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Whitman's Ecological Spirituality

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A discussion of Walt Whitman's spirituality of the earth must begin with his consideration of the human body. There can be no adequate (full) appreciation of the sacredness of the earth that ignores or rejects the sacredness of the body..1. "If anything is sacred," Whitman says, "the human body is sacred. The man's body is sacred and the woman's body" (S.B.E.,6,8). The goodness of creation extends to even the least of creatures. So it is with the human body. "Welcome is every organ and attribute of me, Not an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile, and none shall be less familiar than the rest" (S.O.M.,3).

Not only the parts of the body but its vital instincts and desires are good: "I believe in the flesh and the appetites, Seeing, hearing, feeling, are miracles, and each part and tag of me is a miracle" (S.O.M.,24). Whitman exuberantly proclaims: "Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or am touch'd from, The scent of these arm-pits aroma finer than prayer, The head more than churches, bibles, and all the creeds (S.O.M.,24).

In these considerations one must remember that for Whitman the soul is immanent in and united with the body. Dualistic interpretations tend toward a hierarchy in which the soul is elevated as the spiritual, real essence of the individual and the body is denigrated as merely material and ultimately unreal. Whitman rejects hierarchism and considers body and soul as equals. "Clear and sweet is my soul, and clear and sweet is all that is not my soul. Lack one lacks both, and the unseen is prov'd by the seen" (S.O.M.,3). "O my Body! ...I believe the likes of you stand or fall with the likes of the soul, (And that they are the soul.) (S.B.E.,9). "And if the body were not the soul, what is the soul?" (S.B.E.,1).

For Whitman, the soul is the source of the body's eroticism. We do not know when this realization dawned on him, but in Section 5 of "Song of Myself," there is a poetic indication that this insight occurred suddenly in one powerful experience. He begins by addressing 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."

He then invites the soul to "Loaf with me on the grass, loose the stop from your throat, 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 throat." The soul is the beloved who is invited to lie on the grass and loaf with the lover, the body. Whitman then bids the soul remember their first union (perhaps for Whitman a reminiscence of a powerful sexual experience):

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

feet.

Here the soul is pictured as taking possession of the body,

ravishing it and spreading a warm excitement from head to foot. The soul's union with the body eroticizes the whole person and then leads to a self-transcending experience:

Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge that pass all
the argument of the earth, And I know that the hand of God is the promise
of my own, And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,
And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the women my
sisters and lovers,

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. (S.O.M.,5)

Whitman is led to this wider communion with the divine, human and natural orders. Rather than losing touch with external reality, however, in an inner trance, he sees clearly the limitless array of leaves, brown ants, wells, mossy scabs, heap'd stones and plants.

The basic attraction between body and soul becomes then for Whitman a revelation of and participation in the larger dynamics of the cosmos. Like the gravity that pulls all together, a person is pulled into union with others:

I am he that aches with amorous love; Does the earth gravitate? Does not
all matter, aching, attract all matter So the body of me to all I meet ("I am he
that aches with love")

Explained elsewhere in electro-magnetic imagery he proclaims:

I sing the body electric, The armies of those I love engirth me and I engirth
them, They will not let me off till I go with them, respond to them, And
discorrupt them, and charge them full with the charge of the soul (S.B.E.,1)

Here the soul is likened to an electrical charge that revitalizes the body. The electrical charge like fire burns away the corruption of the "dead" body.

To the man, the magnetism that a woman exercises is fierce, electrical and cosmic:

This is the female-form, A divine nimbus exhales from it head to foot It
attracts with a fierce undeniable attraction, I am drawn by its breath as if I
were no more than a helpless vapor.... Mad filaments, ungovernable shoots
play out of it (S.B.E,5).

This electrical energy of life surges through the poet who in turn becomes a channel, a transformer and a transmitter of this contact with the many human and non-human beings that make up nature. The result is the poet who permits "to speak out at every hazard, Nature without check with original energy" (S.O.M.,1). The poet stands amidst the energies of the world, experiencing the inner erotic impulses of the earth's dynamics. Awakened to and by one's own sexual energies, one experiences similar energies in the movements of earth and sky. In an especially lovely passage, Whitman describes one such experience:

I am he that walks with the tender and growing night, I call to the earth and sea half-held by the night.

Press close bare-bosom'd night—press close magnetic nourishing night!

Night of south winds—night of the large few stars! Still nodding night—mad naked summer night.

Smile O voluptuous cool-breath'd earth! Earth of the slumbering and liquid trees! Earth of departed sunset—earth of the mountains misty-topt! Earth of the vitreous pour of the full moon just tinged with blue! Earth of shine and dark mottling the tide of the river!

Earth of the limpid gray of clouds brighter and clearer for my sake! Far-swooping elbow'd earth—rich apple-blossom'd earth! Smile, for your lover comes. Prodigious, you have given me love—therefore I to you give love!

O unspeakable passionate love. (S.O.M., 21)

A sexuality that is a participation in the energy of the Earth, shares its innocence and chasteness. "Earth of chaste love, life that is only life after love, The body of my love, the body of the woman I love, the body of the man, the body of the earth" ("Spontaneous Me").

Whitman's spirituality is not the spirituality of the fallen who associate sexuality and eroticism with guilt and sin but the spirituality of a New Adam and a New Eve. Sexual passion is not a sign of a loss of unity with the natural and divine but a means for attaining such union.

Eve is not the evil temptress, and knowledge of Eve is not an entrance into sin. Rather, knowledge of Eve is an initiation for man into a new, cosmic existence. It is a new birth, strikingly like Christian Baptism but with quite different implications:

This is the nucleus—after the child is born of woman, man is born of woman, This is the bath of birth, this is the merge of small and large, and the outlet again, Be not ashamed women, your privilege encloses the rest, and is the exit of the rest, You are the gates of the body, and you are the gates of the soul (S.B.E.,5).

Just as at its first birth or outlet, the baby is bathed in the fluids of its mother, so in its second, cosmic birth, the fluids of woman and the "gushing showers" of man initiate the person into a new mode of being. Isolated beings transcend themselves and achieve union with each other and with the earth as mother:

As I see my soul reflected in Nature, As I see through a mist, One with inexpressible completeness, sanity, beauty, See the bent head and arms folded over the breast, the Female I see (S.B.E.,5).

For Whitman there are no hierarchies between male and female, body and soul, divine and human. Feminine imagery is associate with the body, with the nation, with the earth and with the universe. Each of these are organic wholes made up of interrelated parts and wedded to a soul or spirit imaged as male. Both, however, are equal:

I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul. I am the poet of the woman and I the same as the man, And I say it is as great to be a

woman as to be a man (S.O.M.,21).

The poet, whether male or female, must be able to identify with both sexes, enfold both sexual images within and be energized by their association. Whitman implies that fear of the body and domination of the earth finds its correlate in the fear and domination of woman by man. In the poem, "We Two How Long Fool'd," Whitman pictures Nature as perceived by the New Adam and New Eve. Herein conventional sexual stereotypes are transcended by identification of the lovers with the larger context and energies of the earth:

We two, how long we were fool'd, Now transmuted, we swiftly escape as
Nature escapes, We are Nature, long have we been absent, but now we
return, We become plants, trunks, foliage, roots, bark, We are bedded in the
ground, we are rocks, We are oaks, we grow in the openings side by side,
We browse, we are two among the wild herds spontaneous as any, We are
two fishes swimming in the sea together, We are what locust blossoms are,
we drop scent around lanes mornings and evenings, We are also the coarse
smut of beasts, vegetables, minerals, We are two predatory hawks, we soar
above and look down, We are two resplendent suns, we it is who balance
ourselves orbic and stellar, we are as two comets, We prowl fang'd and
four-footed in the woods, we spring on prey,

We are seas mingling, we are two of those cheerful waves rolling over each
other and interwetting each other. We are what the atmosphere is,
transparent, receptive, pervious, impervious, We are snow, rain, cold,
darkness, we are each product and influence of the globe, We have circled
and circled till we have arrived home again, we two, We have voided all
but freedom and all but our own joy.

If there is a method in Whitman's spirituality it is the identification with the other. His greatest joy and his most dramatic poetry spring from this exercise of becoming the other. In transcending ego and becoming the other, we experience life in a new way, realizing our cosmic self. We must avoid partial judgments and embrace all that exists as it exists. In fact, the expanding and sympathetic self is natural to humans, evident in the child but later frustrated and narrowed.

There was a child went forth every day, And the first object he look'd upon,
that object he became, And that object became part of him for the day or a
certain part of the day, Or for many years or stretching cycles of years.

The early lilacs became part of this child, And grass and white and red
morning-glories, and white and red clover, and the song of the phoebe-bird,
And the Third-month lambs and the sow's pink-faint litter, and the mare's
foal and the cow's calf... And the apple-trees cover'd with blossoms and the
fruit afterward, and wood-berries, and the commonest weeds by the road,
And the old drunkard staggering home from the outhouse of the tavern
whence he had lately risen...

His own parents, he that father'd him and she that had conceiv'd him in her
womb and birth'd him, They give this child more of themselves than that,
They gave him afterward every day, they became part of him...

Men and women crowding fast in the streets... The streets themselves and
the facades of houses, and goods in the window... These became part of
that child who went forth every day, and who now goes, and will always go
forth every day. (C.W.F.)

In this poem, the child becomes the things he "sees" and they become a part of him. This, for Whitman, is the basic dynamic of becoming human. The self goes forth to unite with the other and returns with the other as a part of its own identity. Through this bipolar movement the macrocosm becomes personalized and a microcosmic self enriched. Through the experience of becoming the many, the richness of the one is increased; through diversity the one paradoxically finds its unity and place:

I resist anything better than my own diversity, Breathe the air but leave plenty after me, And am not stuck up, and am in my place. The moth and fish-eggs in their place, The bright suns I see and the dark suns I cannot see are in their place (S.O.M.,16).

In an ecosystem each being has its place or niche but is also a part of and contributes to the stability of the larger system. Similarly, the human subject has the ability to recognize its place within the larger order but at the same time through imaginative sympathy to conform itself to the whole of that order. This is not a homogeneous union that sees diversity as illusory or secondary, nor is it an ecstatic experience of one's transcendence of and superiority to the other life-forms. Rather, it is a suspension of judgment coupled with a receptivity to the multitude of sounds and sights that betokens humility. In such a mood, one gains a sense of the wondrousness even of the smallest being:

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars, And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and the egg of the wren, And the tree-toad is a chef d'oeuvre for the highest, And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors of heaven, And the narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn all machinery, And the cow crunching with depress'd head surpasses any statue, And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels. (S.O.M.,31)

Whitman found all creatures worth praise and respect. Each had its essential role to play in the drama of life. Whitman found great joy being among them, in the solitude of the woods. At Timber Creek in New Jersey, he spent time recuperating from a slight stroke probably caused by the pressures of the Civil War years. Here he found revitalization and renewal. He mentions his gratitude to nature for its vital healing influences many times but perhaps nowhere quite as strikingly as this passage from *Specimen Days*:

...as a faint testimonial of my own gratitude for many hours of peace and comfort in half-sickness, (and not by any means sure but they will somehow get wind of the compliment,) I hereby dedicate the last half of these Specimen Days to the bees (splendid fellows,) black-birds, mosquitoes, dragon-flies, butterflies, pond-turtles, wasps and hornets, mulleins, tansy, peppermint, cat birds (and all other birds,) moths (great and little,) some glow worms (swarming millions of them indescribably strange and beautiful at night over the pond and creek,) water-snakes, crows, millers, cedars, tulip-trees (and all other trees,) and to the spots and memories of those days, and of the creek..2.

The poet, Whitman says, is "the caresser of life" who owes his poetry to the deeper poetry of the earth. The primary words are the words of the earth and one must catch their meaning. There are moments when suddenly the earth "speaks" to us. It may happen when we are struck by the look of a cow or hear the call of migrating geese. At such moments meaning pierces the soul and the spirituality of things touches our spirit. These are revelatory moments that never leave the memory:

Oxen that rattle the yoke and chain or halt in the leafy shade, what is that you express in your eyes? It seems to me more than all the print I have read in my life.

My tread scares the wood-drake and wood-duck...they rise together... I believe in those wing'd purposes... And do not call the tortoise unworthy because she is not something else, And the jay in the woods never studied the gamut yet trills pretty well to me, And the look of the bay mare shames silliness out of me.

The wild gander leads his flock through the cool night, Ya-honk he says, and sounds it down to me like an invitation, The pert may suppose it meaningless, but I listening close, Find its purpose and place up there toward the wintry sky. (S.O.M.,13).

In these and other direct encounters with nature, Whitman found words, meanings and purposes not easily transcribed into human language:

A song of the rolling earth, and of words according, 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...

Human bodies are words, myriads of words... Air, soil, water, fire—those are words

I myself am a word with them—my qualities interpenetrate with theirs— (S.R.E.,1).

Both the truth of one's identity and the deeper structure of human language are found in the complex interconnectedness and dynamics of the earth. To discover the deeper meaning of one's self and the source of inspiration and action, one must learn to listen—within and without. The earth will speak when one is ready to hear and to the extent that one can listen: "I swear the earth shall surely be complete to him or her who shall be complete. The earth remains jagged and broken only to him or her who remains jagged and broken" (S.R.E.,3). Our senses are accustomed to the surface of things and the scientific method concerns itself only with the quantitative and physical. The poet, however, must plunge beneath the surface and gather for us the hidden spirit of each being. His invitation and proclamation directs our attention there:

Be not discouraged, keep on, there are divine things well envelop'd, I swear to you there are divine things more beautiful than words can tell (S.O.R.,9)

Only the kernel of every object nourishes; Where is he that tears off the husks for you and me?

Where is he that undergoes stratagems and envelopes for you and me? (S.O.R.,6).

The person who is spiritually sensitive to the earth and its dynamics finds himself or herself gradually shaped and transformed by them. Like a mother, the earth teaches, instructs and nourishes:

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...to her children the words of the eloquent dumb mother never fail....(S.R.E.,1).

Gradually one gains a sense of peace and purpose by absorbing the inner meanings and purposes of the earth. One sees that each thing is perfect and good, the earth, animals, vegetation, minerals, even what we call good and bad ("To Think of Time"). In the

universe that Whitman perceives, the perfection of the natural order is not a perfection of completion but a perfection of function. The beauty, truth or goodness of beings lies not in some ideal type abstracted from the concrete and formed by human standards. We should not create standards by which to judge the earth but shape our own actions and standards by those of the earth. We have no authority or power that does not come from the earth and have no right to formulate plans or policies that abrogate those of the earth:

I swear there is no greatness or power that does not emulate those of the earth, There can be no theory of any account unless it corroborate the theory of the earth, No politics, song, religion, behavior, or what not, is of account unless it compare with the amplitude of the earth, Unless it face the exactness, vitality, impartiality, rectitude of the earth (S.R.E.,3).

In his poem, "Salut au Monde," Whitman indeed tries to emulate the whole earth and to present its wonders to the reader. In this work he meticulously and tirelessly lists and salutes the geological, biological and cultural diversity of the planet. He expands himself and like a shaman takes the listener on a journey grand in scale and breath-taking in scope. The soul excitedly invites him on this journey:

O take my hand Walt Whitman! Such gliding wonders! such sights and sounds! Such join'd unended links, each hook'd to the next, Each answering all, each sharing the earth with all.

Significantly, the journey in "Salut au Monde" begins with the question, "What widens within you Walt Whitman?" To which the poet replies, "Within me latitude widens, longitude lengthens, Asia, Africa, Europe are to the east—America is provided for in the west." This is followed by the question, "What do you hear Walt Whitman?," which is answered by eighteen lines describing various sounds of the globe including: shouts of Australians, castanets of Spaniards, French liberty songs, the chirp of the Mexican muleteer, the Arab muezzin calling, the Hebrew reading his psalms, the Hindu teaching the ancient Vedas to his disciple, and so on. This section of the voyage is followed by the question, "What do you see Walt Whitman?" The answer consists of over one hundred lines of images from all over the world: various types of dwellings and people are mentioned, names of oceans, of mountain peaks, of rivers, of the great cities and rural areas, of various forests, plains, glaciers, and of the various classes and types of people. Whitman then salutes them all. But to make sure you believe his claim to indeed salute all, he adds another thirty lines or so listing Slavs, Russians, Norwegians, Africans, Danes, Icelanders, Sardinians, Bavarians, Chinamen, etc., and saluting them. He then adds—in pure Whitmanese:

Each of us inevitable, Each of us limitless—each of us with his or her right upon the earth, Each of us allow'd the eternal purports of the earth, Each of us here as divinely as any is here (S.A.M.,11).

Then in the final section he imagines the ecstatic journey itself as a participation in the movement and dynamics of the winds and waters of the planet:

My spirit has pass'd in compassion and determination around the whole earth... You vapors, I think I have risen with you, moved away to distant continents, and fallen down there, for reasons, I think I have blown with you winds; You waters I have finger'd every shore with you, I have run through what any river or strait of the globe has run through, I have taken my stand on the bases of peninsulas and on the high embedded rocks... (S.A.M.,13).

Whitman took seriously his claim that all things must be judged by the earth and understood in their relation to the larger dynamics of the cosmic-earth process. His own

poetry is a lifetime-attempt to illuminate the range and levels of these connections. His poetry is an exploration of individual identity and the common threads that connect our diversity, both in time and space. The mystery of being Walt Whitman, he seems to say, is the mystery of being anyone or anything. The quest to find out who we are and where we come from is in many ways a quest for origins. For in an evolving universe—to which Whitman held passionately—the full identity of anything not only includes its interconnectedness with the rest of the cosmos but its rootedness in the process that gave it birth and allows it to speak its "word" here and now as a word of the earth:

My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this air, Born
here of parents born here from parents the same, and their parents the same
(S.O.M.,1).

We are part of a process that links us with the most distant past. In the science of evolution as understood by Whitman one finds the organic process by which all beings arose and through which they passed on to their progeny the accumulations of the past. Evolution for Whitman is like the growth of a plant where each stage contributes to the furtherance of the life-process. And although the process leads from simple to more complex forms; and although the process is one of gradual spiritualization, each form and each stage is essential, perfect and, for Whitman, inevitable. Faith in the power and inevitability of this process gave Whitman great consolation and confidence in *his own historical* mission. One does not understand the significance of the past who, he would argue, has little grounds for hope that his or her work and efforts will be lasting;

I assert that all past days were what they must have been, And that they
could no-how have been better than they were, And that to-day is what is
must be... I know that the past was great and the future will be great, And I
know that both curiously conjoint in the present time...the centre of all days
("With Antecedents," 3).

The self that can expand to include the diversity of space can also expand to include the diversity of the ages that went before. This exercise interprets the past stages as one's own genesis and one's self as epitomizing, summarizing and justifying all that has gone before:

I am an acme of things accomplish'd, and I am encloser of things to be. My
feet strike an apex of the apices of the stairs, On every step bunches of
ages, and larger bunches between the steps, All duly travel'd, and still I
mount and mount.

Rise after rise bow the phantoms behind me, Afar down I see the huge first
Nothing, I know I was even there, I waited unseen and always, and slept
through the lethargic mist, And took my time, and took no hurt from the
fetid carbon.

Long I was hugg'd close—long and long.

Immense have been the preparations for me, Faithful and friendly the arms
that have help'd me....

Before I was born out of my mother generations guided me, My embryo
has never been torpid, nothing could overlay it.

For it the nebula cohered to an orb, The long slow strata piled to rest it on,
Vast vegetables gave it sustenance, Monstrous sauroids transported it in
their mouths and deposited it with care.

All forces have been steadily employ'd to complete and delight me, Now
on this spot I stand with my robust soul. (S.O.M.,44)

Elsewhere, Whitman exclaims:

I find I incorporate gneiss, coal, long-threaded moss, fruits, grains, esculent
roots, And am stucco'd with quadrupeds and birds all over (S.O.M.,31).

In Whitman's Lamarckian theory, the best traits of one generation are passed on to the next. Children not only embody parents' abilities and traits but subsequently add to them by their own efforts, passing the results on to their progeny. Hence each generation is better than the one before. Furthermore, as time goes on, the very mass of life, the biomass increases. Each generation has more children than the one previously and so evolution is both a growth in quality and quantity. There is an inner dynamism in this process that keeps it moving and developing. On the level of life this energy is sexual. Life, rather than retreating or diminishing in the face of death, is able to not only endure but to increase because of this basically erotic drive. Eros overcomes thanatos. But Whitman would further claim that eros increases with each generation, and the person in touch with the dynamics of evolution and the earth feels this urge:

Urge and urge and urge Always the procreant urge of the world. Out of
dimness opposite equals advance, always substance and increase, always
sex, Always a knit of identity, always distinction, always a breed of life
(S.O.M.,3).

The fact that animals and humans share this same history and are thereby united, helps explain why humans recognize something of themselves in other living beings. They are signposts, marking the way of our own long development.

I see in them and myself the same old law. The press of my foot to the
earth springs a hundred affections (S.O.M.,14).

They bring me tokens of myself, they evince them plainly in their
possession.

I wonder where they get those tokens, Did I pass that way huge times ago
and negligently drop them?

Myself moving forward then and now and forever, Gathering and showing
more always and with velocity, Infinite and omnigenous, and the like of
these among them, Not too exclusive toward the reachers of my
remembrancers... Picking out here one that I love, and now go with him on
brotherly terms. (S.O.M.,32)

Not only animals are to be given respect because of their place in the scheme of things, but also humans. Whitman opposed slavery and the horrible buying and selling of bodies (and hence souls) for reasons peculiarly his and not widespread in the 1860's. He had observed slave auctions and said,

A man's body at auction... Gentlemen look at this wonder, Whatever the
bids of the bidders they cannot be high enough for it, For it the globe lay
preparing quintillions of years without an animal or plant, For it the
revolving cycles truly and steadily roll'd... This is not only one man, this
the father of those who shall be fathers in their turns...of populous
states...of him countless immortal lives (S.B.E.,7)

This whole process is the embryogenesis of each person and gives to each person an inestimable value. It is cosmic blasphemy to demean him or her. It is the height of arrogance:

Do you think matter has cohered together from its diffuse float, And the soil is on the surface, and water runs and vegetation sprouts, For you only, and not for him and her? (S.B.E.,6)

The human's role in evolution is to love nature, to elevate it and to carry the earth-process forward:

We see, as in the universes of the material kosmos, after meteorological, vegetable, and animal cycles, man at last arise, born through them, to prove them, concentrate them, to turn upon them with wonder and love—to command them, adorn them, and carry them upwards into superior realms ("Preface", 1872).

This divine plan of "mystic evolution," is to be made clear by the poet-prophet. The events of Whitman's own day reveal a new stage in evolution: the completion of the Suez Canal and the transcontinental railroad, the underwater communications cable from Europe to America. Now for the first time the human species surrounds the globe and is united. The science of the west and the wisdom of the east meet. Humans of different races will now marry and the human family will enter a new stage. The procreant urge continues and the offspring increasingly will be global people:

Lo, soul, seest thou not God's purpose from the first? The earth to be spann'd, connected by network, The races neighbors, to marry and be given in marriage...the distant brought near. The lands to be welded together. (P.T.I.,2)

Yet for Whitman, neither the limits of the human spirit nor of the evolutionary process can be foreseen. What Whitman had

discovered and experienced of the meaning of the earth, of the dynamics of evolution, of the attraction of all beings for one another—led him to hope that at the end of the journey waits the perfection and completion of all these obscure hints:

My rendezvous is appointed, it is certain, The Lord will be there and wait till I come on perfect terms, The great Camerado, the lover true for whom I pine will be there (S.O.M.,45).

Just as his earthly lovers draw him forth, make him respond, so this distant Lover calls him even more powerfully. The Lover who will be met in the "afterward" by each person is the same Lover who will be there at the end of the whole evolutionary process. Nothing of value is lost, even if it is forgotten by us. No one is lost, even if unknown by us.

Not a mark, not a record remains—and yet all remains.

O I know that those men and women were not for nothing, any more than we are for nothing, I know that they belong to the scheme of the world every bit as much as we now belong.

Are those billions of men really gone? Are those women of the old experience of the earth gone? Do their lives, cities, arts, rest only with us? Did they achieve nothing for good for themselves?

I believe of all those men and women that fill'd the unnamed lands, every one exists this hour here or elsewhere invisible to us, In exact proportion to what he or she grew from in life, and out of what he or she did, felt, became, loved, sinn'd, in life.

I believe that was not the end of those nations or any person of them any more than this shall be the end of my nation, or of me...("Unnamed Lands").

Notes

1. All quotations are from the 1891 edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Abbreviated titles of individual poems are as follows:

C.W.F. "A Child Went Forth"

P.T.I. "Passage to India"

S.A.M. "Salut au Monde"

S.B.E. "I Sing the Body Electric"

S.O.M. "Song of Myself"

S.R.E. "A Song of the Rolling Earth"

2. In Louis Untermeyer, ed., *The Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1949), pp. 717-718.

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