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OUTING WALT WHITMAN



by Miles Mathis

WHEN the true poet comes, how shall we know him—
By what clear token,—manners, language, dress?

The two lines above are from an old poem by Richard Watson Gilder. [The poem has been used to introduce](#) the poems of Whitman, back to 1881. But I would like to ask the opposing question here: when the *false* poet comes, how shall we know him?

As a sort of prefatory analysis to the heavy analysis we will do below, let us look closely at those two lines. Do they make any sense? No. Once you have asked the question in line one, why would you start by suggesting that we study the poet's *manners* and his *dress*? Is there any possibility we could judge a poet by those standards? Of course not. No one who could read or think would introduce anything with those lines. So *even the introduction to Whitman's poems turns out to be misdirection.*

I am now in my fifties, and every decade I have disliked Whitman more. But until now, I couldn't have told you precisely why. At last I think I can.

When I first read him in my teens, my reaction was a typical adolescent knee-jerk reaction, based almost entirely on intuition and emotion. It just didn't *feel* right to me. It tasted bad, like a piece of pizza left in the refrigerator too long. It also looked bad. It didn't look like poetry to me. It wasn't pretty in any way, and I have always been very visual, as you may know. Since Whitman is supposed to be all about feeling and sensuality, I should have trusted my feeling, but I trusted it only far enough to avoid re-reading him for several years. I didn't trust it enough to broadcast my dislike. I was a quiet teenager.

In my twenties I re-read parts of *Leaves of Grass*. A friend was gaga over it, so I thought I would give it another try. No luck. I disliked it even more. I had read a lot of good poetry in the meantime, including poetry both before and after Whitman. I considered my tastes pretty broad, since I liked a lot of things—from Horace to Hopkins, Byron to Baudelaire, Matthew Arnold to Dylan Thomas, Christina Rossetti to T.S. Eliot, Wordsworth to Hart Crane. But I just couldn't broaden my tastes enough to include Whitman. The bad taste was still in my mouth, and it had soured more with age, leaving a film on my teeth and soul.

In my thirties I valiantly tried a third time. I scrubbed my teeth and soul with a stiff brush and took the fruit to my lips once more, only to gag all the more ferociously. By this time, I began to have my suspicions. I noticed that Whitman, although technically not Modern, was affecting me like the Moderns. I had by then been a successful painter for several years, and had studied recent art history in some depth. I had even written a few things, to put my feelings and opinions down on paper. I began to see that Whitman, like the Moderns, was faking his forms as well as his emotions. Whereas before I had only assumed he was a *bad* poet, I began to get see signs of the *fake* poet. Both his poetry and his biography had the watermarks of a poser. But since I still didn't understand what was going on with his fame and his appeal to others, I kept quiet. I was quiet in my thirties.

In my forties I finally admitted to a friend that I didn't like Whitman. He asked if it was because of the sexuality. I said, are you kidding me? I paint nudes for a living! I date a different girl every other week. About the only thing I can stomach in Whitman *is* the sexuality. That is the only reason I keep trying to give it a chance. He said, "I mean the gay stuff." I said, "What gay stuff?" That's right, I was clueless about Whitman being gay until recently. I guess I just didn't really care. I didn't know George Michael was gay until I was 45. What can I say: it didn't come up. Which all just goes to prove I wasn't judging Whitman on that. As you will soon see, my problem with Whitman was never about sexuality or sensuality, gay or not. It was about something entirely unrelated.

This did give me a chance to reread Whitman again. But even then, I didn't feel the least inclination to add or subtract gay points. I liked him no more than before, and the little less I liked him had nothing to do with the gay content. To be honest, that whole angle held no fascination for me one way or the other. He could have been a whole lot more sexual and a whole lot more gay, and it wouldn't have changed my opinion one jot. The thought did cross my mind that perhaps he was popular with a certain set for that reason, but I couldn't convince myself that was the whole answer to the mystery of his fame. So again, I just sat on my opinion. In most things, I was still quiet in my forties. Only when at my computer did I start to express myself more freely on a couple of subjects (art and physics).

In the past few years, things have started to come together in my head, and recently I have discovered some things I felt compelled to share. Although in my life away from the computer I am still very quiet, at my keyboard I no longer hold back. If I have something to say, I say it. If people don't like it, they don't have to read it. Well, I re-read Whitman again recently, and I will tell you why. I was wasting some downtime, looking for a movie to watch, and one of the sidebar suggestions on a site I visit was the 2013 film *Kill Your Darlings*.



Although I had commented briefly on this film in my paper on the [Beat poets](#), I hadn't actually watched it. My comments were based only on the broad subject matter of the film, not on its plot or cinematography or anything. I wasn't reviewing the film, just commenting on the strangeness of it coming out at the same time I was writing my paper. So anyway, feeling I needed to round out my opinion, I clicked on the link and watched the first part of it. As you might expect, I hated it so much I couldn't continue to torture my eyes and eidolon by watching it to the end, but I did learn a couple of things. What concerns us here is the extent to which the Beats were influenced by Whitman. He comes up very early in the film more than once, and the crucial scene is a classroom scene where Harry Potter is challenging his teacher. The teacher is telling them the importance of form in poetry, saying it is like tucking in your shirt. Harry raises his hand and says, "What about Whitman? Wasn't Whitman all about the untucked shirt?" The teacher says, "Ah, Harry Potter, you are also Allen Ginsberg aren't you, son of Voldemort Ginsberg the poet. Your father wrote in meter, didn't he? Why do you think he did that?" To which Harry Pooter Ginsberg says "Because it is easier?" And the class laughs, passes gas, etc.

At that point a very large sign above my TV lit up in grand fluorescents, shooting out sparks and burning a hole in my bedroom ceiling. The sign said, "PROPAGANDA ALERT!" You see, the Muses have installed these signs all over my house, at least one in every room. My computer room is rigged out with so many of these signs it looks like a scene from Dexter's Laboratory.



As I sit here in my computer chair surfing the internet, the signs are constantly exploding, and I have found it best to wear protective goggles to keep my eyelashes from getting singed.

Which is just to say that the Muses had given me all the evidence I would ever require that *Kill Your Darlings* was written by some subset of Intelligence spooks, still churning out the old inverted world, in which you are supposed to believe that real art is *easier* to produce than fake art. You are supposed to believe that writing formless bullshit “poetry” like Allen Ginsberg is actually *more difficult* than writing *Paradise Lost*. In the same way, you are supposed to believe it was more creative and actually more *difficult* for Duchamp to rip a urinal out of the wall and put it in the museum than it was for Michelangelo to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

Now, seeing Walt Whitman involved in this bald propaganda set off another sign inside my head, which set off a running fuse, like the long fuse you might see on dynamite. In my research in the past year, I had run across Whitman's name several times, although each time the incident was small, vague, and inconclusive. It was sort of like the way [I keep running across William Butler Yeats](#). The Beat poets have linked themselves in the literature to both Yeats and Whitman, although I never could see the poetic influence. As I have done with Yeats, I did with Whitman: I kept saying to myself, “Naw, it *couldn't* be.”

To clarify all this for myself, I could have searched on negative criticism of Whitman, but that isn't my way. I like to come to my own conclusions, for my own reasons. You don't need me repeating Edgar Allen Poe's or Ambrose Bierce's very negative opinion of Whitman, do you? If you want that, you can go to Poe or Bierce directly. For me to have anything to add to any historical dialogue, I have to have my own individual opinion, and the only way I can come to that is to do my own research, for my own reasons. Of course, the main research in this regard is reading *Leaves of Grass* once again, this time even more closely. This is supposed to be art, after all, and art should tell us the whole story. If we are good readers, we should see all there is to see in the art itself.

I wouldn't call *Leaves of Grass* art, but it *is* an extended simulacrum of art (borrowing a term from Tolstoy's *What is Art?*—which I highly recommend), and as it turns out it is even more transparent to a good reader than real art.

I intend to quote many passages to show this, but before we get to that, let me prime your eye and ear by telling you how I finally decoded this work. As we proceed, I want you to notice how vague the entire performance is in *Leaves of Grass*. Although you can argue until the end about the necessity of meter or rhyme, what you can't argue is the necessity of good poetry to have specific description. This all turns on my use of “specific” there, so I actually took the time to pull out my Thesaurus and find a list of synonyms for “specific.”

particular, precise, personal, concrete, determinate, intimate, defined, characteristic, peculiar, distinct, fixed, distinguished, certain, detailed

We will see that Whitman's writing is an utter failure by any of those measures of poetry. It is vague, loose, imprecise, general, indistinct, and non-specific. Once you realize this, you realize that *Leaves of Grass* isn't really poetry. It is an extended advertisement for America and for Whitman himself, lazily crammed into a form that somewhat resembles poetry.

Don't believe me? Let's go to the source:

I Hear America Singing

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong,
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deckhand
singing on the steamboat deck,
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as
he stands,
The wood-cutter's song, the ploughboy's on his way in the morning,
or at noon intermission or at sundown,
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work,
or of the girl sewing or washing,
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,
The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young
fellows, robust, friendly,
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

That is one of the most famous early poems, near the end of Book I. It doesn't resemble poetry in any possible way, except that it is cut up into lines about a half-page in width. The content of all those sixteen lines together is almost nil. A bunch of people are singing. What are they singing? "Varied carols." How poetic. What people? Again, no one in particular. A carpenter, a mason, a shoemaker. Yes, but *which* carpenter? What *in particular* made him worth writing about? "He is an American." Yes, so what? Am I supposed to get a lump in my throat from any any tradesman waving a flag and singing? What if he is kicking his dog in between stanzas?

Just look how blobby this writing is. Whitman tries to be more specific by giving you a time: "in the morning, or at noon intermission or at sundown." But that's not being specific, that is just naming a lot of non-specific times. You might as well ask him what color the sky was: he will no doubt tell you it is all the colors of the rainbow—red, blue, yellow, green, violet! Then he mentions a girl. You might ask what she is doing. And Whitman answers, "sewing or washing." That isn't a poetic answer, Walt. It just means you don't know or care. "She is sewing or washing or walking or sitting, you know, those things girls do." And where is the boatman? "On his boat." Where is the deckhand? Let me guess—on deck? But the hatter is the most poetic—he is singing *as he stands*. Oh the pageantry! I can almost see it in my mind's eye!

If you think that was an unfair reading, let's give him another chance:

Eidolons

I met a seer,
Passing the hues and objects of the world,
The fields of art and learning, pleasure, sense,
To glean eidolons.

Put in thy chants said he,
No more the puzzling hour nor day, nor segments, parts, put in,
Put first before the rest as light for all and entrance-song of all,
That of eidolons.

That is only a partial poem, but it is too long to reproduce in full. We have enough here to go on. Even after 20 stanzas of that, you aren't sure Whitman even knows what an eidolon is. I used the word above in my own text to prime you for this, as you may have noticed. An eidolon is a just a ghost, phantom, or spirit. With that in mind, can you make any sense of the first stanza? How do you glean a ghost? Even if he just means “gather,” the combination of words is clunky. “To glean eidolons.” A first stanza is not the place for a stretch like that, even if the rest of the stanza were crystal clear. But of course it is not. Is it “I” or “a seer” that is “passing the hues”? We suppose it is the seer, but why is the seer ignoring the physical world to gather ghosts? And if that is indeed what is happening, couldn't Whitman be clearer about it? What I mean is, if the seer is ignoring objects, we must assume he is ignoring tangible things in order to chase the unseen. Given that, why would Whitman choose to express that idea with words like “hue,” “pleasure,” and “sense”? That just confuses the issue, since none of those things are tangible, in the way that objects are. Even the fields of art and learning are intangible, and might already be said to be composed of or by ghosts. So it isn't clear why the seer would need to drive around these fields in order to gather eidolons.

The second stanza is even worse. It isn't even grammatical. He forgot the object of the last two lines. “Put first before the rest as light for all and entrance-song of all, That of eidolons.” That *what* of eidolons? You then comb the first two lines, looking for that object. That *what* of eidolons? But it isn't there, either. You will say “That” refers to “light,” but that isn't what the sentence structure allows. He needs something that “I” should “put first before the rest as light.” You can't put *light* before the rest *as light*.

How about this early stanza?

Me Imperturbe

Me imperturbe, standing at ease in Nature,
Master of all or mistress of all, aplomb in the midst of irrational things,
Imbued as they, passive, receptive, silent as they,
Finding my occupation, poverty, notoriety, foibles, crimes, less
important than I thought,
Me toward the Mexican sea, or in the Mannahatta or the Tennessee,
or far north or inland,
A river man, or a man of the woods or of any farm-life of these
States or of the coast, or the lakes or Kanada,
Me wherever my life is lived, O to be self-balanced for contingencies,
To confront night, storms, hunger, ridicule, accidents, rebuffs, as
the trees and animals do.

That is the same sort of blobby list-making. “Me toward the Mexican sea, or in the Mannahatta or the Tennessee, or far north or inland.” Walt, quit naming places and write some poetry! “A river man, or a man of the woods or of any farm-life of these States or of the coast, or the lakes or Kanada.” Walt, quit naming places and learn to spell.

When he isn't just making lists, Whitman is boldly contradicting himself, even across only nine lines. According to the title and the first line of this stanza, Walt is supposed to be *impertube*. He is standing at ease in Nature, Master of all. OK, then why is he so perturbed just nine lines later? He wants to confront night, storms, hunger, ridicule, accidents, rebuffs, as the trees and animals do. Two problems there, since animals don't confront any of those things *imperturbe*. They run around frightened out of

their minds about half the time. Even your cat or dog, protected by you in your house, runs shivering under the bed during a storm. No animal is master of all or mistress of all. No animal is “passive, receptive, silent.” Beyond that, no animal or tree ever has to confront *ridicule*. Go make fun of your goldfish or your birch: they will be *imperturbe*, but it won't be because they are master of all.

Right after this we get

Savantism

Thither as I look I see each result and glory retracing itself and
nestling close, always obligated,
Thither hours, months, years—thither trades, compacts,
establishments, even the most minute,
Thither every-day life, speech, utensils, politics, persons, estates;
Thither we also, I with my leaves and songs, trustful, admirant,
As a father to his father going takes his children along with him.

Are you still waiting for some “savantism”? I am. Notice the lists again. Everything is lists with this guy. If you don't know and don't care, just make a list. Whitman is saying we all go into the future. Yes, but that, by itself, isn't savantism. That is a *truism*. That's the definition of the future, Walt. A savant would see something in the future, but Whitman sees nothing but the present moving forward. This is blob-ism.

I skip ahead to try to find something different, but the whole book is lists upon lists. Whitman doesn't know how to describe any particular thing, so he substitutes lists for description.

18

See, steamers steaming through my poems,
See, in my poems immigrants continually coming and landing,
See, in arriere, the wigwam, the trail, the hunter's hut, the flat-boat,
the maize-leaf, the claim, the rude fence, and the backwoods village,
See, on the one side the Western Sea and on the other the Eastern Sea,
how they advance and retreat upon my poems as upon their own shores,
See, pastures and forests in my poems—see, animals wild and tame—see,
beyond the Kaw, countless herds of buffalo feeding on short curly grass,
See, in my poems, cities, solid, vast, inland, with paved streets,
with iron and stone edifices, ceaseless vehicles, and commerce,
See, the many-cylinder'd steam printing-press—see, the electric
telegraph stretching across the continent,
See, through Atlantica's depths pulses American Europe reaching,
pulses of Europe duly return'd,
See, the strong and quick locomotive as it departs, panting, blowing
the steam-whistle,
See, ploughmen ploughing farms—see, miners digging mines—see,
the numberless factories,
See, mechanics busy at their benches with tools—see from among them
superior judges, philosophers, Presidents, emerge, drest in
working dresses,
See, lounging through the shops and fields of the States, me

well-belov'd, close-held by day and night,
Hear the loud echoes of my songs there—read the hints come at last.

See, 24 more lines of nothing. Lists. Miners digging mines. Ploughmen ploughing. Presidents presidenting. Yes, we see steamers steaming through your poems, Walt, but why? Could it be to keep you from having to write any poetry?

Finally we get to the famous *Song of Myself*, in Book III. After dozens of lines of maundering, Whitman finally graduates to this, which says something, but none of it true.

Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of
all poems,
You shall possess the good of the earth and sun, (there are millions
of suns left,)
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.

Since we are reading a poem, all this is misdirection. Or brainwashing. We are *in fact* taking things second-hand, looking through his eyes, and since he is dead, we are feeding on spectres in books. He could either argue that is a good thing or a bad thing, but he cannot deny it without turning out the lights. You may be filtering things for yourself, but if you are reading Whitman's poems, you are not listening to all sides. You are listening to *his* side. Why would he take time to deny it? Also, it is probably worth pointing out that as a matter of fact, there are *not* millions of suns left. There are millions of *stars* left, or trillions, but since the Earth doesn't orbit any of them, they won't do us much good. Even if it were true, it would still be a pointless aside.

Also ask yourself this: why did he cut those first two lines at “of” and “millions”? There is no good reason to do it, unless you want to pad out your book, making it look longer and more substantial than it really is. This is a kid's trick, like triple spacing your book report so that it counts out to the required number of pages. *Leaves of Grass* is rife with these paddings and lies:

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

That is one of Whitman's most quoted lines. You can see that it is all-inclusive, since *everything* is either his soul or not his soul. Which makes the sentence *false*. Is a mass murderer clear and sweet? Is dropping bombs on innocent people clear and sweet? Is filling the oceans with plastic litter clear and sweet? Is making children sick for profit clear and sweet? Is writing poems that are obviously not true clear and sweet? Is encouraging people to live lives of utter non-distinction and blind naivete clear and sweet? No and a thousand times no.

Song of Myself was and still is sold as bold and individualistic, the highest example of late Transcendentalism. But if you actually read it for sense, you find it has nothing to do with the self-reliance of Thoreau, Emerson, and the real Transcendentalists. Whitman's individualism turns out to be a navel-gazing egotism, a sample of early American pseudo-Buddhism that is now pandemic, by which faux-thinkers justify their own shallowness and nonchalance, and by which thousands of paid agents continue to stun us, stunt us, and stultify us. While Thoreau talked about specific political causes and specific remedies, actually spending time in jail for them, we can't imagine Whitman doing

the same. Thoreau saw problems he wanted to solve. For him, America wasn't just a big colorful parade. But Whitman sees everything through the eyes of the salesman. *Leaves of Grass* looks like it was written from the Chamber of Commerce offices, not from the shore of some lonely lake. *Leaves of Grass* doesn't trumpet individualism, it reeks of town-hall boosterism.

And this, perhaps, is even worse than boosterism:

I Sit and Look Out

I sit and look out upon all the sorrows of the world, and upon all
 oppression and shame,
I hear secret convulsive sobs from young men at anguish with
 themselves, remorseful after deeds done,
I see in low life the mother misused by her children, dying,
 neglected, gaunt, desperate,
I see the wife misused by her husband, I see the treacherous seducer
 of young women,
I mark the ranklings of jealousy and unrequited love attempted to be
 hid, I see these sights on the earth,
I see the workings of battle, pestilence, tyranny, I see martyrs and
 prisoners,
I observe a famine at sea, I observe the sailors casting lots who
 shall be kill'd to preserve the lives of the rest,
I observe the slights and degradations cast by arrogant persons upon
 laborers, the poor, and upon negroes, and the like;
All these—all the meanness and agony without end I sitting look out upon,
See, hear, and am silent.

That's it? He sees, hears, and is silent? He doesn't wish to *do* anything, not even cry out or sob or wail or stomp his feet? He doesn't wish to propose any solution? He doesn't wonder how this can be? He doesn't question it, or demand it stop immediately? No, he only wishes to talk about *rich people*. That's right, the very next stanza is this one:

To Rich Givers

What you give me I cheerfully accept,
A little sustenance, a hut and garden, a little money, as I
 rendezvous with my poems,
A traveler's lodging and breakfast as journey through the States,—
 why should I be ashamed to own such gifts? why to advertise for them?
For I myself am not one who bestows nothing upon man and woman,
For I bestow upon any man or woman the entrance to all the gifts of
 the universe.

Are you sick yet? Tell me this, if you were a real poet, would you choose to place “To Rich Givers” right after “I Sit and Look Out”? What could he possibly be doing with that sequence? Ask yourself that and demand an answer. Misdirection. This is all misdirection. He *wants* you to be complacent about all the sorrows of the world, being silent. He *wants* you to find solace for your pain in rich givers, like he has. Drown your questions in money and fame! That is what all your heroes in

Washington and Wall Street and Hollywood do. It works so well for them, it must work for you, too!

Right after that, we get these three:

A Farm Picture

Through the ample open door of the peaceful country barn,
A sunlit pasture field with cattle and horses feeding,
And haze and vista, and the far horizon fading away.

A Child's Amaze

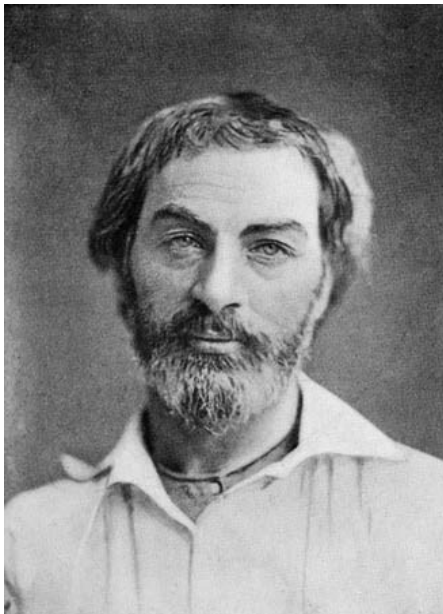
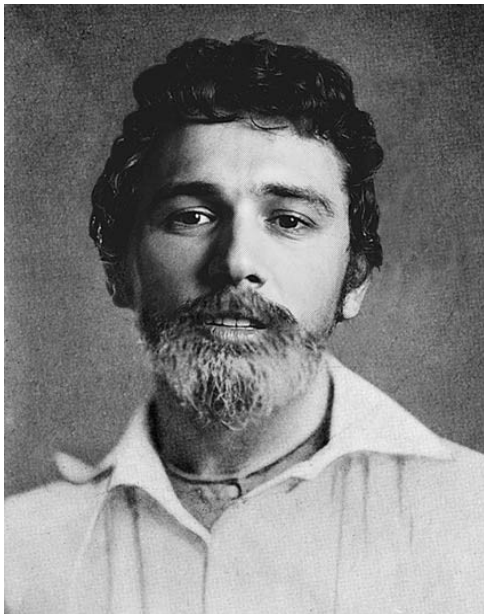
Silent and amazed even when a little boy,
I remember I heard the preacher every Sunday put God in his statements,
As contending against some being or influence.

The Runner

On a flat road runs the well-train'd runner,
He is lean and sinewy with muscular legs,
He is thinly clothed, he leans forward as he runs,
With lightly closed fists and arms partially rais'd.

I include those to show how much of *Leaves of Grass* is filler. It isn't even compost, because it has no richness or fertility. It is these little pointless asides, empty and banal. Each "poem" is just a flat statement, and Whitman hasn't even taken the time to give it an interesting form, as a writer of haiku might, for instance. Although *Leaves* was heavy with filler from the beginning, being padded out with endless lists and unformed observations, Whitman re-swamped it later with hundreds more of these throw-away lists and observations. He seems to have come to the conclusion after about 1856 that any sentence that formed in his head for any reason was a poem worthy of publication. He even admits that above, where he says "I bestow upon any man or woman the entrance to all the gifts of the universe." What? Wouldn't that make him a god, or God? No real poet or writer ever said anything even approaching that. Not even Nietzsche in his wildest rants in *Zarathustra* ever said anything like that.

And now we graduate to the truly disgusting.



What's going on there, you may ask. That is actor James Franco. He pasted himself into Whitman's photo, or allowed it to happen. He then used the picture to front an essay he wrote in December 2013 entitled "[Why Walt Whitman was the original Kanye West.](#)" If you are reading my essays, you may not know who Kanye West is. He is a rapper and a shameless self-promoter. Franco admits that, but doesn't admit that West has been accused of having Intelligence ties. He is often shown on conspiracy sites [flashing what are said to be Illuminati handsigns](#). As I say, Franco doesn't go there, and I won't, either. The point of his essay is defending Whitman's self-promotion, and thereby Kanye West's and his own. Yes, Franco is also known as a shameless self-promoter—perhaps the most unsubtle in Hollywood—which is saying a lot. The paste-up photo even gives you the clue: Franco isn't making apologies for Whitman here, much less West. He is making apologies for *himself*. The article should be entitled, "Why Walt Whitman was the original James Franco." In which case we could make the connection without effort, including the connection I am making here. Do you see it already? Like Whitman, Franco and West are Intelligence assets. This is why the Beats were always referencing Whitman, and it is the same reason Franco is referencing Whitman here. They are talking about their own. They are all part of the same long-running government disinfo campaign.

Again, Franco as much as admits it. He says,

"Song of Myself" can be seen as one long promotion of Whitman's new poetic work; it is an extended advertisement for the kind of writer he was and the kind of audience he was aiming for.

And,

So much of Whitman's poetry is concerned with defining his persona and promoting the work.

And,

Whitman tempers his claims of superiority within "Song of Myself" by simultaneously pumping up his persona and dissolving it into the people.

What you are seeing here is Intelligence admitting what it is up to, but trying to spin it. Even 160 years after the fact, they still have to keep the spin fresh, to keep it from being despun. Franco admits that Whitman wrote at least three of his own early reviews, submitting them anonymously or under an assumed name. Eventually Whitman conceded these reviews and added them to later editions of his books. His self-promotion had been so successful and unquestioned, he felt he no longer had to hide. Franco admits this, but then spins it. To spin it, he tells us of a recent lawsuit against Sony, where Sony was caught making up phony film critics, who then gave their movies glowing reviews. According to Franco, this practice is limited, and is different in kind than what Whitman did. His argument falls flat, though. First of all, given what the press is and has long been, no one should assume this practice is limited. We should all assume it is the norm. When studios aren't just making up critics, they are buying them. Second, if anything, what Whitman did is *worse* than what Sony did, because no one expects film criticism to be pure or transcendent. In defending Whitman, Franco says,

The same kind of promotion looks different in a fictional context because a space is created between the artist and the art, so that the self-promoting persona within the work is given slack to be flawed. We allow our fictional characters to be flawed and arrogant as long as they are charming or intelligent, which we don't as commonly allow in the realm of ostensible non-fiction.

I hope you see how that is reversed. Franco is calling Whitman a fictional character, while calling film

a “realm of non-fiction.” Are you kidding me? The truth is just the opposite. Film is clearly fictional, and Whitman is a real person. Poets are not fictional characters. And because poetry was expected to be a higher and purer form than stage acting (the Civil War equivalent of film), readers did *not* expect to be lied to and propagandized by poets. Readers of poetry at that time (and this) do *not* expect that they are in the presence of shameless self-promotion and promotion of state propaganda. In fact, it is precisely because readers did not and do not expect this that the propaganda has been so wildly successful. By hiding the boosterism in a fake poem, Intelligence fooled everyone and they are still fooling almost everyone.

I encourage you to re-evaluate all you think you know about Whitman. Early on, the argument about Whitman centered on his lack of meter, lack of poetic discipline, or sexual content. The argument still centers on those things. But all those arguments were and are diversions. What should have been and is far more important is Whitman's not-so-subtle turning of the individualism of the Transcendentalists into a cloak for state propaganda. While Whitman may appear on a first reading to be encouraging self-reliance, democracy, fellow-feeling, high emotion, and healthy sexuality, he is actually undermining all of these things, *on purpose*. He was doing in 1855 what Hollywood is doing now. He was steering the cultural life of America into prescribed channels, and the prescriptions were being written by the government. In this way, his writing was the polar opposite of the writing of Thoreau, who was always opposed to the state. While Thoreau wished to further limit the already limited state, Whitman glorified the state, cheerleading for its every expansion.

You should study the form of Whitman's poetry, but not in the way you are taught. What you should ask yourself is, “Why did Whitman write this one long set of poems, and then do almost nothing else his entire life? Yes, he added to it and republished it many times, but that is not what poets normally do. By the time Whitman had hit 40, *Leaves of Grass* had swelled to 456 pages, but by then he was mostly done. Yes, he published *Drum-Taps*, but of course that slender book is as clear an example of war propaganda as has ever been published. The same could be said for *O Captain my Captain*. If Whitman had been trying to prove my thesis here, he could not have written anything more transparent than *Drum-Taps* or *O Captain my Captain*. Even Tennyson, the poet laureate of England and a writer of some amount of state propaganda, would have been embarrassed to have written dreck like this.

Whitman continued to lecture about Lincoln to the end of his life, telling many audiences across the country the standard story of the assassination, burning it into their consciences by adding his own pseudo-poetic flourishes. Just imagine if a prominent poet toured the country today, repeating the standard story of the Kennedy assassination or of 911, spinning it in a boldly patriotic manner. We would know immediately he was a tool of someone, wouldn't we? After the Civil War, from 1865 to 1872, Whitman worked in the US Attorney General's Office. That is a strange job for a famous poet, isn't it? What if a famous contemporary poet worked in the Attorney General's Office now? Would you assume his independence?

Whitman's biography is full of these contradictions and omissions. Even Wikipedia admits, “Whitman, who typically kept detailed notebooks and journals, left very little information about himself in the late 1850s.” Since that is when he was writing the bulk of *Leaves*, that is of some import. We do know he worked for many newspapers, becoming a typesetter at age 12 for the *Long Island Patriot*. In 1835, at age 16, “He moved to New York City to work as a compositor, though, in later years, Whitman could not remember where.” That's convenient, right? By age 17, Whitman was supposed to be teaching at various schools. But wait, we were told his education ended at age 11. How was he qualified to be a teacher of anything at age 17, except maybe typesetting?

At age 19, he is said to have founded his own newspaper, working as both publisher and editor. What? How in hell did he manage that? His family was supposed to be poor, moving frequently due to bad investments. So a poor boy with no education past 4th grade founds his own newspaper on Long Island, and is successful enough in his first year to have something to sell to a guy named E. O. Crowell? No copies of this newspaper survive. Curious.

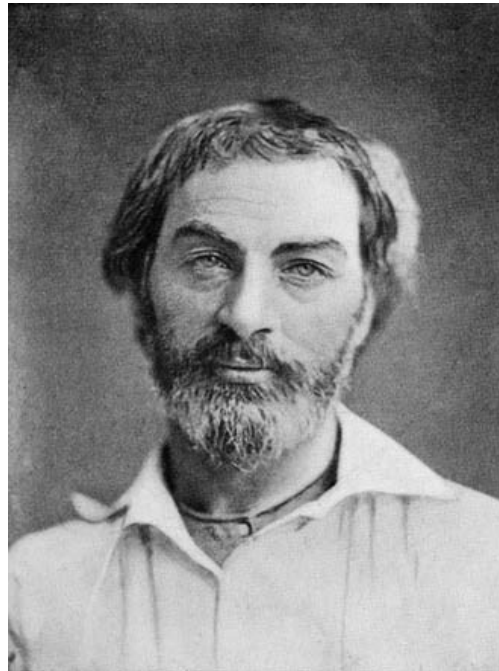
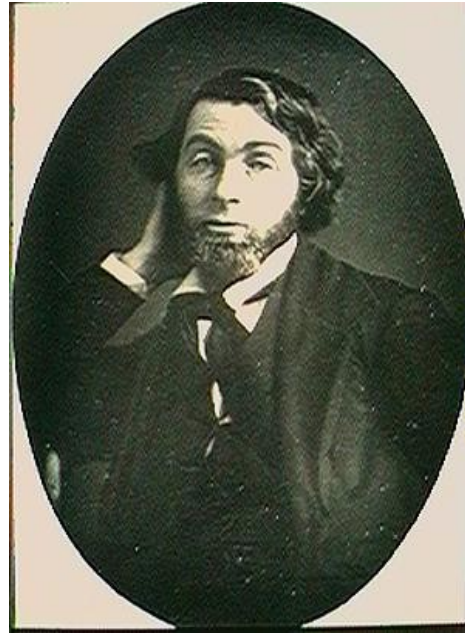
I encourage you to read Whitman's biography closely. None of it makes any sense. Like Ezra Pound and the others in the Lost and Beat Generations, he is always doing something for which he has no qualifications, no money, and no obvious entrée. And after he does it, whatever he does gets mysteriously promoted to the skies, despite having a rather obvious lack of quality. The only honest opinion we get is from marginal characters. Remember how Gerturde Stein's brother thought her books were "an abomination"? Whitman's brother George thought *Leaves of Grass* "wasn't worth reading." Maybe he knew who was paying for it.

The other thing you should study is Whitman's self-promotion. As Franco admits, it was not subtle. But that isn't even the important question. The question is, "Have you ever seen *any* poet before Whitman promote himself like that, in that manner, or to that extent?" No, not even close. Whitman's poetry is utterly new, but not because of the sexuality or lack of meter. Catullus wrote about sex 1,800 years earlier, and actually created poetry out of it. Same for Sappho and many others. What is utterly unprecedented about Whitman is the transparent propaganda, both concerning the promotion of himself and of the State. Poets had been patriotic before, and even Longfellow might be accused of propaganda, but it was infinitely subtle compared to Whitman. And absolutely no one had ever promoted themselves *within the poem* to the extent Whitman did. Poets like Shelley and Byron were never vexed by a lack of confidence, and they sometimes alluded to their own abilities indirectly, but they never took off their shirts inside the poem and paraded in front of you, flexing. Goethe had no least doubt of his greatness, and in private conversations wasn't too shy to admit it, but we don't see him self-promoting within the literature or poetry itself. This was seen as tasteless and counter-productive. To show your greatness in literature, you composed great sentences or great stories; you didn't just flop about on the page preening and winking. Only in a "youthful" America would this kind of *gaucherie* even be possible.

But we now see it was much more than that. We can't lay this this long disinfo campaign on the doorstep of a "youthful America," as the Brits did at the time. The rest of the civilized world looked upon Whitman as some species of vulgarian, but that wasn't the correct analysis. That isn't the correct analysis because neither Whitman nor anything that came after was a natural outcome of America's youth, or of anything outside Intelligence. *Leaves of Grass* wasn't a spontaneous eruption from US academe, much less from the American grassroots; it was a early volley in a preconceived government program. That program consisted of using art to further nationalist and anti-democratic causes, and that program has grown furiously ever since.

Remember, [I showed that Theosophy](#), born in 1875, actually owed its conception to the US War Department. Henry Steel Olcott was a high-ranking officer in military intelligence, and he co-founded Theosophy with Blavatsky. Both Olcott and Whitman worked for New York newspapers in the 1840's. Whitman is said to have founded and/or edited several. Olcott was in the War Department at the same time Whitman was working for the US Attorney General (1860's). Do you suppose it was just a coincidence that both of them were importing a watered-down and corrupted form of Buddhism in the same decades?

We might also ask how many Walt Whitmans they had:



Those first two photos are clearly the same man, since we have a sort of monkey face, with a long upper lip, very high eyebrows, and very heavy eyelids. Look at the lidfold floating way above the top of the eye. But who is that in the third photo? Study the eye to your right, especially the eyelid. Not even close to the previous pictures. Supposing that is really Whitman, why has the image been totally repainted? The hair and neck and shirt have been repainted, and there is some sort of light feather blowing off the right side of his head. What is that? And is that a leather thong around his neck? You should ask yourself what that signifies.

Most of the other photos of Whitman also shows massive retouching/repainting (including the first photo here), which is curious. It is true that these old photos get damaged, but it is rare to see main features like eyes totally repainted. In many of them, we see that Whitman's strange eyelids have been repainted. What are they trying to cover up there? In several, Whitman is wearing an unbuttoned

white shirt. No one at the time allowed themselves to be photographed in unbuttoned white shirts, except mental patients. Maybe Whitman was just a photogenic mental patient they used as a face for this propaganda. That would explain the repainted eyes, since eyes like that may have been a clinical sign of his particular form of insanity.

You may think I have gone over the edge, but we are not over the edge, we are down the rabbit hole. We have taken the red pill and the entire history of the world has evaporated. We are forced to rebuild it from huge, smoking piles of lies and half-truths. Knowing the extent of the Matrix, we must feel free to speculate, because only by speculation can we eventually sort through all the mixed data. Whitman is not who we were told he was. So who was he? I can't answer that yet. It will take more research than I have yet done to begin to answer it.

But one thing is now clear to me, and that is the link between Whitman and the Beat writers. Kerouac obviously borrowed his subject matter and style from Whitman, as did Ginsberg. It was from Whitman that they learned that all real effort was just wasted on the American public. From him they learned they didn't have to learn a trade. They didn't have to learn how to write or how to express themselves. They didn't have to learn to make sense. They could say things that were bald contradictions and obvious lies, and no one would notice. They could sell long lists of nothing as descriptive and poetic. Instead of evoking ideas and emotions and stories from crafted sentences, they could just drop a few catchwords like "babies and workers and freedom and the future." Readers could be taught by repetition that any mention of a baby was a cue to well up. Any mention of workers was a cue to kiss the flag. And if readers still failed to react in the prescribed way, that didn't matter, either. A few hundred people could just be hired to report they *did* react that way, and that you had better, too. If the newspapers said that Whitman was great, he was great. Your opinion didn't even come into the equation. If you questioned the newspapers, you were tossed out of the universities and replaced by people who said they agreed with the newspapers. In this way, a large percentage of people could simply be told what to think, while the tiny percentage of people who saw the truth could be marginalized and defamed.

And the promoters learned from Whitman, too. They saw they could sell anything and everything under the umbrella of novelty, fellow-feeling, freedom, and relevance. Whether what they were selling actually *did* advance any of those things was beside the point. *Saying* it did was enough to complete the sale. Americans had shown they would buy any amount of pulp as long it was labeled "poetry" or "art." They would buy any pile of lies, as long it was labeled "truth." They would buy anti-science as science, anti-art as art, and anti-freedom as freedom. And if Americans *didn't* buy it, the government would just buy it and fake the sales lists, telling Americans they *were* buying it. The government would then make up the difference by stealing the money from the treasury and labeling it as a new democratic program. This is the genesis and operation of all modern markets and government agencies. You buy what they are selling one way or another. If you won't buy it from a store, they just repackage it as a federal program and pay themselves from your taxes.

That is what they have done with art and poetry and literature, which are now so bad no sensible person would buy them. Art is now subsidized at the local, state, and federal levels, and the Modern museums are filled that way with art no one wants to see. You are forced to pay for your own propagandizing, and when you refuse to go to the museums to see it, they produce programs and articles and news stories, so that whenever you turn on the TV or pick up a newspaper or magazine, the art is jammed in front of your face. Now that people are refusing to watch TV or buy newspapers or magazines, I suspect they will round people up and download the art and poetry and other propaganda directly into their brains, via electrodes, sending them a bill afterwards for the privilege.

Actually, now that I think of it, they already do that. It is called the internet. They are downloading the propaganda into your head wherever you go, and billing you monthly for your modem or cable. And they don't need electrodes: they have wi-fi. Even when you turn off your computer, they can download propaganda into your head through the air, using your noggin as a radio. Is your antenna installed yet?