doświadczenia.

W rozdziale VI zajmuję się koncepcją języka u obojga poetów. Whitman zakłada, że język jest w swej istocie organiczny. Jego prace nad językiem ("American Primer") i komentarze zmierzają w kierunku udokumentowania, że słowo i rzecz stanowiły na początku jedność. Ideałem jest powrót do stanu pierwotnej niewinności, w którym słowo i przedmiot byłyby związane tak integralnie, że poeta mógłby operować elementami materialnej rzeczywistości, a interakcje słów miałyby dokładnie te same skutki, co interakcje ludzi i rzeczy. Potęga słowa opierałaby się wówczas o solidność rzeczy i energię czynów. Zainteresowanie językiem ma u Whitmana dwa główne aspekty. Słowa fascynują go jako mnogość indywidualnych form, ale też stanowią wszystkie tylko wieloraką manifestację jednego, potężnego żywiołu. Język jest dla Whitmana przede wszystkim procesem i wzrostem. Chciał dotrzeć do samego jądra, tam gdzie język nie znaczył, a był: żył i pulsował. Rdzeniem języka jest bowiem nie znaczenie, ale zmysłowy, rytmiczny dźwięk. To co najważniejsze nie daje się powiedzieć, ale zadaniem poety jest doprowadzić czytelnika do krawędzi, za którą otwiera się tajemnicza głębia organicznego życia.

Charakterystyczne, że Whitman nie chciał walczyć z językiem, słabo odczuwał opór słowa i jego nieprzystawanie do myśli. Poszukiwał natomiast metod intensyfikacji tego co uważał za "naturalne" działanie języka. Chciał pracować "z", a nie "wbrew" językowi, wydobywając organiczność praw rządzących słowami. Inaczej Dickinson. Kwestia adekwatności słowa do myśli zaprząta ją w listach i wierszach. Często zauważa, że język żyje swoim życiem,

a myśl swoim i trudno je skutecznie związać. Mimo, że oboje artyści postuluję język żywy, dla Dickinson życie języka mało ma wspólnego z życiem organicznym. Język Dickinson przede wszystkim trwa. Jego istnienie bliższe jest bytowi boskiemu niż bytowi przyrody. Zgodnie z tym Dickinson godzi się łatwo, że istota języka jest tajemnicą. Natomiast pilnie poszukuje odpowiedzi na pytanie jak wydobyć unikalne, osobiste znaczenia z powszechnego medium. Celem języka Dickinson jest "ucieleśnianie" myśli wbrew naturze myśli, jest cud wcielenia, stan łaski, objawienie.

Poezja Dickinson uwalnia język z więzów ścisłej zależności od świata materii. Słowa odnoszą się do rzeczy pośrednio, o tyle, o ile poeta rywalizuje z niedoścignym twórcą - przyrodą, której dzieła stanowią wzorce dla sztuki. Słowa nie zaczynają się od przedmiotów czy faktów i nie ku nim dążą. Czyn ma początek w umyśle, a dokonany uzyskuje autonomię w rzeczywistości językowej o wiele trwalszej niż ulotne bogactwo świata organicznego.

W zakończeniu pracy staram się ustalić dwie sprawy. Po pierwsze, miejsce Dickinson w historii poezji amerykańskiej. Po drugie, relację Whitmana i Dickinson do poezji XX w. Oboje wychodzą z założenia, że świadomość artysty stanowi kreujące centrum wszechświata. Świat Whitmana tworzony jest jednak poprzez projekcję emocjonalną, z wiarą, że sztuka może na nowo ukazać człowiekowi jego miejsce w harmonii uniwersum. Dickinson doświadczyła grzechu wiedzy i może tylko obserwować jak jej wyobraźnia buduje chwilowe oazy sensu w bezmiarze niewiadomego. Chronologicznie rzecz biorąc, Dickinson reprezentuje postawę postromantyczną, a Whitman bliższy jest optymistycznej wierze transcendentalistów w nieograniczone możliwości wyzwolonego JA. Dickinson antycypuje modernizm swoim przekonaniem, że jedyną bronią osamotnionej świadomości jest twórcza wyobraźnia i doskonałość rzemiosła. Powyższy porządek w czasie opiera się na kryterium postępującej dezintegracji tradycyjnej religii. W istocie dla Dickinson wiara jest potrzebą psychiczną, a nie źródłem wiedzy i pewności.

Relacja Whitman - Dickinson ma również aspekt synchroniczny, ponieważ każde z tych dwojga poetów akcentuje inną stronę procesu twórczego. Whitman kładzie nacisk na poznanie intuicyjne i na [illegible] źródła twórczości. Wykazuje więc pokrewieństwa na przykład z Bergsonem i witalistami, z ekspresjonistami i surrea-

listami, a także z projektywizmem Olsona. Dickinson skłania się ku podkreślaniu zasadniczej roli kompozycji i racjonalnych elementów procesu twórczego. Jej wiersz jest przede wszystkim "aktem umysłu". Te bieguny procesu twórczego były akcentowane przemiennie zarówno w amerykańskiej poezji XX w., jak i w całej dwudziestowiecznej literaturze naszego kręgu kulturowego. Większa lub mniejsza "współczesność" Whitmana czy Dickinson może więc zależeć po prostu od tego, który akcent aktualnie dominuje. Okazuje się bowiem, że choć terminologia w wielkiej debacie zmieniła się wielokrotnie, wciąż borykamy się z emersonowskim dylematem samoświadomego umysłu otoczonego obcą sobie rzeczywistością.

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