

UNRAVELING WALT WHITMAN

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To my wife, Meredith, and our daughter, Maia

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Chapter One—Metaphorical Tailors: Thomas Carlyle and Walt Whitman

What too are all Poets, and moral Teachers, but a species of Metaphorical Tailors?

—Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*

Modern literary criticism fails to acknowledge the enormity of Thomas Carlyle's influence upon the thought and writing of his time, as well as the still resounding influence of his work upon modern literature. For example, we generally credit Ralph Waldo Emerson with establishing the Transcendentalist movement and its corresponding modes of literary discourse in America, while ignoring the fact that Emerson himself read and borrowed heavily from Carlyle in constructing his own philosophy. This becomes especially problematic when we encounter Walt Whitman, whose writing modern critics generally agree to be an extension or expansion of Emerson's philosophy, in spite of strong textual evidence that it unmistakably derives to a great extent from Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* and *Heroes and Hero Worship*. Fortunately, much in Carlyle's language and choice of metaphor reminds us of Whitman's indebtedness to him and, therefore, of the strands of Carlyle's influence that may still persist in literature through Whitman.

Fred Manning Smith was the last critic to attempt a systematic investigation into the relationship between Whitman and Carlyle, concluding that "much in Whitman that has been considered Emersonian may really derive from Carlyle; that as Carlyle may account for certain resemblances between Emerson and Whitman, so likewise he may account for certain differences; and that an important source of *Leaves of Grass* may be found in *Heroes* and *Sartor*."¹ While Smith bases his assertion upon similarities in

Whitman's and Carlyle's diction and technique, which are far too numerous to be accounted for by mere coincidence, he stops just short of discussing the potential significance contained in those specific elements of Carlyle's writing that Whitman chose to appropriate. It is my belief that a more focused investigation into the nature of Whitman's borrowings from Carlyle, taking into consideration Smith's previous findings, will yield up much in the way of an insight not only as to Whitman's poetic technique, but also his personal philosophy and cosmology, or view of man's relation to the universe.

Nowhere is Carlyle's influence upon Whitman or literature in general more plainly stated than by Whitman himself. In an 1881 essay entitled "Death of Thomas Carlyle," he writes that "as a representative author, a literary figure, no man else will bequeath to the future more significant hints of our stormy era...than Carlyle."² A few paragraphs later, in the same essay, he reinforces this idea by suggesting that the best "way to test how much he has left his country [is] to consider, or try to consider, for a moment, the array of British thought, the resultant *ensemble* of the last fifty years, as existing to-day, *but with Carlyle left out*," concluding that "it would be like an army with no artillery" [emphasis Whitman].³ Whitman was not alone in his admiration of Carlyle, but was instead one of many English and American thinkers to be inspired by the ideas of the Scottish historian and novelist.

Rodger L. Tarr's introduction to the latest edition of *Sartor Resartus* offers a list of some of Carlyle's most notable followers. The list itself is quite impressive from a literary standpoint, consisting of such names as Charles Dickens, Benjamin Disraeli, Anthony Trollope, George Eliot, Robert Browning, Matthew Arnold, Thomas Hardy,

Joseph Conrad, D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf. As Tarr notes, even this list still "[does] not consider the influence of *Sartor Resartus* upon non-English writers as diverse as Charles Baudelaire and Miguel de Unamuno, or Jorge Luis Borges and Yukio Mishima."⁴ In fact, it is difficult to even begin to estimate Carlyle's influence upon modern literature, since, as Tarr points out, "there has yet to be a thorough study on the relationship of [Carlyle] to literary movements and theoretical constructions."⁵ Instead, our knowledge of Carlyle's influence upon modern literature derives mostly from studies of authors who were themselves influenced by Carlyle.

As far-reaching as Carlyle's influence may have been throughout the world, nowhere was it more immediately discernible than in America, where writers like Walt Whitman, Henry David Thoreau, Herman Melville, and Emily Dickinson embraced and expanded Carlyle's concept of Transcendentalism. Whether or not these authors first learned of Transcendentalism directly from Carlyle or indirectly through Emerson, their debt to Carlyle is undeniable.⁶ Since the scope of this investigation does not permit for a comprehensive investigation into the nature of Carlyle's influence upon each of these American authors, this study will limit itself to showing his influence upon the writings of Walt Whitman specifically. Before turning to Whitman, however, we should briefly revisit Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* and *Heroes and Hero-Worship*, in order to identify the first seeds from which Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* may have sprouted.

Sartor Resartus, thought by some in Carlyle's time to be a divinely inspired work—and called by others a "clotted heap of nonsense"—is, at bottom, a difficult read. As Tarr points out, Carlyle "anticipated early in composition the necessarily sophisticated nature of his audience, and quickly turned *Sartor Resartus* into an intellectual chess

match in which the author's expressions anticipate the readers' impressions."⁷ The very title of the novel, which in English translates to "Tailor Retailor," hints at Carlyle's intention to defy traditional literary styles and techniques in order to weave a new tapestry of language. To this effect, it operates on many narrative levels, blending the identities of the author, narrator, and subject of the work to such an extent that the reader is often left uncertain as to whose opinion the text is presenting at any given time.

Despite all of the text's uncertainties, however, one theme remains constant throughout *Sartor Resartus*, which Carlyle summarizes in an atypical moment of narrative clarity when he says that:

Whatsoever sensibly exists, whatsoever represents Spirit to Spirit, is properly a Clothing, a suit of Raiment, put on for a season, and to be laid off. Thus in this one pregnant subject of Clothes, rightly understood, is included all that men have thought, dreamed, done, and been: the whole external Universe and what it holds is but Clothing; and the essence of all Science lies in the Philosophy of Clothes.⁸

The remainder of the novel is at once both a practical and metaphysical exploration of this "Philosophy of Clothes." For Carlyle, clothing serves as the most immediate and tangible image of mankind's attempt at naming (and, therefore, understanding) the universe. Only through a study of man's clothes, or the signs and symbols he places upon himself and the universe, does Carlyle believe we can come closer to understanding the nature of the universe, or in the words of Immanuel Kant, the "thing-in-itself."

This approach to the universe, as a "thing-in-itself," only knowable through its phenomena, serves as the primary basis of Carlyle's metaphysic in *Sartor Resartus*. In "Religion and the Poet-Prophet," one of the few modern acknowledgements of Carlyle's influence upon Whitman, David Kuebrich explains that, "For Carlyle, the "grand

characteristic" of Kant's philosophy was his distinction between the Understanding (*Verstand*, the faculty of ordinary reasoning) and the Reason (*Vernunft*) whose domain was "that holier region, where Poetry, and Virtue and Divinity abide."⁹ Kuebrich goes on to explain how, "in *Sartor Resartus*, the "Pure Reason" is presented as the source of religious revelation or the true scripture 'whereof all other Bibles are but Leaves'."¹⁰ From this perspective, it becomes clearer as to where Whitman's motivation for writing *Leaves of Grass* as a new American Bible may have originated. *Sartor* seems like Carlyle's own attempt at doing this very same thing, of conveying the transcendent mystery of the universe in a new language of prophecy, fit for his time.¹¹

In the novel, as an embodiment of the altogether heightened, or "Transcendental," perspective afforded to those capable of stripping away the garments with which we humans clothe existence, Carlyle uses the character of Herr Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, "Professor of Things in General."¹² Readers rely upon Teufelsdröckh's "editor" in the novel for accounts of the Professor, however, and never in fact actually behold the man. Instead, accounts of him are provided by this anonymous editor to the text's narrator, who is himself a character in the novel, burdened by the difficulties of sorting out the bags of manuscripts Teufelsdröckh's editor heaps upon him. The narrator explains that:

Teufelsdröckh undertakes no less than to expound the moral, political, even religious Influences of Clothes; he undertakes to make manifest, in its thousandfold bearings, this grand Proposition, that Man's earthly interests 'are all hooked and buttoned together, and held up, by Clothes.' He says in so many words, 'Society is founded upon Cloth;' and again, 'Society sails through the Infinitude on Cloth, as on Faust's Mantle, or rather like the Sheet of clean and unclean beasts in the Apostle's Dream; and without such Sheet or Mantle, would sink to endless depths, or mount to inane limbos, and in either case be no more.'"¹³

This passage captures the conceptual distance Carlyle traverses in *Sartor Resartus*, from a practical discussion of the significance of clothes to a mystical speculation on the very fabric of existence. Carlyle's metaphor of clothing can mean either the everyday costumes humans wear in order to hide their nakedness or it can be in reference to the layer of illusory appearances through which man views an otherwise naked universe.

On a metaphysical level, Carlyle uses the metaphor of clothing to symbolize the means by which the universe is interconnected, an immense fabric fastened together by "hook and button." In his mind, all events in time and space are but a segment of this celestial cloth, and this celestial cloth is infinite and explainable only through the human practices of religion, prophecy, and poetry, which allow individuals an insight, if only for a moment, into the heart of all things. Teufelsdröckh's editor finds this model especially compelling and worthy of attention:

Those mysterious ideas on Time, which merit consideration [...] may by and by prove significant. Still more may his somewhat peculiar view of Nature; the decisive Oneness he ascribes to Nature. How all Nature and Life are but one *Garment*, a 'Living Garment,' woven and ever a-weaving in the 'Loom of Time.'"¹⁴

This mystic passage hints at the concepts of reincarnation and indestructibility to which Carlyle was exposed in his readings of Eastern philosophies, and speaks of Carlyle's own transcendental belief in an eternally recurring cycle of death and rebirth, which will become an overarching theme that Whitman adopts and often returns to in composing *Leaves of Grass*. We see Whitman first reiterating this idea of the ever-renewing nature of existence in the opening lines of "Song of Myself," where he writes of "every atom of blood, form'd from this soil, this air, | Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their parents the same."¹⁵ To the same effect, he writes in section six that "All

goes onward and outward, nothing collapses, | And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier," and finally, in ending the poem, Whitman writes, "Do you see O my brothers and sisters? | It is not chaos or death—it is form, union, plan—it is eternal life—it is Happiness."¹⁶

Most important in Carlyle's conception of the universe is his metaphor of cloth, however, which he sees as the essential fabric serving to connect the universe at all points. He writes that, "Even as, for Hindoo Worshipers, the pagoda is not less sacred than the God; so do I too worship the hollow cloth Garment with Equal fervor, as when it contained the Man: nay, with more, for I now fear no deception, of myself, or of others."¹⁷ Man's choice of garments for the universe, the signs he has imposed upon its various manifestations, all serve to signify the universe itself, but still are an imperfect vesture, capable of being seen through by those enlightened enough. Finally, Carlyle writes in *Sartor* that these glimpses into the heart of the universe are always ultimately veiled by the ever onward flow of both space and time, which make a determinate assessment of the universe impossible, but allow fleeting glimpses into its grandeur:

But deepest of all illusory Appearances, for hiding Wonder, as for many other ends, are your two fundamental world-enveloping Appearances, SPACE and TIME. These, as spun and woven for us from before Birth itself, to clothe our celestial ME for dwelling here, and yet to blind it,—lie all-embracing, as the universal canvas, or warp and woof, whereby all minor Illusions, in this Phantasm Existence, weave and paint themselves. In vain, while here on Earth, shall you endeavor to strip them off; you can, at best, but rend them asunder for moments, and look through."¹⁸

According to Carlyle, temporary forms in space and time misrepresent the magnitude and immensity of the universe and can be thought of as a human convention serving to both "clothe our celestial ME for dwelling here, and yet to blind it." As much as the seer

attempts to transcend the world of illusory appearances by tearing away its wrappings, "at best, [he] can but rend them asunder for moments." These moments in which he sees beyond the universe's wrappings, however, distinguish the poet and prophet, and allow him temporary access to the rarefied air attained by former seers.

We will soon come to identify this same habit of reverting to the language of textiles in Walt Whitman's own most mystical works regarding the nature of the universe, such as in "Song of Myself," where he tells of his own weaving of the celestial mystery into his thought and poetry: "And these tend inward to me, and I tend outward to them, | And such as it is to be of these more or less I am, | And of these one and all I weave the song of myself."¹⁹ Also, we will later see how Whitman extends this metaphor of clothing by paralleling it in much of his work with its binary opposite, nakedness. Before turning to Whitman, however, we must still address Carlyle's *Heroes*, which we know Whitman to have reviewed along with *Sartor Resartus* for the Brooklyn *Daily Eagle* in 1846, two years before he would begin making notes for *Leaves of Grass*.²⁰

Five years after *Sartor Resartus* was first published in Boston in 1836, Carlyle published *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, & the Heroic in History*, which incorporates in many areas of its narrative the same metaphor of cloth that we find in *Sartor*. The text consists of six lectures in which Carlyle uses notable historical figures to illustrate the various means by which heroism is denoted. He uses the Norse god Odin to illustrate his concept of the hero as divinity, Mahomet, the founder of Islam, to show the hero as prophet, Dante and Shakespeare to represent the hero as poet, Luther and Knox to symbolize the hero as priest, Johnson, Rousseau, and Burns to show the hero as a man of letters, and finally Napoleon and Cromwell as examples of the hero as king. His

expressed aim is to investigate the conditions under which "Great Men" have been cultivated throughout history, as well as to identify the characteristics which predispose certain individuals to heroism.

Brought up a Calvinist, Carlyle's own system of belief is decidedly deterministic. He believes that fate, in the form of "Nature," every so often provides for mankind an alternative to the unthinking masses, an isolated individual who, through revolutionary thought and action, changes the very path of history. As to the socio-historical argument against this type of hero-worship, Carlyle writes pointedly and at length in *Heroes*:

He was 'the creature of the Time,' they say; the Time called him forth, the Time did everything, he nothing. [...] This seems to me but melancholy work. The Time call forth? Alas, we have known Times *call* loudly enough for their great man; but not find him when they called! He was not there; Providence had not sent him; the Time, *calling* its loudest, had to go down to confusion and wreck because he would not come when called. For if we will think of it, no Time need have gone to ruin, could it have *found* a man great enough, a man wise and good enough: wisdom to discern truly what the Time wanted [...].²¹

According to this view, "Great Men" are not the inevitable products of history, but are instead solely responsible for the perpetuation and progress of civilization. In Carlyle's estimation, it is only through these great individuals that their societies aspired to greatness, and without such heroes, there would be no civilizations or histories of which to speak.

In the first section of *Heroes*, "The Hero as Divinity," Carlyle explains that the Norse god Odin was probably at one time a real person, and that only through legends of his earthly exploits did he come to be viewed as a god in the eyes of his people. As to the Norse system of beliefs, Carlyle finds that it evolved naturally from pagan beginnings into the worship of a single image who embodied the Norse belief in *Wuotan* (the

etymological root of the word Odin), or supreme power and divinity. Carlyle explains that these Norse people, similar to Whitman's adopted persona in *Leaves of Grass*, were "very genuine, very great and manlike," and were characterized by "a broad simplicity" or "rusticity," which distinguished their system of beliefs, in Carlyle's mind, from the "light playfulness of the old Greek Paganism."²² Carlyle writes that it is "a certain homely truthfulness and rustic strength, a great rude sincerity" that differentiates the Norse system of belief from all others.

We cannot overlook Carlyle's praise of the Norse quality of plainness here, as the same quality will come to characterize Walt Whitman's poetry and distinguish it from that of his contemporaries. Whitman's use of common, everyday imagery as a metaphor for the mysterious universe, as well as his plainness of speech, seems to borrow heavily from Carlyle's portrayal of the rugged ways of the Norse people. Carlyle himself uses two such everyday images to represent the universe, vegetation and cloth, which he returns to throughout the work, and which seem to have especially influenced Whitman in his composition of *Leaves of Grass*. In one particular passage from *Heroes*, we see both metaphors emerge, as Carlyle explains the Norse people's customary use of the image of a tree to represent the universe:

Igdrasil, the Ash-tree of Existence, has its roots deep down in the kingdoms of Hela or Death; its trunk reaches up heaven-high, spreads its boughs over the whole Universe: it is the Tree of Existence. At the foot of it, in the Death-kingdom, sit Three *Nornas*, Fates,—the Past, Present, Future; watering its roots from the Sacred Well. Its 'boughs,' with their buddings and disleafings,—events, things suffered, things done, catastrophes,—stretch through all lands and times. Is not every leaf of it a biography, every fibre there an act or word?²³

From this view, the universe can be seen as an interconnected expanse, and every aspect of the universe can be thought of as a fibre or leaf from the tree of existence. Both images, that of vegetation and cloth, symbolize the means by which man and nature are inextricably woven from the same primordial essence.

On the transcendent nature of pagan worship, Carlyle says in the same chapter of *Heroes*, "And look what perennial fibre of truth was in that. To us also, through every star, through every blade of grass, is not a God made visible, if we will open our minds and eyes?"²⁴ Again, in this metaphor of vegetation, we see Carlyle weaving the universe into a single interconnected tapestry, which is capable of being sensed, if not fully understood, through even the most cursory examination of its elements. Whitman makes similar use of the metaphors of vegetation and cloth in a section of "Song of Myself," in which a child inquires of the narrator as to the nature of the grass:

A child said *What is the grass?* Fetching it to me with full hands;
How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is anymore than he.

I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff
woven.

Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,
A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropt,
Bearing the owner's name someway in the corners, that we may see and
remark, and say *Whose?*

Or I guess the grass is itself a child, the produced babe of the vegetation.²⁵

Like the great tree of Norse legend, the grass in Whitman's poem is representative of all of the universe's potential manifestations. First, it symbolizes man's relationship to the universe, in the form of Whitman's "disposition, out of hopeful green stuff woven." Next, the grass is a piece of cloth, a "handkerchief of the lord," hinting at some transcendental

maker or creator. Finally, the grass, "itself a child, the produced babe of vegetation," symbolizes the ever-renewing nature of the universe, in which, ultimately, "the smallest sprout shows there is really no death."²⁶ Whitman's imagery in this section of "Song of Myself" is unmistakably reminiscent of Carlyle's in *Heroes*, and this similarity in metaphors is by no means isolated to this single instance; in fact, the influence of *Heroes* can be seen throughout *Leaves of Grass*.

In the next section of *Heroes*, "The Hero as Prophet," Carlyle returns to the metaphors of vegetation and cloth as he traces the system of Islamic belief from its origin in the mind of its founder and the writer of the Koran, Mahomet, through to its eventual spread across the world. Carlyle writes particularly about Mahomet's overthrowing of idols, of how he related instead to something transcendental that could not be contained within idols. Mahomet insists instead upon the idea of divinity, and Carlyle offers an overview of these insights in his own words:

That all these Idols and Formulas were nothing, miserable bits of wood; and there was One God in and over all; and we must leave all idols and look to Him. That God is great; and that there is nothing else great! He is the Reality. Wooden Idols are not real; He is real. He made us at first, sustains us yet; we and all things are but the shadow of Him; a transitory garment veiling the Eternal Splendour.²⁷

As in *Sartor*, Carlyle here again reminds us of the "transitory garment" that in all ages veils the true nature of existence, which in Mahomet's time came in the form of idolatry. In the place of traditional pre-Islamic idolatry, Mahomet sought to substitute his vision of Allah, or the version of God he presents in the Koran.

Once again, we find a parallel exploration of this same theme in *Leaves of Grass*. In a passage from "Song of Myself," Whitman directly addresses the version of God

Mahomet presents in the Koran, probably as he learned of it through *Heroes*, as well as various other gods (including Odin), and ultimately concludes that they too are but transitory idols:

Taking myself the exact dimensions of Jehovah,
Lithographing Kronos, Zeus his son, and Hercules his
 grandson,
Buying drafts of Osiris, Isis, Belus, Brahma, Buddha,
In my portfolio placing Manito loose, Allah on a leaf, the
 crucifix engraved,
With Odin and the hideous-faced Mexitli and every idol and image,
Taking them all for what they are worth and not a cent more,
Admitting they were alive and did the work of their days, [...] ²⁸

Whitman considers Allah equally alongside all of the other gods humans have worshipped over the course of time, including the closely related Christian monotheistic concept as symbolized by the image of the crucifix. Though arguments persist over the true nature and extent of Whitman's beliefs, the narrator of this section of "Song of Myself" includes Christianity among the list of idols that "were alive and did the work of their time." That Whitman writes about Christianity, along with these other religions, in the past tense indicates his insight into the fundamental breakdown that was transpiring in the belief of his time as a result of the Enlightenment. In the place of "every idol and image," Whitman instead substitutes man as the true embodiment of nature to which all these other religions originally referred.

Where Whitman champions mankind above all of nature's other creations, he draws from Carlyle's example of Mahomet replacing the idols of his people with the idea of an omnipotent being. Carlyle summarizes Mahomet's philosophy in the Arabic phrase, "*Allah akbar*, God is Great," and concludes that this same fundamental, transcendent belief is what has compelled all prophets in all times, and that whatever religion one

considers, "If it [does] not succeed in meaning this it means nothing." Compare this analysis of the value of transcendent belief with Whitman's own estimation in "Song of Myself":

These are really the thoughts of all men in all ages, they are not original
with me,
If they are not yours as much as mine they are nothing, or next to nothing,
If they are not the riddle and the untying of the riddle they are nothing.
If they are not just as close as they are distant they are nothing.²⁹

This passage seems like Whitman's acknowledgement of his place within the line of prophetic souls who came before him, such as Mahomet, who, like Whitman, were but writing "the thoughts of all men in all ages." Like Mahomet's Koran, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* is both "the riddle and the untying of the riddle," encompassing the mystery of the universe within its contents, while veiling this mystery in the language of prophecy.³⁰ In Whitman's mind, any writing that does not likewise contribute to the perpetuation of this timeless message is "nothing, or next to nothing."

Leaves of Grass must be understood then as Whitman's attempt at carrying on this prophetic tradition, and especially in how, like the prophets of the past, he does not adhere to the conventions of his time, nor those of his chosen mode of discourse. Rather than communicating his beliefs through a preexisting literary form, Whitman "tailored" the poetry of his time to meet the demands of his lofty ideas. Such was also the case with two other prominent writers who Carlyle examines in the third section of *Heroes*, which shall be the final section we explore at length. In "The Hero as Poet," Carlyle explains how exile, combined with their keen intellect, afforded Dante and Shakespeare with conditions sufficient to aspire to literary heroism. Only in Dante's exile from Florence, when finally freed from the garments of state and government, did the true nature of the

existence present itself to him, which he saw simultaneously as a paradise, purgatory, and hell. In the case of Shakespeare, Carlyle relies on the legend of the poet's exile from Stratford for poaching to explain his exile to London and subsequent literary career, in which he made of the city's people and events a world that we are still capable of identifying through his words. Carlyle suggests Dante and Shakespeare are also isolated by their greatness, that "they dwell apart, in a kind of royal solitude; none equal, none second to them: in the general feeling of the world, a certain transcendentalism, a glory as of complete perfection, invests these two."³¹

The poetic hero, represented here by Dante and Shakespeare, shares much in common with the prophetic hero of Carlyle's second chapter. Carlyle says the two are the same "in this important respect especially, That they have penetrated both of them into the sacred mystery of the Universe; what Goethe calls 'the open secret!'"³² Carlyle goes on to define this 'open secret' as "the Divine Idea of the World, that which lies at the bottom of Appearance [...]; of which all Appearance, from the starry sky to the grass of the field, but especially the Appearance of man and his work, is but the *vesture*, the embodiment that renders it visible." Here again we see Carlyle relating the world of appearance, in the form of "the starry sky" and "the grass of the field," with clothing, or the "*vesture*, the embodiment that renders it visible." The image of grass here also reminds us of the recurring theme of vegetation that we see in *Heroes*, which first began with Carlyle's recounting the legend of the Norse tree, Igrasil, and which continues throughout the work, and may perhaps have contributed to Whitman's choosing *Leaves of Grass* as the title of his work.

In Carlyle's investigation of Dante's work and technique in the third section of *Heroes*, we find yet another probable influence upon Whitman's writing. Carlyle explains in this section his belief that "all *old* Poems, Homer's and the rest, are authentically Songs," and suggests that "whatsoever is not *sung* is properly no Poem, but a piece of Prose cramped into jingling lines."³³ Carlyle especially admires Dante's *Divine Comedy*, writing that "I give Dante my highest praise when I say of his *Divine Comedy* that it is, in all senses, genuinely a Song." Whitman, who repeatedly refers to his own poems as "songs" or "chants" must have internalized this concept and knowingly incorporated it within his own writing style. We see this within such poems as "Song of Myself," "A Song for Occupations," "Song of the Answerer," "Song of the Broad Axe," "Song of the Open Road," "Song of Prudence," and "Chants Democratic," just to name a few poems from the first two editions.

Another quality Carlyle attributes to Dante is a peculiar insight, which intuitively sees into the heart of all matters. Carlyle writes that "[Dante] is world-great not because he is world-wide, but because he is world-deep. Through all objects he pierces as it were down into the heart of Being."³⁴ We see similar depths in the work of Whitman, such as in "Song of Myself," where he writes "My voice goes after what my eyes cannot reach, | With the twirl of my tongue I encompass worlds and volumes of worlds."³⁵ Notice that Whitman writes specifically of his voice in this passage and ignores the fact that the poem itself consists of written words, once again reinforcing the notion of poetry being fundamentally a song or chant. This insistence on voice or speech at once lends presence to Whitman's thoughts and opposes the absence of a spoken dimension characteristic of writing. The immortality, or perpetual presence, of the soul and of all matter is a major

theme throughout *Leaves of Grass*, which Whitman often revisits. In concluding "Song of Myself," Whitman mystically hints at his own immortality, as well as the essential immortality of all matter:

I depart as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,
I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags.

I bequeath 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.³⁶

Though Whitman acknowledges that he, like all humans, must eventually succumb to death, he is certain, as he states earlier in the "Song of Myself," that "All goes onward and outward, nothing collapses," and that matter but changes its form and is always and will ever be a part of the universe. Still, Whitman recognizes his soul throughout the poem as something both separate from and greater than the flesh that contains it, and believes that, through his words and his immortal soul, he will always remain an "adjunct of the earth."

Whitman's belief in attaining immortality through his songs is here reminiscent of Shakespeare, who Carlyle discusses along with Dante in "The Hero as Poet," and who in his eighteenth sonnet wrote, "So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see | So long lives this, and this gives life to thee." Shakespeare too recognized that his own literary immortality was inexorably tied to his writings and that they alone ensured his posterity. What Carlyle praises in Shakespeare above all else is that "the thing he looks at reveals

not this or that face of it, but its inmost heart and generic secret: it dissolves itself as in light before him, so that he discerns the perfect structure of it."³⁷ Like the prophets Carlyle previously discusses in *Heroes*, Shakespeare was capable of seeing deeper into the very essence of things, and this combined with his wit and literary ingenuity did indeed result in his literary immortality. In concluding this section, Carlyle suggests that Shakespeare provided for England what all great nations require: "that it get an articulate voice; that it produce a man who will speak forth melodiously what the heart of it means."³⁸

Taking this advice to heart, Walt Whitman set out in America to create "an articulate voice" for the still young nation, capable of speaking "forth melodiously what the heart of it means." To this end, Whitman adopted a free-verse form that attempted to capture the ruggedness and rusticity of a still untamed America and its people. He would not be classified along with the other American poets who had unsuccessfully attempted to tame the American spirit by placing it within the framework of a European poetic, but instead saw in the pioneering spirit of America one that matched his own. This pioneering spirit sought to break new ground and to expand its scope beyond the confines of a strictly European way of thinking. Similarly, Whitman saw in the American spirit something that could not be conveyed in foreign words or forms, but that required a language of its own in order to best be understood. An example of this awareness comes in the concluding stanzas of "Song of Myself," where he is just as likely writing of America as himself when he says that, like the hawk soaring above him in this section of the poem, "I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable."³⁹

It would seem that Whitman's relentless conviction was an extension of the examples set forth by Carlyle in *Heroes*. Like the revolutionary individuals in Carlyle's lectures, Whitman would not blindly acquiesce to the conventions of his time, but, where his beliefs were concerned, would instead uncompromisingly "sound [his] barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world." Still, like these heroes, Whitman did not exist in a vacuum, and was just as subject as were they to the inescapable influence of precursors. In Whitman's case, this influence came primarily from Thomas Carlyle, whose ideas and images resound throughout *Leaves of Grass*. From Carlyle's depiction of the Norse people, Whitman adopted the rugged persona that would characterize his work, as well as a belief in the fundamentally organic nature of the universe, as was expressed by the Norse in their image Igdrasil. In Carlyle's Mahomet, Whitman found an example of both the conviction necessary in order express his beliefs and the courage to abide by them, regardless of the immediate or potential consequences. Finally, from Carlyle's examples of Dante and Shakespeare, Whitman used his homeland as the setting for his songs, and like Dante and Shakespeare, these songs would ultimately come to signify the nation, giving it a voice where before there had only been echoes or utter silence.

Any proper investigation into Whitman's place within the genealogy of world literature should consider the effects of *Heroes* and *Sartor* upon him. That Carlyle had faults of his own and possessed opinions that would be unpopular in today's postmodern, hegemonic society is unquestionable.⁴⁰ Still, these faults do not change the fact of Carlyle's enormous popularity and influence upon mid-nineteenth century thought, and especially in America. Through both Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman, Carlyle's transcendentalist beliefs would evolve into a uniquely American literature, discernible

from all others before it in both its boldness and its ability to encompass the nation's pioneering spirit. If there are numerous similarities between Emerson and Whitman, it is largely attributable to both authors "having drunk from the same source," as Fred Manning Smith first pointed out in his 1940 essay.⁴¹

Where Emerson transformed Carlyle's transcendentalism into a practical philosophical system, however, Whitman breathed life into it, transforming it, in Nietzschean terms, into a Dionysian reality to be lived and celebrated, where in Emerson it had been an Apollonian object understandable only in aesthetic terms. Whatever can be said to be aesthetically pleasing in Whitman is secondary in order of importance to his fundamental message, because, as Jorge Luis Borges pointed out in a 1968 lecture on Walt Whitman at the University of Chicago, "in Walt Whitman the words are less important than what lies behind the words."⁴² What lies behind the words of Whitman is a mystical ancestry carried on from the likes of Mahomet, Dante, and Shakespeare, but most notably from Thomas Carlyle. We see especially in the metaphors of cloth and vegetation a direct link between Carlyle and Whitman, which, given further investigation, may yield much insight into the mysticism of both.

In both men's works, we see vegetation symbolizing the interconnected nature of the earth and universe. Where Carlyle found the Norse legend of Igdrasil to be an exquisite representation of the universe, however, Whitman instead chose the image of grass to express man's transcendent relation to the universe and to all things. Both men also repeatedly return to the image of cloth and fabric when describing the universe; Carlyle sees everything as a raiment or vesture used to veil the true nature of reality, while Whitman uses the image of cloth as a reminder of how all things and events are

fundamentally interwoven. One need only to turn to *Leaves of Grass* and its numerous references to cloth, fabric, thread, and weaving in order to reinforce this fact, as well as to begin understanding the particular significance of these images within Whitman's work.

II. The Threads that were Spun are Gather'd: Whitman's Use of Textiles

The threads that were spun are gather'd, the weft crosses the warp, the pattern is systematic.

—Walt Whitman, "To Think of Time"

My previous chapter examines Thomas Carlyle's influence upon Walt Whitman, and especially Carlyle's influence upon Whitman's choice of poetic imagery. From Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* and *Heroes and Hero-Worship*, Whitman borrowed a language of textiles that would come to permeate *Leaves of Grass*. This language operates on both a literal and abstract level, and can be classified in both men's work according to its varying uses within differing narrative contexts. While each uses clothing ostensibly in his writing as a general means of describing his human subjects, just as often these images related to cloth can be seen as a recurring metaphor that represents a shared system of beliefs. By examining the cases in which these metaphors begin to appear systematically within the writing of both men, one may begin to understand the significance of this language of textiles within the context of their transcendentalist mode of thought.

In this chapter, I will define and explore three principal meanings associated with the metaphors of cloth and weaving in Whitman's poetry. Whitman followed Carlyle's lead in using the image of clothing first to denote an individual's place and function within society, as indicated by his garments. Where, in *Sartor Resartus*, Carlyle saw in the opulent fineries of the wealthy a representation of "Dandical Self-worship," he also saw in the clothing of the poor, in contrast, a symbol of "Drudgical Earth-worship."⁴³

Likewise, Whitman recognized and acknowledged the means by which society distinguishes between its members on the basis of their attire, and most often in his poetry he emphasized the illusory nature of these distinctions. Whitman sought instead to arrive at what lay hidden behind a person's clothing, at those transcendental qualities which would denote a soul that exists separately from the self. In his poetry, Whitman often stripped his subjects of their clothes in order to examine the naked soul. Beyond the realm of appearances, as symbolized by clothing, Whitman saw evidence of the transcendental in every human. Still, he and Carlyle acknowledged that one can never altogether disregard the world of appearances; as it alone serves as the link between humans and the transcendental forces at work in the universe.

A more mystical version of the metaphor of clothing next comes to symbolize in the works of both men the illusory garments humans impose upon an ultimately unknowable universe in order to understand it by its outward appearances. In this way, transcendentalism resembles phenomenological thinking, which also suggests the concept of an underlying essence operating behind the realm of outward appearances. Carlyle and Whitman, too, saw in even the most commonplace events, evidence of a transcendental force at work in the universe, which defied any more explanation than was apparent in the phenomena it elicited. Throughout *Sartor Resartus* and *Leaves of Grass*, Carlyle and Whitman use the language of textiles and the metaphor of clothing to signify this realm of illusory appearances, as well as to illustrate their shared belief in how even these earthly garments are but individual threads composing the far vaster fabric of the cosmos.

Finally, the metaphor of weaving represents to Carlyle and Whitman the process whereby the fabric of reality is joined, as well as the fundamentally interconnected nature

of the universe. As I shall begin to explain at the close of this chapter (and detail more extensively in the next), both thinkers' mystic insights resulted in their corresponding view of the universe as a single tapestry, into which all of history's events are woven together and thereby joined. They saw this tapestry as encompassing all of space and time, and space and time as the loom from which the threads of history originate. In this way, Whitman and Carlyle's examination of clothing, as well as the realm of appearances it denotes, may be seen as a natural transition toward their ascribing to the universe the characteristic of being fundamentally interwoven, or connected such that all of the events in the universe can be explained or understood through their relationship to the whole.

Before exploring these metaphorical categories further, it is important to understand the system of belief which lies behind both men's writing, as it is expressed in this language of textiles. What links Carlyle and Whitman is a profound reverence for the "transcendental," the belief that some greater underlying force is at play in the universe which transcends explanation, but can be recognized at work in everyday events. Neither a religion nor a philosophy, properly speaking, transcendentalism may best be thought of as an almost pagan reverence for the inexplicable forces at work behind the scenes in the universe. As to the relation of transcendentalism to philosophy, Carlyle writes in *Sartor Resartus*, "what is philosophy throughout but a continual battle against Custom; an ever-renewed effort to *transcend* the sphere of blind custom, and so become Transcendental."⁴⁴ Transcendentalism begins to appear, then, as more of a nebulous category of belief, which allows for both philosophy and divinity, but does not necessarily entail either. Rather than attempting to transform their mystic insights into a systematic philosophy, as would Emerson, Carlyle and Whitman sought instead to exhibit

in their writing the transcendental majesty they recognized in even the most mundane events.

Both saw in the commonest events not only a reminder of the transcendental, but also a reminder of the world of appearances which separates humanity from the transcendental. As a metaphor for this world of appearances, Carlyle adopted the language of textiles, writing in *Sartor*, "The thing visible, nay the thing Imagined, the thing in any way conceived as Visible, what is it but a Garment, a Clothing of the higher, celestial Invisible, unimaginable, formless, dark with excess of bright?"⁴⁵ Carlyle maintains such a prophetic tone throughout *Sartor*, and always returns to images related to thread or cloth in the process. We can only surmise that it is from *Sartor* and Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero-Worship*, both of which Whitman reviewed for the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* in 1848, that Whitman derived the language of textiles found throughout *Leaves of Grass*.

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From the very first poem of the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* (originally untitled, but which Whitman would come to call "Song of Myself"), the poet makes extensive use of the language of textiles. Within the poem's first hundred lines, Whitman introduces the metaphor of weaving by replying to a child that asks him "*What is the Grass?*" that it "must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff woven."⁴⁶ The grass here becomes the transitory garment whereby Whitman first introduces his concept of self to the poem, which the poet considers to be something altogether separate from the soul. To this effect, he writes just a few lines earlier in the poem that "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."⁴⁷ Neither the self nor the soul can be expressed in the terms of the other, but can only be apprehended by outward appearances. As we shall see, Whitman seeks to get at the transcendental essence of the soul and the self by stripping both of their outward appearances in order to expose their true nature.

In section seven of the poem, Whitman writes, "Undrape! you are not guilty to me, nor stale nor discarded, | I see through the broadcloth and gingham [...]"⁴⁸ No matter the quality of the person's garment, Whitman looks beyond it into the self and soul of the wearer, and does not pass judgment, but believes all humans to be "manifold objects, no two alike and every one good."⁴⁹ This marks a point of departure in Whitman's writing from that of his precursor Thomas Carlyle, in that Carlyle saw humans as fundamentally and essentially unequal creatures. As Fred Manning Smith points out, one of the primary differences in these two systems of thought is that "Carlyle believes some are born to be heroes and some to follow the heroes; Whitman believes that in America every man can be the Hero."⁵⁰ In every newborn American babe, Whitman saw a contributor to the still young nation, and, in this way, a hero in his or her own right.

It should come as no surprise, then, that Whitman uses the image of a newborn babe in section eight of "Song of Myself" to illustrate the essence of the transcendental in its purest, unadulterated form. "The little one sleeps in its cradle," Whitman writes, "I lift the gauze and look a long time, and silently brush away flies with my hand."⁵¹ In order to gaze upon the soul of the child, Whitman must only part the fabric separating him from it, a thin veil which still has yet to be fully determined by time and circumstances. The soul of the child too will inevitably become part of the world of appearances, indistinguishable even to itself from its own garments, but for now only the thinnest of veils serves to hide

it. Whether inherited or imposed, Whitman realized that all garments are but a trapping, illusory garments binding their wearers to the world of appearances. Himself having been freed from the world of illusory appearances, Whitman speculates on the transmutability and immortality of the soul when he writes that "I pass death with the dying and birth with the new wash'd babe and am not contain'd between my hat and boots."⁵²

Whitman realized that clothing merely represented the world of outward appearances, and sought to transcend this world of appearances in his poetry by looking beyond people's dress and into the very essence of their being; and, in this respect, he can be considered a liberator of the human spirit. A concrete example of this is provided in section ten of "Song of Myself," in which Whitman writes of assisting a slave in flight from his master:

The runaway slave came to my house and stopt outside,
I heard his motion crackling the twigs of the woodpile,
Through the swung half-door of the kitchen I saw him limpsy and weak,
And went where he sat on a log and led him in and assured him,
And brought water and fill'd a tub for his sweated body and bruis'd feet,
And gave him a room that entered my own, and gave him some coarse
clean clothes, [...] ⁵³

It is worth noting that this passage from "Song of Myself" appears in the earliest edition of *Leaves of Grass*, and, inasmuch, exhibits Whitman's insight as to the nation's preexisting division over the issue of slavery, as well as foreshadows his role as a nurse to both sides during the Civil War. In giving the slave a change of garments, Whitman is not only helping to disguise him from his pursuers, but is also freeing him from the implications of his old garments, which signify his place in the world as a slave. The "coarse clean clothes" Whitman gives the slave represent the ability to change one's self through the process of changing one's outer garments.⁵⁴ With a fresh change of clothes,

the slave may start anew in constructing his own identity, separate from the identities imposed upon him by previous masters. In the slave's relentless pursuit of freedom, Whitman also provides us with an example of the self's incessant desire to strip away its garments and rejoin with the soul, while abandoning the world of appearances in which the self is trapped.

Still, the transcendental nature of the soul manifests itself in even the most confined or oppressive circumstances; whether the nature of the slavery be voluntary or not, the soul is always somehow apparent in spite of its trappings. Throughout "Song of Myself," Whitman uses the clothes of his subjects as an illustration of the underlying soul:

The negro that drives the long dray of the stone-yard, steady and tall he
stands pois'd on one leg on the string-piece,
His blue shirt exposes his ample neck and breast and loosens over his hip-
band,
His glance is calm and commanding, he tosses the slouch of his hat away
from his forehead.
The sun falls on his crispy hair and mustache, falls on the black of his
polish'd and perfect limbs.⁵⁵

In spite of the drudgery and toil, the nobility of this man's spirit, clothed in this case by a blue shirt and hat, makes itself apparent. His soul is best illustrated by his manner of being, which is "calm and commanding" and evident in spite of the garments clothing him. Although Whitman characterized the subjects of his poetry in almost every instance according to their clothing, it was not the actual clothing itself that was of importance to him so much as what it signified. Most importantly, he saw in every person's clothes a symbol of the transcendental will that fueled the pioneering spirit of early America.

Above all, Whitman championed the ruggedness and adaptability of Americans, and used their clothing in his poetry as an illustration of these qualities. In section ten of "Song of Myself," Whitman arranges a symbolic marriage between America's European settlers and its native inhabitants, a merging of two cultures as seen in their clothes:

I saw the marriage of the trapper in the open air in the far west, the bride
was a red girl,
Her father and his friends sat near cross-legged and dumbly smoking, they
had moccasins to their feet and large thick blankets hanging from
their shoulders,
On a bank lounged the trapper, he was drest mostly in skins, his luxuriant
beard and curls protected his neck, he held his bride by the hand,
She had long eyelashes, her head was bare, her coarse straight locks
descended upon her voluptuous limbs and reach'd to her feet.⁵⁶

Here, the native people, represented by the bride's father and friends, are clothed customarily in moccasins and thick blankets, a custom which the trapper, "drest mostly in skins," has at least partially adopted. Whitman makes no mention of the bride's clothing, but instead finds the essence of her being best captured in her wild and striking features, such as her "coarse straight locks," which are not braided, or woven, but remain untouched and unadorned by either custom or culture. She may be seen as symbolizing the beauty of an America which still had yet to be fully explored and tamed by Europeans, and her marriage to the trapper as one between nature and the American pioneering spirit he represents. In this way, their relationship may also be seen as an example of the weaving of separate ancestries into a new pattern of being.

Likewise, the clothes of American women represented to Whitman their newfound roles within the young country. In section fifteen of "Song of Myself," where for the first time in the poem the poet begins systematically cataloguing the people and events around him, he writes of an industrious "clean-hair'd Yankee girl [who] works

with her sewing-machine," shaping raw textiles into garments suitable to be worn.⁵⁷ A few lines later, he writes of a bride who "unrumples her white dress," signifying her virginity and foreshadowing her role as a wife and the mother to offspring who shall one day populate the country.⁵⁸ Finally, he writes of a prostitute who "draggles her shawl" and of the crowd who mocks her as she passes.⁵⁹ Unlike the rest of them, who "laugh at her blackguard oaths," Whitman refrains from judging or taunting her, recognizing in her spirit something of the transcendental which cannot be communicated in her outward appearance. In each of these examples, Whitman considers the varying roles women play in the development of early America, and does not draw distinctions between the three merely on the basis of appearances.

Rather, Whitman saw in all people and events a reminder of the transcendental essence of the universe by which all things are joined, yet separated on the basis of appearance. Instead of allowing these appearances to dictate his own opinions and ideas, Whitman filters them through his soul in "Song of Myself" and attempts to communicate their quintessences:

And these tend inward to me, and I tend outward to them,
And such as it is to be of these more or less I am,
And of these one and all I weave the song of Myself.⁶⁰

The relationship between Whitman's soul and the universe is reciprocal; people and events "tend inward" to the poet, and he "outward to them." He believes that in any of the illustrations he has provided, one can see "more or less" an example of the same transcendental spirit found in him. Though their outward appearances may differ, all humans are fundamentally cut from the same transcendental cloth, and from the remnants of this cloth we see Whitman "weave the song of Myself."

In fact, Whitman did such an excellent job of weaving these images together that it often becomes difficult to isolate his persona in the poem from the people he describes. Probably consciously, Whitman left the greater part of his actual self out of the poem, which allowed him to adopt whatever form he saw fitting for his purposes at the time. Whitman acknowledges and reinforces this sense of indeterminacy when he writes that "I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as the wise, | Regardless of others, ever regardful of others, | Maternal as well as paternal, a child as well as a man, | Stuff'd with the stuff that is coarse and stuff'd with the stuff that is fine."⁶¹ The narrator's identity transcends classification and encompasses all of the possible forms of humanity. Age or gender cannot define him, nor can the coarse or fine stuffing of his garments, but instead he can be seen as a fundamentally interconnected combination of all these elements—as a tapestry woven out of all of humanity.

"Song of Myself" can be seen, then, as setting a precedent for Whitman's use of the language of textiles throughout *Leaves of Grass*. In fact, the poet often made use of the same images of textiles from "Song of Myself" in the poems that would follow it. We see an example of this in "A Song for Occupations," where Whitman writes of a "butcher in his killing-clothes," which reminds us of the opening lines of section twelve of "Song of Myself," where the poet writes of how a "butcher-boy puts off his killing clothes." In both cases, the butchers' clothes signify their occupation, but Whitman recognizes that their clothes must be considered separately, and cannot convey those qualities in the men that defy or transcend the world of appearances, as represented by their clothing. This is what the poet means when he writes early in "Song of Myself" that the soul must not be

abased by the other, or that it should not be confused with the forms or appearances through which the soul identifies itself.

We see another case of Whitman's recycling images in section seven of "Song of Myself," where he writes that he sees "through the broadcloth and gingham," and in "I Sing the Body Electric," where, in describing a man, he writes that "the strong sweet quality he has strikes through the cotton and broadcloth." The essence of the man's character in "I sing the Body Electric," or "the strong sweet quality he has," transcends, or "strikes through," any appearance that could otherwise define him in communicable terms. Whitman here reinforces the transcendentalist function of his poetry, which reconsiders and poses an alternative to the means through which humans customarily identify and classify objects in the world according to their appearances, rather than their actual nature. In this way, Whitman's language of textiles can be seen as describing not only the physical garments veiling man's true nature, but also as a metaphor for the world of appearances in which the fundamental essence of the universe is clothed.

This analogy provides a meaningful bridge to the second way in which Whitman used the language of textiles—that is, as a reminder of the reality that lies hidden behind the world of appearances. Whitman saw that in the same way humans use clothing to classify one another, so do they clothe all of the multifaceted aspects of the universe in order to understand it. Consequently, we see in *Leaves of Grass* numerous examples of Whitman's unclothing the universe in order to penetrate this veil and get at its essence. Though the theme of nakedness in Whitman's work has been discussed at length in various critical studies, these studies have limited their scope mainly to an analysis of the metaphor in relation to the poet's sexuality, and have disregarded, for the most part, its

potentially greater metaphysical significance within the context of Whitman's transcendentalist mode of thought.⁶² In employing the metaphor of nakedness to represent an unclothed universe, freed from the false appearances imposed upon it by man, Whitman is following the example of Thomas Carlyle, who believed that "round [man's] mysterious 'Me,' there lies, under all those wool-rags, a Garment of Flesh (or of Senses), contextured in the Loom of Heaven; whereby he is revealed to his like, and dwells with them in Union and Division; and sees and fashions for himself a Universe."⁶³

We know many of Carlyle's own beliefs to be mere extensions of the German philosophy to which he was exposed prior to his composition of *Sartor*, and especially that branch known as phenomenology. From Immanuel Kant, he borrowed the idea of the "thing-in-itself" in developing his own concept of the transcendental, or that which inherently eludes classification beyond its outward appearances. In turn, Carlyle saw the true essence of the universe as something that could only be arrived at by a process of removing the layers of illusion through which man had traditionally viewed it. Whitman, too, recognized that beneath the strata of appearances hiding the universe could be found its fundamental essence, and in his "Song of the Open Road," asks "Where is he who tears off the husks for you and me?"⁶⁴ In "To You," we see Whitman himself adopting this role when he suggests that "the pert apparel [...] I part aside."⁶⁵

Whitman first makes clear his purpose of removing the veil separating humans from their essence in section 44 of "Song of Myself," where he writes, "What is known I strip away, | I launch all men and women forward with me into the Unknown."⁶⁶ If we understand correctly, then, it was Whitman's intention in *Leaves of Grass* to "strip away" the world of appearances to arrive at the "Unknown," in order to know it firsthand. In

turn, he expected no less of his readers than that they too should experience the universe for themselves, as he suggests in "Song of Myself," and not rely upon his or other accounts of it:

Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the
origin of all poems, [...]
You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look
through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the spectres in books,
You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,
You shall listen to all sides and filter them from your self.⁶⁷

To get at the transcendental essence of the universe, or the "origin of all poems," the reader cannot rely upon Whitman's account of it, nor upon any of the accounts offered in the past, represented here by "the eyes of the dead" and "spectres in books." Instead, one must consciously participate in tearing away the illusory garments veiling reality in order to arrive at unique conclusions regarding the universe.

Such glimpses into the unknown are both difficult to attain and fleeting, as they necessarily defy the very principles upon which humans base their perception of reality—namely, space and time. As Carlyle explains in *Sartor Resartus*, space and time are the most basic aspects of the world of appearances:

But deepest of all illusory Appearances, for hiding Wonder, as for many other ends, are your two fundamental world-enveloping Appearances, Space and Time. These, as spun and woven for us from before Birth itself, to clothe our celestial Me for dwelling here, and yet to blind it,—lie all-embracing, as the universal canvas, or warp and woof, whereby all minor Illusions, in this Phantasm Existence, weave and paint themselves. In vain, while here on Earth, shall you endeavor to strip them off; you can, at best, but rend them asunder for moments and look through.⁶⁸

Carlyle here suggests that humans are always already born into a world of appearances, the basis of which is space and time. These two fundamental laws of existence serve as

the canvas upon which humans render their visions of the universe, as the original bolt of fabric from which all of the world's illusory garments are necessarily cut and fashioned. Any attempt at getting beyond the world of appearances, then, can be seen as a parting of the very fabric of existence, which just as quickly darns itself back up in response to this breach.

Whitman too saw, in the process of weaving, a symbol for the means by which the universe operates according to predictable laws, which dictate man's perception of it. "The threads that were spun are gather'd," he writes in "To Think of Time," "the weft crosses the warp, the pattern is systematic."⁶⁹ Within the greater context of the poem, the present can be seen as the culmination of all past events in history, the place in which "the threads that were spun are gather'd." According to Whitman, these events are not random or without purpose, but in the way "the weft crosses the warp," we see an illustration of the elegant processes of the universe, wherein "the pattern is systematic." We see in other passages from Whitman examples of his neatly stitched view of the universe, such as at the end of section seventeen of "Song of Myself," where he writes, "(The moth and the fish-eggs are in their place, | The bright suns I see and the dark suns I cannot see are in their place, | The palpable is in its place and the impalpable is in its place)."⁷⁰

In the realm of appearances, Whitman saw evidence of a transcendental will at work akin to the concept of the will in the German existentialist philosophy of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, except that Whitman's version operated neither blindly nor with power as its ultimate end, but rather to maintain a balance in the universe that could be identified through its manifestations. Instead of detesting the world of appearances for

what it concealed, Whitman embraced its outward forms, as is illustrated in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry":

Appearances, now or henceforth, indicate what you are,
You necessary film, continue to envelop the soul,
About my body for me, and your body for you, be hung our
 divinest aromas,
Thrive, cities—bring your freight, bring your shows, ample and sufficient
 rivers,
Expand, being than which none else is perhaps more
 spiritual,
Keep your places, objects than which none else is more
 lasting.⁷¹

Here, Whitman does not attempt to look beyond the world of appearances for meaning, but embraces the examples afforded by the people and events of the city for what they signify of the transcendental. Far from denying the world of appearances, or "you necessary film," the poet asks for it to "continue to envelop the soul," in order that he may be in closer contact with that which lies beneath. Whitman considered this "necessary film" or fabric as the primary means by which the universe is interconnected, or, in the words of Carlyle, "hooked and buttoned together, and held up, by clothes."⁷²

As in *Sartor Resartus*, the language of textiles in *Leaves of Grass* comes finally to be symbolic of the transcendentalist belief in a fundamental interconnectedness attributable to all things and events in the universe. This concept of interconnectedness also explains the prevalence of the metaphor of weaving in both men's works. In *Sartor*, Carlyle uses Teufelsdröckh's "editor" to explain the professor's unique view of existence itself as a single, all-encompassing fabric, woven according to some original design:

Through many a little loophole, we have had glimpses into the internal world of Teufelsdröckh: his strange mystic, almost magic, Diagram of the Universe, and how it was gradually drawn, is not henceforth altogether dark to us. Those mysterious ideas on Time, which merit consideration

[...] may by and by prove significant. Still more may his somewhat peculiar view of Nature; the decisive Oneness he ascribes to Nature. How all Nature and Life are but one Garment, a 'Living Garment,' woven and ever a-weaving in the 'Loom of Time.'"⁷³

Here, a "loophole" affords us insight into Teufelsdröckh's "Diagram of the Universe," which reminds us of Whitman's later insistence in "To Think of Time" that "the pattern is systematic." It is from this original diagram or pattern that transcendentalists saw the universe unfolding, or "ever a-weaving in the 'Loom of Time.'" In *Leaves of Grass*, we see many such examples of Whitman's own use of this metaphor of weaving to describe what he saw as the interconnected, or interwoven, nature of the universe.

Nowhere is Whitman's use of this metaphor more explicitly and powerfully stated than in "Weave in, My Hardy Life," a poem he later added to *Leaves of Grass* in the *Drum Taps* section of the 1865 edition. In this poem, Whitman encourages the universe to "weave lasting sure, weave day and night the weft, the warp, incessant weave, tire not."⁷⁴ He is still assured in his beliefs that some transcendental work is at force in the weaving of world events. The Civil War having forever transformed his outlook on life by this time, however, Whitman acknowledges his powerlessness against the forces of the universe and, in concluding the poem, writes in regard to the universe's design that "we know not why or what, yet weave, forever weave." With Lincoln's death later in 1865, Whitman grew even more introspective and somber with regard to the universe, as is evidenced in the poetry that followed. He realized that the tapestry of America he had woven in his poems had come unraveled at the seams, and that he, along with the rest of America, stood alone at a crucial and indeterminate point in the history of the nation.

No longer seeing himself or others as an "adjunct of the universe," as he did in "Song of Myself," Whitman began to view the self as inherently estranged from the soul, at least as long as one was bound by the world of appearances. In 1871 he added the *Passage to India* section to *Leaves of Grass*, which included the poem "A Noiseless Patient Spider." In the poem's eponymous spider, we see a symbol of Whitman's own efforts at connecting with what he must have come to view by then as an indifferent universe:

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 out.

And you O my soul where you stand,
Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space,
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.⁷⁵

The spider in this poem remains isolated amidst its "vacant vast surrounding," and can be seen as a part of the universe only insofar as it remains connected through the filaments it launches forward. Likewise, Whitman realized that, in the very act of living, the self is always and forever estranged from the soul, which itself resides "in measureless oceans of space." Only when the metaphorical bridge in the poem between life and death is crossed, when the "ductile anchor" firmly takes hold and rejoins with the universe, can the self and soul be reconciled.

Still, even before this point of recognition, before humans learn to draw distinctions between the self and soul, there is a time in childhood in which the two are

indistinguishable. Whitman recounts this period in "There was a Child Went Forth," where he writes of a boy who has not yet learned to draw distinctions between himself and the external world, but instead immediately joins with whatever he experiences. By the end of the poem, all things from "the white and red clover, and the song of the phoebe bird" to the "men and women crowding fast in the streets" to "the streets themselves and the facades of houses, and goods in the windows," have become connected through the child. We see here, then, another example of the transcendentalist mode of thought, which saw in the image of cloth a metaphor for the interconnected nature of the universe, represented in this case by the child's unconscious means of seamlessly weaving into himself all that he experiences.

At times in his poetry, Whitman himself seems to regress to a state of perception comparable to childhood in its innocence and candor. We see such behavior especially coming in response to the women in his poems, who he often uses as symbols for the primordial mother that first gave birth to the universe, thereby joining all of humanity. One such example is afforded to us in "I Sing the Body Electric," where Whitman is seemingly dumbstruck at the sight of a woman, and what she immediately connotes:

This is the female form,
A divine nimbus exhales from it from head to foot,
It attracts with fierce undeniable attraction,
I am drawn by its breath as if I were no more than a
 helpless vapor, all falls aside but myself and it,
Books, art, religion, time, the visible and solid earth, and what was
 expected of heaven or fear'd of hell, are now consumed,
Mad filaments, ungovernable shoots play out of it, the
 response likewise ungovernable, [...] ⁷⁶

The world of appearances cannot hide the transcendental essence that this woman represents to Whitman, but he is instead consumed by her very being, which draws him

to her "as if [he] were no more than a helpless vapor," or, as in the case of the last poem we examined, a child who does not draw distinctions between itself and eternity. From her being, "mad filaments" and "ungovernable shoots" issue forth, which at once connect Whitman with her and the universe. In this final example, these "filaments," an image borrowed perhaps from a chapter of Carlyle's *Sartor* entitled "Organic Filaments," symbolize the transcendental threads that Carlyle and Whitman believed permeated and joined existence.

As we have seen in the previous examples, the language of textiles served various roles in the writings of Thomas Carlyle and Walt Whitman. Both authors used metaphors borrowed from this language to express their views on man, the universe, and the relation between the two. Despite the differing contexts in which these metaphors appear in both men's writing, they share in common the fact that they are inspired by the same underlying system of beliefs. While their perception of the universe may be argued against by empiricists, there still remains much yet to be examined in the way of the relation of their beliefs to our modern views of existence. In the next chapter, we will identify some of the modern manifestations of this language of textiles, and especially in the discourse science, where we find its metaphors being used as a tactile illustration through which to understand and describe the universe and its exquisite inner workings.

III. This Vast Similitude: Whitman's Weaving of the Cosmos

All lives and deaths, all of the past, present, future,
This vast similitude spans them, and always has spann'd,
And shall forever span them and completely hold and enclose them.

—Walt Whitman, "On the Beach at Night Alone"

The strategy I have mapped out in chapter two for understanding Whitman's language of textiles and weaving allows me to comment more confidently on Whitman's overarching mysticism and its relation to his vision of the cosmos. Specifically, we see Whitman using the language of textiles to join his visions of reality through a process of poetic unification that can be likened to weaving. Whitman does not stop there, however, but instead allows the connections he draws from his experiences to inform his poetic speculations in *Leaves of Grass* as to the very nature of the universe. To his credit, these speculations were largely based upon the scientific principles of Whitman's time, of which the poet was more than familiar. Other instances, though, find Whitman unable to express his transcendental view of the universe in terms of the science of his time, and, at these points, his poetry can be seen taking on the heightened and rarefied characteristics of mysticism.

Much has been written regarding Walt Whitman's mysticism in the one hundred and fifty years since he first published *Leaves of Grass*. While some critics have likened Whitman's writing to prophecy, going so far as to call him a seer, others have found it easier to dismiss Whitman's mysticism altogether, finding it no more than psychological evidence of a grandly delusional mind. Whatever their differences of opinion, Whitman's

critics have shared equally in the difficulty of determining what to do with his most mystical passages. This difficulty is attributable to a number of factors, including—but not limited to—Whitman's own often ambiguously expressed beliefs, which vary from monotheistic to pantheistic to atheistic. The poet's characteristic indeterminacy in expressing his beliefs, however, may be seen as reflecting a more general crisis of faith taking place in society during his time, which largely came about as a result of various findings in the field of science.

From his biographers, and by his own acknowledgement, we know Whitman's thoughts and writing to have been largely influenced by the science of his time. In *Walt Whitman: A Life*, Justin Kaplan writes of how, in the time preceding his composition of *Leaves of Grass*, "[Whitman] reads the proceedings of the American Association for the Advancement of Science," and how, "absorbing the spirit of his times, he is already an evolutionist when Darwin publishes *Origin of Species*."⁷⁷ Similarly, David S. Reynolds writes in *Walt Whitman's America* of how there exists within Whitman's poetry a "characteristic movement from the scientific to the spiritual," as well as of how the poet "struggled to bring together the two in his poetry, [using] popular approaches that made such couplings possible."⁷⁸ Reynolds goes on to contend that, "the very title *Leaves of Grass*, and Whitman's constant play on foliage and leaves in his poetry, stem in part from propositions about plant life popularized by [German chemist, Justus] Liebig and others."⁷⁹ Rather than corresponding exactly with any of the scientific views of his time, however, Whitman's poetry can be seen as borrowing simultaneously from a combination of scientific approaches to the universe, and, in this way, *Leaves of Grass* operates outside, or on the furthest periphery, of the confines of traditional science.

Whitman's mysticism can be seen as existing within that indeterminate space created by the scientific speculation of his time, which not only allowed, but began to account for the principles of uncertainty we find operating within *Leaves of Grass*. This explanation corresponds with the one Thomas Kuhn provides in regards to shifting paradigms, in which advocates of each paradigm are unable to communicate across the ideological chasm separating them.⁸⁰ Between the old and new ways of thinking about the universe, Whitman was left with an open field in which to allow his speculations to roam and play. Newton's principles had begun breaking down under closer scrutiny, and in their place an array of equally plausible explanations for the various events of the universe remained, each of which Whitman at least partially entertained in his exploration of relativism. Further, the reductionistic hierarchies which had formerly been accepted by science came to be argued against by proponents of a holistic view of the universe, and, at different times in *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman can be seen as representing both sides of this debate.

At other times, Whitman's mysticism in *Leaves of Grass* can be viewed as hearkening to a science that is yet to come, which would be better capable of explaining the transcendental aspects of the universe he sensed. In the same way his poetry operates within the indeterminate space provided by scientific speculation, so does his poetry leave much room for conjecture. We have come to call these points of uncertainty within Whitman's poetry "mystical," but, rightly understood, they correspond with any number of scientific views held before and during the poet's lifetime, as well as seem to predict or hint at conclusions that science would arrive at much later. It is my contention that within this scientific context, we can better guess at the meaning behind Whitman's mysticism,

as well as begin to understand his use of the language of textiles and the metaphor of weaving. From this perspective, we will see that Whitman's fundamentally interwoven view of the universe quite rationally corresponds with views held by modern science, which has independently arrived at conclusions that seem to correspond in many respects with Whitman's views regarding the universe, as they are expressed in *Leaves of Grass*.

Necessarily, this analysis of Whitman's cosmology will entail a cursory elaboration of the various scientific principles which seem to correspond with the differing, and often contradictory, perspectives he adopts throughout *Leaves of Grass*. Chief among the dichotomies Whitman explores is the opposition posed between the competing philosophical and scientific paradigms of reductionism and holism. While the former view holds that the universe can only be explained in terms of its constituent parts, the latter finds the universe only able to be elaborated in terms of the greater relationships which exist between these constituent parts. Rather than adopting either approach to the universe exclusively, Whitman's perspective can be seen as oscillating, at different times, between both modes of thought in *Leaves of Grass*. At times within the same poem or passage, he makes use of the binary opposition posed by the principles of reductionism and holism to illustrate his broader, transcendental beliefs regarding the universe. As we will see, Whitman rejects neither perspective, as both necessarily inform and are entailed by the transcendentalist beliefs to which he adhered.

Also corresponding with Whitman's transcendentalism is the relativistic view that was being proposed by the philosophers and scientists of his time that all objects and events in the universe are dependent upon their accompanying contexts in order to be understood. Relativism explores the means by which all objects and events are

determined through their fundamental interrelationships, and, in this way, can be seen as also using both principles of reductionism and holism to account for the relative processes of the universe. In his explicitly stated goal of objectively understanding and communicating the universe, we see how Whitman adheres to and holds this relativistic approach above all others in *Leaves of Grass*. In considering Whitman's use of the principles of relativism, we may also begin to analyze the means by which the offshoots of this relativistic perspective might relate to Whitman's cosmology.

By the time Whitman composed *Leaves of Grass* in 1855, scientists had all but accepted the principles of thermodynamics, which initially operated to explain the endless transference of heat or energy that takes place within the universe. By 1860, two of these principles came to be considered laws: the "zeroth" principle, which states that heat or energy naturally tends toward a state of equilibrium, and is, therefore, ever being transferred where there is an uneven distribution, and the second more popularly known principle of the conservation of energy, which states that matter cannot be created or destroyed, but instead merely changes forms. Whitman expresses these same principles throughout *Leaves of Grass*, but in terms that are poetic, and, therefore, entail a measure of conjecture. We shall see him returning to these principles often enough in his poetry, however, that we may begin to speculate that the poet possessed at least some inkling of an insight as to their validity.

Still, we see Whitman unable to submit himself entirely to the conclusions of science, which he saw as ultimately failing to take into account all of existence. He believed there was something more to the universe than could be conveyed in scientific proofs, something transcendental, which eluded exact measurement or quantification.

Likewise, shortly after Whitman's time, certain members of the scientific community began questioning the limits of science's ability to ever truly express or measure with certainty the phenomena it was observing. As an acknowledgement of the inherent shortcomings in the field of science where precision is concerned, the principle of uncertainty emerged. Developed in 1927 by Werner Heisenberg, this principle states that an objective assessment of any observable phenomena is impossible, attributable to inherent biases in measurements, which do not allow for a simultaneous observation of all relevant data pertaining to a subject. Likewise, Whitman suggests in his poetry that any purely scientific elaboration of the universe fails at accurately accounting for what he detects of the transcendental, the nature of which he illustrates as uncertain at best.

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It should not be thought too great a leap in logic to associate Whitman's nineteenth-century poetry with twentieth- and twenty-first century scientific thinking, especially when we consider Whitman's interest and background in science. From his biographers, we know him to have read and absorbed the works of such scientific figures that came before him as Newton and Spinoza, as well as that of Darwin, his historical contemporary, whose *On the Origin of Species* was published just four years after Whitman first published *Leaves of Grass*. We also know of him having personally attended many lectures and exhibitions on various scientific subjects made open to the public of New York during his day. Admitting that Whitman also naively lent a great deal of attention to such questionable practices as phrenology does not imply his ignorance in scientific matters, but rather speaks of his general intellectual curiosity and willingness to entertain any idea which might shed light on the nature of the universe.

Though Whitman entertained the popular scientific notions of his time, we see him repeatedly denying the possibility of pure science, alone, ever arriving at a definitive or satisfactory conclusion regarding the universe. Instead, he believes in an indefinable and unquantifiable metaphysical force at work behind the scenes of existence, which mercurially eludes the best attempts at explanation. In "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer," which first appeared in the *Drum Taps* section of the 1865 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman acknowledges science's failure at fully capturing or expressing the true nature of mankind's relation to the universe, which by the end of the poem, Whitman finds better illustrated in his own personal communion with the stars he finds in the night sky:

When I heard the learn'd astronomer,
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and measure
them,
When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much
applause in the lecture-room,
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,
Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.⁸¹

In response to the reductionist illustrations of the universe that these scientists provide, Whitman soon grows "tired and sick," as they fail at bottom in addressing the transcendental essence he finds responsible for the greater phenomena they are observing. No amount of reductive scientific data can provide Whitman with the same sense of assuredness or certainty regarding the universe than he finds in simply witnessing the stars of the "mystical moist night-air." What he derives from this primal communion with nature cannot be explained by the elaborations of the "learn'd astronomer," which

reminds us of an early passage in "Song of Myself" in which he writes that "To elaborate is no avail, learn'd and unlearn'd feel that it is so."⁸²

Instead, Whitman finds evidence for the transcendental aspect of the universe in his own direct and unique personal experiences with the natural world, in which everything he experiences can be seen as performing the function for which it was originally intended. In this way, his writing may be seen as reflecting the relativistic perspective in science, which holds that any subject can only be rightly understood in its relation to everything else. From this perspective, nothing in existence seems out of place to Whitman, but is instead justified in its very being, as we see in "Song of Myself":

(The moth and the fish eggs are in their place,
The bright suns I see and the dark suns I cannot see are in their place,
The palpable is in its place and the impalpable is in its place.)⁸³

The simple fact that life renews itself, as symbolized by "the moth and the fish eggs," suggests to Whitman that all things "are in their place," or are as they should be, as dictated by the design of nature. Similarly, the organization of celestial bodies and the cycle of days indicate to him that all things in the universe are working as intended, and he surmises that even those "dark suns" he cannot see must too be in their place, according to this same design. This metaphor corresponds with Whitman's suggestion in the next line that both the palpable and impalpable are in their place, or his assuredness that even objects and events that he cannot observe are at work in ordering the universe.

We see, then, Whitman allowing both metaphysics and science to inform his beliefs and his metaphors in relation to the universe, which he feels cannot be otherwise expressed. Many examples are afforded to us in "Song of Myself" of Whitman

conjecturing far more than can be surmised from what is available to him in the form of evidence. Often, in the midst of his cataloguing of experiences, Whitman will make some great leap in judgment that is not necessarily entailed in what he is listing, but is instead alluded to indirectly:

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.⁸⁴

In his acknowledgment of the dead and dying, as well as the despairing, the thieves, and the dwarfs, Whitman is reducing all of humankind to its basest element. His reductionism here does not detract from the majesty of the universe, but instead serves in explaining the universe through its constituent parts, among which even the dung beetle must be considered.⁸⁵ Notice, the poet does not use reductionism here in the scientific sense, in an attempt to isolate his subjects for the sake of study, but in the relativistic sense through which he saw every element of the universe related. Whitman understands that all of the subjects in this passage belong inherently to the universe and always return to it through "cycles of preparation and accretion." In humans, this cycle is perpetuated and symbolized by "wombs" and the "father-stuff," which characterize and distinguish humans only in type from the universe's various other means of renewing itself. Finally, Whitman saw in the "beetles rolling balls of dung" yet another relativistic illustration of this cycle. Rather than detracting from the majesty of the universe, the dung beetle can be

seen, instead, as ultimately operating to augment Whitman's perception of the totality of the universe.

One phrase in this passage, however—Whitman's mention of "threads that connect the stars"—has even more direct bearing on the underlying metaphor of this thesis. This bit of metaphysics, seemingly in disjunction with Whitman's other subjects in this passage, can be seen as an example of those parts of the poet's cosmology which find their way into the most unexpected contexts within *Leaves of Grass*. When he writes of "the threads that connect the stars," Whitman could be meaning to say that all things derive from the same primordial origin, and are thereby distantly related. Another reading might have him meaning that all things remain continuously and invisibly joined through a transcendental union, despite the forms they take. Which of these two interpretations one chooses to accept will be based on gestalt perception, as the poet allowed the line to remain indeterminate in the way of tense or further elaboration. Unarguably, Whitman's scientific reductionism informs his metaphysics in this passage, and we see in modern scientific laws and theories a parallel through which to begin to understand some of the concepts presented here by Whitman.

Whitman, like the scientists of his time, consistently tested these laws by applying them to all that he experienced. Chief among these laws is the idea that all energy remains in a constant state of equilibrium within the universe—that is, nothing can be created or destroyed, but is instead transformed into a new and equivalent form of energy. In *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman repeatedly echoes this principle, as well as expands it by applying it to humanity and using it as evidence attesting to the soul's immortality:

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

And what do you think has become of the women and
children?
They are alive and well somewhere,
The smallest sprout shows there is really no death,
And if ever there was it led forward life, and does not wait at the end to
arrest it,
And ceas'd the moment life appear'd.

All goes onward and outward, nothing collapses,
And to die is different from what any one supposed, and
luckier.⁸⁶

This passage from "Song of Myself," which concludes the sixth section, makes plain Whitman's opinion regarding the cycles of the universe. He sees even in "the smallest sprout" transcendental evidence of past lives, which "shows there is really no death." His conclusion that "All goes onward and outward, nothing collapses," could be used to introduce any science textbook's chapter on the laws of thermodynamics, as it summarizes the concept in the briefest, yet most elegant terms possible. Finally, his speculation in this passage that "to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier," further illustrates Whitman's belief in a transcendental force at work behind the processes of the universe, which cannot be explained in either scientific or poetic terms, but must, like death, be experienced firsthand in order to be properly understood.

We see here again, then, another example of Whitman presenting his beliefs regarding the natural laws of the universe within the most mystical of contexts. Mysticism within this context, however, begins to appear rather more as a form of indeterminacy or uncertainty than as an intentional attempt at misdirection by the poet. Under his own admission, Whitman does not intend to dazzle readers by suggesting any determinate solution to the grand mystery of the universe, but seeks instead only to present clues to this mystery as they are made evident to him in nature:

Do you guess I have some intricate purpose?
Well I have, for the Fourth-month showers have, and the mica on the side
of a rock has.
Do you take it I would astonish?
Does the daylight astonish? does the early redstart
twittering through the woods?
Do I astonish more than they?⁸⁷

Whitman sees a reflection of the transcendental in these various natural phenomena, which in their very being defy explanation or further elaboration. The appearance of the "Fourth-month showers" and "mica on the side of the rock" corresponds with the changing of seasons, which, through its ever unfolding processes symbolizes nature's inconstancy. Similarly, "the daylight" and "the early redstart twittering through the woods" represent the temporal in nature, in that both may only be experienced fleetingly. Whitman knew that he could not pinpoint the transcendental meaning of the universe in his poetry any more than he could stop the universe for the sake of inspecting it, and in this way, his conclusions predict another important and widely-accepted scientific principle of the twentieth century.

In 1927, less than forty years after Whitman's death, a German physicist by the name of Werner Heisenberg systematized the principle of uncertainty, which stated that a precise measurement of any process or phenomenon is inherently impossible. Heisenberg sought through illustrations of position and momentum to illustrate the indeterminate or uncertain nature of all events. He concluded that with increasing certainty in regards to an object's position, there was a correlative diminishment of certainty in regard to its movement, and vice versa. In other words, the more specifically we try to explain something, the less accurate does our account of it become in general. In literature, Walt Whitman—and, shortly after him, Stephen Crane and other pioneers of Naturalism—

seem to have arrived independently at this same conclusion.⁸⁸ Correspondingly, Whitman may be seen as adopting the mocking voice of the universe in section 25 of "Song of Myself," when he writes, "My final merit I refuse you, I refuse putting from me what I really am, | Encompass worlds, but never try to encompass me, | I crowd your sleekest and best by simply looking toward you."⁸⁹

Maintaining this defiant spirit, Whitman addresses pure science in "Song of Myself" in much the same way as in "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer." Although he can be seen in both poems as respecting the intentions of science, his lack of faith in the pursuit as a means to wholly understanding the universe is obvious. While Whitman acknowledges science's value in attempting to explain certain of the universe's phenomena, he recognizes its failure to get at what he senses of the transcendental:

Hurrah for positive science! long live exact demonstration!
Fetch stonecrop mixt with cedar and branches of lilac,
This is the lexicographer, this the chemist, this made a grammar of the old
cartouches,
These mariners put the ship through the dangerous
unknown seas,
This is the geologist, this works with the scalpel, and this is a
mathematician.
Gentlemen, to you the first honor always!
Your facts are useful, and yet they are not my dwelling,
I but enter by them to an area of my dwelling.⁹⁰

Although Whitman profoundly respects all forms of human endeavor that perpetuate and advance civilization, he realizes that such pursuits alone fall short of explaining existence. Whitman uses these images as a means of advancing his idea that, hiding below these men and their occupations is the true fundamental essence of the universe, and that the realm of the transcendental, which he considers his dwelling, lies beyond the confines of these necessary worldly designations. Each occupation offers Whitman a

differing insight into the transcendental, of which these individuals can be seen merely as representations.

As a result, we see Whitman as often deriving his images from nature as from civilization in attempting to illustrate his system of beliefs. One of the eighteen poems Whitman added to the 1856 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, entitled "On the Beach at Night Alone," further attests to Whitman's belief in some transcendental force which encompasses, and thereby joins, all of existence. In another moment of reverie with the night sky, such as we saw earlier in "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer," Whitman is again convinced by the stars of the universe's elegant design:

On the beach at night alone,
As the old mother sways her to and fro singing her husky song,
As I watch the bright stars shining, I think a thought of the clef of the
 universes and of the future.
A vast similitude interlocks all,
All spheres, grown, ungrown, small, large, suns, moons, planets,
All distances of place however wide,
All distances of time, all inanimate forms,
All souls, all living bodies though they be ever so different, or in
 different worlds,
All gaseous, watery, vegetable, mineral processes, the fishes, the brutes,
All nations, colors, barbarisms, civilizations, languages,
All identities, that have existed or may exist on this globe or any globe,
All lives and deaths, all of the past, present, future,
This vast similitude spans them, and always has spann'd,
And shall forever span them and compactly hold and enclose them.⁹¹

This poem is worth revisiting in its entirety, insofar as it, more than any of Whitman's other poems, provides the most explicit and detailed account of his overarching beliefs. In his communion with the stars again in this poem, Whitman identifies himself and all things through them; they represent the various potential manifestations of matter in the list which follows Whitman's description of them. All things from gases to vegetables to

minerals to humans to civilizations can be seen as being joined, according to Whitman, through the example provided to him in the shining stars of this particular night's sky. In this sense, Whitman's assertion that a "vast similitude interlocks all," which "shall forever span" and "compactly hold and enclose" all things, yet again suggests a view of the universe similar to the one at which science itself would soon arrive.

My argument here is not to suggest that Whitman's poetry sees beyond the science of his time, but rather that his mysticism may be viewed as a form of poetic speculation which reflected the emerging scientific thought of his time. His writing is not alone in paralleling the ideas of science, yet is one of the earliest and best-known examples that we have in America of this phenomenon. In *Science and English Poetry*, Douglas Bush writes of the undeniable relationship which has always existed throughout history between the prevailing scientific thought of any time and that time's corresponding literature.⁹² Whitman may be seen as carrying on this tradition in *Leaves of Grass*, and perhaps transcending it, in the way his metaphors predict certain scientific principles. The most significant of Whitman's metaphors in this respect is that of textiles and weaving, in that these are the images to which he most systematically reverts in his poetic accounts of the universe, and that they most strikingly correspond with modern descriptions of the universe provided by science.

Due to compelling evidence in the field of physics, science now seriously considers the possibility that the universe is constituted by an infinite number of strings, which, much like Whitman's "vast similitude," operates to "compactly hold and enclose" all things. This principle arose primarily from science's inability to reconcile Einstein's general theory of relativity with what researchers were witnessing at the subatomic level.

At this almost unfathomably small scale, Einstein's laws, which derive largely from Newtonian principles, begin to fall apart and are unable to predict the outcomes of events which, on a larger scale, behave systematically. Expectedly, as in the case of most major shifts in paradigms of thought, party lines were drawn in response to the evidence presented by quantum physicists. On the one hand were those who adhered to scientific tradition and flatly denied the possibility of any outcome that did not fit within the preexisting guidelines set forth by Newtonian physics. On the other side, you had individuals attempting to reconcile the differences between the two modes of thought.⁹³

The primary gap separating these two ways of scientific thinking was constituted by a measure of faith in the results of experiments which undeniably pointed to the conclusions of quantum physicists. Up until this point, science had always prided itself on empirical, verifiable, and reproducible observations, and had not allowed mathematical equations without physical evidence to guide their experiments. Suddenly, quantum mechanics introduced itself along with such revolutionary ideas as that there were far more than the formerly presumed four dimensions. The number of dimensions proposed by quantum mechanics ranges from 10 to 26, but any of these conclusions, if proven, would undoubtedly turn traditional science on its head. In its very nature, science has an inherent distaste for the immeasurable, and its practitioners find great difficulty in supposing anything they cannot themselves witness firsthand.

Fortunately, literature adheres to different standards than science, and Whitman's speculations regarding the universe entailed as many worlds or universes as he liked. Often times in *Leaves of Grass*, as in "On the Beach at Night Alone," Whitman supposes an unlimited number of possible manifestations to the universe, and does not allow

traditional systems of belief to interfere with his insights into the unknown. In "Kosmos," which he added to the 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman's observations regarding the known seem to naturally lead him to speculations regarding the unknown, which do not prevent him from depicting a universe far greater than man has ever formerly supposed:

Who, out of the theory of the earth and of his or her body understands by
subtle analogies all other theories,
The theory of a city, a poem, and of the large politics of these States;
Who believes not only in our globe with its sun and moon, but in other
globes with their suns and moons,
Who, constructing the house of himself or herself, not for a day but for all
time, sees races, eras, dates, generations,
The past, the future, dwelling there, like space, inseparable
together.⁹⁴

Whitman's cosmological conjectures permit him to suppose as many globes with their own suns and moons as he likes, and, perhaps rightfully, he supposes the likelihood of other worlds to be in equal proportion to the likelihood of humans inhabiting the earth. From what he observes of human endeavors, Whitman believes that the same transcendental force that created life on earth could just as easily manifest itself throughout the universe, just beyond humankind's grasp or understanding. Throughout *Leaves of Grass*, when describing the earth, Whitman repeatedly views it in relation to an unlimited number of other possibilities. In this sense, his speculation regarding the universe again parallels conclusions at which science would arrive a short time later.

Just over a hundred years after Whitman first published *Leaves of Grass*, a budding physicist at Princeton by the name of Hugh Everett composed a Ph.D. dissertation entitled "The Theory of the Universal Wave Function." In this work, Everett illustrates how the matter of choice plays an active role in determining reality. He

suggests that the outcome of any experiment is indeterminate until the point at which an observer collapses the light-wave function of the subject, thereby effectively deciding its outcome. From this perspective, all possible outcomes of an experiment are equally likely up until the actual point at which the subject's light-wave function is collapsed by an observer. It is at this point, once an observation is made, that the subject's relative state is decided and becomes a reality, through a process known as quantum entanglement. Until the moment in which its outcome is witnessed, however, the function of the light-wave is indeterminate, existing in a superposition of possible states. Insofar as it suggests a simultaneous combination of possible outcomes or realities, this concept has become known as Everett's "Many-Worlds Hypotheses." Everett's initial speculations resulted in similar thought experiments by other scientists who sought to explain the indeterminacy which characterizes quantum mechanics at the subatomic level.

One such scientist was Erwin Schrodinger, who, in his most famous experiment, contended that simultaneous realities are not only plausible, but also necessary in order to explain the wave functions of subatomic particles. "Schrodinger's Cat" exhibits how quantum particles exist in an inherently indeterminate state at the macroscopic level, until the exact moment in which an observer, through the very act of observation, indirectly determines the phenomena, at which point one of any number of possible outcomes becomes a reality. In this experiment, a cat is placed inside a box, in which it is then enclosed along with a vial of hydrocyanic acid and a Geiger counter. The Geiger counter and the vial of acid are positioned such that there is an approximately equal probability that the acid will be released inside the box, killing the cat. Until the box is opened, however, the cat's fate remains indeterminate, and it exists simultaneously in a

superposition of possible states; for all intents and purposes, the cat is both alive and dead inside the box, existing in a nebulous state until the time in which it is subjected to observation, or quantum entanglement, and the observer decides reality.

Everett and Schrodinger's conclusion that reality is ultimately subjective, and that the state of any subject can be seen only in its relation to its indeterminate response to quantum entanglement, begins to resemble the transcendentalist view put forth in the writings of Carlyle and Whitman. In *Sartor Resartus*, Carlyle affords the reader a layman's account of both the inherently relative and interconnected nature of all events and objects in the universe:

I say, there is not a red Indian, hunting by lake Winnipic, can quarrel with his squaw, but the whole world must smart for it: will not the price of beaver rise? It is a mathematical fact that the casting of this pebble from my hand alters the centre-of-gravity of the Universe.⁹⁵

In this passage from a chapter of *Sartor Resartus* entitled "Organic Filaments," Carlyle sees the minutest events impinging on the outcome of all other events in the universe; thus, these events can be seen as "filaments" connecting the greater fabric of the cosmos. While offering no quantifiable evidence, Carlyle transcendently intuits and accepts the "mathematical fact" that every object or event in the universe is somehow interrelated.

Likewise, Whitman believed that a relative explanation for everything could be found among the various means by which humanity and nature are naturally joined. In order to understand Walt Whitman, the poet encourages his readers in "Song of Myself" to simply look out toward the world:

If you would understand me go to the heights or water-shore,
The nearest gnat is an explanation, and a drop or motion of waves a key,
The maul, the oar, the hand-saw, second my words.⁹⁶

Again, Whitman uses the scientific principle of relativism in order to explain himself through his relation to every other possible, observable phenomenon in the universe. Likewise, he allows reductionism to again illustrate the means by which these phenomena are inexorably tied to his own existence. The metaphors he uses to describe himself decline in scale in this passage from the vast "heights or water-shore" to "the nearest gnat." From Whitman's relativistic perspective, both of these images could be seen as illustrations of the transcendental connection that he felt existed between himself and the sum of the universe's contents.

Finally, and perhaps most intriguing, is the way in which Whitman's language corresponds with the metaphors employed by modern science in describing the exquisite workings of the universe. In the field of modern theoretical physics known as quantum mechanics, for example, we see science using some of the same images as Carlyle and Whitman to illustrate a conclusion repeatedly hinted at in their experiments: that the fabric of the cosmos is fundamentally interwoven, or connected by irreducible, infinitesimally small strings. Superstring theory, by which this idea has become known, has become the holy grail of modern physics, and its practitioners believe that they, in approaching an understanding of this concept, are drawing nearer to a scientific principle which begins to explain everything in the universe, or a grand unifying theory. From this perspective, Whitman's "Song of Myself," in which he writes, "Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems," may be seen as correspondingly attempting to provide an all-encompassing account of the universe, except that he did not have the knowledge of modern science at his disposal, and instead substituted transcendentalism as a placeholder for such evidence, should it ever emerge.

Comparing the metaphors Whitman uses on the side of art and those used by scientists, then, we find the poet's language serving not only to reconcile humanity and nature, but also art and science, which Whitman believed ultimately operated to explain identical phenomena. Rather than choosing sides in the scientific debates of his time, which he felt were still largely uninformed by discoveries which would occur in science, Whitman borrowed from science those principles which best corresponded with his own transcendental view of the universe, and used them repeatedly in *Leaves of Grass*. Mostly, Whitman used an amalgamation of competing scientific principles to inform his transcendentalism, and did not draw hard and fast distinctions between these principles, but allowed each explanation to fill in the gray areas of uncertainty left by the others.

Although Whitman utilized principles of reductionism, relativism, uncertainty, and, perhaps, some proto-form of quantum mechanic speculation to inform his outlook on the universe, none of these approaches can be taken alone as representing Whitman's overarching beliefs, but must all be considered within the context in which they appear in *Leaves of Grass*. My suggestion at the start of this chapter that Whitman's mysticism operates within that indeterminate area between competing paradigms of scientific thought is reinforced when we see him using these competing paradigms interchangeably within the same contexts in order to arrive at the same transcendental conclusions. In the way Whitman contrarily defends reductionism through his holistic appraisal of the world, as well as the way in which he paradoxically uses the concept of indeterminacy to illustrate the universe's design, we begin to better understand what Whitman means when, in concluding "Song of Myself," he writes, "Do I contradict myself? | Very well then I contradict myself, | (I am large, I contain multitudes)."⁹⁷

Conclusion

In the course of this study, we have seen how Whitman's use of the language of textiles in *Leaves of Grass* corresponds in many ways with Carlyle's earlier use of the same language in *Sartor* and *Heroes*, as well as how this language can still be seen persisting in modern attempts at an explication of the universe. This should not be taken to suggest that Carlyle marks a point of origin in the use of this imagery, however, nor that Whitman represents its culmination; both of which may very well be the case, but which remain to be determined by the unfolding of future events. Rather, since I did not know the German language to trace Carlyle's influences back further, I proceeded from Carlyle as a matter of practicality, as his work offers the earliest known—and, perhaps until recently, the least known—example in English of the perpetuation of this language of textiles.

Likewise, Whitman seems to mark the earliest systematic use of this language in the New World, and, like Carlyle's writing, *Leaves of Grass* should properly be understood as echoing a much older tradition in thought, the origins of which we may now only guess. Marking the beginnings of transcendentalist thought would doubtlessly prove as difficult as pinpointing the moment at which humankind first began speculating on metaphysical subjects. Beyond a certain point in recorded history, the Promethean evolution of higher thinking in humans remains a mystery, shrouded by time and growing dimmer with each passing day. While tracing humankind's earliest metaphysical notions may prove impossible, we may be able to identify manifestations of these earliest ideas operating in posterity, through what can be seen as their philosophical, scientific, and literary descendants in terms of thought.

We see Carlyle's and Whitman's influences being immediately reflected after their time in the language and images of such poets as T. S. Eliot and Hart Crane, whose stated intention in *The Bridge*—much like Whitman's in *Leaves of Grass*—was to provide a "mystical synthesis of America." Further, if one had more time, a comparison of Crane's metaphorical bridge and the images used by Whitman to draw connections between points in the universe might prove fruitful. As for Eliot, we know the first lecture he ever gave was on the subject of Carlyle, attesting to his intellectual and literary debt to the Scotsman. While Crane attempts to maintain Whitman's spirit of optimism concerning his fellow humans and the universe, but fails despairingly in the process, Eliot draws no pretences as to his own often contemptuous regard for humankind.

In "The Hollow Men" and the "The Wasteland" Eliot encapsulates his view of both humankind and the universe respectively. Although these two poems differ drastically in their tone from any poem found within *Leaves of Grass*, Eliot can be seen as using Whitman's means of undraping humanity to arrive at the conclusion in "The Hollow Men" that, beneath the world of external appearances or garments, we are but "stuffed men." Eliot can also be seen as borrowing from both Carlyle and Whitman in his weaving together of various mythological systems of belief in "The Wasteland," except that his view clearly resembles more that of Carlyle where the apocalyptic is concerned. As opposed to Carlyle's and Eliot's view, Whitman's stance in relation to the universe can be said to have been fundamentally reverent, and where these authors seem least contented in their writings, Whitman can be seen as placidly accepting and then recreating in his poems the events in the world around him.

In the second half of the twentieth-century, we begin to witness Carlyle's general decline in popularity, and, as a result, many of his most noteworthy literary contributions are attributed to either Emerson or Whitman. While many investigations have concerned themselves with relating *Leaves of Grass* to the sum of world poetry that would follow it, few go the next step in analyzing Carlyle's place within this chain of events, and fewer are beginning to concern themselves with acknowledging Emerson's place. Walt Whitman remains, then, as the primary figure from the transcendentalist school of thought through which we consciously trace our modern modes of literary discourse. Inasmuch, it becomes essential to establish a genealogy of influence between Whitman and his precursors before the strands of influence connecting them altogether disappear.

Finally, the same relations we draw between literary figures should be expanded to encompass all forms of human intellectual activity. Literature, philosophy, and science have been quarantined long enough from one another, and their reunion is long overdue. Interdisciplinary investigations, such as this one, operate to weave a tapestry of human intellectual endeavors, and, in doing so, acknowledge that scholars are all essentially cut from the same cloth in their shared desire of transcending the unknown to arrive at the known. Rather than one discipline acknowledging and attempting to fully understand the findings of another, however, the disciplines themselves grow ever more estranged and turn inward upon themselves in a nihilistic process of deconstruction. In this way, our hope for a unified field theory will ultimately continue in vain so long as the fields we hope to unify continue to defy our broader attempts at contextualizing them.

Notes

¹ Fred Manning Smith, "Whitman's Poet-Prophet and Carlyle's Hero," *PMLA* 55.4 (1940), 1164. Two years later, Smith would expand his investigation of Carlyle's influence on Whitman in "Whitman's Debt to Carlyle's Sartor Resartus," published in *Modern Language Quarterly*.

² Walt Whitman, *Complete Poetry and Prose*, (New York, 1982), 886.

³ *Ibid.*, 888.

⁴ Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, (Berkeley, 2000), xxx. Hereafter, the text shall be referred to as *Sartor*.

⁵ *Ibid.*, xxxiii-iv.

⁶ The earliest, and still perhaps best, appraisal of Carlyle's influence upon mid-nineteenth century American intellectualism can be found in William Silas Vance's "Carlyle in America Before *Sartor Resartus*," *American Literature* 7.4 (1938). In the article, Vance explains how the New England Transcendental Club, headed by Ralph Waldo Emerson, emerged in response to Carlyle's writings.

⁷ *Sartor*, xxxvi.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 56-7.

⁹ David Kuebrich, "Religion and the Poet-Prophet," *A Companion to Walt Whitman*, (Malden, 2006), 201.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ In 1836, the same year that *Sartor Resartus* is first published in America and three years after its serial publication in *Fraser's Magazine*, Ralph Waldo Emerson publishes *Nature*, which, like *Sartor*, calls for new poets and a new language in order to give voice to the thoughts of their generation. The extent to which Emerson's *Nature* borrows from Carlyle is debatable; the fact that both works figured heavily into Whitman's composition of *Leaves of Grass* is not.

¹² The name Carlyle elects for his novel's protagonist, Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, translates roughly from Greek and German to mean "God-born Devil-dung." This choice of names lends comical irony to Teufelsdröckh, who is an otherwise solemn and indeterminable figure in the work, and it is illustrative of the very means by which the character—and Carlyle—may be seen to be at spiritual odds with himself throughout the course of the work, or, in Carlyle's terms, wavering between the "Everlasting Yea," the "Everlasting No," and the "Centre of Indifference" dividing them.

¹³ *Sartor*, 40.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 152.

¹⁵ Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," *Leaves of Grass: A Textual Variorum of the Printed Poems*, (New York, 1982), 6-7. Any poem reproduced from *Leaves of Grass* throughout the course of this study will be taken from the 1982 NYU Press variorum edition, and all numerical citations will be in reference to line numbers within the individual poems rather than to pagination within the edition. Citations for lesser known Whitman poems (i.e. poems other than "Song of Myself") will be prefaced by the abbreviation *LG*.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 129-30.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁸ *Sartor*, 191.

¹⁹ "Song of Myself," 327-30.

²⁰ Especially interesting is Whitman's praise of Carlyle's language in his review of Carlyle's *Life of Oliver Cromwell*, in which Whitman writes of Carlyle's work as being "a dashy, rollicky, most readable book that sets at defiance all the old rules of English composition."

²¹ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, & the Heroic in History*, (Berkeley, 1993), 13. Hereafter, the text shall be referred to as *Heroes*.

²² *Ibid.*, 18.

²³ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁵ "Song of Myself," 99-105.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 126.

²⁷ *Heroes*, 49.

²⁸ "Song of Myself," 1028-34.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 355-8.

³⁰ We see Melville exploring this same trope of "the riddle and the untying of the riddle" as early as 1851, when he first publishes *Moby Dick*. Melville returns to this theme and expands it in *Benito Cereno*, which he publishes in 1856, just a year after Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*.

³¹ *Heroes*, 73.

³² *Ibid.*, 69.

³³ *Ibid.*, 77.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

³⁵ "Song of Myself," 564-5.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 1337-46.

³⁷ *Heroes*, 89.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 97.

³⁹ "Song of Myself," 1332.

⁴⁰ As an example of the modern criticism waged against Carlyle's methods as a historian and thinker, see Ann Rigney's "The Untenanted Places of the Past: Thomas Carlyle and the Varieties of Historical Ignorance," *History and Theory* 35.3 (1996), 338-357.

⁴¹ "Whitman's Poet-Prophet and Carlyle's Hero," 1146.

⁴² Jorge Luis Borges, "Walt Whitman: Man and Myth," *Critical Inquiry* 4.1 (1975), 711. This article is a transcript of a lecture given by Jorge Luis Borges at the University of Chicago on January 30, 1968. Throughout the course of the lecture, Sr. Borges, after admitting to not having read *Leaves of Grass* in over twenty years, goes on to quote verbatim several lengthy passages from the work, further reinforcing his suggestion that one needs only to properly read Whitman once and understand him in order for the poet's message to be forever internalized.

⁴³ *Sartor Resartus*, 208.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁴⁶ "Song of Myself," 99-101.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 82-3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 76-7.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁵⁰ "Whitman's Poet-Prophet and Carlyle's Hero," 1158.

⁵¹ "Song of Myself," 148-9.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 133.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 189-94.

⁵⁴ Interestingly, the word "coarse," appears three times in "Song of Myself," and each time it appears Whitman uses it as a contrast to the fine clothing he associates with civilized opulence. We see Whitman first using the adjective in section 10 of the poem in order to describe an Indian girl's "coarse straight locks," as opposed to braided or weaved locks, which would imply the infringement of modern society upon her native customs. At the end of this same section, Whitman again uses the adjective to describe the coarse clothes he gives to the slave. Finally, Whitman insists in section 16 of "Song of Myself" that he is both "Stuff'd with the stuff that is coarse and stuff'd with the stuff that is fine," or that he draws no distinction between himself and others on the basis of outward appearance.

⁵⁵ "Song of Myself," 226-9.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 185-88.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 295.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 303.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 305.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 327-29.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 330-33.

⁶² For two recent studies on Whitman's use of the theme of nakedness in relation to sexuality, see Randall C. Griffin's "Thomas Eakins' Construction of the Male body, or 'Men get to Know Each Other across the Space of Time,'" *Oxford Art Journal* 18.2 (1995), 70-80, and Onno Oerlemans' "Whitman and the Erotics of Lyric," *American Literature* 65.4 (1993), 703-30. Griffin compares the use of nakedness as a theme in the works of Walt Whitman and painter Thomas Eakins, and concludes that both men attempted to recreate modern versions of classical Hellenic examples of beauty in their art through the theme of nakedness. As this theme relates to sexuality, Oerlemans explains in his article how, in Whitman, "physical nakedness is a trope for the collapse of awareness back to stark individuality that follows sexual activity" (718).

⁶³ *Sartor*, 50.

⁶⁴ *LG*, "Song of the open Road," 89.

⁶⁵ *LG*, "To You," 32.

⁶⁶ *LG*, "Song of Myself," 1135.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 33-37.

⁶⁸ *Sartor*, 191.

⁶⁹ *LG*, "To Think of Time," 76.

⁷⁰ "Song of Myself," 352-54.

⁷¹ *LG*, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," 120-25.

⁷² *Sartor Resartus*, 40.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁷⁴ *LG*, "Weave in, My Hardy Life," 4.

⁷⁵ "A Noiseless, Patient Spider," 1-10.

⁷⁶ "I Sing the Body Electric," 52-57.

⁷⁷ Justin Kaplan, *Walt Whitman: A Life*, (New York: 1980), 230.

⁷⁸ David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America*, (New York: 1995), 236.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 241.

⁸⁰ For a more refined elaboration of this concept of shifting paradigms, see Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, (Chicago: 1996).

⁸¹ *LG*, "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer," 1-8.

⁸² "Song of Myself," 48.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 352-54.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 508-155.

⁸⁵ In Douglas R. Hofstadter's "Prelude...Ant Fugue," *The Mind's I*, (New York: 1981), 148-91, we are afforded a modern equivalent to Whitman's combined vision of the world. Hofstadter adopts a similar perspective in comparing the processes of an ant colony with that of the human brain, and explains how principles of reductionism and holism are necessary in understanding both of these natural phenomena.

⁸⁶ "Song of Myself," 123-30.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 382-86.

⁸⁸ During the late nineteenth century, the literary movement of Naturalism arose in America. This approach, which came about largely as a response to the Romantic and Realist movements in literature, sought to display nature candidly in its rawest and sometimes least appealing forms. In response to these observations, its adherents generally came to view the universe as an inherently harsh and indifferent place. One of the primary representatives of the Naturalist movement in America was Stephen Crane, now mostly known for his *Red Badge of Courage*. In 1899, a year before his death at the age of twenty-nine, Crane best illustrates the Naturalist perspective when he writes in regard to the indifference and inaccessibility of the universe: "A man said to the universe: | "Sir I exist!" | "However," replied the universe, | "The fact has not created in me | A sense of obligation."

⁸⁹ "Song of Myself," 576-78.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 485-92.

⁹¹ *LG*, "On the Beach at Night Alone," 1-14.

⁹² Douglas Bush, *Science and English Poetry*, (New York: 1950).

⁹³ For a more thorough explanation of the scientific information I have presented here, see Brian Greene's *The Elegant Universe: Superstrings, Hidden Dimensions, and the Quest for the Ultimate Theory*, (New York, 1999, as well as Greene's *The Fabric of the Cosmos: Space, Time, and the Texture of Reality*, (New York, 2004). In both works, Greene provides a highly readable account of the primary principles guiding modern theoretical physics, and draws connections between these principles in order to illustrate the modern scientific view of the universe.

⁹⁴ *LG*, "Kosmos," 7-11.

⁹⁵ *Sartor*, 181.

⁹⁶ "Song of Myself," 1252-54.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1325-27.

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