

FREE-BOUND AND FULL CIRCLE: A STUDY OF  
WHITMAN'S MIMETIC PROSODY

By

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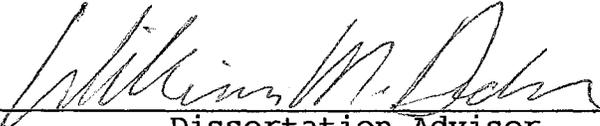
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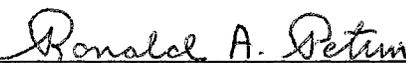
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## ABBREVIATIONS

In this study, these frequently cited Walt Whitman texts are referred to with the following abbreviations:

CRE: Leaves of Grass: Comprehensive Reader's Edition

Corr.: The Correspondence

DBN: Daybooks and Notebooks

EPF: The Early Poems and the Fiction

LG 1855: Leaves of Grass: The First (1855) Edition

NF: Notes and Fragments

NUPM: Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts

PW: Prose Works 1892

WWC: With Walt Whitman in Camden

WWW: Walt Whitman's Workshop

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CHAPTER I.

"TO BE IN ANY FORM, WHAT IS THAT?":

THE REACTION TO WALT WHITMAN'S

NEW PROSODY<sup>1</sup>

Thus my form has strictly grown from my purports and facts, and is the analogy of them.

Walt Whitman

1.

When Walt Whitman exploded upon the American literary scene with the 1855 debut of Leaves of Grass, he attacked the whole history of English prosody. In this quarto, its gold cover-title growing "organic" leaves and roots, the new poet of democracy discarded traditional poetry as the world then knew it. In the engraving by S. Hollyer on the book's frontispiece, the author is shown in working-class trousers, his shirt unbuttoned, his hat tilted defiantly on his head, a portrait drastically different from the dress of upper-class authors at the time. The twelve untitled poems comprising the first edition of Leaves of Grass broke completely with the themes and traditional prosody of the aristocratic, English-influenced poetry prevalent in America, beginning a debate in American Arts and Letters which still continues today in the arguments between free versers and neo-formalists.

Yet, ironically, Whitman's prosodic break with the past should have come as no surprise to an America obsessed with creating a new literature. Such an environment, no doubt, impacted the young poet. One example of this influence is the "Young America" movement, which by the late 1830s had become adamant about wanting a new American poetry free from British influence, an idea closely tied to the political fervor of the times, although discussions within this movement failed to give specifics on just what the new prosody of the country should be.<sup>2</sup> The "Young America" group was constantly battling it out with more conservative Whigs who believed that, like American politics, poetry should be influenced by the past and remain privileged. Appealing to the tastes of the masses would only lower the quality of American writing.

The "Young America" movement began around 1837 when John L. O'Sullivan and Samuel D. Langtree founded the Democratic Review. These radical Jacksonian Democrats, or Locofocos, consisted of some of the best critics of the era, including Evert A. Duyckinck, Cornelius Mathews, William Gilmore Simms, and William A. Jones. Melville was even associated with this movement through his friendship with Duyckinck.

That Whitman sided with the "Young Americans" is evident in both his literary ambitions and his politics. Between the years of 1841-1845, Whitman contributed ten works to the Democratic Review, nine tales and an article entitled "A Dialogue [Against Capital Punishment]." In September of 1855, in fact, Whitman published one of his self-reviews on

Leaves of Grass in this publication, by then named the United States Review. With such a call to break with the past so prevalently in the air, Whitman's free verse crusade should have come as no surprise.

Even the French anticipated that someone like a possible Walt Whitman would arrive in the near future. Specifically, Tocqueville, as early as 1840, uncannily foresees Whitman's arrival. Although in his Democracy in America Tocqueville believes American writers, apart from journalists, are mostly non-existent, he eerily predicts Walt Whitman's 1855 Leaves of Grass (and other rebellious writers that follow) in a now famous passage familiar to scholars of nineteenth-century American literature.<sup>3</sup> The passage deserves to be quoted in full:

Taken as a whole, literature in democratic ages can never present, as it does in the periods of aristocracy, an aspect of order, regularity, science, and art; its form, on the contrary, will ordinarily be slighted, sometimes despised. Style will frequently be fantastic, incorrect, overburdened, and loose, almost always vehement and bold. Authors will aim at rapidity of execution more than at perfection of detail. Small productions will be more common than bulky books; there will be more wit than erudition, more imagination than profundity; and literary performances will bear marks of an untutored and rude vigor of thought, frequently of great variety and singular fecundity. The object of authors will be to astonish rather than to please, and

to stir the passions more than to charm the taste.

(2: 59)

Out of Tocqueville's many observations (and, from the piece's tone, it seems apprehensions), just one seems incorrect as it applies to Whitman. The first edition of Leaves of Grass, although only ninety-five pages, gave the appearance of a book-length poem, and later grew in size over nine editions (1855-1892), becoming bulkier as the years progressed. Here, ironically, Tocqueville basically sums up the scholarly attack on Walt Whitman, fifteen years before Leaves of Grass is even published.

Although Whitman must have been influenced by the discussion of a need for a new American measure, his innovation' in free verse evolves out of theories Bryant and Poe imported from middle eighteenth and early nineteenth century England years before Leaves of Grass was composed. Poe, in The Rationale of Verse (1843), was still clinging to the notion that English prosody was quantitative and not accentual, although he nonetheless recognized a slight need for experimentation. His prosodic theories, among other things, take into account time, specifically the length (duration) of syllables. An outdated approach for its time, Poe's theory accepts metrical variations only in what he calls "bastard feet," those with an additional unstressed syllable which could be spoken rapidly to keep the time-duration of a line (Rationale 235-240). This variation, apparently, could come in any type of foot. Elisions (the contraction of two syllables into one, sometimes by deleting a consonant, as in "ne'er" for "never") for Poe are not

acceptable, since the natural speech of the English language required the pronunciation of all syllables.

Bryant's prosodic treatises are more rational in their championing of metrical substitution, though his ideas also derive from English theory in the middle eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In "On Trisyllabic Feet in Iambic Measure," published in the North American Review in September 1819, Bryant argues that anapestic and tribrachic substitutions have been "allowed from the very beginnings of English poetry," and should therefore be accepted in American writing (Prose Writings 1: 61). Basically, Bryant allows elisions of syllables under certain circumstances, namely when two vowels can be read as one. Thus, in an anapestic foot, two unstressed vowels can be read as one unstressed vowel, thereby converting the anapestic foot into an iamb. These substitutions can also work with diphthongs. Moreover, Bryant often accepted anapestic and tribrachic feet without elision, so that a poem could maintain an irregular measure in perfectly written trisyllabic feet. This practice allows the poet more freedom, loosening up the monotony of the iambic line and giving it a natural freedom. In a passage similar to what Whitman will later write, Bryant discusses the natural tendencies of a freer, traditional line:

For my part, when I meet with such passages, amid a waste of dissyllabic feet, their spirited irregularity refreshes and relieves me, like the sight of eminences and forests breaking the uniformity of a landscape.

(Prose Writings 1: 64-65)

One wonders, however, if the "landscape" Bryant refers to,

like the prosodic idea itself, is one imported from England and transplanted in America. Since such metrical substitutions were uncommon in American prosody at this time, Bryant can be credited with at least bringing the obvious to the attention of native poets, although his ideas sound very similar to Coleridge's.

In England, around 1820, Coleridge is shifting from a purely accentual-syllabism to a more accentual prosody, specifically using trisyllabic substitutions in a normal duple line, a technique employed by eighteenth-century poets and prosodists Samuel Say, John Mason, and Joshua Steele.<sup>4</sup> Reacting against the strict syllabism of Edward Bysse and the regulated and solely iambic metrical variations of Pope and Johnson,<sup>5</sup> this group calls for trisyllabic substitutions and an "expandable" line which could lengthen and condense to expression. Whereas Say's group is often forgotten in criticism and poetry, Coleridge's prosody remains an important force. In the 1816 "Christabel," he uses a purely accentual measure, and thus trisyllabic substitutions. In his well-known prefatory note to this poem, Coleridge writes:

I have only to add that the metre of "Christabel" is not, properly speaking, irregular, though it may seem so from its being founded on a new principle: namely, that of counting in each line the accents, not the syllables. Though the later may vary from seven to twelve, yet in each line the accents will be found to be only four. Nevertheless, this occasional variation in number of syllables is not introduced wantonly, or for

mere ends of convenience, but in correspondence with some transition in the nature of the imagery or passion.

(Abrams 1076)

Still, having a line where the number of accents stays constant and the number of unstresses wavers is a far cry from Whitman's future upheaval.

Actually, it is Wordsworth, not Coleridge, who comes closest to Whitman's verse, although only in theory and not in practice. In the preface to the second edition of Lyrical Ballads (1800), Wordsworth anticipates Whitman's desire to break the barriers between poetry and prose a half-century later, by arguing for a common language for the common man. Wordsworth, claiming there can be no "essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition" (749), believes the function of meter is to keep in check the powerful feelings of emotion necessary for a new type of poetry.

A few years after Coleridge and Wordsworth, in his 1804 "To the Public" preface to Jerusalem, William Blake continues the discussion of opening up the strict poetic line:

We who dwell on Earth can do nothing of ourselves, every thing is conducted by Spirits, no less than Digestion or Sleep. [*to Note the last words of Jesus, I fear the best...in Jesus whom we...*]

When this Verse was first dictated to me I consider'd a Monotonous Cadence like that used by Milton & Shakspeare & all writers of English Blank Verse, derived from the modern bondage of Rhyming, to be a necessary and indispensible part of Verse. But I soon

found that in the mouth of a true Orator such monotony was not only awkward, but as much a bondage as rhyme itself. I therefore have produced a variety in every line, both of cadences & number of syllables. Every word and every letter is studied and put into its fit place: the terrific numbers are reserved for the terrific parts--the mild & gentle, for the mild & gentle parts, and the prosaic, for inferior parts: all are necessary to each other. Poetry Fetter'd, Fetters the Human Race! Nations are Destroy'd, or Flourish, in proportion as Their Poetry Painting and Music, are Destroy'd or Flourish! The Primeval State of Man was Wisdom, Art, and Science.

(145-46)

Here Blake uses the word "cadence" to mean accentual units. Much like Coleridge and later Bryant, Blake often substitutes the trisyllabic foot for the iambic in Jerusalem. Thus, when an anapest replaces an iamb, the number of unstressed syllables increases in the line, giving the poet more freedom to dance around the base-measure.<sup>6</sup>

Behind this dialogue concerning trisyllabic feet and metrical substitution is the desire for English (and American poets after them) to take advantage of metrical mimesis. These writers, like many before them, realized that breaking the measure of a traditional poem to fit the subject matter is what separates a great poem from one merely well-written.

In fact, mimesis has been a concern for poets since its inception with the Greeks. The whole concept of theoretical

mimesis originates with a statement Socrates gives in Plato's Republic 10. Socrates argues that poetry is "imitation," a mirror turning round and round and thus producing an appearance of all external things (qtd. in Abrams, "Theories" 640). For Plato, ironically, poetry can only counterfeit the external appearance of the world and can never reach the realm of Ideas. Thus, it is a detriment to an ideal education.

It is not, however, until Aristotle translates this "imitation" into metrics that we find the concept of mimetic prosody as it is used today. In chapter 24 of his Poetics, Aristotle touches upon the appropriateness of imitative measures:

As for the meter, the heroic measure has proved its fitness by the test of experience. If a narrative poem in any other meter or in many meters were now composed, it would be found incongruous. For of all measures the heroic is the stateliest and the most massive; and hence it most readily admits rare words and metaphors, which is another point in which the narrative form of imitation stands alone. On the other hand, the iambic and the trochaic tetrameter are stirring measures, the latter being akin to dancing, the former expressive of action. Still more absurd would it be to mix together different meters, as was done by Chaerephon. Hence no one has ever composed a poem on a great scale in any other than heroic verse. Nature herself, as we have said, teaches the choice of the proper measure.

(108)

Of course, Aristotle is speaking of quantitative measure, not accentual-syllabism. Nonetheless, the idea that specific meters can produce specific mimetic effects which complement subject matter gets translated into accentual-syllabic feet in poetry written in the highly-stressed English language. Aristotle, in this passage, however, is rather general.

Aristotle, as well, is the first to have observed a specific, mimetic line-instance. As Northrop Frye points out in his Anatomy of Criticism, poets and critics have commented on such line-mimesis ever since Aristotle in book 3 of Rhetoric heard the noise of a huge stone rolling down a hill in Homer's line about Sisyphus (259). Pope, in fact, later translates this line to work mimetically in "Thunders impetuous down, and smoaks along the ground" (Od 11.738). Here, the falling rhythm operates as a pun in the two initial dactyls. At the end of the clause, "down" is appropriately a caesura. The caesura mimics both visually and audibly (as a stressed syllable) the rock finally reaching the bottom of the hill in a final "pluck," wherein it starts its bump of perfect iambs ("and smoaks along the ground"). The word "down" as an extra stressed syllable is not part of the true metrical feet of the line. Its stress, however, imitates the force of the first knock of the rock hitting the bottom of the hill. Through its sounds and measure, Pope's rendition quite dexterously recreates the original mimesis, or onomatopoeia, of Homer.

In An Essay on Criticism, Pope discusses his obsession with metrical mimesis:

'Tis not enough no Harshness gives Offence,

The *Sound* must seem an *Eccho* to the *Sense*.  
*Soft* is the *Strain* when *Zephyr* gently blows,  
 And the *smooth Stream* in *smoother Numbers* flows;  
 And when loud *Surges* lash the sounding *Shore*,  
 The *hoarse, rough Verse* shou'd like the *Torrent* roar.  
 When *Ajax* strives some *Rock's* vast *Weight* to throw,  
 The *Line* too *labours*, and the *Words* move *slow*;  
 Not so, when swift *Camilla* scours the *Plain*,  
 Flies o'er th'unbending *Corn*, and skims along the *Main*.

(2.364-73)

Here Pope pounds force into line 370 by making the fourth foot spondaic, so we get "Weight" thrown into the line with three stresses. Line 371, also, has prosodic mimesis. The third foot is a pyrrhic substitute which adds force to the three stresses at the line's end, one stress a part of an iambic foot, followed by a spondee. These stresses make the "Words move *slow*" literally, so, as Pope says, to make the line labor along. In line 373, Pope begins with three trochaic substitutions by squeezing two syllables together (the "th'un" of "th'unbending"). Like all trochaic substitutions, this speeds up the rhythm, a speed which mimics *Camilla* flying over the plain. Then, in the last part of the line, to create harmony and mimesis once again, Pope returns to a perfect iambic base to illustrate through meter *Camilla* skimming across the plain like a rock bouncing across water. Thus, in Pope we find mimetic-instances in traditional prosody that work as well as any throughout the history of English verse.

But seeing Popes and other neoclassical poets'

insistence on counting syllables as a limitation on mimesis, the Romantics argue for an organic form to loosen up further the poetic line. Although the Romantics question the copying of earlier poetic forms, in their writings specific line-mimesis did not go out of fashion. A poet could utilize new forms organically and still alter the meter to create meaning. The Romantics believed, though, that the poet must mine the unconscious in the process of composing, letting the natural flow of the poem develop an "organic form." Coleridge, for example, criticizes the imitation of exterior models for poetry, yet accepts nature as a general model for mimetic theory:

The form is mechanic, when on any given material we impress a pre-determined form, not necessarily arising out of the properties of the material;--as when to a mass of wet clay we give whatever shape we wish it to retain when hardened. The organic form, on the other hand, is innate; it shapes, as it develops, itself from within, and the fullness of its development is one and the same with the perfection of its outward form. Such as the life is, such is the form. Nature, the prime genial artist, inexhaustible in diverse powers, is equally inexhaustible in forms;--each exterior is the physiognomy of the being within,--its true image reflected and thrown out from the concave mirror;--and even such is the appropriate excellence of her chosen poet.

("Shakespeare" 46-47)

Here, although interpreting Aristotle literally, Coleridge

implies there are more aspects of nature to mimic, and more types of prosody than traditional, classical measure. Accordingly, a writer should let the meter come organically, without intentionally writing a poem in iambic pentameter. The feeling must come first, and it should shape meter, not the other way around. Such an organic approach anticipates Emerson's theory and Whitman's practice despite the fact that Coleridge remained concerned with traditional prosody and mimetic line-occurrences, evident in the following example from "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner:"

Her lips were red, her looks were free,  
Her locks were yellow as gold:  
Her skin was as white as leprosy,  
The Nightmare LIFE-IN-DEATH was she,  
Who thicks man's blood with cold.

(3.190-94)

As Paul Fussel notes, by loading down the last line here with a medial spondee, Coleridge, like Shakespeare before him in the Ghost's address to Hamlet, shows the chilling stillness the Specter-Woman produces in the ship's crew and the ancient Mariner (Poetic Meter 52). By the three stresses placed side by side ("thicks," "man's," "blood"), Coleridge mimics the thickening of the blood with fear.

Mimetic-instances were also very common in nineteenth-century American poetry, in the time leading up to Whitman's Leaves of Grass. For an example, we can turn to a poem by Bryant, a poet Whitman had serious differences with, but still admired. At the beginning of the 1818 "To a Waterfowl," Bryant uses trisyllabic substitution to set up

the speaker's anxiety concerning his journey in life:

WHITHER, midst falling dew,

While glow the heavens with the last steps of day,  
Far, through their rosy depths, dost thou pursue  
Thy solitary way?

(Poetical Works 1: 1-4)

In this first stanza, the speaker sees his own lost purpose in life reflected in the bird's journey. Like the bird, the speaker wonders where his life-path will lead. To show this anxiety and loss of direction, Bryant throws in an anapest at the end of line 2 ("with the last"), followed by a cretic one ("steps of day"). These two triple-feet show the awkward situation for both speaker and bird. The anapest's last syllable is stressed and so is the first syllable of the cretic. The anapest's two unstresses push the line forward while the two stresses stop it in the same manner the last steps of a man (or in this case, the anthropomorphic sunlight) stop his journey. The triple-measure collapses the line's base-meter, as a man on his last leg of a journey would collapse from exhaustion.

Still, by poem's ending, where the speaker believes the same God who leads the bird to a safe haven will also lead him to his final, pleasant destiny, Bryant depicts "stepping" in iambs. The next to last line shows that anxiety remains by the spondaic substitution's break in measure in the second foot: "In the long way that I must tread alone." Nonetheless, with its perfect iambic measure the last line brings the meter, and the speaker's feelings, into harmony: "Will lead my steps aright."

There is no proof that Whitman noticed prosodic mimesis in Bryant or any of the other writers he read, but many of his comments on poetry show an awareness of how meter is capable of imitating subject matter. As we shall see in this study, Whitman did think of meter mimetically and in an evolutionary manner. Although further loosening the line from the experimentation that had come before him was of utmost importance, Whitman still saw the need for mimetic instances. In this matter, Whitman was able to start a new poetry for a new America, one free, yet with the metrical mimesis common to traditional prosody. In this regard, Whitman perceived prosody in the same manner he perceived all aspects of his poetry, one in which opposites (male/female, soul/body, etc.) were fused into a new whole. The mimetic nature of Whitman's poetic line in Leaves of Grass is the basis of this study. Critics have been slow to see this prosodic trait.

2.

The first review of Leaves of Grass came from Charles A. Dana and appeared in the July 23, 1855 issue of the New York Tribune. Arguing that Whitman's poetry was "uncouth and grotesque" (3), and "shaped on no pre-existent model out of the author's own brain" (3), at the end of his article, Dana notes that Whitman's verse contains "much of the essential spirit of poetry" (3) and is full of "bold and stirring thoughts" (3). Although Dana only hints at prosody in his review, the disdain of Whitman's formless verse is implied. Dana was the first critic to have mixed feelings about

Whitman's style, but there were plenty more to follow.

Some early scholars, moreover, saw little merit at all in the measure, or lack of it, in Leaves of Grass. Writing in one of the era's leading magazines, Putnam's Monthly, Charles Eliot Norton braces the literary clientele for Walt Whitman:

Our account of last month's literature would be incomplete without some notice of a curious and lawless collection of poems, called Leaves of Grass, and issued in a thin quarto without the name of the publisher or author. The poems, twelve in number, are neither in rhyme nor blank verse, but in a sort of excited prose broken into lines without any attempt at measure or regularity, and, as many readers will perhaps think, without any idea of sense or reason. The writer's scorn for the wonted usages of good writing extends to the vocabulary he adopts; words usually banished from polite society are here employed without reserve and with perfect indifference to their effect on the reader's mind; and not only is the book one not to be read aloud to a mixed audience, but the introduction of terms never before heard or seen, and of slang expressions, often renders an otherwise striking passage altogether laughable.

(Norton 321)<sup>7</sup>

Understandably, Norton's comments initiate the long-running argument that Whitman's verse, since it often lacks a base meter, is not poetry, but merely prose.<sup>8</sup> Norton's view was

shared by many of the elite of American Arts and Letters.

Some critics, meanwhile, were much more vicious. One writer, speaking in the May 3, 1856 issue of the Boston Intelligencer, quotes from an anonymous critic in the Criterion who, in his "Review of 1855 Leaves," says: "It is impossible to imagine how any man's fancy could have conceived it, unless he were possessed of the soul of a sentimental donkey that had died of disappointed love" (qtd. in Woodress 27). The Boston Intelligencer writer states that "this book should find no place where humanity urges any claim to respect, and the author should be kicked from all decent society as below the level of the brute" (qtd. in Woodress 27). Reviewers in England were just as contemptible, one writer for the Critic going so far as to boast that "Walt Whitman is as unacquainted with art, as a hog is with mathematics" (171). Even as late as 1901 many scholars were not accepting Whitman's work. Although arguing in his Literary History of America that Whitman's poetry was strictly American, Barrett Wendell, a Harvard College English Professor and friend of the Boston Brahmins, calls "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" "confused, inarticulate, and surging in a mad kind of rhythm which sounds as if hexameters were trying to bubble through sewage" (473). We now know that some of these attacks were a result of Whitman's openness to sexuality, his perceived religious blasphemy, and his "working-class" mentality, but if the poems had been written in traditional meter, the critical statements would have been less critical.

Of course, not everyone had problems with Whitman's new measure. Emerson had been calling for a new American poet

for years, beginning with "The American Scholar," his Harvard address which became America's declaration of literary independence. Emerson, in one of the most famous letters in American literary history, praised Whitman and found "incomparable things said incomparably well" (Whitman, Corr. 1: 41). Although Emerson would later object to Leaves of Grass' overt sexuality, he was still impressed by the effort. Was Whitman indeed the poet Emerson had been wanting? Not exactly. In light of the formal poem Emerson places as an epitaph to his 1844 essay, "The Poet," Whitman's free verse was not exactly what he meant when he stated that "it is not metres, but a metre-making argument, that makes a poem" (Collected Works 3: 6).<sup>9</sup> Emerson believed, however, that "the argument is secondary, the finish of the verses is primary" (Collected Works 3: 6). In other words, the poem's subject matter should not be crammed into a preconceived meter, but the other way around. The meter should make the argument. In fact, the meter should fit the subject matter mimetically, and form and content should be one. Importantly, one influential man of letters accepted Whitman's prosodic revolution, if only indirectly.

Fortunately, some contemporary critics sided completely with Whitman. Writing in The Christian Spiritualist, one reviewer praises Whitman's "style" and "purpose":

His very gait, as he walks through the world, makes dainty People nervous; and conservatives regard him as a social revolution. His style is everywhere graphic and strong, and he sings things before untouched in prose or

rhyme, in an idiom that is neither prose nor rhyme, nor yet orthodox blank verse. But it serves his purpose well. He wears his strange garb, cut and made by himself, as gracefully as a South American cavalier his poncho.

(qtd. in Allen, Reader's Guide 11)

Nonetheless, Whitman's "wild, irregular lines" as the answer to America's new prosody was more than most men of letters could handle. Whitman's verse stunned his contemporary critics who either denounced it as rhythmical prose, or found traces of traditional metrical measure they did not know what to do with.

Unfortunately, this negative reaction to Whitman's discarding traditional prosody has led to a lack of focused criticism on his measure. Harsh critics of Whitman's work have stubbornly decided not to attempt to understand his prosody, while the other half of the prosodic campers have been busy trying to find what new general metrical plan he is using. Furthermore, the handful of prosodists that actually scan Whitman's poetry according to traditional accentual-syllabic rules seldom observe the metrical mimesis in the line. The problem with approaches to Whitman's prosody is that most of them are general treatises. All camps either fall under the group who scan Whitman's verse according to non-accentual-syllabic theories, or those which scan it in an accentual-syllabic manner.

One early camp of scholars who scan Whitman's poetry non-accentual-syllabically believe the measure is based on the Hebrew parallel tradition of the Bible. In 1874, George

Saintsbury noticed that Whitman's prosody resembled that found in the English Bible, a view endorsed by Pasquale Jannacone in 1898 and Bliss Perry in 1906. However, it is not until 1933, when Gay Wilson Allen publishes his "Biblical Analogies for Walt Whitman's Prosody," that a studious, developed take on this approach appears. In great detail, Allen points out the similarities of Whitman's parallelism to the original and translated versions of the Hebrew Bible. Calling Whitman's line a "rhythm of thought," Allen makes specific connections between how the Hebraic poet and Whitman both balance ideas and sentences instead of syllables and accents.

Whitman, it is true, made notes on how Leaves of Grass was to be the New American Bible, but this scholarly approach is somewhat prosodically limited.<sup>10</sup> Accurately, in his 1833 article, "The Bible as Poetry," Whitman draws on an essay by Dr. Frederic de Sola Mendes concerning Hebrew prosody, claiming that "Dr. Mendes says 'that rhyming was not a characteristic of Hebrew poetry at all. Metre was not a necessary mark of poetry. Great poets discarded it; the early Jewish poets knew it not'" (PW 2: 546). There is no question that Whitman was influenced by the parallel structure of biblical prosody, but Hebrew poetry was scanned according to the number of words per line, as well. Whitman's poetry, although fitting into a parallel structure, must also be examined in an accentual-syllabic light in order to understand fully its prosody.

Some critics believe Whitman was basing his measure on

the recitation and rhetorical devices of speeches he witnessed before writing Leaves of Grass, whereas others claim the poet was trying to capture the speech of the common American. Arguments from what has become known as the "oratory school" are also prosodically limited. One of the first scholars to note the latter was Max Kaluza, who, in his A Short History of English Versification (1911), argues that Whitman's prosody was the irregular rhythm of ordinary speech. Furthermore, Richard Chase, in Walt Whitman, also briefly mentions the oratory influence on Whitman's prosody, and those of Italian opera and the Bible. Nonetheless, C. Carroll Hollis' 1983 Structure and Style in Leaves of Grass remains the best study of oratory influences on Whitman's poetry. Hollis identifies rhetorical devices, parallelism, and the oratory quality present in Whitman's style. Importantly, he traces the rhetorical handbooks of the time (which, for example, used ellipses to note long pauses in delivery) as possible sources for Whitman's use of dots in the first edition of Leaves of Grass.

Hollis runs into trouble, though, when he brings up *cursus* prose rhythm as a clue to understanding Whitman's oral prosody. Historically, the *cursus* was a special type of prose rhythm used by the writers of the Book of Common Prayer in order to give flow to the end of a rhetorical unit or line, as in Whitman's case. Although Hollis claims the *cursus* is essentially an oral device and not a metrical one, he goes on to accentually-syllabically scan Whitman's lines backwards (37). In other words, he numbers the last syllable of a Whitman line as 1, the next to last syllable number 2,

and so on and so forth, up to the line's beginning. Drawing on the work of Morris Croll, Hollis formulates rules to decide which lines in Whitman are cursus lines and which ones are not. For Hollis, the main stress will be the first accent read in the line. Every other stress that follows loses impact in oral delivery. Furthermore, for Hollis' theory, the meter must be in falling rhythm. In fact, each cursus must have two accents, each accent followed by an arbitrary number of unstresses (38-39).

In his theory, Hollis uniquely bridges the gap between critics who scan Whitman's work according to accentual-syllabic rules and those who do not. Nonetheless, if Whitman indeed was influenced by oration it seems highly unlikely he would go through the trouble of mapping out the elaborate schemes Hollis presents. Any influence which Whitman received from speeches he heard was likely an unconscious influence. It is true that Whitman spoke positively about preachers Elias Hicks and Father Taylor,<sup>11</sup> but there is still doubt that Whitman was overly concerned with oral prosody at all. To further illustrate this point, I give you the following Whitman quotation which Horace Traubel, one of the poet's executors, jotted down after a visit with Whitman in May 1888:

Two centuries back or so much of the poetry passed from lip to lip--was oral: was literally made to be sung: then the lilt, the formal rhythm, may have been necessary. The case is now somewhat changed: now, when the poetic work in literature is more than nineteen-

twentieths of it by print, the simple tonal aids are not necessary, or, if necessary, have considerably shifted their character.

(WWC 1: 163)

As Roger Assilneau points out in the early 1960s, the critics championing Whitman's "oral-prosody" conveniently fail to mention this significant quotation from Traubel (Evolution 240). If this is not enough proof against the "oratory school," Assilneau also rightfully argues (243) that Whitman perceived oratory and poetry as two distinct entities, as this note which Whitman pinned down in 1858 illustrates:

Henceforth, two co-expressions. They expand, amicable from common sources, but each with individual stamps by itself. First POEMS, Leaves of Grass, as of INTUITIONS, the Soul, the Body (male and female), descending below laws, social routine, creeds, literature, to celebrate the inherent, the red blood...Second, Lectures, or Reasoning, Reminiscences, Comparison, Politics, the Intellectual, the desire for knowledge....

(WWW 197-98)

Thus, for Whitman, poetry was to be more concerned with the unconscious, the intuitions, and therefore much freer in form. Orality, on the other hand, was rational, more patterned.

Staying with traditional approaches, however, many critics set out to prove Whitman's verses' accentual-syllabic nature. One of the most important early views on this methodology

appears in Percy Boynton's History of American Literature (1919). In his chapter on Whitman, Boynton asserts that prejudice and ignorance have prevented serious attempts to understand Whitman's prosody, a prosody which often uses regular rhymed meter, trochaic tetrameter, and iambic heptameters to create a personal style (368).

Fortunately, many critics have followed Boynton's lead. In the 1920s, Clement Wood, in his work on Whitman's traditional prosody, discusses a "definite tendency toward unity of rhythm" (48), discovering in the poet's verse many occurrences of tetrameter, pentameter, trochaic, and anapestic feet. Henry Seidel Canby, furthermore, in 1943, proposes an accentual-syllabic theory for Whitman's verse, one which breaks up long lines into units of three or four stresses followed by a caesura, the main pattern containing an unusual trochaic variation (314-15). More recently, Annie Finch, in her book The Ghost of Meter, shows the importance of iambic and dactylic feet in Whitman's verse. Likewise, Cristanne Miller, in her 1982 essay "The Iambic Pentameter Norm of Whitman's Free Verse," notes an iambic base meter in many of Whitman's poems, arguing that the poet's verse "remains undeniably close to the careful restraints of traditional prosody, but by relaxing some restrictions...Whitman has given us a vigorous new type of prosody" (306). Even more recently, John Schwiebert, in his 1990 The Frailest of Leaves: Whitman's Poetic Technique and in the Short Poem, also argues that since Whitman was unable to rid himself of traditional prosodic forms, scholars need to focus on an accentual-syllabic approach to his verse.<sup>12</sup>

Although these critics rightfully find traditional metrical feet in Whitman's poetry, only a few see how Whitman uses metrical rhythm to create meaning. The first of these, Edith Wyatt, in a 1919 essay published in the North American Review, shows that Whitman uses the rhythms of hendecasyllabics and decasyllabics to mimic the ocean waves breaking on the shore. This is a insightful approach to Whitman's metrical mimesis, and correct at times, but it is too general in nature and derived from words Whitman himself wrote. W.D. Snodgrass, on the other hand, perceives Whitman's meter as mimicking his own internal body rhythm, or "the heartbeat of the mother as we could have known it in the womb" (508). Although noticing the poetry's mimetic nature, Snodgrass employs an age-old metrical approach of meter as heartbeat, which is too general. Indeed, these theories are interesting, but Snodgrass is unable to sustain them for a serious discussion of mimesis in Whitman's verse.

The New Critics, with their close readings of poetry's mimetic line-instances, could have helped solve the problem of Whitman's prosody had they left their personal prejudices aside and taken a serious look at Whitman's verse. It is no great secret that the New Critics were not fond of Whitman. As Larry Cook mentions in a 1976 article in the Walt Whitman Review, "no New Critic has published an analysis of a single poem by Whitman" (95). Although Cook believes it is strictly a result of their attack on Whitman's nineteenth-century Romantic Idealism which hinders the New Critics from taking the poet's formlessness seriously, there is much more to

their reluctance to take on Whitman's prosody.<sup>13</sup>

Although the New Critics do not declare it, their problem with Whitman (and all perceived non-metrical verse for that matter) is that they believe no way exists to discover meaningful metrical variations in free verse poetry, a procedure which is the foundation of their very theory of prosody. One can tell this merely by their statements on Whitman. Drawing on Cleanth Brooks' analysis of the poet, Cook points out that "Whitman's failure to discriminate is the direct cause of his formlessness and generality" (Cook 97; Brooks, Modern Poetry 76). Another New Critic, Yvor Winters, attacks Whitman and all his free verse descendants in the following quotation:

To say that a poet is justified in employing a disintegrating form in order to express a feeling of disintegration, is merely a sophistical justification of bad poetry, akin to the Whitmanian notion that one must write loose and sprawling poetry to "express" the loose and sprawling American continent.

(144)

The impact of this assault even carries over to one of the best prosodists to rise from the New Critical school: Paul Fussell. Like the New Critics before him, Fussell, in his 1965 Poetic Meter and Poetic Form, also rejects Whitman's poetry for what he perceives is a general mimetic, and therefore inferior, prosody. Fussell's skills as a scanner can never be overrated, but with Whitman and free verse he makes the very same mistake in not looking for specific,

foot-level mimetic instances in Whitman. To show my point, the following Fussell passage is worth quoting in its entirety:

It almost goes without saying that expressive metrical variations are possible only in verse conceived in a tradition of more or less regular base rhythm: we can have no variations in entirely "free" or "cadenced" verse. The poet working in free verse has already chosen to eschew one of the most basic expressive techniques in poetry. Variations are also rare in some other kinds of verse. According to Wimsatt and Beardsley again, "One of the disadvantages of the old strong-stress meter [i.e., of Beowulf or Piers Plowman] is...its limited capacity for interplay. The stress pattern of the meter is so nearly the same as the stress pattern of the syntax and the logic that there is nothing much for the meter to interplay with. The same must be true for all meters depending on patterns of repeated or parallel syntax--such as the meter of the Hebrew Psalms or the free verse of Walt Whitman" [Wimsatt 142]. We must conclude that variations of the kind we shall be considering are the province of a very specific and limited kind of poetry--namely, accentual-syllabic verse (or accentual verse with a high degree of syllabic regularity) written since the stabilization of Modern English early in the Renaissance. If English prosodic history has one great tradition, this is where we must go to find it.

(Poetic Meter 39)<sup>14</sup>

Correctly, Fussell notices that Whitman's prosody is influenced by the Hebrew Psalms, but here we are concerned with this critic's discussion of accentual-syllabic variations. Although not orderly accentual-syllabic, Whitman's free verse can be scanned this way, and among the chaos and repeated order of parallelism, there are instances of metrical variation (or, in this case, order, since Whitman often lacks a base measure) which create just as much meaning as those in traditional verse (iambic pentameter, for instance). The New Critics, for various reasons, have not noticed that although there is often no base meter in a Whitman poem (and many times there is), the poet nonetheless uses metrical variation to make mimetic meaning.

Two important critics who have noticed mimetic instances in Whitman's verse take a more open-minded New Critical approach to the prosody. Pasquale Jannacone and Gay Wilson Allen's work stands out for its mimetic, accentual-syllabic scansion of Whitman. Both Jannacone and Allen scan Whitman's poetry according to traditional prosodic rules and still find mimesis, unlike the majority of scanners who find only conventional prosodic patterns. Only these two critics show how metrical variations create mimesis in Whitman's poetry, even though, often, there is a lack of a basic prosodic norm.

Allen began his studies of Whitman's prosody by dealing with the poet's use of biblical parallelism and phonetic recurrence. Allen justifies his argument, but fails to examine the smaller, metrical details necessary to any prosodic approach. Only later in life does Allen scan Whitman's poetry in more detail, pointing out the

significance of certain accentual-syllabic occurrences, and often noting how Whitman's measure, when seen in this light, works mimetically. In A Reader's Guide to Walt Whitman (1970), Allen devotes the last chapter to Whitman's form. Although his discussion is at times general in nature, he often speaks of Whitman's poetry mimetically and in accentual-syllabic terms. While fifty-six pages are devoted to Whitman's form, Allen promulgates ideas on the mimetic nature of the poems only in places.

Allen's prosodic insights are undoubtedly indebted to a study that has been largely ignored by Whitman scholars: Pasquale Jannacone's Walt Whitman's Poetry and the Evolution of Rhythmic Forms. Written in Italian in 1897 and not translated into English until 1973, Jannacone's work is the only full-length study of Whitman's prosody done in an accentual-syllabic light. In his introduction to the book, Gay Wilson Allen writes of his indebtedness. As Allen notes, although Jannacone often is too intent in mapping out the instances of perfect accentual-syllabic feet in Whitman's Leaves of Grass, missing many of the mimetic, prosodic occurrences, this author offers many profound comments on how Whitman uses meter to imitate subject matter. For this reason, the work remains the most in-depth essay dealing with the approach to Whitman's prosody which will appear in this study. Unfortunately, since the book was not published until nearly thirty years ago, recent scholars who have focused on gender issues in Whitman scholarship have mostly ignored Jannacone's writing and Whitman's prosody in general. My study proposes to pick up where Allen and Jannacone left off

by carrying on a serious dialogue with Whitman's metrics as a way to better understand not only his verse, but its bearing upon the direction prosody and contemporary poetry is heading today.

As scholars, we must continue discussing Whitman's poetics in terms of traditional metrics and show the mimetic significance of such an approach. Too many critics have been content to argue over whether a specific Whitman line is iambic or anapestic. Such insights mean nothing if we fail to perceive how Whitman's prosody reflects content. Thus, although many New Critics have found nothing prosodically sensible in Whitman's work and have therefore denounced it, my study will ultimately be affirming of Whitman's verse as well as New Critical and historical in nature.

In chapter 2, I will identify the mimetic metrical substitutions in Whitman's pre-Leaves of Grass poems, proof that in the 1840s he was already offering various examples of rhythmical excellence. Although writing in traditional verse in these early poems, Whitman breaks the meter to fit the subject matter. Quite sensibly, many of the pre-Leaves poems which show metrical mimesis deal with the quest for political freedom. By seeing metrical freedom as analogous to political emancipation, Whitman starts perceiving prosody as it relates to the independence of America. This connection allows him the impetus he needs to finally break ties with traditional prosody in the first edition of Leaves of Grass, although the remnants of conventional meter found in his collection are present enough to form metrical mimesis.

Furthermore Chapter 2 will discuss how Whitman uses

prosody to delineate national expansion and the journey motif in the first edition of Leaves of Grass. It is well understood that Whitman wanted an American epic as free and limitless as the United States and doing so meant incorporating new prosodic ideas. Yet, how the prosody illustrates the expanding frontier has not been fully treated. As units of scansion, the end-caesura of the line and the verse paragraph point to this mimesis. In fact, line upon line of Whitman's verse paragraphs may be perceived to be linear, to appear as one extended line. In fact, it may be best to think of Whitman's lines, in the first edition of Leaves of Grass, as extending into space in much the same way as printed prose does. Furthermore, the poet's anaphora energizes the paragraph or catalogue forward into time and space, something that mere prose with its end-stopped sentences cannot accomplish. Such an extended line is necessary for a speaker traveling through the landscape of America and the cosmos. In this regard, the measure is a pushing forward, a syntactical march of the people in the catalogues. If thought of in this linear manner, many of Whitman's sentence paragraphs can be converted into single lines stretching across several feet of page, a perfect way to mimic the national expansion of territory, the journey motif, and a speaker expanding his perception throughout the entire universe, from the tiniest of forms to the largest.

Chapter 3 of this study deals with mimetic sound patterns as they relate to sexuality and desire in various Whitman poems. This section will closely examine poems from the "Children of Adam" and "Calamus" clusters, showing how

certain instances of sound and meter in Whitman go hand in hand to depict the self's sense of sexuality and homoeroticism.

Chapter 4 examines Drum-Taps as one of the best examples of Whitman's sound and metrical mimesis. Besides using a somewhat traditional rhythm as a beat measure to illustrate the Northern call to arms during the Civil War, Whitman shows his ambivalence toward the conflict in many different poems. By adding the sounds of battle to his prosody, Whitman writes some of his best mimetic poems during this time period, and one of his least successful, "O Captain! My Captain!" This poem is one of the most prosodically traditional of any of Whitman's works, and I will examine how various social influences as well as a personal quest for immortality are at the core of the poet writing this piece. Also, in Drum-Taps are two highly significant works for my study, "Eighteen Sixty One" and "To a Certain Civilian," both of which comment on the poet's need for a new prosody to exemplify the chaos during America's civil conflict, and Whitman's frustration over how the American readership fails to accept and understand his new brand of poetry.

Taking the highly discussed argument that Whitman's prosody imitates the ebb and flow of the ocean, and the activity of walking, chapter 5 discusses how sometimes the poet's meter does indeed work like sea waves and the stopping and starting of the persona walking through the United States. Yet, there are many instances in Whitman's poems which illustrate sea-movement and walking in perfect iambic feet, something Whitman himself detested in the poems of his

contemporaries. Examining specific quotations from Whitman shows how the poet often said one thing about prosodic structure and ended up contradicting it in practice. Unlike most scholars who have spoken of Whitman's prosody as depicting sea-movement or nature in general, I analyze specific feet to correct this misunderstanding of exactly what takes place in the "Sea-Drift" section of Leaves of Grass, which actually deals with the ocean as subject matter. This misunderstanding, I believe, is partially the poet's own fault.

The last chapter is concerned with Whitman's later, more traditional poems, and their mimetic instances. Although Whitman utilized aspects of conventional prosody throughout his free verse career, his later poems, such as "Pioneers," "Passage to India," and "Prayer of Columbus" show a more conservative usage of traditional prosody. Unfortunately, in these canonized works, there occur no mimetic instances. Nonetheless, in dealing with Whitman's poems on death and aging, specifically "A Noiseless Patient Spider," "Youth, Day, Old Age and Night," and "Halcyon Days," one can detect that the poet's creativity is still intact. It affords an opportunity to consider Whitman's formal qualities as they relate to his quest to have his poetry live on into the next century.

The last chapter demonstrates how Whitman's measure fits significantly into the on-going debate by poets and critics over the superiority/inferiority of non-metrical and formal poetry. The contemporary argument essentially begins with Pound and Williams and today continues with poets Alice

Fulton and Timothy Steele, Fulton calling for a physicist's look at free verse prosody and Steele, an advocate of traditional verse, almost completely ignoring Whitman in his influential book Missing Measures. Essentially, poets like Fulton extend William Carlos Williams' idea that the world is no longer iambic and requires a different sort of prosody. Fulton and others claim that free verse, both today's and Whitman's, is more attuned to the natural ways of the world, specifically fractal physics. On the other hand, American writers like Timothy Steele and the New Formalists of the 1980s insist we go back to basic conventional prosody in our poetry. Nonetheless, behind their argument that non-metrical poetry is inferior to traditional verse is the belief that a poet cannot create metrical mimesis in free verse poetry. In other words, if there is no base meter to break from, the poet cannot use metrical variations to illustrate subject matter as conventional poets of the past could.

This study of Whitman's measure attempts to put an end to this widely and incorrectly held belief, showing how it has been perpetuated by contemporary poets and critics and their failure to understand Whitman, prosodically. The following chapters will prove that mimetic occurrences are indeed possible in a freer prosody, specifically Whitman's. Most importantly, however, this study proves there is not as wide a gap between free verse and formal prosody as most poets and critics suspect. In fact, Whitman's combination of free verse and traditional poetics in Leaves of Grass leads to his most interesting mimetic prosody.

CHAPTER II.

FEUDAL, BUT FREE-BOUND: THE EARLY POEMS  
AND THE FORWARD PROSODY OF THE FIRST  
EDITION OF LEAVES OF GRASS

No one of the Themes generally considered as the stock fit for or motif for poetry is taken by W.W. for his foundation. No romantic occurrence, nor legend, nor plot of mystery, nor sentimentalizing, nor historic personage or event, nor any woven tale of love, ambition or jealousy is in his work. The usual dominant requirements--beauty, art, hero and heroine, form, meter, rhyme, regularity, have not only not been the laws of its creation but might almost seem at first glance to have never been suspected by the author.

Walt Whitman (1871)

1.

This quotation applies strictly to Leaves of Grass, but anyone who discovers Whitman's earlier poems finds that the poet, too, was guilty once of producing the traditional themes and measures of the times. Writing in a period when sensationalism was common to fiction, and conventional meter was all one knew of poetry, Whitman was unable to rise above the literary movements of the 1840s. Still, his early poems show a need for prosodic adventure which foreshadows his work later in Leaves of Grass. Critics have not spent much time

examining these early poems because of their supposed traditionalism. It is because of the very fact that Whitman's early poems are traditional in nature that later critics have largely ignored them,<sup>1</sup> an irony since the first edition of Leaves of Grass was equally shunned by critics for the opposite reason, its unconventionality. For example, Lois Ware, in "Poetic Conventions in Leaves of Grass," notes that, when compared to the poems of 1855 and later, the earlier work lacks alliteration, assonance, repetition, refrain, parallelism, and end-stopped lines (57). Thus, Whitman's pre-Leaves poems are seen as unpoetic, filled with archaisms and the trite measures common to the time-period. In most regards, this argument is valid, yet there are metrical instances of mimesis in these early poems that help pave the way for similar and more experimental techniques in Leaves of Grass.

In fact, between 1838 and 1850 before his massive, prosodic groundbreaking in the 1855 Leaves of Grass, Whitman published around twenty poems in New York area newspapers and magazines, and in the New Orleans Crescent for which he was an editor (Gibson 545-46). All these prove he did indeed "suspect" the laws of "form, meter, rhyme." Although most of these pieces maintain the conventional measure and themes of pride, death and the afterlife (or lack of), sensationalism, and sentimentalism prevalent in the popular verse of the 1840s, their mimetic, metrical substitutions show that Whitman was already thinking of content and form as one. Of these twenty poems, at least three ("Each His Own Grief,"

"Young Grimes," and "The Play-Ground") are in perfect ballad meter; five others have some form of ballad stanza ("Our Future Lot," "The Inca's Daughter," "Fame's Vanity," "Time to Come," and "Ambition") with the beats varying from 4/4/4/3 measure to a combination of three to four beats per line, as in "The Spanish Lady." The rest of these pre-Leaves poems fall into various traditional stanzaic patterns, meter, and rhyme. Of these early poems, only "The House of Friends," "Resurgemus," and "Blood-Money"--all published in 1850--could be considered precursors to the free verse Whitman would use in his later compositions. These three poems contain no rhyme nor strict conventional meter, and only "Resurgemus" has any significant instances of metrical mimesis. But before we discuss this poem in detail, one needs to understand something about the environment in which Whitman composed these conventional poems and examine the various metrical variations which create mimesis in these texts.<sup>2</sup>

Whitman, at this time, was living in Manhattan, moving from one boardinghouse to another until 1845, when he took up a residency near his family in Brooklyn (Reynolds, Walt Whitman's 84). The poet was contributing conventional poems to the Democratic Review, an outlet of the "Young America" movement. By the mid-1840s, Emerson's essay, "The Poet," had been written, and since the 1830s, "changing print technology [had] resulted in a whole new kind of literature for the masses" (Reynolds, Walt Whitman's 80). Whitman was also reading and clipping poems from British publications (Bucke 21; Stovall 143), and as Gay Wilson Allen points out, the

difference between British and American prosody at this point was only slight, though scholars today tend to think differently (Solitary 130). Still, in the 1830s and 40s, Whitman's free-verse, revolutionary mode was not foreshadowed in his writings.

Among other things, what separates these early poems from those in Leaves of Grass are their finish. Speaking to Horace Traubel in his elder years, Whitman suggests these early pieces were taken from the surface of his mind, implying a lack of organic utterance (Allen, Reader's Guide 41). In fact, these purely metrical poems seem to have been somewhat mapped out by Whitman before he began writing, or at least written in a slow, metrically calculated manner. Nonetheless, even in the early 1850s, as his notebooks attest, Whitman was contemplating a freer style. Bucke, for instance, believes this following passage to have been written by Whitman in the early 1850s, and Edward F. Grier agrees, for the "small, regular hand" is similar to the hand writing in early drafts of the 1855 Leaves of Grass, as well as the early notebooks (NUPM 1: 101). With the journal-title of "Rules for Composition," Whitman sets out a plan for his new art:

A perfectly transparent plate-glass style,  
artless, with no ornaments, or attempts at ornaments,  
for their own sake,--they only looking well when like  
the beauties of the person or character, by nature and  
intuition, and never lugged in to show off, which  
nullifies the best of them, no matter when and where.

Take no illustrations whatever from the ancients or

classics, nor from the mythology, nor Egypt, Greece, or Rome--nor from the royal and aristocratic institutions and forms of Europe.--Make no mention or allusion to them whatever, except as they relate to the New, present things--to our country--to American character or interests.--Of specific mention of them, even for these purposes, as little as possible.--

Too much attempt at ornament is the slur upon nearly all literary styles.

Clearness, simplicity, no twistified or foggy sentences, at all--the most translucid clearness without variation.--

Common idioms and phrases--Yankeeisms and vulgarisms--cant expressions, when very pat only.--

(NUPM 1: 101)

Undoubtedly, Whitman, here, is working toward the rebellious style which will occur in Leaves of Grass, but it will be a few more years until the break-through. In fact, the conventional poetry Whitman wrote before this statement shows it is no great surprise that instances of metrical mimesis happen in the pre-Leaves of Grass poems. One example is "The Spanish Lady," first published in the Long Island Democrat on August 4, 1840. A common topic in European literature, the poem deals with Inez de Castro's murder in the fourteenth-century for marrying below her high birth. King Alfonso, as the story goes, felt Castro's actions would lead to bad political repercussions and ordered her killed. In the following passage, the young Whitman is describing the killer entering the door to do the deed:

Now noiseless on its hinges  
    Opens the chamber door,  
And one whose trade is blood and crime  
    Steals slow across the floor.

(EPF 29-32)

Written in a 3/3/4/4/ beat, a variation of the ballad measure, "The Spanish Lady," in line 32 uses metrical mimesis. Both words, "Steals slow," are stressed syllables, and literally "slow" the line. Thus, like the killer sneaking up to Lady Inez, the line slowly sneaks across the page. Whitman, in Leaves of Grass, we shall see, modifies how he imitates sneaking and walking. Here, though, he is just working up to his later prosody.

From 1842, "Ambition," likewise, contains metrical mimesis. A major re-write of an earlier poem entitled "Fame's Vanity," "Ambition" deals with a cloud-like aura which addresses a young boy, conveying to him that his high aspirations in life may not be fully realized. This poem begins in loose, blank verse, but becomes more formal when the cloud-like aura speaks, as it does in this passage:

And some will win that envied goal,  
    And have their deeds known far and wide;  
And some--by far the most--will sink  
    Down in oblivion's tide.

(EPF 15-18)

The last two lines show metrical imitation not only through stresses, but also with their visual layout on the page. Both "sink" and "down" are accented so that line 17 "sinks" into line 18 with its prosodic weight. This is a common



since both the seraph and angels in "The Punishment of Pride" and "The Play-Ground" are "hovering." In these early examples, Whitman prepares for the initial trochaic and dactylic feet in his later poems which are used to show movement, dancing, and at times merriment.

Most importantly, in these pre-Leaves poems, Whitman uses consecutive stresses to depict death, a prosodic technique he revisits in his post-war poems. Here is an example from the early poem "The Love That is Hereafter:"

And from the cradle in the bier  
He wearily plods on--till Death  
Cuts short his transient, panting breath,  
And sends him to his sleep.

(EPF 27-30)

In lines 28 and 30, the stresses of "Death/"Cuts short" mimic the suddenness of one leaving the world. Like a knife, the three stresses cut into the lines. The line-break from line 28 to 29 enhances this severing effect. Then, in line 30, Whitman shows the peace found after death metrically by the perfect iambic line. Death, prosodically, is harsh and invasive, whereas the sleep following is harmonious.

In "Each Has His Grief" (1841), Whitman exemplifies death in a similar metrical manner, replacing the three stresses of "pall's dark gloom" by perfect iambs in line 28:

No; dread ye not the fearful hour--  
The coffin, and the pall's dark gloom,  
For there's a calm to throbbing hearts,  
And rest, down in the tomb.

(EPF 25-28)

Whitman uses death-stresses, also, in the second line of each of the following stanzas of "Time to Come," first published in the Aurora, April 9, 1842:

The leaping blood will stop its flow;  
The hoarse death-struggle pass; the cheek  
Lay bloomless, and the liquid tongue  
Will then forget to speak.

The grave will tame me; earth will close  
O'er cold dull limbs and ashy face;  
But where, O Nature, where shall be  
The soul's abiding place?

(EPF 13-20)

These examples prove that Whitman was aware of how metrical mimesis works in traditional prosody. It was, therefore, up to the new poet of Leaves of Grass to translate such prosodic ideas into the free verse realm. His first opportunity to do this came in an early poem.

It is no mere coincidence that one of Whitman's first free verse poems deals with the issue of freedom. Critics have written about this poem more than any other of Whitman's early works, and for good reason. For "Resurgemus" hints at full-blown free verse, but also along with "A Boston Ballad," it is the only early poem the poet felt highly enough of to place into his groundbreaking first edition of Leaves of Grass.<sup>3</sup> Both Thomas Brasher and Gay Wilson Allen see "Resurgemus" as having a rough iambic-anapestic base (39; Reader's Guide 162). Truthful statements, but in this poem

Whitman is quickly leaving behind the idea of poetic normality for an unstructured norm. With such a scheme, he can create order from this freedom by throwing in metrical regularity, the direct opposite approach a traditional poet takes. "Resurgemus" deals with the failed revolutionary movements of 1848 in Europe. Nonetheless, Whitman, in the poem, believes that liberty will one day overcome tyranny in Europe, and that freedom's final victory will also occur in the United States. Here is first stanza of the early, pre-Leaves version of the poem:

Suddenly, out of its state and drowsy air, the air  
of slaves,  
Like lightning Europe le'pt forth,  
Sombre, superb and terrible,  
As Ahimoth, brother of Death.

(EPF 1-4)

Line 1, with its clausal build-up, syntactically shows the build-up of Europe's quest for freedom. Its length is much longer than the poem's following lines. In this first line, Whitman, no doubt, uses the length to mimic the long foreground of the fight for liberty. The sounds are also important, since they are much more repetitive than ones in many of the early poems.

Line 2 imitates how after the desire for freedom was recognized the European revolution was quickly launched. Whitman shows this not only in the short line juxtaposed to the first longer one, but also with the "l" and "s" sounds which are easy and quick to recite in the mouth.

In the first part of the next stanza, the sound-patterns

imitate the violence of the rebellion:

God, 'twas delicious!  
That brief, tight, glorious grip  
Upon the throats of kings.

(EPF 5-7)

First of all, the "g" sounds are notable. This harsh sound, along with the hard end-stops of "t" and "k" ("tight," "throats," and "kings") depicts, again, the rebellion's violent force. In line 6, the consecutive stresses of "brief, tight, glorious" also reinforce the violence against the establishment.

In stanza three, the "b" accomplishes the same task, as does the internal rhyme of "state" and "trains":

But the sweetness of mercy brewed bitter destruction,  
And frightened rulers come back:  
Each crimes in state, with his train,  
Hangman, priest, and tax-gatherer,  
Soldier, lawyer, and sycophant;  
An appalling procession of locusts,  
And the king struts grandly again.

(EPF 19-25)

In the initial position of lines 22 and 23, the stresses also intensify this harsh effect. Furthermore, in this stanza's last line, the stresses of "king struts grandly" show metrically the king's rigid, stuck-up, "strutting" attitude, each stress pointing out the superficial importance of the country's leader.

In stanza four, the death-stress prosody discussed above occurs in line 34, as well as the "hovering" falling meter

and "h" sound of "hangs heavily":

Meanwhile, corpses lie in new-made graves,  
Bloody corpses of young men;  
The robe of the gibbet hangs heavily,  
The bullets of tyrants are flying,  
The creatures of power laugh aloud:  
And all these things bear fruits, and they are good.

(EPF 34-39)

And in the last line here we find (if we demote the stress of "bear") perfect iambic pentameter. Whitman uses this measure to show the possibility of harmony after the battle of control for freedom is won.

Whitman represents this same harmony, in the next stanza, by the long "e," which when recited is peaceful and easy to vocally release:

Not a grave of those slaughtered ones,  
But is growing its seed of freedom,  
In its turn to bear seed,  
Which the winds shall carry afar and resow,  
And the rain nourish.

(EPF 49-53)

Then, at poem's end, Whitman returns to the "l" he started with, so that the poem's sound-patterns come full circle. Likewise, he tosses in more long "e's" to illustrate his future hope for a harmonious free world. The "w" sounds of line 61 work in the same way:

Liberty, let others despair of thee,  
But I will never despair of thee:  
Is the house shut? Is the master away?

Nevertheless, be ready, be not weary of watchings,  
He will surely return; his messengers come anon.

(EPF 58-62)

As we shall discover in the rest of this study, "Resurgemus" is significant to an understanding of Whitman's later prosody. For the first time in his career, the poet is using a free verse form, but at the same time one in which metrical mimesis still occurs. The first edition of Leaves of Grass, in its full-blown free verse mode, also utilizes metrical mimesis in its quest for a new prosody which represents the newly-found freedom of Whitman's United States.

2.

In Leaves of Grass: America's Lyric-Epic of Self and Democracy, James E. Miller outlines Whitman's location in the poet's own culture and time. After tracing the prosodic attempts of Philip Freneau and Joel Barlow to represent the far-reaching American political events at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth-century, Miller writes:

*Leaves of Grass* commands attention because of its uniquely poetic embodiment of America's democratic ideals as written in "founding" documents of both the Revolutionary War and the Civil War and in the blood spilled by soldiers of both wars. The credentials supporting its claims to be America's epic are impressive and worthy of consideration even by those who might take exception to such claims. Moreover, its

form--the free-verse lyric epic--invented and developed by Whitman to contain his personal, national, and world vision, has had an incalculable influence on successor poets both in America and throughout the world--an influence that has continued into the twentieth century.

(9)

Besides touching upon Whitman's prosodic influence on later poets, Miller's argument shows how the prosody of Leaves of Grass in Whitman's mind derives from the freedom of America. Like the critics who rightfully point out that the parallelism and unconventional meter of Whitman's free verse in the first edition of Leaves of Grass corresponds to the freedom of America as a new country, Miller's discussion is both justified and too general to be of use.<sup>4</sup> That Whitman was looking for a new prosody for a new country is true. How he rebels against the past has not been clearly identified, however.

In the 1855 preface to the first edition of Leaves of Grass, Whitman wants to take poetry somewhere different in the future than where it has been in the past:

Past and present and future are not disjoined but joined. The greatest poet forms the consistence of what is to be from what has been and is. He drags the dead out of their coffins and stands them again on their feet...he says to the past, Rise and walk before me that I may realize you. He learns the lesson...he places himself where the future becomes present. The greatest poet does not only dazzle his rays over character and

scenes and passions...he finally ascends, and finishes all...he exhibits the pinnacles that no man can tell what they are for or what is beyond...he glows a moment on the extremest verge. He is most wonderful in his last half-hidden smile or frown...by that flash of the moment of parting the one that sees it shall be encouraged or terrified afterward for many years. The greatest poet does not moralize or make applications of morals...he knows the soul. The soul has that measureless pride which consists in never acknowledging any lessons but its own. But it has sympathy as measureless as its pride and the one balances the other and neither can stretch too far while it stretches in company with the other. The inmost secrets of art sleep with the twain. The greatest poet has lain close betwixt both and they are vital in his style and thoughts.

(LG 1855 12)

Here, Whitman is calling for an evolutionary approach to prosody. And although he seems somewhat kind to past poets, Whitman is merely taming his revolutionary, prosodic break from the past in what follows poetically. In fact, in reference to the prosodic past, Whitman saw the traditional measure of the English poets as "feudal," a reflection of the aristocracy in which they lived. Completely ignoring how the metrical heritage goes back to a popular and oral culture, Whitman believed that the freedom to write about the common man and woman, using the slang and depicting the vastness of a new country, meant a meter free from a stringent

traditional rhyme and base meter. Whitman was thinking about this even in his pre-Leaves of Grass poems, for one of the first free verse poems the poet composes, "Resurgemus," deals specifically with the theme of political freedom. Writing years after the fact, Whitman, in the 1888 "A Backwards Glance O'er Travel'd Roads," discusses his desire to break away from the prosodic past, as well as to prosodically represent the freedom of America:

For grounds for "Leaves of Grass," as a poem, I abandon'd the conventional themes, which do not appear in it: none of the stock ornamentation, or choice plots of love or war, or high, exceptional personages of Old-World song; nothing, as I may say, for beauty's sake--no legend, or myth, or romance, nor euphemism, nor rhyme. But the broadest average of humanity and its identities in the now ripening Nineteenth Century, and especially in each of their countless examples and practical occupations in the United States to-day.

(PW 2: 715)

In this same essay, Whitman considers "'Leaves of Grass' and its theory experimental--as, in the deepest sense, I consider our American republic itself to be, with its theory" (PW 2: 713). In the 1855 preface to the first edition of Leaves of Grass, Whitman even claims that "The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem" (LG 1855 5). Undoubtedly, throughout his career, he remained adamant (as he claimed in his "Poets to Come") that American poets continue to carry on the evolution of free verse prosody which he started for this free country.

Whitman realized that America was entering a new and bright era, one in which he believed would bring new bards to experiment with poetic forms. This new world brought with it a new mind, a new psychological reality for the people. According to Whitman, this freedom should also bring about a new psychology for American poets. Anticipating William Carlos Williams' comment years later that the world is no longer iambic, Whitman writes this in his 1855 preface: "[America] is not so impatient as has been supposed that the slough still sticks to opinions and manners and literature while the life which served its requirements has passed into the new life of the new forms" (5).

Obviously, the lack of a metrical base in Whitman's work depicts freedom which mimics America's independence from British rule. Yet, critics who argue for this prosodic approach seldom analyze Leaves of Grass in any detail. However, to merely say that Whitman's free verse reflected his free country is cheating the poet out of his other prosodic gifts. To see Whitman's verse only in this light is to also see prosody superficially, for scholars give no detailed discussion concerning this connection between form and country.

In order to take American poetry away from the past and fling it toward the future, Whitman's approach to composing the first edition of Leaves of Grass needed to be an organic one heavily influenced by Emerson. While discussing the writing process, in an undated note Whitman wrote that he wanted "no ornamental adjectives, unless they have come molten hot, and imperiously prove themselves" (NF 63). And

later in the same passage, Whitman seems to be describing the organic process when he states that "a certain vagueness almost passing into chaos (it remains to be acknowledged) is in a few pieces or passages; but this is apparently by the deliberate intention of the author" (64). Still, in a May 16th, 1888 conversation with Horace Traubel, Whitman had this insightful statement about his writing intentions and process:

Well--the lilt is all right: yes, right enough: but there's something anterior--more imperative. The first thing necessary is the thought--the rest may follow if it chooses--may play its part--but must not be too much sought after. The two things being equal I should prefer to have the lilt present with the idea, but if I got down my thought and the rhythm was not there I should not work to secure it. I am very deliberate--I take a good deal of trouble with words: yes, a good deal: but what I am after is the content not the music of words. Perhaps the music happens--it does no harm: I do not go in search of it.

(WWC 1: 163)

Whitman, here, seems to be stating that in composition, the "thought," or subject matter of any given poem is more significant than the rhythm. Although Whitman contradicts his approach to prosody in both his prose and poetry, for the first edition of Leaves of Grass the poet seems more concerned with what he says than how he says it, although this fact itself leads to something said in a new way.

Discussing Whitman's quotation and subject matter, Gay Wilson

Allen sees no difference in Whitman's thought and rhythm, terming his prosody, among other things, as "thought-meter" (New Walt Whitman Handbook 224). In other words, Whitman's lines may be seen as broken according to complete thoughts and not individual stresses and unstresses.

This organic approach seems to be what Whitman is describing in one of his most famous quotations from the preface to the 1855 Leaves of Grass:

The poetic quality is not marshalled in rhyme or uniformity or abstract addresses to things nor in melancholy complaints or good precepts, but is the life of these and much else and is in the soul. The profit of rhyme is that it drops seeds of a sweeter and more luxuriant rhyme, and of uniformity that it conveys itself into its own roots in the ground out of sight. The rhyme and uniformity of perfect poems show the free growth of metrical laws and bud from them as unerringly and loosely as lilacs and roses on a bush, and take shapes as compact as the shapes of chestnuts and oranges and melons and pears, and shed the perfume impalpable to form. The fluency and ornaments of the finest poems or music or orations or recitations are not independent but dependent. All beauty comes from beautiful blood and a beautiful brain. If the greatnesses are in conjunction in a man or woman it is enough...the fact will prevail through the universe...but the gaggery and gilt of a million years will not prevail. Who troubles himself about his ornaments or fluency is lost.

(10)

Among the many ideas sweeping through this passage, especially noteworthy is the concept of mimesis, where the "ornaments" are not "independent" from the subject matter, but "dependent" on them. Yet, what this statement further suggests is an organic strategy to prosody. First beginning with Coleridge, the organic theory of poetry looked to nature as a living organism, constantly changing and growing. Yet, in both passages above it seems likely that Whitman is re-stating a passage on organic theory in Emerson's "the Poet:"

For it is not metres, but a metre-making argument, that makes a poem,--a thought so passionate and alive, that, like the spirit of a plant or an animal, it has an architecture of its own, and adorns nature with a new thing. The thought and the form are equal in the order of time, but in the order of genesis the thought is prior to the form. The poet has a new thought: he has a whole new experience to unfold....

(Collected Works 3: 6-7)

Martin F. Chesin, in "The Organic Metaphor and the Unity of the First Edition of Leaves of Grass," furthers the connections between Whitman's 1855 edition and Emerson's organic theory. He writes:

Whitman's concept of the organic growth of his poetry may be viewed in much the same way that R.P. Adams sees Emerson's use of the organic metaphor. The organicist thinks of the universe not as a 'copy of ideal reality,' nor as a 'vast self-regulating machine,' but 'as if it were a living plant or animal.' For Whitman as for Emerson, organicism is the most useful

theory of composition because one of its underlying principles is growth. An organicist 'tends to concentrate, often with a rather mystical air, on the wholeness of the whole, reluctant to analyze at all,' stressing functional relatedness and the coherence of all things. The aim of organicism 'is to realize the ultimate organization of all things in a unity which includes them as they are, a harmonious relationship of human experience with all the processes of nature, or the universe.'

(37)<sup>5</sup>

This statement is correct. Most importantly, Chesin sees how Whitman's poetry is a living organism, growing out of its own existence, just as a human body or a plant grows. Prosodically, the first edition of Leaves of Grass is more organic than the following editions, the length of the lines growing down the page. In the heavily Emerson-influenced 1855 production, Whitman is looking at the whole prosodic forest more than he is the trees. However, as sections of this study point out, in the first edition of Leaves of Grass, Whitman also attended to the trees, or small metrical details, at times. Nonetheless, in order to represent the freedom and expansive nature, as well as spirituality, common to his America, Whitman, in the first edition of Leaves of Grass, is more prosodically concerned with tearing down the past than with building up the whole accentual-syllabic tradition.

3.

In The American Adam, R.W.B. Lewis claims that in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" the "growth of the world is exactly indicated in the increasing length of the lines" (53). Discussing a poem which does not appear in Leaves of Grass until the second edition of 1856, Lewis hints at the expansive nature of Whitman's prosody, but like many critics, he does not elaborate on how this forwardness takes place. Critics do not deal with the forward movement of Whitman's prosody because they only occasionally see it as mimetically exemplifying the ideas prevalent in nineteenth-century America. Of course, scholars have done their part in illustrating Whitman's concepts. In the Walt Whitman Handbook, Gay Wilson Allen has discussed Whitman's long journey motif (286-87), his ideas on national expansion (328-35), and cosmic flight as it applies to the new Great Chain of Being (277-92). Robert Weisbuch and others have discussed Whitman's contributions to American futurism. Still, these scholars do not specifically connect such concepts with the poet's prosody.

Like many writers in nineteenth-century America, Whitman was concerned with creating a new epic for a new land. Nineteenth-century American writers felt they needed to discard the past literature handed down from England, even Pope's translation of Homer and the classics from Rome and Greece.<sup>6</sup> Whitman was no different in this regard. In "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads," Whitman describes the

inadequacy of the old texts to compete with nature. After speaking of reading Shakespeare, Ossian, and various versions of Homer and Dante among others, the poet writes:

I have wonder'd since why I was not overwhelm'd by those mighty masters. Likely because I read them, as described, in the full presence of Nature, under the sun, with the far-spreading landscape and vistas, or the sea rolling in.

(PW 2: 722-23)

By stating it is better to read outdoors than in any library or indoor room, Whitman brings in the inadequate past for a present America. More poetically important, however, Whitman comments on the need for a new American epic. If a poet is to illustrate nature (in the broadest sense of the word) in a new country, the dactylic adventures of Homer's Odysseus, the heroic couplets of Pope, and the blank verse of Milton are all inappropriate. The hero must be a personal epic hero who is alive in the present moment, encompassing every atom in the universe. In fact, according to Whitman, the new epic must be as free and limitless as the United States it is written in, and must incorporate new prosodic ideas. Such a scheme says something significant about Whitman's world view, not only of the expanding United States represented in the 1855 edition of Leaves of Grass, but also of a speaker who expands his perception from the smallest forms on earth to the entire universe.

In the first edition of Leaves of Grass, Whitman's forward prosody is evident in his end-line commas and semi-colons. This is one way in which the poet scans the line.

The end-line commas create an illusion of the old heroic end-stopped couplets of Pope, yet at the same time push the sentence onward. In fact, each comma coming at the end of a line is a breath-pause Whitman uses in order to gather momentum to push the syntax forward. This forward progression is analogous to the expansive territorial movement of America.

Gay Wilson Allen, in his Walt Whitman Handbook, discusses Whitman's idea that the national expansion of America was inevitable and natural. Whitman, Allen notes, claimed that "it is for the interest of mankind that its [America's] power and territory should be extended--the farther the better" (qtd. in Allen, Walt Whitman Handbook 330).<sup>7</sup> Indeed, as Allen goes on to show, Whitman repeatedly expressed this view with reference to the Oregon dispute with Great Britain. Declaring that America must always regard human and property rights, the poet in 1847 still boasted that perhaps the United States "may one day put the Canadas and Russian America [Alaska] in its fob pocket" (qtd. in Allen, Walt Whitman Handbook 330).

In the first edition of Leaves of Grass, such syntactical expansion also depicts the forward movement of an epic hero's journey through America and the cosmos. In his 1961 book Walt Whitman as Man, Poet, and Legend, again Gay Wilson Allen notes Whitman's obsession with the journey.<sup>8</sup> The critic points out how in the early 1850s the poet created prose sketches concerning a long epic poem which would encompass the history of all races (63). This history-like

project was later narrowed down into a song of America with the first version of Leaves of Grass. Allen also shows how Whitman saw America as "one stage in the endless 'progress'" of history (64), and therefore focused his poem on just that stage. Essentially, this progression is the "long journey motif" we find in Leaves of Grass--a journey so much more expansive than any other beforehand in epic poetry--and Whitman depicts this by the end-line commas and colons constantly flinging the syntax of his poem down the page. Thus, line upon line of Whitman's verse paragraph may be seen on a linear plane to appear as one extended line. In fact, it may be best to think of Whitman's lines extending into space in much the same way printed prose does. Such an extended line is necessary for a speaker traveling through the landscape of America and the cosmos. Yet the verse is not prose, because of its parallelism, assonance, consonance and other techniques, as many scholars have noted over the past one-hundred years. In this regard, the measure is a pushing forward, a syntactical march of the people in the catalogues.

For example, at the beginning of Leaves of Grass, here are first the lines as they originally appear in Whitman's first edition, then my own different expanded mode:

I CELEBRATE MYSELF,  
And what I assume you shall assume,  
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

I loafe and invite my soul,  
I lean and loafe at my ease....observing a spear of

summer grass.

(LG 1855 1.1-5)

Extended, these become:

I CELEBRATE MYSELF,        and what I assume you shall assume,        for every atom  
belonging to me as good belongs to you.

I loafe and invite my soul,        I lean and loafe at my ease. . . . observing a spear  
of summer grass.

If printed in this manner, many of Whitman's sentence paragraphs could be converted into single lines stretching across several feet of page. In the first edition of Leaves of Grass, indentations are present because Whitman does not have room to print an overrunning line. Printed in such an extended way, some of the catalogues would literally stretch out many feet into the space of a huge sheet of paper. For example, in the following catalogue which runs five pages, such a printing device would physically depict the actual aerial-like point of view the poet describes as he witnesses the vast types of people and animals, as the poet flies into space, hovering over the landscape. Here are a few lines for you to decide:

By the city's quadrangular houses....in log-huts, or  
    camping with lumbermen,  
Along the ruts of the turnpike....along the dry gulch  
    and rivulet bed,  
Hoing my onion-patch, and rows of carrots and parsnips  
    ....crossing savannas....trailing in forests,  
Prospecting....gold-digging....girdling the trees of a  
    new purchase,

Scorched ankle-deep by the hot sand....hauling my boat  
down the shallow river;  
Where the panther walks to and fro on a limb overhead  
....where the buck turns furiously at the hunter,  
Where the rattlesnake suns his flabby length on a rock  
....where the otter is feeding on fish,  
Where the alligator in his tough pimples sleeps by the  
bayou,  
Where the black bear is searching for roots or honey....  
where the beaver pats the mud with his paddle-tail;  
Over the growing sugar....over the cottonplant....  
over the rice in its low moist field;  
Over the sharp-peaked farmhouse with its scalloped scum  
and slender shoots from the gutters;  
Over the western persimmon....over the longleaved corn  
and the delicate blueflowered flax....

(LG 1855 1.715-26)

In this passage, the anaphora of "Where" and "Over" would energize the catalogue forward into time and space, something that mere prose with its end-stopped sentences could not accomplish. Whitman wanted a line that explodes into eternity, a line which exemplifies the forward progression of America as well as the poet marching into the future and through space and time. This line is, in part, visual. It looks forward to later poets, such as William Carlos Williams, and their smearing of lines over the written page.

If it seems extremely farfetched to state that Whitman was thinking of an expanded printed line, then it is appropriate to look at his 1855 preface to Leaves of Grass<sup>9</sup>

where the poet states:

His spirit [the poet's] responds to his country's spirit...he incarnates its geography and natural life and rivers and lakes. Mississippi with annual freshets and changing chutes, Missouri and Columbia and Ohio and Saint Lawrence with the falls and beautiful masculine Hudson, do not embouchure where they spend themselves more than they embouchure into him. The blue breath over the inland sea of Virginia and Maryland and the sea off Massachusetts and Maine and over Manhattan bay and over Champlain and Erie and over Ontario and Huron and Michigan and Superior, and over the Texan and Mexican and Floridian and Cuban seas and over the seas off California and Oregon, is not tallied by the blue breath of the waters below more than the breadth of above and below is tallied by him. When the long Atlantic coast stretches longer and the Pacific coast stretches longer he easily stretches with them north or south. He spans between them also from east and west and reflects what is between them.

(7)

And later, this, from the same 1855 preface:

The soul has that measureless pride which it consists in never acknowledging any lessons but its own. But it has sympathy as measureless as its pride and the one balances the other and neither can stretch too far while it stretches in company with the other. The inmost secrets of art sleep with the twain. The greatest poet has lain close betwixt both and they

are vital in his style and thoughts.

(12)

The stretching Whitman writes of could very well be his concept of expanding the line beyond the printed page. Furthermore, such forward movement descriptions are commonly found in myriads of references in the poem itself. Whitman speaks of everything going "onward and outward" (LG 1855 1.120) wherein nothing collapses, and of the "Endless unfolding of words of ages" (LG 1855 1.483). In fact, at one point in the poem, he says "My voice goes after what my eyes cannot reach,/With the twirl of my tongue I encompass worlds and volumes of worlds" (LG 1855 1.566-67). A few pages later, one finds the poet stating that he moves "forward then and now and forever,/Gathering and showing more always and with velocity" (LG 1855 1.696-97).

E.C. Ross realizes Whitman's lines as small units of thought which may stand alone (364). But this critic does not adequately point out the significance of the whole verse paragraph as a measure of scansion in Whitman. In fact, the verse paragraph is also one device of forward movement. In Whitman's verse paragraph, the poet constantly places a period only at the end of stanzas. Indeed, the only time in which the poet uses a complete end-stop at the end of the line (and not the stanza) occurs when he uses question marks and exclamation points. As for the question marks, Whitman often does not even consider them to be a complete stop, but part of the free-flowing sentence: "Where are you off to, lady? for I see you,/You splash in the water there, yet stay stock still in your room" (LG 1855 1.200-01). These

techniques add to the speed of the work, the movement forward of America through time, as well as the poet moving through the landscapes and cosmos of the poem.

In Whitman's verse paragraph, the lack of the medial period common to many poems of the eighteenth-century also illustrates the expansion of the United States into new territory, and the poem's persona traveling through space. In the first edition of Leaves of Grass, one finds no periods used as medial stops. Thus, there is no new sentence started at the beginning or in the middle of the line. To see the contrast, all we have to do is look at Milton who uses the medial period in the verse paragraphs of Paradise Lost, and the initial or medial comma more frequently than Whitman:

So prayed they innocent, and to their thoughts  
Firm peace recovered soon and wonted calm.  
On to their morning's rural work they haste  
Among sweet dewes and flow'rs; where any row  
Of fruit trees over-woody reached too far  
Their pampered boughs, and needed hands to check  
Fruitless embraces: or they led the vine  
To wed her elm; she spoused about him twines  
Her marriageable arms, and with her brings  
Her dow'r th'adopted clusters, to adorn  
His barren leaves. Them thus employed beheld  
With pity heav'n's high King, and to him called  
Raphael, the sociable Spirit, that deigned  
To travel with Tobias, and secured  
His marriage with the seven-times-wedded maid.

(5.209-23)

In this Milton passage, we find three complete sentences marked off by a period. The first period ends the second line, whereas the next one is a medial stop. Finally, as in Whitman's verse, we notice the final period stop at the end of the verse paragraph. Undoubtedly, a few of the verse paragraphs in Paradise Lost are one long sentence, yet such a technique does not occur as frequently as in Whitman. It seems, therefore, that Whitman found a way to break out of the Miltonic verse paragraph in order to depict mimetically the free-flowing progress of a new country and his ideas toward the universe. This could only be done by unscrewing "the doors themselves from their jambs" (LG 1855 1.503). Take this verse paragraph by Whitman, for example:

I troop forth replenished with supreme power, one of  
an average unending procession,  
We walk the roads of Ohio and Massachusetts and  
Virginia and Wisconsin and New York and New Orleans  
and Texas and Montreal and San Francisco and  
Charleston and Savannah and Mexico,  
Inland and by the seacoast and boundary lines....and  
we pass the boundary lines.

Our swift ordinances are on their way over the whole  
earth,  
The blossoms we wear in our hats are the growth of two  
thousand years.

(LG 1855 1.964-68)

The free-flowing, forward movement of one traveling  
through America is obvious, yet here we find ellipses,

another technique Whitman uses to create a pushing movement.<sup>10</sup> In line 966, our eyes glide over the ellipses and leap onto the word "and," then suddenly our eyes are forced downward to continue the line on the indentation. This works mimetically in the sense that visually the ellipses are a crossing between the two sections of the line. In the first section we are stuck on the "seacoast" and its "boundary lines." But as our eyes fly over the ellipses we land over the water, over the boundary line of the second part of the line. Thus, the ellipses help us visually jump from section to section of the line, in the same way the poet seems to be flying over the water to land at the next boundary line of dry land. Once again, the verse paragraph becomes important here, for after the last boundary lines in this sentence we have a pause of white space and a new paragraph begins. The white space seems to depict a sea as well, and our eyes leap from the period of the boundary lines at the end of the verse paragraph and move over the white space and begin again in the next paragraph, where Whitman states we make our way over the earth continuously.<sup>11</sup>

In the above passage, the prosodic effect is mostly visual. This visual prosody is a forward prosody and at first glance merely appears as a wonderful poetic technique illustrating a speaker who is flying over the Savannah River and the Atlantic, possibly changing course and landing in Mexico. Still, Whitman's political expansionist ideas shortly before Leaves of Grass was printed add a sinister mood to the passage. In 1846, Whitman was very upset over

the "Gallatin Plan" to call back American troops from Mexican territory (Allen, Walt Whitman Handbook 330). Whitman believed that Mexico should be a part of the United States. In addition, in this passage the speaker could very well be on his way to Cuba. As David Reynolds points out in his Walt Whitman's America, Whitman in an 1850s newspaper article stated that: "It is impossible to say what the future will bring forth, but 'manifest destiny' certainly points to the annexation of Cuba by the United States" (qtd. in Reynolds, Walt Whitman's 136). Whitman, according to Reynolds, seemed to have doubts about the Democratic Party's election of Franklin Pierce in 1852, since the poet favored John P. Hale for the position. Nonetheless, Whitman seems to have held the same views with Pierce concerning the annexation of Cuba and Mexico (Reynolds, Walt Whitman's 135). At this point in Whitman's life, it appears that he was still under the political influence of President James Polk and the expansionism movement of the 1840s (Reynolds, Walt Whitman's 136).

Regardless of Whitman's more aggressive expansive ideas concerning America's conquest of land, his ellipses often work in another way to push the verse forward. Often in Whitman's catalogues the ellipses slide the phrases along to create momentum. Whitman uses this technique in the catalogues to keep the syntax flowing, yet it is also obvious in some of Whitman's depictions of the future and eternity itself, as in the following lines:

Do you see O my brothers and sisters?

It is not chaos or death....it is form and union and

plan....it is eternal life....it is happiness.

The past and present wilt....I have filled them and  
emptied them,

And proceed to fill my next fold of the future.

(LG 1855 1.1307-10)

Essentially, this futurism is important to Whitman's time period. Many writers in nineteenth-century America were looking toward the future as a way to compensate for the lack of a historical past common to writers in England. In Atlantic Double-Cross, Weisbuch also shows that Whitman's optimism toward the future is reminiscent of early American writers like Crèvecoeur, Cooper, and Emerson (166-67). According to Weisbuch, Whitman's futurism makes up for the anxiety over developing new literary forms in America in an attempt to surpass the writings of the British. Weisbuch quotes Whitman's 1855 preface where Whitman claims the unique poet "places himself where the future becomes present" (167; LG 1855 12). Of course Whitman's belief that the present is the future is one reason why the poet frequently uses the present tense and the present participle.<sup>12</sup> Still, the whole chanting quality of Whitman's poetry, and specifically the run-on sentences pushing forward in the verse paragraphs as they run down the white space of the page, exemplify this movement into the future. In other words, since each Whitman line is connected by commas or semi-colons (and are not separated by periods) there is a continuous movement to each verse paragraph. At the end of a verse paragraph we have a

complete pause, but then the action starts up again and pushes forward into the future of the poem.

Closely tied into this prosodic futurism is Whitman's attempts to use the ellipses as a visual form of the temporalizing Chain of Being common throughout the nineteenth-century. Whitman's persona wants to describe the smallest of details on earth as well as the matter of all the cosmos. In this manner every little speck in the universe is a link in the chain which stretches upward and through eternity. If we see the ellipses as visual puns on the idea of this chain, then there is another dimension added to Whitman's prosody. As Gay Wilson Allen notices, the temporalizing of the Chain of Being during Whitman's time was to see God as "becoming" (Walt Whitman Handbook 293). Whitman represents this "becoming" through the repetition of the ellipses, scattered through his verse paragraphs. Furthermore, the repetition of the commas and colon-endings of each Whitman line depicts the same idea, a soul which on its journey through the cosmos is trying to find God. And importantly, Allen states that the new Chain of Being is analogous to the expansion of the United States, "geographically, economically, politically, [and] culturally" (Walt Whitman Handbook 284) in 1855, and Whitman is a symbol of this.

Whitman's ellipses and commas and semi-colons work on another level concerning the Chain of Being. In the nineteenth-century the Chain of Being was seen as moving upward, a journey toward God as depicted by Whitman. Nonetheless, in Whitman this is in direct tension to the fact

that the ellipses and commas push the poem forward but down the page. Such tension is necessary to all great poetry, and this downward and forward collision of movement works as a new variation on the mock epic's use of iambic pentameter, specifically in Pope's "Rape of the Lock" where a low-brow topic is elevated into epic proportions. In fact, in his Essay on Man, Pope summed up the eighteenth-century view of the Chain of Being. Although there is no proof that Whitman was familiar with Pope's work, here, in complete contradiction, he plays off the idea of elevating a low-brow subject, since through the tension of forward and backward movements clashing, Whitman lowers a high topic to a lower status, an idea in tune with his preference for the common man and woman, and not the elite society he associates with England.

But Whitman believed the best way to find God was a pantheistic approach, where God is in everything and most specifically in the poet himself.<sup>13</sup> The poet as God may live into the future and into eternity as well, through the present moment and forward movement of his prosody. D.H. Lawrence rightfully claims that because of the emphasis on the present moment in Whitman "there is no rhythm which returns upon itself, no serpent of eternity with its tail in its own mouth" (vi-vii). In other words, time is not circular. In the first edition of Leaves of Grass, Whitman's prosody has no beginning nor end, but constantly throws itself forward from the present. In the same regard, this is a common philosophy to many writers of Whitman's time.

Seeing America as a new country with limitless potential, the important present was a way to continue the progression of history literally through new art forms. Not only does Whitman not want his poem to end--and we know this from the fact that he constantly revised it over the years--but he himself wants the poem to reflect his own time and to last beyond it. In regards to Leaves of Grass representing its own time, Whitman writes:

I know very well that my "Leaves" could not possibly have emerged or been fashion'd or completed, from any other era than the latter half of the Nineteenth Century, nor any other land than democratic America, and from the absolute triumph of the National Union arms.

(PW 2: 718)

The poet, toward the end of his life, reflects on his desire to fling Leaves of Grass into the future:

My Book and I--what a period we have presumed to span! those thirty years from 1850 to 80'--and America in them! Proud, proud indeed may we be, if we have cull'd enough of that period in its own spirit to worthily waft a few live breaths of it to the future!

(PW 2: 716)

That Whitman succeeded in giving breath to the future is no great secret. Hundreds of poems dedicated to or about him have been written since his death. The first edition of Leaves of Grass, as the song for America, is a 118 page non-stop progression.

In the first edition of Leaves of Grass, Whitman truly

believed the prosody of the past should be left behind. Thus, he was more concerned with a general, all-encompassing mimetic prosody, the general approach critics have argued for, apart from that of the line. Leaves of Grass, at this time, after all, was one long poem. But when Whitman started breaking the poem into separate titles, the importance of line-mimesis and traditional prosody started to take hold. In the first edition of Leaves of Grass, Whitman, the printer and rebel, saw a new prosody for a new nation, but in later editions this attitude changes, and mimetic occurrences of the line start to appear in Whitman's now shorter poems. By the time of the Deathbed edition, Whitman had given up his quest for a new epic believing along with Poe that in their day "there can be no such thing as a long poem" (PW 2: 723). When Whitman gives up his long poem form, his decision ruins the thematic idea of one great country made up of individual parts and people still part of the whole. In addition, the forward movement of the prosody with all of its implications also is abandoned. But, as Whitman loses faith in his country after the Civil War, his new idea of combining free verse with traditional prosody adds a new twist to metrics. The prosody now holds a unique mimesis, one combining free verse and traditional metrics.

### CHAPTER III.

#### SEX PROSODY: EARLY POEMS OF THE BODY AND DESIRE, "CHILDREN OF ADAM," "CALAMUS," AND LATER WORKS ON COPULATION

1.

In an anonymous review of the first edition of Leaves of Grass entitled "Walt Whitman and his Poems," written by the poet himself, and published in the United States Review in September of 1855 (and reprinted by Traubel in In Re Walt Whitman, 1893), Whitman touches upon the importance of sex as poetic subject matter:

No skulker or tea-drinking poet is Walt Whitman. He will bring poems to fill the days and nights--fit for men and women with the attributes of throbbing blood and flesh. The body, he teaches, is beautiful. Sex is also beautiful. Are you to be put down, he seems to ask, to that shallow level of literature and conversation that stops a man's recognizing the delicious pleasure of his sex, or a woman hers? Nature he proclaims inherently clean. Sex will not be put aside; it is a great ordination of the universe. He works the muscle of the male and the teeming fibre of the female throughout his writings, as wholesome realities, impure only by deliberate intention and effort. To men and women he says, You can have healthy and powerful breeds of

children on no less terms than these of mine. Follow me, and there shall be taller and richer crops of humanity on the earth.

(Traubel, In Re 17)

While quite a vigorous stance, this is not Whitman's most aggressive one toward sex in literature. In his response to Emerson's famous letter welcoming the 1855 Leaves of Grass,<sup>1</sup> Whitman makes his most adamant stance for the inclusion of sexuality in American poetry:

Infidelism usurps most with foetid polite face; among the rest infidelism about sex. By silence or obedience the pens of savans, poets, historians, biographers, and the rest, have long connived at the filthy law, and books enslaved to it, that what makes the manhood of a man, that sex, womanhood, maternity, desires, lusty animations, organs, acts, are unmentionable and to be ashamed of, to be driven to skulk out of literature with whatever belongs to them. This filthy law has to be repealed--it stands in the way of great reforms. Of women just as much as men, it is the interest that there should not be infidelism about sex, but perfect faith. Women in These States approach the day of that organic equality with men, without which, I see, men cannot have organic equality among themselves. This empty dish, gallantry, will then be filled with something. This tepid wash, this diluted deferential love, as in songs, fictions, and so forth, is enough to make a man vomit; as to manly friendship,

everywhere observed in The States, there is not the first breath of it to be observed in print. I say that the body of a man or woman, the main matter, is so far quite unexpressed in poems; but that the body is to be expressed, and sex is.

(CRE 737-38)

Indirectly, in this passage, Whitman is stating that the whole core of his poetry comes from the drive to procreate, not only human life, but language itself. In fact, H. Sperber's claim that the derivation of language from the mating calls of animals is interesting in the light of Whitman's sexual-based language experiment. Sperber sees that language usage helps move the species toward labor, which is essentially a substitution for sexual intercourse (qtd. in Brown 69). If, indeed, language is the result of the unfulfilled sexual needs of an individual and species, it should follow that Whitman's prosody, specifically his sound patterns, should represent the sounds of human sexuality. Seen from a different side of the ongoing debate concerning the origins of language, scholars such as Norman O. Brown have argued that language development, at least as it applies to an individual, grows out of the "life of play, pleasure, and love" (69). Brown believes "it is the language of love and the pleasure-principle before it becomes the language of work and the reality-principle" (69). Thus, childhood language develops out of erotic expression, but is then halted by the reality-principle, a conflict which leads to neurosis.

Whitman's "Children of Adam" cluster complies with Brown

and Sperber's ideas in several relevant ways. First of all, Whitman's desire to return mankind to the innocent state of Adam and Eve in the garden--where this time, however, the lovers' sexuality and nakedness are seen as natural and divine--is the desire to go back to an era when language and sexuality are one, each fulfilled in its turn. Secondly, this cluster's persona needs to produce offspring for the United States who will follow the pattern of language and sexual development much in the same way that mankind has followed it, yet without guilt. Thus, in Whitman's world view language and sexuality are both pure, natural, and garden-like.<sup>2</sup>

Whitman's poetic attempt to recover the power of lost language is obvious. What is often not noticed, however, is how his ideas connect with the writings of mystic Jacob Boehme. Boehme believed that when man recovers the lost paradise of the garden of Eden, he will also discover mankind's lost language. Language, for Whitman and Boehme, is natural in its original pre-fall state. Boehme calls this natural speech of Adam "*die sensualische Sprache*," or "sensual speech." In a passage that sounds much like Whitman, Boehme writes:

No people understands any more the sensual language, and the birds in the air and the beasts in the forest do understand it according to their species. Therefore man may reflect what he has been robbed of, and what he is to recover in the second birth. For in the sensual language all spirits speak with each other,

they need no other language, for it is the language of nature.

(qtd.in Brown 72)

The "language of nature," for Whitman, is the language of the human body and its sexuality, without guilt. In "Song of the Rolling Earth," first published in the second edition of Leaves of Grass (1856), Whitman sums up this concept:<sup>3</sup>

Human bodies are words, myriads of words,  
(In the best poems re-appears the body, man's or  
woman's, well-shaped, natural, gay,  
Every part able, active, receptive, without shame or the  
need of shame.)

(CRE 1.7-9)

Whitman is describing the ultimate poem as one which attempts to regain and interpret the pre-fall garden, the poet rescuing in the composition a more primitive language, one akin to mysticism and sexuality.<sup>4</sup> No doubt, since Whitman connected mysticism and sexuality, he needed a more primitive prosody in the "Children of Adam" cluster than the conventional meter and sound patterns used by poets of his time.

Concerning "Language and Eros," Norman O. Brown rightfully mentions that it is the goal of poets to recover mankind's "sensuous and sensual nature" (73). But, as Brown continues, if language is a neurotic response to the "compromise between the erotic (pleasure) and operational (reality) principles, it follows that the consciousness, in the artistic use of language, is subversive of its own

instrument and seeks to pass beyond it" (73). Whitman, one may argue, surpasses his own consciousness by giving sex a mystical quality and also by transcending the meter and sound patterns of conventional poetry. Still, both metrical mimesis and the repetition of sounds allow him to use language in a playful, sexual way. Whitman's depiction of sex in his poems is charged with sound patterns and rhythms which illustrate the act itself. Still, we must be aware that any given sound is not innately sexual in itself. For instance, an "l" or "o" in any given poem does not hold sexual mimesis. Obviously, for the sound to be sexual in nature, first it must appear in the context of sexual subject matter. "L's" and "o's" in most of Whitman's poems are not sexual. Yet, in poems where the subject matter is indeed sexual, these sounds, and many others, take on a lascivious nature.

That Whitman was well on his way, even in 1855, to seeing how sounds become sexual in the context of poems dealing with sexual subjects, can be seen by the famous sexual union of the soul and body in the beginning poem (later to be named "Song of Myself") in the first edition of Leaves of Grass:

Loafe with me on the grass....loose the stop from your  
throat,

Not words, not music or rhyme I want....not custom or  
lecture, not even the best,

Only the lull I like, the hum of your valved voice.

(LG 1855 1.75-77)

In this section, the "l" slides most obviously exemplify

sexual desire. Add to this the long "o's" of "loafe," "throat," and "only," and the sounds, like the subject matter, become sexual. The "hum of your valved voice" refers not only to the soul's sensuality, but also to Whitman's desire to give sound to sexuality in his poem, not in rhyme and reason but in the free verse form of alliteration, assonance, and rhythm which approximate the rhythm of the sexual body. The ellipses also slide the line along, as the sounds of the soul and the poet are pushed along in their illustration of sexuality. The "lull" is a sexual one, as the soul escapes from the "valved voice." In addition, as fricatives the "v" sounds at this passage's end also carry a sexual nature. If Whitman's use of meter and sound resembles biblical prosody, as many critics argue, the poet here may indeed be trying to rediscover the lost language of Adam in a re-written garden where everything, including sex, is divine.

In the preceding stanza, Whitman keeps up the lascivious sound-sense, altering it enough to allow sexual language to unconsciously arouse the reader:

I mind how we lay in June, such a transparent summer  
morning;  
You settled your head athwart my hips and gently turned  
over upon me,  
And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged  
your tongue to my barestript heart,  
And reached till you felt my beard, and reached till you  
held my feet.

(LG 1855 1.78-81)

Here, the "m's" convey sexual emotion in much the same way as

the "l" sound of the previous passage. Also, besides the "b" alliteration, the placement of assonance generates a sexual tension in the line. The first example, "hips" and "gently" involves the sound of the body sexually enjoying the work of the soul. Then follows the sexual tonguing of the soul in "plunged" and "tongue," as well as the long "e" of "reached" and "feet." These assonantal instances add sexual energy to the line, Whitman using language to illustrate sonically the body's sexual rush while being copulated by the soul. In fact, Whitman is playing with language like an infant plays with words while learning to speak, something normally at first associated with the love of the mother.

What later became section 11 in the final revisions of "Song of Myself," the famous "bathing scene," is thick with sexual prosody. The first stanza's anaphora describes the life-long longing for sexual pleasure that has haunted the female:

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

(LG 1855 1.193-95)

To exemplify the sexuality of the young men, and the female, Whitman's lines 193 and 194 are burdened with stresses. Certainly, the stresses overpower the line in the same manner that the sex drive overpowers the people Whitman, in this section, mentions. Notice, also, how the "l" and "m" repetition depicts sexual longing, as in the previously examined passages.

In the next stanza, the poet alters the meter from

falling to rising, showing a mood change in sexual energy:

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

(LG 1855 1.196-97)

In lines 196-97, anaphora works its part again, and so does assonance. The sexual long "o" of "owns" echoes the word "lonesome" in the previous stanza, and is continued with "window." Sexual as well is the long "i" of "fine," "rise," "hides," and "blinds." Metrically, line 196 rises and puns on the idea of the "rise of the bank." It starts with two iambs, then a trochee, then another iamb, then the true rising foot of the terminal anapest. In line 197, the alliterative "h's," both stressed, mimetically "hide" in the measure. In other words, the unstresses of "she" and "some" represent the space of one standing, whereas the stresses of "hides" and "hand" exemplify the body's mass moving to a secure spot behind the curtains, peeking lustfully away from the view of the twenty-eight young men.

Two stanzas down, with the persona's voice taking on a playful tone, language, childhood play, and sexual desire are all fused:

Where are you off to, lady? for I see you,  
You splash in the water there, yet stay stock still in  
your room.

(LG 1855 1.200-01)

Line 200's meter creates a playful, sexual tone, a tone reminiscent of a child asking a question. In the context of the entire poem, such a question reminds Whitman's readers of

the section where the child asks about the identity of the grass. Here, the first foot is a trochee, followed by three iambs, and the final amphibrach. This is a "peekaboo meter," one used by a child, or a lover in the language of sexual foreplay. Line 201 has three stresses in a row, which stills the line: "stay stock still."

Then, in the next stanza, Whitman throws in a jubilant, "drunken bar-room dancing meter" with the falling measure of line 202's dactylic feet:

Dancing and laughing along the beach came the twenty-  
ninth bather,  
The rest did not see her, but she saw them and loved  
them.

(LG 1855 1.202-03)

Once again, the "l" and "b" sounds depict sexual desire.

In the next stanza, to show sexual desire, the "b" sound is continued, as well as the short "i" sound.

The beards of the young men glistened with wet, it ran  
from their long hair,  
Little streams passed all over their bodies.

(LG 1855 1.204-05)

In line 205, the meter also shows mimesis, for like the little streams passing over the bodies of the bathers, the stresses pass over the line. Skipping a stanza, Whitman gives us this final description:

The young men float on their backs, their white bellies  
swell to the sun....they do not ask who seizes fast  
to them,  
They do not know who puffs and declines with pendant

and bending arch,

They do not think whom they souse with spray.

(LG 1855 1.208-210)

In the phrase "young men float," Whitman prosodically exemplifies the floating, inert bodies of the males by accents. Just as the young men float motionless on the water, the stressed words float motionless through the line. Accents always slow the poetic line, but the measure continues as long as the human eye reads it. Here, this idea is analogous to how the young swimmers' bodies are motionless, but the waves of the water move them along. In fact, in this final section of the passage, it is as if the bathers have all ejaculated over the body of the hidden woman. Thus, now the young men are motionless, exhausted from their orgasms. The woman, however, still seems aroused. Whitman depicts this idea in the next line where the "p" and "b" sounds carry on. In line 210, the "s" alliteration, as well as the assonance of "think" and "splay," finish off this sexual fantasy, for nothing has actually happened. The woman is bent over and masturbating, but she has "declined" any sexual encounter with the young men. Nonetheless, the sexual language and meter of the poem leave the reader exhausted as well, and although the sounds are arousing to the reader's central nervous system, words can never fully illustrate the sexual act itself. Thus, we have here another example of Whitman's desire to put into words what he realizes will never be captured. Language is play, and sexual, but in itself is only a substitute for sex.

In what finally becomes section 21 of "Song of Myself,"

Whitman delivers a mating call to the earth, in which the sexuality of the male and female is one and the same as the sexual desire and love for the planet:

Smile O voluptuous coolbreathed earth!  
Earth of the slumbering and liquid trees!  
Earth of the departed sunset! Each of the mountains  
    misty-topt!  
Earth of the vitreous pour of the full moon just tinged  
    with blue!  
Earth of shine and dark mottling the tide of the river!  
Earth of the limpid gray of clouds brighter and clearer  
    for my sake!  
Far-swooping elbowed earth! Rich apple-blossomed earth!  
Smile, for your lover comes!

(LG 1855 1.439-46)

If each dactylic-based line here is seen as a mating call, then the breath-measure runs its course, and the line runs out of breath when the speaker does. In such a long-winded poem, the anaphora pushes the measure forward, into a desperate sexual pleading. Once again, Whitman uses the sounds of "l," "m," and "b" to show this sexual desire. In this passage, as well, he adds the "v" sound to show the violent tendencies of the sexual instinct.

This passage's language is purely primitive, a celebration of the joy as well as the fear of human and earthly sexuality, an "unspeakable" love that tears at the core of human and animal existence:

Prodigal! you have given me love!....therefore I to you  
    give love!

O unspeakable passionate love!

(LG 1855 1.447-48)

Whitman depicts this violent tendency and fear of sex in the following lines of the 1855 edition which get deleted in later versions:<sup>5</sup>

Thruster holding me tight and that I hold tight!

We hurt each other as the bridegroom and the bride hurt  
each other.

(LG 1855 1.449-50)

Then, the poet gives us his well-known love scene with the sea:

You sea! I resign myself to you also....I guess what  
you mean,

I behold from the beach your crooked inviting fingers,  
I believe you refuse to go back without feeling of  
me....

(LG 1855 1.451-53)

Line 451 is mostly iambic, while the "s" repetition mimics the soft sound of the sea waves witnessed by the poet from a distance. Then, in line 453, a triple-meter mostly works, and Whitman again uses the "b" sound to show sexual energy, as he does in the following line where we get the first overt mention of sexuality in the section:

We must have a turn together....I undress....hurry me  
out of sight of the land,

Cushion me soft....rock me in billowy drowse,

Dash me with amorous wet....I can repay you.

(LG 1855 1.454-56)

In lines 455-56, Whitman begins a falling meter to show the force of sexuality. In line 455, the poet starts with a dactylic foot, and like the softness he wishes the sea to present to him, the sounds are quiet. Then, the meter and the sound patterns change. The spondee shows violence in the line and is reinforced by its hard end-stops, as well as the ellipses that slide between the two stresses, all representing the sexual force which the persona desires from his intercourse with the sea. Then, to lessen this force, Whitman throws in two anapestic feet, and this triple-meter creates a hypnotic "drowse" to the line. Then, in line 456, the poet returns to violent prosody, illustrated by the first stress which kicks off the two dactylic feet. Then, Whitman begins a rising, iambic meter to show the serious voice-tone, a tone which through the meter begs, if you will, to be sexually taken by the waves. Next are these two lines:

Sea of stretched ground-swells!

Sea breathing broad and convulsive breaths!

(LG 1855 1.457-58)

First off, the anaphora reinforces the persona's sexual energy, as well as the sea's. Both lines, furthermore, are loaded with stresses which add to the desperation for sex felt in the speaker's voice. In addition, Whitman uses the "b" sounds once again, and these make the line breath, make the line, like the sexuality of the sea itself, "convulsive." The line, in other words, is heavy with "breath" (as represented by the stresses and "b" sounds) in the same way the speaker, lustful and needy, is breathing heavily.

Whitman uses a similar stress-mimesis to depict the sex

drive in "I Sing the Body Electric," another poem first presented in the 1855 Leaves of Grass and later included in the "Children of Adam" cluster. Sections 5 and 9, in the final version, are significant for this discussion:

Hair, bosom, hips, bend of legs, negligent falling hands  
all diffused, mine too diffused,  
Ebb stung by the flow and flow stung by the ebb,  
love-flesh swelling and deliciously aching,  
Limitless limpid jets of love hot and enormous,  
quivering jelly of love, white-blow and delicious  
juice,  
Bridegroom night of love working surely and softly into  
the prostrate dawn,  
Undulating into the willing and yielding day,  
Lost in the cleave of the clasping and sweet-flesh'd  
day.

(CRE 5.58-63)

In section 5, Whitman's prosody is a dizzying one, the stresses slowing the line and punching the syntax onward. Specifically, in line 59, the stresses, like the bee-analogy, "sting" the line. The falling meter adds to the sexual effect of the sound patterns. Once again, Whitman is using the "l," "h," "d," "c," "s," "f," and "b" sounds to depict sexual desire and copulation. In this passage, though, he adds the "j" to show sexual desire. Specifically, the hard sounds of the "f" and "j" show an aggressive desire, one that is not tamed by words alone.

Then, in the next stanza, the poet adds this:

This the nucleus--after the child is born of woman, man

is born of woman,  
This the bath of birth, this the merge of small and  
large, and the outlet again.

(CRE 5.64-65)

Once again, Whitman manifests the procreant urge in the image of offspring, and we find that sex, childhood, and language are all part of the same unique human manifestation.

In section 9 of "I Sing the Body Electric," Whitman also emphasizes accent to exemplify sexual desire and copulation, mostly, once again, in his lists of anatomy. As in the previous passage, as well, he develops similar sound patterns of "b," "l," "h," "j," and "f":

Broad breast-front, curling hair of the breast, breast-  
bone, breast-side,  
Ribs, belly, backbone, joints of the backbone,  
Hips, hip-sockets, hip-strength, inward and outward  
round, man-balls, man-root,  
Strong set of thighs, well carrying the trunk above,  
Leg-fibres, knee, knee-pan, upper-leg, under-leg,  
Ankles, instep, foot-ball, toes, toe-joints, the  
heel....

(CRE 9.141-46)

Similarly, a few lines later, Whitman continues these sounds:

The womb, the teats, nipples, breast-milk, tears,  
laughter, weeping, love-looks, love-perturbations  
and risings,  
The voice, articulation, language, whispering, shouting  
aloud,

Food, drink, pulse, digestion, sweat, sleep, walking,  
swimming,  
Poise on the hips, leaping, reclining, embracing, arm-  
curving and tightening,  
The continual changes of the flex of the mouth, and  
around the eyes,  
The skin, the sunburnt shade, freckles, hair,  
The curious sympathy one feels when feeling with the  
hand the naked meat of the body,  
The circling rivers the breath, and breathing it in  
and out,  
The beauty of the waist, and thence of the hips, and  
thence downward toward the knees,  
The thin red jellies within you or within me, the bones  
and the marrow in the bones,  
The exquisite realization of health;  
O I say these are not the parts and poems of the body  
only, but of the soul,  
O I say now these are the soul!

(CRE 9.152-64)

Here, the sound repetition, along with the stress-loaded line, describes a speaker sexually aroused not only over male and female anatomy, but also over language itself, the various forms of "articulation" which illustrate different forms of sexuality, play, and love. That Whitman saw this stress-loaded prosody as something transcendent is evident in the last two lines, where the parts of both body and language become the human soul which is one with nature, itself, all human beings, and God.

Likewise, in poem 249, Emily Dickinson also uses stresses to depict pure lust and sexual transcendence. In poem 249, Dickinson shows the anticipation of sex by stress-loading the line in the first stanza:

Wild Nights--Wild Nights!  
Were I with thee  
Wild Nights should be  
Our luxury!

(1: 1-4)

Here, just as she leaves the subject matter deemed appropriate by the American readership of the time, Dickinson leaves the accepted iambic tetrameter and trimeter of common measure to show the speaker's sexual excitement. Furthermore, in the first stanza, Dickinson breaks completely out of the typical hymnal stanza rhyme scheme of "abab (or sometimes "abcb"), stressing the long "e" sound to show the wild abandon of sexual desire.

The last two stanzas are significant as well:

Futile--the Winds--  
To a Heart in port--  
Done with the Compass--  
Done with the chart!

Rowing in Eden--  
Ah, the Sea!  
Might I but moor--Tonight--  
In Thee!

(1: 5-12)

For the most part, the poet turns to a falling measure in

these last two stanzas. Although the speaker's body and "Heart" are both anchored on shore, away from the desired lover, Dickinson shows the fantasy of rowing to the mate through the tossing-wave like structure of the falling measure. Still, this meter takes on a more important meaning in the last line, which is iambic. Here, opposed to the falling measure, the iambic foot depicts the thrust of the male penis into the female. Incredibly, if the speaker is indeed female, this iambic line works to show how often during carnal love roles are reversed. In other words, the male becomes, in a sense, the female, while the female becomes the male. Quite significantly, this sexual union gets associated with the garden of Eden, an idea which Whitman also picks up on.

For Whitman, the garden of Eden gets translated into the prosodic, sexual representations in the "Children of Adam" poems, both in terms of pure lust and sexual transcendence. In "From Pent-up Aching Rivers," the sex-prosody consists of anaphora and sex-sounds once again. Here are the first four lines:

From pent-up aching rivers,  
From that of myself without which I were nothing,  
From what I am determin'd to make illustrious, even if I  
stand sole among men,  
From my own voice resonant, singing the phallus....

(CRE 1-4)

Besides mimicking the speaker's constant sexual desire through the anaphora's repetition, Whitman accumulates accents to represent the build-up of lust. Line 1, with its

three consecutive stresses, imitates the "pent-up" sexual frustration. The line is clogged, "pent-up," if you will, in the same way the speaker's sexual needs have been "pent-up." Line 2, if we demote and promote syllables, is iambic, and this shows the rhythmic frustration and unceasing presence of lust. Line 4 also uses the consecutive stress technique to show sexual stress. At the end of this line, the word "singing" patches together with the anaphora in the following lines:

Singing the song of procreation,  
Singing the need of superb children and therein superb  
    grown people,  
Singing the muscular urge and the blending,  
Singing the bedfellow's song, (O resistless  
    yearning!....)

(CRE 5-8)

In these lines, like the anaphoric verb itself, the meter "sings" with its falling measure. Line 5 starts with a dactylic foot, followed by three trochees, and the alliterative "s" not only glides along the line, it also is a sex-sound. The assonance of "singing" and "need," in line 6, also creates sexual sound-sense. This line "grows up," so to speak, since the measure begins with a falling meter and ends with three accents ("superb, grown, people") popping up or growing out of the line's falling measure. Whitman, after having broken the falling measure in this line, returns to the perfect falling beat in line 7, with its three dactyls and final trochee. Line 8 varies from the falling metrical norm in order to slightly shake things up and show that the

sexual act, although it does indeed have rhythm, is an energy at times hard to consciously control.

Then, a few lines down in the poem, the "w" and "l" repetitions add another sexual sound-pattern:

Of the wet of woods, of the lapping of waves,  
Of the mad pushes of waves upon the land, I them  
    chanting,  
The overture lightly sounding, the strain anticipating,  
The welcome nearness, the sight of the perfect body,  
The swimmer swimming naked in the bath, or motionless on  
    his back lying and floating....

(CRE 18-22)

In line 19, the first two unstresses prepare for the following spondaic thrust, so the force of the stresses prosodically "push" the line along much as the waves "push" themselves to shore.

Then, Whitman works the "f" sound to illustrate sexual desire:

The female form approaching, I pensive, love-flesh  
    tremulous aching,  
The divine list for myself or you or for any one making,  
The face, the limbs, the index from head to foot, and  
    what it arouses....

(CRE 23-25)

The "f" is present in all three lines here. Voiced in the throat, and so closely associated with the word "fuck," of all the fricatives the "f" sound works best to carry sexual desire in a passage such as this one which deals with human anatomy or intercourse. Still, the meter of this section

mimics sexuality as well. Line 23 has, for its beginnings, a basic iambic base. Then, in order to depict the speaker's built-up sexual tension, as well as the tension in the line, Whitman tosses in three stresses ("love-flesh tremulous"), and accentual force makes the line "ache" in the same way the speaker aches for sexual contact.

Then, the next passage follows:

The mystic deliria, the madness amorous, the utter  
abandonment,

(Hark close and still what I now whisper to you,

I love you, O you entirely possess me,

O that you and I escape from the rest and go utterly  
off, free and lawless,

Two hawks in the air, two fishes swimming in the sea not  
more lawless than we;)

The furious storm through me careering, I passionately  
trembling,

The oath of the inseparableness of two together, of the  
woman that loves me and whom I love more than my  
life, that oath swearing,

(O I willingly stake all for you,

O let me be lost if it must be so!

O you and I! what is it to us what the rest do or  
think?

What is all else to us? only that we enjoy each other  
and exhaust each other if it must be so;)

From the master, the pilot I yield the vessel to,

The general commanding me, commanding all, from him  
permission taking,

From time the programme hastening, (I have loiter'd too  
long as it is,)  
From sex, from the warp and from the woof,  
From privacy, from frequent repinings alone,  
From plenty of persons near and yet the right person not  
near,  
From the soft sliding of hands over me and thrusting of  
fingers through my hair and beard,  
From the long sustain'd kiss upon the mouth or bosom,  
From the close pressure that makes me or any man drunk,  
fainting with excess,  
From what the divine husband knows, from the work of  
fatherhood,  
From exultation, victory and relief, from the  
bedfellow's embrace in the night,  
From the act-poems of eyes, hands, hips and bosoms,  
From the cling of the trembling arm,  
From the bending curve and the clinch,  
From side by side the pliant coverlet off-throwing,  
From the one so unwilling to have me leave, and me just  
as unwilling to leave,  
(Yet a moment O tender waiter, and I return,)  
From the hour of shining stars and dropping dews,  
From the night a moment I emerging flitting out,  
Celebrate you act divine and you children prepared for,  
And you stalwart loins.

(CRE 26-57)

Here, the varying rhythms, the fricatives and mouthed "m's,"  
the anaphora, alliteration, and assonance, all come together

to create a sexual tour-de-force. The speaker, in "From Pent-Up Aching Rivers," is one mad with his own vision. Yet, without such sexual-prosody, these emotions would not wholly get through to the reader.

Although "From Pent-Up Aching Rivers" mostly celebrates male sexuality, to show the transcendent quality of human sexuality, Whitman throughout Leaves of Grass describes the female in sexually equal terms with the male.<sup>6</sup> Before bursting into the "Children of Adam" poems, and their quest for the lost language as it refers to sexuality, Whitman begins with a poem which shows the importance of the female, to sex, to man, and to God. Although not sexual in nature, "To the Garden the World" sets up Whitman's equality of the sexes theory and its significance for the whole "Children of Adam" cluster. Here is the poem in its entirety:

To the garden the world anew ascending,  
Potent mates, daughters, sons, preluding,  
The love, the life of their bodies, meaning and being,  
Curious here behold my resurrection after slumber,  
The revolving cycles in their wide sweep having  
    brought me again,  
Amorous, mature, all beautiful to me, all wondrous,  
My limbs and the quivering fire that ever plays through  
    them, for reasons, most wondrous,  
Existing I peer and penetrate still,  
Content with the present, content with the past,  
By my side or back of me Eve following,

Or in front, and I following her just the same.

(CRE 1-11)

Not only does this poem introduce the sexual theme that will develop throughout "Children of Adam," it also shows, through its meter, how the sexes in Whitman's world are created equally. In this thematic regard, the last two lines, specifically, are metrically mimetic. In fact, these lines are almost identical in meter, just as Eve and Adam are sexually and humanly equal:

/+//+//+//++

/+//+//+++//+/

As in the sexes, there is just enough variety in the line to depict the various traits of the male and female personality. In addition, by creating a swift movement, the unstresses in these last two lines mimic the silent steps which Eve takes in her trip with Adam through the garden.

Still, line 1 has another mimetic, prosodic quality. Whitman, here, discusses the "ascending" of the new world garden. The meter also "ascends" in its rising measure until the last unstressed syllable. This last unstressed syllable, which gets terminally repeated in the other lines that follow, drops off from the rising meter. Like Dickinson's ellipses at the end of her poems, the unstresses and "ing" ending of Whitman's lines show a thrust toward the eternal. The silence of the terminal unstress is the silence of eternity. This metrically prepares the reader for the theme of sexual transcendence that will appear in the cluster itself. For Whitman, it is all right to be "content with the present, content with the past," for in the "Children of

Adam" poems he will accomplish his main goal of re-discovering the long lost language of humankind's pre-fall state and fling it into the future.

2.

For a general discussion of his prosody, Whitman's sexual preference is not essentially important, but in the "Calamus" cluster his homosexual tendencies truly are reflected in the metrics.<sup>7</sup> In this section of Leaves of Grass, Whitman changes his approach to sex and prosody, and his theme of brotherly, sexual love is concealed in the metrics of the poems. Of course, Whitman was having a difficult time officially coming out of the closet, and this is evident in the prosody of this group of poems.

In the first "Calamus" poem, "In Paths Untrodden," we witness a symbolic "walking" where Whitman starts the first line with two iambs and one hanging, unstressed syllable.<sup>8</sup> The poem, in fact, utilizes an iambic base surrounded by anapests and trochaic/spondaic substitutions. As soon as this loose pattern risks turning monotonous, however, Whitman throws in alliteration and an initial dactylic foot which changes the poem's course, as a different path taken changes the course of a walk. This happens in line 9. Here is the poem up to this point:

In paths untrodden,  
In the growth by margins of pond-waters,  
Escaped from the life that exhibits itself,  
From all the standards hitherto publish'd, from the

pleasures, profits, conformities,  
Which too long I was offering to feed my soul,  
Clear to me now standards not yet publish'd, clear to me  
that my soul,  
That the soul of the man I speak for rejoices in  
comrades,  
Here by myself away from the clank of the world,  
Tallying and talk'd to here by tongues aromatic....

(CRE 1-9)

After line 9's variation, Whitman resumes the perfect iambic pattern which so well depicts the human walk. Essentially, if we see the whole poem as a walk, then each foot is a step.<sup>9</sup> With 18 lines, the poem, like the symbolic walk illustrated within it, is half over. Whitman turns the poem metrically the same way traditional poets turn a sonnet. Since it is 18 lines long, line 9's dactylic substitution perfectly starts the second half of the poem:

No longer abash'd, (for in this secluded spot I can  
respond as I would not dare elsewhere,)  
Strong upon me the life that does not exhibit itself,  
yet contains all the rest,  
Resolv'd to sing no songs to-day but those of manly  
attachment,  
Projecting them along that substantial life,  
Bequeathing hence types of athletic love,  
Afternoon this delicious Ninth-month in my forty-first  
year....

(CRE 10-15)

Here, the lines combine iambs, trochees, and anapests. Nonetheless, in the poem's last three lines which work syntactically as the main clause of the dependent clause which has started the poem, Whitman slips out of an initial anapestic foot and returns to his perfect iambic norm:

I proceed for all who are or have been young men,  
To tell the secret of my nights and days,  
To celebrate the need of comrades.

(CRE 16-18)

There is the spondaic substitution of "young men," of course, and the last dangling unstress of "comrades," but these substitutions are clearly accepted as normal occurrences when writing in conventional meter.

Other metrical substitutions mimic the poem's theme, as well. Literally, the persona is either resting or walking by the pond, symbolically contemplating the future paths he will walk. The persona is or will be on his way through paths he has never walked before. Thus, by throwing in feet besides the iambic base, Whitman exemplifies a speaker who does not know where he is going, who has to stop and start his walk over, slow down, always cautious since he does not really know where he is walking. Metrically speaking, one not aware of his destination is hesitant and does not walk in iambs.

Seen another way, the metrical variety of walking in "In Paths Untrodden" illustrates Whitman's own fear of giving the world poems which reveal his homosexual feelings. The poem's first few lines show the speaker's conflict between his old conventional self and his future unconventional persona who will appear in the "Calamus" cluster (Martin 305), a speaker

who will come out of the closet and confess his love of comrades. On the other hand, besides depicting a steady, symbolic gait, the perfect iambs and soft sibilants of the poem's last two lines create a verbal harmony. This balance implies that Whitman will indeed get the courage to express his homosexual feelings ("the secret of my nights and days"), something he in fact does in the remaining "Calamus" poems.

This poem metrically leads us by the hand into the "Calamus" cluster. Not only have we taken a journey syntactically through the various clauses that separate the dependent clause of the first line from the independent clause of the last, we also have taken a walk through various metrical patterns. By starting and ending the poem in perfect iambs Whitman describes the different steps, the distance, of a walk metrically. We may walk in iambs when we start a walk, and we may end our walking in iambic step, but what occurs during the walk may consist of pauses, stops, and different directions, as the person goes on his way through the world.

Another "Calamus" poem which represents sexual desire and the "walking-mimesis" I will discuss in my next chapter is "O You Whom I Often and Silently Come." It is important to point out that this poem remained the same through all the various editions of Leaves of Grass. Although only three lines, it is jammed full of mimetic instances:

O you whom I often and silently come where you are that  
I may be with you,  
As I walk by your side or sit near, or remain in the  
same room with you,

Little you know the subtle electric fire that for your  
sake is playing within me.

(CRE 1-3)

Line 1 consists of an initial iambic foot, followed by three anapests, four trochees, plus the stressed half-foot of "you." The first half of the line's anapestic-rising meter exemplifies the silent walk of the persona as he approaches his lover. A common metrical practice, poets writing in traditional meter often use unstresses (the two in the anapestic feet in this poem) to depict silence, or softness, the spondee to depict noise, some type of hard physical activity, or violence. Adding to this effect, the long "u" assonance and "m" stops ("you," "whom," "come," "may") combine with the "s" of "silently" to create sonically a lack of noise, or silence. The line's second part interrupts this metrical tiptoeing as if the persona who has been sneaking up on his comrade has been seen. The trochaic feet metrically resemble a "human strut," the stresses of each feet mimicking the walker throwing his shoulders and chest backward; the unstresses mimicking the walker releasing the shoulders and chest forward. Obviously, this "metrical-strut" is sexual in nature, a manifestation of the walker's "electric fire" "playing" within him. In this context, the long "u's" and "m's" depict not only silence but sexual energy.

In line 2, the speaker has been seen by his lover, so now the silent tiptoeing as he sneaks up has been changed to a "strut." Metrically, the two initial anapests no longer illustrate silence, but the "human strut" itself.<sup>10</sup> It's as

if the speaker is rapping this entire line: *papaPA, papaPa, PAPA, papaPA, papaPAPA paPa*. Furthermore, the two stresses in "sit near," and "same room" also add metrical meaning to the text. In "sit near," the stresses' force metrically mimics the walker actually sitting down next to his lover. Both "sit near" and "same room" mirror each other, almost as if the "sit near" phrase is visually the two eyes of the walker, and the "same room" phrase is the two eyes of the lover. Taken together or by themselves, the visual as well as the metrical balance fits the harmony of the two lovers finally side by side. Side by side, the two stresses and two phrases equal the two dear friends sitting side by side.

Sound-wise, line 2 has a similar mirror effect. The alliteration of "side" and "sit," the assonance of "remain" and "same," and the near-rhyme of "room" and "you" all exemplify two comrades speaking the same bonding words to each other. Furthermore, the "remain" and "same" and "room" and "you" work as echoes, the same sounds or words of friendship coming out of each comrade's mouths, blissful to be with one another. Of course, for the poem's speaker the sounds represent more than brotherly love. They also exemplify lust which the friend is not fully (at least consciously) aware of, since the speaker claims that his friend doesn't know of the "electric fire" of lust which the speaker feels for his friend.

The poem's last line is the hardest to scan according to any set pattern. Whitman here weaves different types of feet together to create a dizzy meter which mimics the dizziness of lust the speaker experiences. His body, like the line

which depicts it, is literally crawling all over. The base meter of anapests set up in the first two lines dissolve and are barely audible in the sexual rhythm of the line. In this last line, the sounds are rather bland and try to conceal the sexual arousal of the speaker. Still, bits of sexual language are revealed in the "l" consonance ("Little," "subtle," "electric," "playing"), the somewhat aggressive "for your," and the sexual assonance of "sake" and "playing." Whitman, in this part of the "Calamus" section, is once again struggling to conceal his homosexual feelings through not only what he says, but how he prosodically says it.

Whitman, did not, as regards sex, mellow with age, in theory or in practice. Even toward the end of his life, Whitman did not back down from his original call for an American poetry of sexuality. In "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads," the poet writes:

From another point of view "Leaves of Grass" is avowedly the song of Sex and Amativeness, and even Animality-- though meanings that do not usually go along with those words are behind all, and will duly emerge; and all are sought to be lifted into a different light and atmosphere. Of this feature, intentionally palpable in a few lines, I shall only say the espousing principle of those lines so gives breath of life to my whole scheme that the bulk of the pieces might as well have been left unwritten were those lines omitted. Difficult as it will be, it has become, in my opinion, imperative to achieve a shifted attitude from superior men and women towards the thought and fact of sexuality, as an element

in character, personality, the emotions, and a theme in literature. I am not going to argue the question by itself; it does not stand by itself. The vitality of it is altogether in its relations, bearings, significance--like the clef of a symphony. At last analogy the lines I allude to, and the spirit in which they are spoken, permeate all "Leaves of Grass," and the work must stand or fall with them, as the human body and soul must remain as an entirety.

(PW 2: 727-28)

Although the handful of Whitman's later poems which deal with sexuality are slightly more prosodically formal, they still use the mimetic measure as it refers to the sexual act. For example, a late poem which takes a more conventional approach to sexual issues is "The Dalliance of the Eagles" (1880). Here are the first three lines:

Skirting the river road, (my forenoon walk, my rest,)  
Skyward in air a sudden muffled sound, the dalliance of  
the eagles,

The rushing amorous contact high in space together....

(CRE 1-3)

Lines 1 and 2 show the common Whitman anaphora and falling measure used in the earlier poems to describe sexual activity. Starting with a trochaic foot, however, line 1 becomes perfectly iambic. Again, the "walking activity" is described in iambic measure. Metrically, line 2 does the same, beginning with a trochee and then lapsing into iambic feet. Line 2, though, creates a sort of onomatopoeia, with the phrase "sudden muffled sound." Here, the "u" is

literally "muffled" in the mouth when spoken, and Whitman uses it to depict the sexual noise of the eagles, a sound connected with the age-old idea of sex and mortality, the muffled sound of a death-rattle, if you will. Furthermore, "r" invades the first line, as well as the "s" alliteration and "sk" anaphora. In line 3, if we compress the syllables of "amorous," the poem continues in a perfect iambic base. Sex, so far in this poem, is soft and natural.

Then, suddenly the sex act becomes aggressive:

The clinching interlocking claws, a living, fierce,  
gyrating wheel,  
Four beating wings, two beaks, a swirling mass tight  
grappling....

(CRE 4-5)

Here, the sounds also become violent, while the meter stays constant. In line 4, Whitman illustrates this violence through the hard sounds of "c" and "ck." Nonetheless, the meter stays in its iambic base, so the sounds break into chaos and violence while the meter keeps a controlled harmony. This prosodic maneuver represents the sex act itself, for the copulation of the eagles is free, violent, and aggressive, but within the bounds of normality, a controlled violence of the male overcoming the female in submission.

In line 5, Whitman goes on to exemplify this controlled violence of prosody and sex. Two stresses begin this line, then the unstress, then the spondee of "two beaks." The prosody becomes violent, as the sex act turns aggressive. Then, in the last part of the line, the two bodies are connected in intercourse, and the line is connected with

stresses as well, in "mass tight" and the first stress of the last foot. Then, the last syllable is unstressed to relieve tension.

As the sexual act intensifies, and the birds start falling downward, Whitman gives this metrical mimesis:

In tumbling turning clustering loops, straight downward  
falling....

(CRE 6)

If we compress the syllables of "clustering," three perfect iambs begin this line, but as the birds start to fall Whitman depicts this action with the spondee of "straight downward." The falling act itself is realized in the last foot of the meter, since the word "falling" is a trochee, or falling measure.

In the next two lines, Whitman harmonizes by using perfect iambic feet with minor demotion and promotion of syllables:

Till o'er the river pois'd, the twain yet one, a  
moment's lull,  
A motionless still balance in the air, then parting,  
talons loosing....

(CRE 7-8)

When the birds decide to rise up in the sky again during their copulation, Whitman rightfully and mimetically changes the line's rhythm to show the change in the birds' movements:

Upward again on slow-firm pinions slanting, their  
separate diverse flight,  
She hers, he his, pursuing.

(CRE 9-10)

Line 9 starts with a trochee, then an iamb, then the poet throws in three stresses, first a spondee, then a trochaic foot, followed by another trochee. The sex act continues, the birds' movements rising upward and chaotic. And then the sexual act itself once again creates a balanced order in body and movement by the rest of the line's perfect iambic feet (if we use the demotion and promotion rules of traditional prosody). The last line returns to an unbalanced iambic measure, for the first four syllables are stressed. If not, though, we scan the line as three iambic feet, followed by the last unstressed, hovering syllable. This last unstressed syllable is important, for it leaves the poem in silence (again, much like Emily Dickinson's ellipses at the end of her poems), showing how the act of sexually connecting with another creature is harmonious, a silence that continues through eternity.

Sexuality, for Whitman, remained an important aspect of being human and alive. Whether it be the "Children of Adam" poems where heterosexual activity is openly justified, or his "Calamus" work where homosexuality is hidden within the poems' prosody, the poet of America was eager to explore the relationships between sexuality, childhood play, and God. Sexuality, through various sound patterns, as well as the stress-loaded line, continues throughout Whitman's long career. When we get to the later poems, the poet develops the idea of nature and sexuality started in his prime with passages on the intercourse of man and the sea. The post-war poems, in this regard, are more metrically controlled, but metricality gives Whitman the freedom to break from the

prosodic norm, and to show the intensity of human sexuality  
in a more fulfilling and long-lasting light.

CHAPTER IV.  
THE POETIC NOISE OF WAR: SOUND PATTERNS  
IN DRUM-TAPS

My experiences on the field have shown me that the writers catch very little of the real atmosphere of a battle. It is an assault, an immense noise, somebody driven off the field--a victory won: that is all. It is like trying to photograph a tempest.

Walt Whitman

1.

As with all areas of prosody, Whitman gave contradictory comments about the importance of sound. In a two-page prose manuscript entitled "My Poetry is more the Poetry of Sight than Sound," written toward the end of his life, Whitman asserts that sound has not been a primary factor in his prosody. Currently part of the Feinberg Collection, and composed in 1890 or 1891 (possibly as the beginning of a preface), this piece included the following five lines of verse entitled "To Soar in Freedom and in Fullness of Power." Critics have largely ignored the poem because it first appears in the 1897-1898, posthumous tenth edition of Leaves of Grass. It reads:

I have not so much emulated the birds that musically  
sing,

I have abandon'd myself to flights, broad circles,

The hawks, the seagull, have far more possess'd me than  
the canary or mocking-bird,  
I have not felt to warble and trill, however sweetly,  
I have felt to soar in freedom and in the fullness of  
power, joy, volition.

(CRE 1-5)

Although this passage may be Whitman's general attack against Keats' nightingale and the inheritance of similar subject matter into American poetry,<sup>1</sup> the aviary comments suggest a prosodic declaration, specifically how sound relates to any given poem on hand. In this poem, Whitman states he has not been concerned with sound-patterns in his life's work. Looking back on his poetic career, Whitman appears to have been confused about what it is he actually accomplished. His crusade to break with traditional prosodic structures was so exuberant he fooled even himself into believing such techniques as sound were indeed not important.

In fact, in "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads" (1888), the poet apologizes for his lack of "verbal" or "surface melody," phrases he often uses to call attention to the superficial subject matter but melodious sounds of his contemporaries:<sup>2</sup>

And whether my friends claim it for me or not, I know well enough, too, that in respect to pictorial talent, dramatic situations, and especially in verbal melody and all the conventional technique of poetry, not only the divine works that to-day stand ahead in the world's reading, but dozens more, transcend (some of them

immeasurably transcend) all I have done, or could do.

(PW 2: 718)

Likewise, in another old age statement, Whitman contradicts himself by claiming that in his early poems, at least, he was indeed concerned with musicality. William Thayer, Whitman's publisher for the third edition of Leaves of Grass, quotes the elder Whitman as saying:

Nobody could write in my way unless he had a melody singing in his ears. I don't always contrive to catch the best musical combination nowadays; but in the older pieces I always had a tune before I began to write.

(qtd.in Finch 44)

This "melody singing in his ears" is proof that Whitman was, indeed, concerned with sound-patterns in his poetry. In this passage, Whitman clearly is worried about his future status as an American poet. He has broken with prosodic tradition and is questioning whether he did the right thing, whether or not he should have been slightly more conventional in his poetics. However, as we shall see, this was merely an incorrect observation on his part, or a denial to even be slightly associated with conventional poetics. In Whitman's best works, the "verbal melody" is present.

Guilt-stricken or merely confused over his prosody, Whitman's most adamant proclamations against sound-pattern abuses are his comments on Sidney Lanier, Swinburne, and Poe. After speaking of Lanier's merit as a musician, Whitman speaks of Lanier's failure as a poet:

This extreme sense of the melodic, a virtue in itself, when carried into the art of the writer becomes a fault.

Why? Why, because it tends to place the first emphasis on tone, sound--on the lilt as Rhys<sup>3</sup> so often puts it. Study Lanier's choice of words--they are too often fit rather for sound than for sense. His ear was over-sensitive. He had genius--a delicate, clairvoyant genius: but this over-tuning of the ear, this extreme deference paid to oral nicety, reduced the majesty, the solid worth, of his rhythms.

(WWC 1: 170-71)

It is true. As a result of his musical background, Lanier often approached poetry symphonically. His treatise The Science of English Verse (1880) elaborates on a music notation scansion for poetry and mirrors his own writing techniques. Quite expectedly, Whitman and Lanier never did see eye to eye on prosodic issues. In an 1878 letter to Whitman, Lanier opposed the poet's views on artistic form, but nonetheless lauded Leaves of Grass for its modernity. In addition, Whitman's comments on Lanier's sound-sense are significant in another regard; they discredit later scholars' attempts at seeing Whitman's prosody as influenced solely by music.<sup>4</sup>

Lanier aside, Whitman is even harsher while discussing the musicality of Swinburne's *A Double Ballad of August*:

And if Swinburne had a few grains of thought with all his music wouldn't he be the greatest charmer of all? I never liked him from the first--Swinburne--from the very first: could not take him in, adapt myself to him. I know of nothing I think of so little account as

pretty words, pretty thoughts, pretty china, pretty arrangements.

(WWC 2: 188)

Swinburne and Whitman, as this quote shows, also had their prosodic differences. In his 1868 study, William Blake, Swinburne favorably compares Whitman to the English writer, but argues that Blake's work is more profound. Later, in Under the Microscope (1872), Swinburne perceives a clash between Whitman's democratic poet and his forms, noting specifically the failure of the poet's catalogues. Swinburne continued to attack Whitman, claiming that the poet's work was not poetry but rhetoric. Of course, these comments might slight Whitman's comments on Swinburne. But the fact of the matter is that Whitman believed the polished attention to sound in both Lanier and Swinburne took away from what needed to be said in their work.

In terms of sound abuse, Poe was, for Whitman, an even more deserving target. While criticizing Poe in "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads," Whitman gives his most specific reference on the use of sound in poetry:

Toward the last I had among much else look'd over Edgar Poe's poems--of which I was not an admirer, tho' I always saw that beyond their limited range of melody (like perpetual chimes of music bells, ringing from lower *b* flat up to *g*) they were melodious expressions, and perhaps never excell'd ones, of certain pronounc'd phases of human morbidity. (The Poetic area is very spacious--has room for all--has so many mansions!)

(PW 2: 723)

Unmistakably, Whitman's "room" in the "mansion" of sound-sense is a separate one from Poe's. For Whitman poetry must say something significant. "Pretty sounds" and the "chimes of music bells" are mere ornaments that, if not kept in check, lead only to dead music. For Whitman, it is the poem's subject matter--not dead music--that impacts the reader and the world.

With all these unfavorable comments, one would suspect that Whitman never concerned himself with sound-patterns in his verse. This is, however, not the case. Whitman's statements concerning lack of "verbal melody" in his own poetry are misleading. There are too many instances of sound-sense throughout Leaves of Grass to be ignored. Of course, Whitman believed sound patterns, as they create unity and mimic subject matter, were necessary. Yet, for Whitman the "sound and sense" must complement one another. Whitman, as his poetry and early notebooks show, was always fascinated with the musicality of words. It is the overuse of sounds for artistic decoration only that the poet objects to.

Whitman's interest with poetic sound dates back to early notebooks he wrote during the first and second editions of Leaves of Grass. In these early scribblings, the poet criticizes Noah Webster's faulty ear (DBN 3: 718). Even in "The Primer of Words," Whitman proposes "the creation of a set of type capable of keying the phonetic quality of words and their sounds" (qtd. in Burnham 42) in order to "preserve the intended sounds" (42) which would make pronunciation easier for illiterate readers. In one notebook, for a planned but undelivered lecture,<sup>5</sup> Whitman goes so far as to

represent the sound of a word, giving its correct pronunciation and effect in a sentence (DBN 3: 755; Burnham 43). In reality, in an unpublished dissertation entitled "An Analysis and Description of Walt Whitman's Composing Process," Christopher Charles Burnham argues that Whitman was more concerned with the consonant than the vowel, and this preoccupation led to his denial of traditional rhyme. Burnham writes that "rhyme depends on normalized pronunciation, especially the conventional sounding of vowels, which Whitman's commentary on sound suggests is impossible" (45). In fact, according to Burnham, Whitman substitutes "a more reliable sound similarity, consonance" for traditional rhyme (45). Thus, in a free verse poem there occurs a dependence on caesura, "a method of metering the consonantal patterns" (45). Burnham sees proof of this because Whitman would often try his poems outloud while composing. Thus, regardless of what Whitman claims, the poetics are more aural than visual (45). For Burnham, consonance and caesura are the trademarks of Whitman's style rather than line-length and traditional rhyme (45). Of course, sounds are a major part of Whitman's overall prosody.

Whitman, undoubtedly, was interested in consonants. In one notebook, after quoting from Webster's "Introduction" to the American Dictionary of the English Language (the 1828 edition), Whitman adds that consonants are in fact the "bones of words" (DBN 3: 715; Burnham 50). Yet, as Burnham points out, Whitman in one notebook traces the shifting pronunciation of the "a" vowel from past times to contemporary America (50). In this interesting observation,

Burnham, however, fails to see how his quoted passage dismisses his argument that Whitman was only mostly interested in consonants. Although it is true that Whitman perceives the significance of consonants and caesura, we must not overlook his use of rhyme and line-length, for the rhyme which he does utilize in Leaves of Grass is as important as the consonance and assonance.

Sound-mimesis occurs throughout Leaves of Grass, but in Drum-Taps is extremely prevalent. In this cluster, Whitman consciously represents the sounds of war through assonance and consonance, and sometimes even off-rhymes. That Whitman is searching for a unique way to create meaning with sounds, apart from the traditional poet's use of end-rhymes, is evident in his argument in "Eighteen Sixty-One" and "To a Certain Civilian," both of which appeared in the first edition of Drum-Taps in 1865. Both poems protest against depicting the tragedy of war with a traditional prosody.<sup>6</sup> A few lines from "Eighteen Sixty-One" will suffice to show Whitman's strategy:

Arm'd year--year of the struggle,  
No dainty rhymes or sentimental love verses for you  
    terrible year,  
Not you as some pale poetling seated at a desk lisping  
    cadenzas piano,  
But as a strong man erect, clothed in blue clothes,  
    advancing, carrying a rifle on your shoulder,  
With well-gristled body and sunburnt face and hands,  
    with a knife in the belt at your side,

As I heard you shouting loud, your sonorous voice  
ringing across the continent,  
Your masculine voice O year, as rising amid the great  
cities....

(CRE 1-7)

"Eighteen Sixty-One" is the second poem in the Drum-Taps cluster. On the other hand, as if to remind the reader of his prosodic plan to illustrate the war, Whitman places "To a Certain Civilian" toward the end of the collection. In the second poem, though, the tone is much more aggressive. Whitman insults the reader who may not accept the poet's handling of the war theme in not full-blown end-rhymes, but in the less traditional prosody of off-rhyme, assonance, and consonance. Such a negative address, as Whitman scholars know, is extremely rare for the poet who normally celebrates each reader's identity as similar to his own:

Did you ask dulcet rhymes from me?  
Did you seek the civilian's peaceful and languishing  
rhymes?  
Did you find what I sang erewhile so hard to follow?  
Why I was not singing erewhile for you to follow, to  
understand--nor am I now;  
(I have been born of the same as the war was born,  
The drum-corps' rattle is ever to me sweet music, I  
love well the martial dirge,  
With slow wail and convulsive throb leading the  
officer's funeral;)  
What to such as you anyhow such a poet as I? therefore  
leave my works,

And go lull yourself with what you can understand, and  
with piano-tunes,  
For I lull nobody, and you will never understand me.

(CRE 1-10)

Here, the "civilian's peaceful and languishing rhymes," their "piano-tunes," signify the popular poetry in America read by the common citizen. In "To a Certain Civilian," Whitman criticizes the masses for accepting only traditional poetry, and basically for not reading his own. His "language experiment" has been a failure. By not reaching the masses, Whitman's verse was having little impact on society, the poet's most important wish. Furthermore, those who had read Leaves of Grass did not understand it, and this misunderstanding fuels Whitman's attack in this poem. The masses wanted a sentimental, heroic, optimistic poetry. They would not find this in Whitman's new poetry on the war. As a collection, Drum-Taps has its fair share of positive battle-cry poems, but it is also burdened with the tragedy which ensues. It is a brutally honest collection about the times. Its prosody is free, but with serious hints at the traditional.<sup>7</sup> It is structured, but loosens prosodically to carry on its new breed of poetry, unlike the work of the popular poets of the time.

By the time "To a Certain Civilian" was written in 1865, Whitman had good reason to be irked by the state of American poetry. Not much had changed since the first edition of Leaves of Grass ten years earlier. In "Eighteen Sixty-One," Whitman correctly predicts the outpouring of traditional

patriotic poems which would be written during the war. By the time "To a Certain Civilian" was composed, a long list of war poems utilizing traditional prosody to portray the cry to battle and horrors of war were in print: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "The Cumberland," John Greenleaf Whittier's "Barbara Frietchie," and James Russell Lowell's "Ode Recited at the Harvard Commemoration," to name a few.<sup>8</sup>

Whitman had even a more personal reason to be vexed. On October 1, 1861, the poet attempted to sell "Eighteen Sixty-One" (along with two other poems subsequently printed in Drum-Taps) for twenty-dollars to James Russell Lowell for inclusion in the Atlantic (CRE 282; Smith 41). Lowell apparently claimed that by the time of publication the poems' interest "would have passed" (CRE 282). Whitman's relationship with Lowell previously had been stormy. The editor had printed "Bardic Symbols" (later called "As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life") in the Atlantic in 1860, but deleted two lines from the fourth stanza which graphically suggested suicide. It seems more likely that Lowell, as regards "Eighteen Sixty-One," would have found Whitman's criticism of "dainty rhymes" and "sentimental love verses" written by a "pale poetling" a little too close to his own prosodic practice to accept.

To make matters worse, Lowell published Julia Ward Howe's "Battle-Hymn of the Republic" in an 1862 issue of the Atlantic. Written after hearing the Union soldiers singing the song "John Brown's Body," this poem became the North's anthem during the Civil War. Cliche-burdened, the work makes

use of a traditional measure which bruises the natural line with its excess of demoted and promoted syllables, archaisms, and forced end-rhymes. Whitman must have detested the popularity of Howe's poem, much as he would dislike how his poems on Lincoln's death were mostly ignored when first published while William Cullen Bryant's purely conventional "The Death of Lincoln" was requested by the Committee of Arrangements to be written when the murdered President was carted through New York City in April of 1865. Howe's poem is typical of the unambitious verse written by American poets on the Civil War. To illustrate Howe's prosody, I quote from the first two stanzas of "Battle-Hymn of the Republic:"

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;  
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of  
wrath are stored;  
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible  
swift sword;  
His truth is marching on.

I have seen Him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling  
camps;  
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and  
damps;  
I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring  
lamps;  
His day is marching on.

(1-8)

To Whitman, Howe's poem must have been prosodically boring, and possibly it and similar others added to the fury he

displays in "To a Certain Civilian."

Nonetheless, Whitman needed to press on with his own prosodic experiment on the war, and concerning Drum-Taps he was optimistic. Whitman shows his happiness with the cluster in a letter to his friend and literary champion, William Douglas O'Connor, on January 6, 1865, in which the poet discusses the superiority of the war-poems to Leaves of Grass. Quite importantly, after speaking of the blood color of war present in everything, Whitman brings up the use of sound:

The book is therefore unprecedently sad, (as these days are, are they not?)--but it also has the blast of the trumpet, & the drum pounds & whirrs in it, & then an undertone of sweetest comradeship & human love, threading its steady thread inside the chaos, & heard at every lull & interstice thereof--truly also it has clear notes of faith & triumph.

(Corr. 1: 247)

The "blast of the trumpet" and "the drum pounds" Whitman refers to in his letter possibly could be the sounds and metrical mimesis used to illustrate war in Drum-Taps.

As many critics agree, Whitman had ambivalent emotions about the Four Years War.<sup>9</sup> On one hand, he saw the conflict as essential to hold the Union together, to give it the strength necessary in its aftermath to rise to heights greater than it had before. Still, Whitman also perceived his country's conflict as tragic and unnecessary. Undoubtedly, this ambivalence is prominent in the prosody of

Drum-Taps.<sup>10</sup> As a case in point, "Beat, Beat, Drums" initially appears as merely a patriotic poem, a naive call to arms with no conscious pronouncement of the slaughter of war to come. Quite frankly, this is only half the story. In "Beat, Beat, Drums," the energetic battle-cry is similar to ones appearing in Manhattan newspaper editorials during the onset of the civil conflict. But while the poem's theme says one thing, the rhythm and sound patterns imply the opposite. Here it is, in its entirety:

Beat! beat! drums!--blow! bugles! blow!  
Through the windows--through doors--burst like a  
ruthless force,  
Into the solemn church, and scatter the congregation,  
Into the school where the scholar is studying;  
Leave not the bridegroom quiet--no happiness must he  
have now with his bride,  
Nor the peaceful farmer any peace, ploughing his field  
or gathering his grain,  
So fierce you whirr and pound you drums--so shrill you  
bugles blow.

Beat! beat! drums!--blow! bugles! blow!  
Over the traffic of cities--over the rumble of wheels in  
the streets;  
Are beds prepared for sleepers at night in the houses?  
no sleepers must sleep in those beds,  
No bargainers' bargains by day--no brokers or  
speculators--would they continue?

Would the talkers be talking? would the singer attempt  
to sing?

Would the lawyer rise in the court to state his case  
before the judge?

Then rattle quicker, heavier drums--you bugles wilder  
blow.

Beat! beat! drums!--blow! bugles! blow!

Make no parley--stop for no expostulation,

Mind not the timid--mind not the weeper or prayer,

Mind not the old man beseeching the young man,

Let not the child's voice be heard, nor the mother's  
entreaties,

Make even the trestles to shake the dead where they lie  
awaiting the hearses,

So strong you thump O terrible drums--so loud you bugles  
blow.

(CRE 1-21)

Line 1's "b" sounds and stresses not only mimic the striking of the drum to war, interrupting the silence of the city, but also prepare the reader for the bullets which will shatter the silence as the war progresses. Out of the seven syllables in the line, six are stressed. Line 2 begins with two unstresses followed by a stress, then two more unstresses. These unstresses establish a silence in the line which is shattered by the double stress of "doors" and "burst." Line 3 is also prosodically interesting. After utilizing perfect iambs for four feet, Whitman throws in a pyrrha to disrupt the line, following it by two trochees. In

other words, these three terminal variations "scatter" the line, mimicking the congregation's mass of people going their separate ways, each individual scattering from the group into their own personal, silent space to contemplate how they will deal with the war. In fact, Whitman continues the "b" sound-pattern throughout the entire poem, adding to the mimetic illustration of the violent sounds of war ("bridegroom," (5); "bugles," "blow," (7); the refrain of the first line, (8, 15); "beds," (10); "bargainers," "bargains," "brokers," (11); "before," (13); "bugles," "blow," (14); "beseeching," (18); "bugles," "blow," (20).

"Dirge of Two Veterans" (1865) is another Drum-Taps poem where sounds and the conventional stanza generate mimesis. As Gay Wilson Allen points out, the somewhat steady metrical rhythm and imagery thematically fit the poem's subject matter (Reader's Guide 87). The movement from soft to hard sounds works the same thematic way, illustrating death's sadness and the violence of war:

The last sunbeam  
Lightly falls from the finish'd Sabbath,  
On the pavement here, and there beyond it is looking,  
Down a new-made double grave.

(CRE 1-4)

In the first stanza, the "b" sounds work alongside rhythm to depict metrically and sonically the sad peace and acceptance of the death of the two soldiers, son and father. Surrounded by soft sounds, the "b" takes on peaceful qualities as well. The final three stresses ("last sunbeam") add violence to the line and prosodically illustrate the force the sun has

emitted on the earth for the entire day, but this is soon followed by the second line's light falling rhythm with its soft "l's" and "f's." In this stanza's last line, the repetition of "d" sounds and the four stresses of "new-made double grave" throw the poem back into dissonance.

In the first stanza, even the form fits the subject. As John M. Picker rightfully mentions, the two long lines "flanked" by single short ones visually symbolize the two coffins in the funeral procession, as well as the steps of the death-march (234). This visual prosody exemplifies perfectly Whitman's quotation at the beginning of this chapter dealing with his preference for "sight" over "ear" in poetry. Still, the music of the poem, as we are beginning to see, also holds weight in its overall mimetic structure.

In the second stanza, Whitman introduces the rising moon as peace symbol. A tranquility and acceptance of death shows through in the soft "l's," "m's," "s's," and "n's":

Lo, the moon ascending,  
Up from the east the silvery round moon,  
Beautiful over the house-tops, ghastly, phantom moon,  
Immense and silent moon.

(CRE 5-8)

These murmured, accepting sounds clue us in to the moon's symbolic tranquility, preparing us for the seventh stanza where the orb is indeed transformed into a mother's face in "heaven brighter growing."

Interestingly, the music of the death-march enters the poem in the fourth and sixth stanzas, separated by the fifth in which Whitman uses the "f" sounds to show the violence of

war, and not, as in the first stanza, as the tranquil, falling, last ray of sun. In the fourth and sixth stanzas, the music of the funeral procession reinforces the violence of war:

I hear the great drums pounding,  
And the small drums steady whirring,  
And every blow of the great convulsive drums,  
Strikes me through and through.

(CRE 13-16)

Now nearer blow the bugles,  
And the drums strike more convulsive,  
And the daylight o'er the pavement quite has faded,  
And the strong dead-march enwraps me.

(CRE 21-24)

Here, sound and sense merge. Loaded down with stresses, these lines also have their fair share of cacophony to display the noisy conflict. The end-stops of "t" ("great") and "k" ("strikes") add accompaniment to the hard "d's," "p's," and "b's" (now transformed into violent sounds since they are surrounded by other harsh verbal constructions). Mimetically, Whitman is stating that the sounds of war are too much to bear in all this death.

Since the poet has prepared the reader for such a mimetic trick, it should come as no surprise that in the last two stanzas Whitman lets the soft sounds echo the acceptance of war's harsh reality which the words themselves illustrate:

O strong dead-march you please me!  
O moon immense with your silvery face you soothe me!

O my soldiers twain! O my veterans passing to burial!  
What I have I also give you.

The moon gives you light,  
And the bugles and the drums give you music,  
And my heart, O my soldiers, my veterans,  
My heart gives you love.

(CRE 29-36)

By poem's end, the speaker is at home with the outcome of war's death. Prosodically, Whitman gives love to the dead the same way the moon and bugle-music give the deceased some peaceful closure to the violence. Along with the gentle sounds, oddly the last section's stresses also enhance the sense of peace. In lines 33, 34, and 36, the back-to-back accents of "moon gives," "drums give," and "heart gives" push the line forward instead of slowing it down. Placed together the stresses and the repetition of the verb "gives" add authority, assurance, and courage to the voice, a voice which accepts fate and remains optimistic among the dead of war, willing to continue.<sup>11</sup>

Another Drum-Taps poem, "Cavalry Crossing a Ford" (1865), exemplifies Whitman's extreme attention to prosody, despite his contrary statements. In a poem which predates Pound's Imagist movement by almost fifty years, Whitman added line 6 in 1871, the only alteration of this piece in any of the editions of Leaves of Grass:

A line in long array where they wind betwixt green  
islands,

They take a serpentine course, their arms flash in the  
sun--hark to the musical clank,  
Behold the silvery river, in it the splashing horses  
loitering stop to drink,  
Behold the brown-faced men, each group, each person a  
picture, the negligent rest on the saddles,  
Some emerge on the opposite bank, others are just  
entering the ford--while,  
Scarlet and blue and snowy white,  
The guidon flags flutter gayly in the wind.

(CRE 1-7)

Firstly, in "Cavalry Crossing a Ford," the assonance and inner/off rhyme illustrate one of Whitman's most important poetic themes, the fusion of the individual with the en masse. The assonance and inner/off-rhyme ("hark," "clank," "drink," "bank") here is extensive. "Clank" and "drink" both stand as their own entities at the end of their respective lines, yet are part of the whole poem, much in the same way that each soldier and horse stands apart, yet is of the whole army.

Whitman also renders this individual/en masse idea by the poem's one-sentence line. Although most of Whitman's poems are one-sentence lines, this one--due to its shortness--operates more grammatically as one unit. As we read, the sentence's movement down the page imitates the movement of the horses and soldiers across the ford. Yet, as a poem physically static on the page the whole structure works like a photograph. Apart from a pictorialness reminiscent of Matthew Brady's Civil War photographs,<sup>12</sup> "Cavalry Crossing a

Ford" is unique because unlike the majority of Whitman's poems this one uses full enjambment of the line. In most of Whitman's poems lines 5 through 7 would have been placed together as one-line, or one thought-unit, but not in this case. "While" of line 5 clearly modifies the "guidon flags." This syntax-pulling from line to line is so rare in Whitman that here it notably stands out. When a reader's eyes cross over the end of line 5, he or she pulls the word "while" down the page so as to make it connect with the next line, and then pulls the end word of this line down with his or her eyes for meaning as well. The physical activity of reading moves along the page, mimicking the movement of the horses and their riders leaving the water and entering the bank. In this manner, each line represents each individual horse or soldier, all part of the en masse, or poem's one sentence.

But "Cavalry Crossing a Ford" involves even more rhythm, sound, and eye-rhyme mimesis. For example, in line 1, the verb "wind" cues the reader into the winding syntax that follows and the subject matter of the cavalry "winding" across the ford. Even the sound patterns suggest this. In the first two lines, the long "i" repetition "winds" and tightens with "line," "wind," "islands," and "serpentine." As soon as the grating long "i" becomes too much for the reader to bear, Whitman throws in harsh sounds to mimic the hooves either hitting the land or water. The phrase "hark to the musical clank" introduces the hard "k" sound which, like the sound of the horses' hooves, is carried throughout the entire poem. Furthermore, the meter of "hark to the musical clank" interrupts the iambic base which starts the poem. The

phrase is in falling triple-meter, mimicking the gait of the horses' hooves and their musical movement. Later in the poem, this triple-falling meter also conveys a nonchalance or happiness, as in "the negligent rest on the saddles." But more importantly, "silvery river" is a visual trick of eye-rhyme. This eye-rhyme, along with the other rhymes of the poem, mirror each other like the men and horses seeing their own faces while glancing down into the river. In other words, the rhymes are mirror reflections of each other imitating the mirror reflections of the men and horses in the river. These rhymes also, astonishingly, illustrate prosodically the banks of the two islands which the calvary are entering and leaving.

With the rare instance of complete enjambment, the last few lines of Whitman's poem also function mimetically. In line 6, the only line added to the poem in later revisions, Whitman slips back into the falling meter used in the poem's beginning to illustrate the clanking sound of the horses' hooves. In fact, this falling rhythm prepares the reader for the iambic reversal of the last, powerful line. The music in the last line, as opposed to the horses' music at the poem's beginning, is the flag fluttering in the wind. Here, Whitman alliterates "guidon" and "gayly" and "flags flutter" to exemplify the sounds the flags are actually making. The double-stress of "flags flutter" adds noise to this phrase, furthermore illustrating the confident sound of the flags. Still, as Stephen Cushman notices, the alliteration fits the subject matter and Whitman's choice of execution for the poem. Like the rhymes earlier, the alliterative instances

mirror each other and represent the image of the soldiers and horses staring at their reflection in the water (Fictions 39). Cushman also rightfully discusses the adverb "gayly" which enters this photographic poem as Whitman's commentary on the failure of subjectivity. Said another way, no matter how objective a poet or photographer appears to be in his or her imagistic presentation of a given situation (in this case, the soldiers and horses crossing the ford), the subjectivity of the writer or photographer inevitably creeps into the work. Thus, "Cavalry Crossing a Ford" is a poem about aesthetics as much as about war.

Mimetically, the sounds and rhythms of war are also present in another Drum-Taps poem shortly following "Cavalry Crossing a Ford." Here is "An Army Corps on the March:"

With its clouds of skirmishers in advance,  
With now the sound of a single shot snapping like a  
    whip, and now an irregular volley,  
The swarming ranks press on and on, the dense brigades  
    press on,  
Glittering dimly, toiling under the sun--the dust-  
    cover'd men,  
In columns rise and fall to the undulations of the  
    ground,  
With artillery interspers'd--the wheels rumble, the  
    horses sweat,  
As the army corps advances.

(CRE 1-7)

Though not as prosodically interesting, nor as well constructed as "Cavalry Crossing a Ford," "An Army Corps on

the March" functions mimetically with its sounds and rhythms. This poem consists of several metrically rising lines broken in the middle of the poem by the falling meter of the first half of line 4. Mimetically, this technique illustrates the army struggling through the various skirmishes, falling back on their route onward. Whitman points to this interpretation in line 5: "in columns rise and fall to the undulations of the ground." This is essentially a rising line, but it does "fall." The falling meter occurs with the only hypermetric syllable in the line, the word "to." By poem's end, the army is back on its feet, so to speak, and we know it is continually advancing, despite the setbacks of attacks (represented by the falling rhythm of line 4, as well as the heavy stresses which depict struggle found in line 3 ("ranks press on," and "brigades press on"). Thus, to describe prosodically this successful advance, Whitman ends the poem on the positive rising meter of the last line. In addition, after a whole poem of hard end-stops ("d," "k," "p,"), the poet finishes with a series of murmured sounds to show hope, "s's" to note that the army will make it through the skirmishes and advance onward to their given, safe destination ("horses sweat/As the army corps advances"). The last line imitates the first line of the poem, but is more iambically stable, showing that the troops have overcome the attacks and are moving on. Mostly iambic, the last line is also reminiscent of other poems in Drum-Taps which use iambs to mimic the rhythm of the marching soldiers. Here we find an initial unstress followed by three iambs and another pyrrha which drops the poem off into the space of the page,

into eternity, so as to give a prosodic impression that the troops will continue to march forever, or at least until the war is won.

But in order to arrive at this positive conclusion, Whitman juxtaposes less pleasant prosody at the poem's beginning. In line 2, the "s's" copy the quickness of a gun shot flying through the field. Prosodically, the "s's" illustrate the bullet flying through the air, while the harsher word-endings of "t" and "p" depict the bullet actually hitting an object. Just as the bullet "whips" across the surface of its target, the sound patterns and stresses of line 2 "whip" the line out of shape. The hard sounds and double-stress of "shot snapping" mirror the bullet's impact. The following two unstresses ("like a") show the bullet airborne again, ricocheting to land on another target (here represented by the end-stop of "whip").

That Whitman is well knowledgeable of sound-sense and rhythm in Drum-Taps is obvious. In fact, he seems to be leaning in many ways toward a free verse prosody that incorporates more traditional techniques than in the first few editions of Leaves of Grass. If this prosodic approach is the reason why he felt that Drum-Taps was superior than the other earlier sections of his great poem for America, we will never know. And, in fact, it does not matter.

2.

No discussion of Drum-Taps would be complete without explicating the two poems on Lincoln's death Whitman included in the Sequel to Drum-Taps: "O Captain! My Captain!" and

"When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed." Two of his most well-known pieces--Whitman later placed each in the "Memories of President Lincoln" cluster in the final authorized version of Leaves of Grass--strangely, they are so prosodically different. As his most formal poem, Whitman both accepted and hated "O Captain! My Captain!" Unfortunately (or fortunately, maybe), Whitman's more traditional poem was not publicly chosen to celebrate Lincoln's death. Whitman wanted desperately for "O Captain! My Captain!" to be recited at Lincoln's funeral, though William Cullen Bryant's "Death of Lincoln" was read instead. Always wanting to connect with the masses, Whitman knew his fellow countrymen and women would more likely enjoy his occasional poems if they were in conventional rhyme and meter, and it is no wonder all his traditional compositions center around major American events. Besides, the more the poet aged, the more he questioned if his prosodically wilder free verse would live on after his death. Thus, Whitman's return to conventional prosody can be seen not so much as a mellowing with age as an attempt to be accepted once and for all by the elite and the masses. Yet, the fact that Whitman did not think too highly of "O Captain! My Captain!" has been noted by David Reynolds in his recent biography of the poet.<sup>13</sup> Ironically, later in Whitman's life, the poem became very popular and was recited by the poet after each of his nineteen lectures on Lincoln. But, even more ironically, later critics and readers do not think too highly of the piece. Whitman's fame has rested in his free verse poems, which open up the line after thousands of

years of traditional prosody, and, in a sense, build it back up again.

Appropriately, though, "O Captain! My Captain!," Whitman's most famous, school-book, anthologized poem, sadly is one of his worst composed. With archaic word choices and overly conventional rhythm, it stands at a completely separate spectrum from Whitman's free verse, as well as his more traditional free verse poems. Furthermore, in regards to this study, it holds only one repeated phrase of mimetic, metrical variation:<sup>14</sup>

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,  
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought  
is won,  
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all  
exulting,  
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and  
daring;  
But O heart! heart! heart!  
O the bleeding drops of red,  
Where on the deck my Captain lies,  
Fallen cold and dead.

(CRE 1-8)

The conventional metricality of "O Captain! My Captain!" is conspicuous. In line 1, Whitman shoves the meter into perfect iambic feet. By using demotion and promotion, Whitman abuses the iambic measure. If recited aloud, the line would read pretentiously. For instance, "my" and the second syllable of "Captain" would be forcibly stressed,

producing a falseness to the poem's oral presentation. Likewise, line 2 is iambic. Line 3 is iambic with a common unstressed ending. The same goes for line 4. To document the speaker's distress over Lincoln's death, Whitman uses four consecutive stresses ("O heart! heart! heart!") in line 5, but these are not really mimetic. Line 6 breaks the monotony of the traditional measure with a few initial trochaic feet, but such a trick is well-known to conventional prosody. Line 7 is iambic tetrameter. However, line 8, with its trochaic substitutions does work mimetically. In fact, in line 8 the falling meter puns off the word "fallen" and mimics the president falling in death.

In the second stanza, Whitman breaks the flow of the first two lines with accents:

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;  
Rise up--for you the flag is flung--for you the bugle  
trills....

(CRE 9-10)

In iambic hexameter line 9, the fourth foot is a spondaic substitution ("rise up"). Line 10 repeats this same phrase, and is iambic heptameter. This spondaic command for the president to rise from the dead illustrates the speaker's mourning, yet does not prosodically mimic a body rising from the ship's deck.

The stanza's next section consists of two lines of iambic heptameter with extra unstressed endings followed by two iambic trimeter lines, one iambic tetrameter line, and a final iambic trimeter line, none holding any metrical mimesis:

For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths--for you the  
shores a-crowding,  
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces  
turning;  
Here Captain! dear father!  
This arm beneath your head!  
It is some dream that on the deck,  
You've fallen cold and dead.

(CRE 11-16)

In the last stanza, we find a comparable prosodic structure:

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still,  
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor  
will,  
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed  
and done,  
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object  
won;  
Exult O shores, and ring O bells!  
But I with mournful tread,  
Walk the deck my Captain lies,  
Fallen cold and dead.

(CRE 17-24)

Line 17 has one anapestic substitution, then Whitman returns to an iambic heptameter measure for three lines. Then, line 21 utilizes iambic tetrameter; line 22 iambic trimeter. And the last two lines of "O Captain! My Captain!" once again use a trochaic base. Unfortunately, compared to Whitman's other instances of mimesis, nothing of prosodic significance occurs

in this most famous of Whitman poems. Whitman is returning to his prosodic past, yet at the same time he is unconcerned with making a want-to-be public poem a good poem in the first place.

Though dealing with the same subject matter, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" begins mimetically, taking the reader on such a pleasant prosodic journey as to be, along with "Song of Myself," one of Whitman's best accomplishments:

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd,  
And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in  
the night,  
I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with ever-returning  
spring.

Ever-returning spring, trinity sure to me you bring,  
Lilac blooming perennial and drooping star in the west,  
And thought of him I love.

(CRE 1.1-6)

Pushing and pulling through "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," the reader, if even unconsciously, feels the measure. One reason for this response is the overriding death-stresses in the first stanza. For instance, in lines 1 and 2, the death-stresses dominate ("dooryard bloom'd," "great star early"). Whitman, here, is using the stresses' impact to show the speaker's emotional intensity over Lincoln's death. Likewise, the sound-patterns birth an emotional energy. Sound-wise, the first stanza uses the "l," "m", "d," and long "i" sounds. In line 1, for example, the

three consecutive "l's" get caught in one's throat when read aloud, this tongue-choking showing the speaker's emotional distress. Metrically, line 2 works mimetically, too. The first half-line is loaded with accent, but once we get to "droop'd," the stress drops off and the line becomes subdued. Thus, the line, like the moon, "droop's," the stresses illustrating the moon's movement downward, the unstresses depicting the falling of the moon (and the speaker's mood into depression) down into the lower level of sky. Like the persona's mental frame of mind, and the dead president's body after being shot, the moon's gravity at this point in the line gives out.

In lines 3 and 4, Whitman repeats "ever-returning spring" to further depict the speaker's sorrowful state of mind. The inner rhyme in line 4 of "spring" and "bring" alludes to past eulogies where rhyme and meter was intrinsic. In addition, the rhyme adds emotional intensity, but peace from the stressed-loaded second line. The "m" repetition, likewise, brings tranquility to the stanza. Line 5 oddly combines the sonic qualities Whitman has so far used in the poem ("l's," "m's," "b's," and "d's") so that the whole stanza and its emotional impact turns back on itself. The sound-patterns, like the springs before and after Lincoln's death, show how the poem simultaneously moves forward and backward. Prosodically, these sound-patterns illustrate how the speaker, as well as the country, must look back on Lincoln's successful presidency and its end to the nation's civil conflict sadly, yet look forward to restoration and healing as well. At this point, however, the country--like the

poem's sound-sense--is having a difficult time moving forward, is constantly looking back to the pain of the war and the president's dismissal.

Although in section 1 the sound-patterns and stresses show the speaker's distress, Whitman lessens their repetition just enough to keep the emotion in check. In section 2, however, the anaphora and stress-loaded lines let all hell prosodically and emotionally break loose:

O powerful western fallen star!

O shades of night--O moody, tearful night!

O great star disappear'd--O the black murk that hides  
the star!

O cruel hands that hold me powerless--O helpless soul of  
me!

O harsh surrounding cloud that will not free my soul.

(CRE 2.7-11)

The same sounds found in section 1 of the poem are present, but the anaphora and stress-loaded lines show the gut reaction concerning Lincoln's death. Likewise, the anaphora pushes the poem along in an attempt to push the country along on its road to recovery. Yet, by eliminating the anaphora, section 3 calms the poem's tone, and Whitman, once again, attempts to maintain emotional and prosodic balance:

In the dooryard fronting an old farm-house near the  
white-wash'd palings,  
Stands the lilac-bush tall-growing with heart-shaped  
leaves of rich green,  
With many a pointed blossom rising delicate, with the  
perfume strong I love,

With every leaf a miracle--and from this bush in the  
dooryard,  
With delicate-color'd blossoms and heart-shaped leaves  
of rich green,  
A sprig with its flower I break.

(CRE 3.12-17)

The same calm syntax occurs in section 4, yet prepares us for the emotional intensity of sections 9 and 13, both of which deal with the bird's singing, intensified after the speaker induces the bird to express himself. Here, however, the bird is still a "recluse":

In the swamp in secluded recesses,  
A shy and hidden bird is warbling a song.

Solitary the thrush,  
The hermit withdrawn to himself, avoiding the  
settlements,  
Sings by himself a song.

Song of the bleeding throat,  
Death's outlet song of life, (for well dear brother I  
know,  
If thou wast not granted to sing thou would'st surely  
die.)

(CRE 4.18-25)

In section 5 Whitman picks up the tempo, and along with the long-rambling syntax, the long and short "a" sounds reinforce the speaker's distress as he begins describing the president's coffin's journey throughout the states, back to

Illinois:

Over the breast of the spring, the land, amid cities,  
Amid lanes and through old woods, where lately the  
violets peep'd from the ground, spotting the gray  
debris,  
Amid the grass in the fields each side of the lanes,  
passing the endless grass,  
Passing the yellow-spear'd wheat, every grain from its  
shroud in the dark-brown fields uprisen,  
Passing the apple-tree blows of white and pink in the  
orchards,  
Carrying a corpse to where it shall rest in the grave,  
Night and day journeys a coffin.

(CRE 5.26-32)

In this section, the anaphora and the present participles inflate the emotional energy. In fact, the whole section is strung together the same way the various cars of the train, on its way to Illinois are strung together. As an example of this, witness how the word "amid" ends line 26 and begins lines 27 and 28. "Passing" falls at the end of line 28, and begins lines 29 and 30. In this manner, Whitman's word-strings "pass" from the words "amid" in the first few lines to "passing" in the following lines. This prosodic technique increases the emotional intensity, and visually depicts the connected train cars themselves. Then, in lines 31 and 32, the last two of the section, Whitman leaves this repetition to finalize things. From line to line, the hard "c" sounds are strung together ("orchards," "carrying," "corpse," "coffin") to psychologically bring home the harshness of

Lincoln's death and final resting place. This move prepares the reader for section 6, where, along with the death-stresses, the "c" sound continues, an indication of the severity of the president's death, as well as those rough emotions in the people left to deal with the tragedy.

Section 6, however, is tamer than section 5, Whitman using the catalogue to completely break out emotionally and prosodically, showing the coffin on its long journey through the states:

Coffin that passes through lanes and streets,  
Through day and night with the great cloud darkening the  
land,  
With the pomp of the inloop'd flags with the cities  
draped in black,  
With the show of the States themselves as of crape-  
veil'd women standing,  
With processions long and winding and the flambeaus  
of the night,  
With the countless torches lit, with the silent sea of  
faces and the unbared heads,  
With the waiting depot, the arriving coffin, and the  
sombre faces,  
With dirges through the night, with the thousand voices  
rising strong and solemn,  
With all the mournful voices of the dirges pour'd around  
the coffin,  
The dim-lit churches and the shuddering organs--where  
amid these you journey,  
With the tolling bells' perpetual clang,

Here, coffin that slowly passes,  
I give you my sprig of lilac.

(CRE 6.33-45)

Section 7, likewise, is subdued:

(Nor for you, for one alone,  
Blossoms and branches green to coffins all I bring,  
For fresh as the morning, thus would I chant a song for  
you O sane and sacred death.

All over bouquets of roses,  
O death, I cover you over with roses and early lilies,  
But mostly and now the lilac that blooms the first,  
Copious I break, I break the sprigs from the bushes,  
With loaded arms I come, pouring for you,  
For you and the coffins all of you O death.)

(CRE 7.46-54)

With line 47's inner rhyme, Whitman echoes line 4 of the poem. Also, as in the poem's first section, the "b" repetition occurs, yet here is more prevalent. Thus, section 7, by returning to the prosody of section 1 takes the poem back to its beginning. Again, Whitman is commenting on how America must look back on the positive aspects of Lincoln's time in office, while at the same time look forward to the future healing of the country. Here, the "d" and "i" sounds of the first section become the "f" and "s" alliteration of line 48. Nonetheless, the "d" and "m" sounds are still present in section 7. The "b" sound, however, is most obvious. In line 52, for example, the "b" sounds and meter depict the breaking of the "springs from the bushes." This

line begins with a dactylic foot followed by an iamb. As in traditional prosody, when a poet introduces a spondee and precedes it with a pyrrha, the dactylic-iambic combination here works in much the same way. After the first iamb, Whitman throws in another with the same word-phrase ("I break, I break"). This sound, word, and metrical repetition shows the speaker's process of breaking the sprigs from the bushes. The iambic base of the next line, also, shows this repetitive act: "With loaded arms I come, pouring for you").

In section 8, by anaphora Whitman illustrates a "walking measure":

O western orb sailing the heaven,  
Now I know what you must have meant as a month since I  
    walk'd,  
As I walk'd in silence the transparent shadowy night,  
As I saw you had something to tell as you bent to me  
    night after night,  
As you droop'd from the sky low down as if to my side,  
    (while the other stars all look'd on,)  
As we wander'd together the solemn night, (for something  
    I know not what kept me from sleep,)  
As the night advanced, and I saw on the rim of the west  
    how full you were of woe,  
As I stood on the rising ground in the breeze in the  
    cool transparent night,  
As I watch'd where you pass'd and was lost in the  
    netherward black of the night,  
As my soul in its trouble dissatisfied sank, as where  
    you sad orb,

Concluded, dropt in the night, and was gone.

(CRE 8.55-65)

This section's sentence goes on and on, much like the speaker's walking. Interestingly enough, in terms of our discussion of Whitman's prosody returning to the past and flinging itself into the future at the same time, this section works the same way. In the first sense, the poem returns to the past springs of Lincoln's reign as president by being set in the past tense. In terms of the future, Whitman uses the same technique as in section 5, the repetition of words strung together in each line. Yet, this time, the repeated words are separated by a longer spacing. For instance, line 56's "walk'd" connects with line 57's "walk'd" in much the same manner as the connections of "amid" in section 5. Then, Whitman intensifies this prosodic technique. Line 57 ends with the word "night," and in the following line's ending repeats the word not once, as in section 5, but twice. This, in fact, complements the "I break, I break" repetition in section 7.

In section 8, Whitman is building the poem's pace, intensifying the emotional aspect of the work. In fact, the word "night" travels like the speaker walking and the coffin with Lincoln's body throughout the country to Illinois, throughout this whole section. The word "night" moves throughout the whole section from beginning to ending places in the line, thus representing the poem's theme of America going back to celebrate Lincoln's accomplishments during the Civil War and the need to go forward after the president's death to take the country into an optimistic future. In line

60, Whitman places "night" in the middle of the line. In line 61, it appears toward the beginning of the line. And in both lines 62 and 63 it is the last word in the line. In line 65, it appears toward the end. Like the speaker walking, moving here and there, and like the coffin traveling, moving from place to place, the word "night" moves around in the section. Not only does this depict Whitman's theme of going both backward and forward in time, it also represents a confusion in the psyche of the speaker in terms of what to make of Lincoln's death and the country's restoration.

This confusion gets translated in a more positive way in section 9, where the singing bird is a symbol of hope for America. Finally, in this section, the speaker's psyche is calmed, and the country and the syntax moves forward.

Section 9 reads:

Sing on there in the swamp,  
O singer bashful and tender, I hear your notes, I hear  
    your call,  
I hear, I come presently, I understand you,  
But a moment I linger, for the lustrous star has  
    detain'd me,  
The star my departing comrade holds and detains me.

(CRE 9.66-70)

The anaphora and repetition, here, is emotional, no doubt, but its line-placement is more optimistic.

Confusion, again, starts sections 10 and 11, with Whitman's questions. In these two sections, Whitman contradicts the optimism set up in section 9 with the address

to the singing bird:

O how shall I warble myself for the dead one there I  
loved?

And how shall I deck my song for the large sweet soul  
that has gone?

And what shall my perfume be for the grave of him I  
love?

(CRE 10.71-73)

In section 11, the same questioning of reality takes place:

O what shall I hang on the chamber walls?

And what shall the pictures be that I hang on the walls,  
To adorn the burial-house of him I love?

(CRE 11.78-80)

Although Whitman answers some of these fears in the second part of section 11, the doubt still remains. It is up for the poet to compose section 13, to return to the positive bird-song, to bring the country and the syntax forward:

Sing on, sing on you gray-brown bird,  
Sing from the swamps, the recesses, pour your chant from  
the bushes,

Limitless out of the dusk, out of the cedars and pines.

Sing on dearest brother, warble your reedy song,  
Loud human song, with voice of uttermost woe.

O liquid and free and tender!

O wild and loose to my soul--O wondrous singer!

You only I hear--yet the star holds me, (but will soon  
depart,)

Yet the lilac with mastering odor holds me.

(CRE 13.99-107)

This section, in theme and prosody, mirrors section 9. In this section, the repetition of "sing" appears as anaphora, tamed from the repetition of "night" jumping around the page in section 8. Much as in section 9, we have the bird's hopeful song, as well as the same basic prosodic outline. The anaphora pushes the poem forward, but in this case in a positive way.

All of these prosodic maneuvers build up until the last section of "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" where the combination of falling and rising meter reminds the reader of the typical Whitman poem. In the first three lines of section 16, Whitman uses falling meter and anaphora, the initial line repetition here ordered, and the psyche of the speaker is, in the same way, intact again. The anaphora takes on a pleasant tone, one of triumph, for both the speaker and the country:

Passing the visions, passing the night,  
Passing, unloosing the hold of my comrades' hands,  
Passing the song of the hermit bird and the tallying  
song of my soul....

(CRE 16.185-87)

Then, Whitman slightly varies the measure, falling into rising meter. The bird-song and speaker-song fuse. The country and the speaker, here, are rising, as well, breaking into a more optimistic state of mind concerning Lincoln's death. Even in line 188, Whitman mentions the "rising" of his song:

Victorious song, death's outlet song, yet varying ever-  
altering song,  
As low and wailing, yet clear the notes, rising and  
falling, flooding the night....

(CRE 16.188-89)

Then, the meter changes, and the following line works  
mimetically, its falling meter sinking as the line suggests:

Sadly sinking and fainting, as warning and warning, and  
yet again bursting with joy....

(CRE 16.190)

One more line of falling meter to represent the country and  
speaker's doubts:

Covering the earth and filling the spread of the  
heaven....

(CRE 16.191)

Then, Whitman returns to a rising meter, plus the anaphora of  
"passing" which in the beginning of this section, and still  
now, depicts a positive tone concerning Lincoln's death:

As that powerful psalm in the night I heard from  
recesses,  
Passing, I leave thee lilac with heart-shaped leaves,  
I leave thee in the door-yard, blooming, returning with  
spring.

(CRE 16.192-94)

The rising meter continues, almost in an iambic base in  
certain lines, and we are finally left with hope, healing,  
and transcendence:

I cease from my song for thee,  
From my gaze on thee in the west, fronting the west,

communing with thee,  
O comrade lustrous with silver face in the night.  
  
Yet each to keep and all, retrievements out of the  
          night,  
The song, the wondrous chant of the gray-brown bird,  
And the tallying chant, the echo arous'd in my soul,  
With the lustrous and drooping star with the  
          countenance full of woe,  
With the holders holding my hand nearing the call of the  
          bird,  
Comrades mine and I in the midst, and their memory ever  
          to keep, for the dead I loved so well,  
For the sweetest, wisest soul of all my days and lands--  
          and this for his dear sake,  
Lilac and star and bird twined with the chant of my  
          soul,  
There in the fragrant pines and the cedars dusk and dim.

(CRE 16.195-206)

The last two lines go back to a falling meter, not so much to depict Lincoln's tragedy, as to add force to the poem's theme, how the trinity comes together, how Lincoln and the country will live on. In the last instance of alliteration with the "d" sound, the ending of the poem returns to the poem's beginning, yet at the same time finalizes the emotional and thematic ideas of the "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd." Here, Whitman takes the best of free verse and traditional prosody, and adds a final touch to his work in Drum-Taps, giving more meaning to his work, and at

the same time showing prosodically how the conflict with one's self--whether it be over homosexual tendencies or the death of a mentor--can be resolved through the creative process.

CHAPTER V.

A WALKING, SEA-DRIFTING RHYTHM

1.

In his essay "Walt Whitman: Always Going Out and Coming In," R.W.B. Lewis comments generally on how Whitman's life reflects his metrics. Lewis asserts that "Whitman's life shows the same pattern of thrust and withdrawal, advance and retreat, that pulsates so regularly in the very metrics as well as the emotional attitudes of his verse" (6).<sup>1</sup>

Unquestionably, Lewis' rhetoric evokes Whitman's famous quote comparing his rhythm to the ebb and flow of the ocean, as well as the prosodic arguments of the "sea-meter" camp of Whitman prosodists. Whitman's quote, which Horace Traubel scribbled down in a Monday, July 2, 1888 entry (in With Walt Whitman in Camden) from a sheet of penciled paper supposedly written by Whitman in the early 1870s had the headline 'A Question of Form' which was later marked out. The quotation, one of Whitman's most specific on mimesis, deals with the idea of prosody imitating the waves of the ocean:

The want for something finished, completed, and technically beautiful will certainly not be supplied by this writer, as it is by existing esthetic works. For the best poems both the old ones and the later ones now accepted as first class are polished, rhymed regular,

with all the elegance of fine conceits, carefully elaborated, showing under all the restraints of art, language and phrase chosen after very much has been rejected, and only the best admitted, and then all joined and cemented together, and finally presenting the beauty of some architectural temple--some palace, proudly rising in proportions of marble, entered from superb porticos and adorned with statuary satisfying the art sense and that of form, fulfilling beauty and inviting criticism. Not so his poetry. Its likeness is not the solid stately palace, nor the sculpture that adorns it, nor the paintings on its walls. Its analogy is *the Ocean*. Its verses are the liquid, billowy waves, ever rising and falling, perhaps sunny and smooth, perhaps wild with storm, always moving, always alike in their nature as rolling waves, but hardly any two exactly alike in size or measure (meter), never having the sense of something finished and fixed, always suggesting something beyond.

(1: 414-15)

Before looking into Whitman's "sea-meter" paradigm, I want to examine another prosodic aspect implied by both Whitman's quotation and Lewis' article, and dealt with in my previous chapter, the idea of movement, in this case, "walking." In his essay, Lewis notes how up until his thirty-first year Whitman was constantly going out into the world, meeting people and digesting all important data to later regurgitate in his first edition of Leaves of Grass. Following Whitman, Lewis does not specifically mention a

connection between metrics and the poet's "walking" activity, but it is implied.

The only critic who sees Whitman's prosody as mimicking "walking" is Basil De Selincourt. In his 1914 book, Walt Whitman, A Critical Study, De Selincourt shows the connection between Whitman's anaphora (he uses the less common term, "epanaphora") and "walking." After quoting section 7 of "Song of the Open Road," the critic writes:

The importance of continuity to the form is displayed at once here in that *epanaphora*, that taking up of words or phrases, which is a pronounced characteristic of the style of *Leaves of Grass*. Each line hangs by a loop from the line before it. The motion is like the motion of walking; we continually catch up our foremost foot and take a half step beyond.

(100)

De Selincourt's comparison of how one's eye moves down the page while reading a Whitman poem is interesting, and more specific than Lewis' observations. Like the majority of Whitman prosodists, however, De Selincourt is general. If we must interpret the critic for himself, this means that metrically catching up with "our foremost foot" in order to "take a half step beyond," implies that Whitman's line has two basic meters operating within it, one counterpointing the other, a shadow following close behind. Prosodically, a unique statement, undoubtedly. However, Whitman's forward-line has one push forward. And, unfortunately, De Selincourt's idea does not take into account specific line metrics. For this study, I am more concerned with Whitman's

metrics as they refer to and reflect the subject matter of "walking" within a given line.

In many of Whitman's poems, the persona is "walking." In fact, Whitman saw the activity of "walking" not only as a means for his poetic persona to include the national working class throughout his catalogues, but also, and more importantly for this study, as a mimetic possibility for prosody. Nonetheless, the two concepts of the sea and walking were a prosodic possibility. In this critically-neglected passage, Whitman clearly ties "walking" and "ocean" prosody together:

As to the form of my poetry I have rejected the rhymed and blank verse. I have a particular abhorrence of blank verse, but I cling to rhythm; not the outward, regularly measured, short foot, long foot--short foot, long foot--like the walking of a lame man, that I care nothing for. The waves of the sea do not break on the beach every so many minutes; the wind does not go jerking through the pine-trees, but nevertheless in the roll of the waves and in the souging of the wind in the trees there is a beautiful rhythm. How monotonous it would become, how tired the ear would get of it, if it were regular! It is the under-melody and rhythm that I have attempted to catch...

(Bergman 163-66)

Besides Whitman's "natural" comparisons to metrics and his contempt of blank verse, the reference to "lame men" walking hints at one possible aspect of the poet's prosody.<sup>2</sup> For

Whitman, "walking," as illustrated by rhythm, should not be monotonously iambic, but more akin to nature. Humans do not walk in perfect iambs, according to Whitman, or as we shall discover, not always in iambs. Instead, they walk irregularly, sometimes stopping and taking in a scene with their eyes, then starting over again, and stopping when need be. Although Whitman may merely be using walking as a prosodic analogy in the above passage, one would guess from his comments that he never exemplifies "lame walking" as iambic in any of his poems.<sup>3</sup> But, as with the "ocean-meter" concept behind his work, the poet often contradicts himself. Whitman frequently meters out the "walking" activity in perfect iambs, or in mostly iambic feet with the minimal promotion, demotion, hanging, or compression of syllables, all traits accepted in traditional scansion. Here are a few examples:

On journeys through the States we start....

("On Journeys..." CRE 1)

....I come and I depart.

("Song of Myself" CRE 166)

As under doughty Sherman I march toward the sea.

("Ethiopia..." CRE 6)

And courtesies to the regiments, the guidons moving  
by.

("Ethiopia..." CRE 12)

As toilsome I wander'd Virginia's woods....

("As Toilsome..." CRE 1)

The moving flocks and herds, the plains and emerald  
meadows....

("The Return of the Heroes" CRE 2.21)

As I walk these broad majestic days of peace....

("As I Walk..." CRE 1)

"Life, life an endless march, an endless army, (no  
halt, but it is duly over,)...."

("Going Somewhere" CRE 6)

The swarming ranks press on and on, the dense  
brigades press on....

("An Army Corps on the March" CRE 3)

In contrast, "walking," for Whitman, can also be trochaic, as  
in the strict, falling, conventional rhythm of "Pioneers! O  
Pioneers!" which mimics the march of Civil War soldiers:<sup>4</sup>

We must march my darlings, we must bear the brunt  
of danger....

(CRE 6)

Or in:

Wandering at morn....

("Wandering at Morn," CRE 1)

Or iambic and anapestic, as in these lines from "Song of  
Myself:"

The wild gander leads his flock through the cool  
night....

("Song of Myself" CRE 14.245)

....the policeman travels his beat, the gate-keeper  
marks who pass....

("Song of Myself" CRE 15.280)

I am he that walks with the tender and growing  
night....

("Song of Myself" CRE 21.433)

And again as I walk'd the beach under the paling  
stars of the morning.

("Song of Myself" CRE 33.713)

Or a combination of metrical feet:

As I walk'd with that electric self seeking types.

("As I Ebb'd..." CRE 1.17)

Over the sterile sands and the fields beyond, where  
the child leaving his bed wander'd alone,  
bareheaded, barefoot....

("Out of the Cradle..." CRE 1.4)

The felon steps forth from the prison....

("The Sleepers" CRE 8.171)

These became part of that child who went forth

every day, and who now goes, and will always  
go forth every day.

(“There Was a Child Went Forth” CRE 39)

Walking the path worn in the grass and beat through  
the leaves of the brush....

(“Song of Myself” CRE 33.732)

Here and there with dimes on the eyes walking....

(“Song of Myself” CRE 42.1070)

“Walking” is at times iambic for Whitman, but it has many  
metrical variations, some of which are mimetic.

Besides the two poems (“In Paths Untrodden” and “O You  
Whom I Often and Silently Come”) from the “Calamus” cluster,  
“When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer” also uses metrical  
mimetic-walking to illustrate its theme of accepting and even  
learning from science, although simultaneously deeming the  
natural world superior. Whitman breaks the poem into two  
sections (each of four lines), one which takes place in the  
lecture room, the other as the persona wanders outside,  
gazing up at the stars:

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.

(CRE 1-8)

Concerning this poem, Ed Folsom has demonstrated that the first four lines concerning the astronomer's lecture have "sixty-four noisy syllables," while the last four settle into quieter sounds reminiscent of the outdoors ("When I Heard" 769). Folsom has hit upon something. To translate, compared to the natural world's original awe, the lecturer's speech is so much noise or empty intellectual chatter. For Whitman, science may enhance our understanding and appreciation of the natural, but it will never be a substitute for the real thing. To depict the learnedness but long-windedness of the astronomer's lecture, the poet gradually lengthens each of the first four lines from 9 to 23 syllables. These lines are in rising meter with an anapestic/iambic base. In line 5, the persona's "tired" emotions, as he becomes bored at the lecture, appear in one direct, independent clause of 14 syllables. The poem turns on itself syntactically and thematically, though not metrically. Metrically, the poem turns in line 6 with the initial, dangling unstressed syllable ("Till"), followed by the falling rhythm of one dactylic foot, four trochaic feet, and a terminal iamb: "Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself." By giving the second part of the poem fewer syllables, the poem is less talkative than the astronomer's lecture. This less talkative second part deals with the speaker's walk through the natural world, where Whitman claims nature's superiority over

science. The silent awe of the stars, in other words, says more than the long-windedness of the astronomer's lecture.

As a variation of "walking," "marching" is a part of Whitman's overall mimetic prosody. In "A March in the Ranks Hard-Prest, and the Road Unknown," mimesis occurs out of an iambic-anapestic measure set up at poem's start:

A march in the ranks hard-prest, and the road unknown,  
A route through a heavy wood with muffled steps in the  
darkness....

(CRE 1-2)

The first line uses the Bryant-like triple stress to show the soldiers' physical struggle on their march through the "unknown." Specifically speaking, Whitman begins with an iambic foot, slides in an anapest, then beats the meter home with the spondee "hard-prest." Besides this metrical violence to the line, the end-stops of "k," "t," and "d" also raise havoc. Yet, using a common trick of many traditional, metrical poets, Whitman lessens up the stress with two unstresses which begin the anapestic foot.

In line 2, the "marching measure" (a variation on what Whitman calls lame-walker meter) begins with the steady first iamb, an anapest, three iambs, and then an anapest with its one dangling terminal unstress. In this metrically eerie mood, these four silent syllables surround the stressed ("dark") one like the silence surrounds the troops as they lumber through the unknown.

Although eerie, Whitman's measure and variations in line 2 are not so repetitive as to irritate the reader, like Poe's rhythm does in "The Raven," for example. Nor is Whitman's

"dark" meter morbid.<sup>5</sup> Whitman's prosodic strangeness is more believable and artistic, with nothing of Longfellow's "idiosyncrasy, almost a sickness, of verbal melody" (PW 1: 284). With Whitman, here, there is a fine balance between metrical stability and variation, and with sounds. Whitman's awareness of how a dissyllabic base meter (such as iambs in this poem) can be wonderfully interrupted with trisyllabic feet (the anapestic in this poem) may have come from Bryant, but we will never know for sure.

With line 2's metrical variations, Whitman sonically has prepared the reader for the bloody "church-hospital" scene which will begin in a few lines. In line 6 of "A March in the Ranks Hard-Prest" the speaker arrives at the "large old church" converted into a temporary hospital. These three stresses ("large old church") make the reader pause, and are metrical hints that what will occur in the poem may not be very settling:

'Tis a large old church at the crossing roads, now an  
impromptu hospital....

(CRE 6)

In fact, we later find bloody and dying bodies:

And by one great pitchy torch stationary with wild red  
flame and clouds of smoke,  
By these, crowds, groups of forms vaguely I see on the  
floor, some in the pews laid down....

(CRE 9-10)

Whitman uses another three-stress combination in "wild red flame" (line 9) and in the "these, crowds, groups" of line

10. This last instance prepares the reader for the line's last three stresses which mimic the immobile bodies on the floor ("pews laid down"). The stressed words imitate the stress, or force, of the bodies resting motionless on the floor. Nonetheless, it is not until the poem's ending that we get any more significant metrical variations. Here, Whitman is witnessing the death of a young soldier:

Then the eyes close, calmly close, and I speed forth to  
the darkness,  
Resuming, marching, ever in darkness marching, on in the  
ranks,  
The unknown road still marching.

(CRE 23-25)

In line 23, the stresses "eyes close" and the first syllable of "calmly" show the impact of the eyelids closing on death. Here, Whitman emphasizes death's finality by following up with the repetitive phrase "calmly close," then the meter goes to a harmonious iambic foot, by which Whitman tries to compensate metrically for the soldier's death. This line's second half has an anapest followed by an amphibrach. The word "forth" is another extra syllable, and since it adds force to the stress which precedes it ("speed forth") it works mimetically. Normally, as I have shown above, Whitman uses the unstressed syllables to show a speedy gait, but here the two stresses illustrate the speaker physically leaping up from the dead body and going to find the troops where they will continue their marching (and the iambic-anapestic meter which depicts it) into the dark night.

Through the entire poem, Whitman composes in this

marching, iambic-anapestic beat. Still, with the exception of a few spondees at beginning and end, there is no significant metrical mimesis. Still, there is plenty of room in the remainder of the poem where he could have and just chooses not to display metrical mimesis. Possibly this is because like many of the other Drum-Taps poems, "A March in the Ranks Hard-Prest" is more conventional than most of Whitman's earlier work. On the other hand, a piece like "O You Whom I Often and Silently Come" which lacks a basic metrical norm works better mimetically. Ironically, Whitman seems to be better with his metrical gymnastics in the field of the open free verse poem.

As we have seen, for Whitman the ways to show "walking" metrically vary as much as the metrical feet of traditional prosody. When Whitman is at his best, the form and content of his poems blend together. Often, however, Whitman contradicts himself, using meter that drastically conflicts with the subject matter of "walking" in the poems. Witness this example from "Song of Myself," where the stresses slow the line so much we can't really believe the swiftness which the line's subject matter discusses:

Flatboatmen make fast towards dusk near the cotton-wood  
or pecan-trees....

(CRE 15.318)

The first part of line 297, of this poem, has the same problem, metrically mimicking a slow walk and not the trot of Whitman's subject matter:

The canal boy trots on the tow-path....

(CRE 15.297)

2.

Among Whitman's clippings about which Floyd Stovall has written extensively are notes to an article by Christopher North entitled "Christopher Under Canvass" (Dies Boreales, No. 1) in Blackwood's Magazine for June, 1849. In this essay, North, in a section entitled "Some Ideas on Hexameters, Poetry & Prose, and on Milton," praises Paradise Lost's iambic pentameter and Homer's hexameters, but in the margin Whitman has written:

....Another point of difference is, the Iliad was wanted to give body and shape to the nebulous float of traditions....and it gives them beautiful, swift, rolling, continuing shape.--The Paradise Lost was not wanted for any such purpose. What is in the Bible had better not be paraphrased. The Bible is indescribably perfect--putting it in rhyme, would that improve it or not?

(Stovall 127-28)

Of course, this is Whitman's written preference for non-rhyming poetry for America. Yet, for our current discussion on "sea-meter," the other comments by North are more significant. As Stovall points out, Whitman (in the summer of 1849, but maybe somewhat later) underlines the first quotation, and the second quotation he not only underlines but brackets, writing "good" next to in the margin. The first passage reads: "A discourse in prose resembles a chain. The sentences are the successive links--all holding to one another--and holding one another. All is bound." The second

passage says: "A discourse in verse resembles a billowy sea. The verses are the waves that rise and fall--to our apprehension--each by impulse, life, will of its own. All is free" (Stovall 128).

Just how North sees Homer or Milton in this prosodic light is unclear. Nonetheless, this passage echoes Whitman's idea that American poets must start a new poetry which combines the rhythms of both poetry and prose. More importantly, it shows where Whitman may have come upon the idea that free verse poetry mimics the ocean in its rising and falling. Thus, while formulating a poetic theory which he includes several years later in the first edition of Leaves of Grass, Whitman discovers "ocean-prosody."

A fascination with the ocean seems to have appeared early in Whitman's life, making the connection between it and poetry come quite naturally. Looking back on his life and poetry in Specimen Days, Whitman claims that "The shores of this bay [the south bay of Long Island], winter and summer, and my doings there in early life, are woven all through L of G" (PW 1: 11) Also, in Specimen Days, is this entire entry entitled "Sea-Shore Fancies:"

Even as a boy, I had the fancy, the wish, to write a piece, perhaps a poem, about the seashore--that suggesting, dividing line, contact, junction, the solid marrying the liquid----that curious, lurking something, (as doubtless every objective form finally becomes to the subjective spirit,) which means far more than its mere first sight, grand as that is--blending the real and ideal, and each made portion of the other. Hours,

days, in my Long Island youth and early manhood, I haunted the shores of Rockaway or Coney Island, or away east to the Hamptons or Montauk. Once, at the latter place, (by the old light-house, nothing but sea-tossings in sight in every direction as far as the eye could reach,) I remember well, I felt that I must one day write a book expressing this liquid, mystic theme. Afterward, I recollect, how it came to me that instead of any special lyrical or epical or literary attempt, the sea-shore should be an invisible *influence*, a pervading gauge and tally for me, in my composition. (Let me give a hint here to young writers. I am not sure but I have unwittingly follow'd out the same rule with other powers besides sea and shores--avoiding them, in the way of any dead set at poetizing them, as too big for formal handling--quite satisfied if I could indirectly show that we have met and fused, even if only once, but enough--that we have really absorb'd each other and understand each other.)

There is a dream, a picture, that for years at intervals, (sometimes quite long ones, but surely again, in time,) has come noiselessly up before me, and I really believe, fiction as it is, has entered largely into my practical life--certainly into my writings, and shaped and color'd them. It is nothing more or less than a stretch of interminable white-brown sand, hard and smooth and broad, with the ocean perpetually, grandly, rolling in upon it, with slow-measured sweep, with rustle and hiss and foam, and many a thump as of

low bass drums. This scene, this picture, I say, has risen before me at times for years. Sometimes I wake at night and can hear and see it plainly.

(PW 1: 138-39)

These childhood memories show the ocean's influence on Whitman's subject matter, as a myriad of passages in Leaves of Grass prove, but what of its influence on his prosody? As Whitman notes in the ocean passage in 'A Question of Form,' his prosody is analogous to ocean-waves. In fact, since the inception of Leaves of Grass, critics have been swift at jumping on this prosodic bandwagon, and in a very general way.<sup>6</sup> But does Whitman's measure--apart from it being free verse (which still, nonetheless, contains metrical feet)--really imitate the ebb and flow of the ocean? For an answer, let us examine several Whitman poems dealing with the sea, first, two from the "Sea-Drift" cluster compiled in Leaves of Grass in 1881.

"Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" is one of Whitman's best known and most critically lauded poems. First published in 1859 under the title "A Child's Reminiscence," and later called "A Word Out of the Sea," "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" deals with a boy alone on the beach, witnessing a bird's disappearance from its mate. Here are several lines to show the billowy nature of the poem's beginning:

Out of the cradle endlessly rocking,  
Out of the mocking-bird's throat, the musical shuttle,  
Out of the Ninth-month midnight,

Over the sterile sands and the fields beyond, where the  
child leaving his bed wander'd alone, bareheaded,  
barefoot,  
Down from the shower'd halo,  
Up from the mystic play of shadows twining and twisting  
as if they were alive,  
Out from the patches of briars and blackberries,  
From the memories of the bird that chanted to me,  
From your memories sad brother, from the fitful risings  
and fallings I heard,  
From under that yellow half-moon late-risen and swollen  
as if with tears,  
From those beginning notes of yearning and love there in  
the mist,  
From the thousand responses of my heart never to cease,  
From the myriad thence-arous'd words,  
From the word stronger and more delicious than any,  
From such as now they start the scene revisiting,  
As a flock, twittering, rising, or overhead passing,  
Borne hither, ere all eludes me, hurriedly,  
A man, yet by these tears a little boy again,  
Throwing myself on the sand, confronting the waves,  
I, chanter of pains and joys, uniter of here and  
hereafter,  
Taking all hints to use them, but swiftly leaping beyond  
them,  
A reminiscence sing.

(CRE 1-22)

If any of Whitman's lines prosodically imitate ocean waves,

with their steady anaphora joined by a single sentence of which we do not get the verb phrase until the end of the verse paragraph, these do.<sup>7</sup> If on the page we visually perceive the whole verse paragraph as the ocean, then each line is a separate wave, different in shape and metrical structure. Yet, as Whitman notes in his prose statement on the different physicality of each wave, each line has similarities that allow one to understand that it is a wave or a line of poetry. Throughout this verse paragraph, for instance, the anaphora is a wave. In addition, the majority of the poem's lines are in a falling measure, specifically dactylic-trochaic. Yet, each line has its own unique metrical make-up, thrown out into space the same way a wave is thrown toward the shore. At the end of the line, we hit the white-space of the page, just as the wave reaches the shore. The line is then pulled down to the following one, as if it were a wave ebbing back to the ocean. In fact, each line works in this mimetic way.<sup>8</sup>

In a few locations, in fact, Whitman fuses a rising meter with the falling dactylic-trochaic. Line 16 is an example, and it is important since in the line itself Whitman uses the word "rising" to describe the flock. The line starts with a rising meter, then returns to a falling one. Line 18 is in perfect rising iambs. And the last line of the verse paragraph is perfect iambic trimeter. Thus, like the rising and falling of the sea, in this first verse paragraph in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," the poet mimics the sea's movement by utilizing both rising and falling measures.

Although the poem's remaining sections are measurably looser, the first one introduces the image of the sea which follows in the poem. Furthermore, it also imitates the boy's "walking" upon the beach and the speaker's metaphorical "walking" from a babe in the crib, to a young boy, to a grown man. In other words, this passage's meter and syntax show a "walking" through time, as well as the ocean's ebb and flow. In fact, Whitman returns to a dactylic-trochaic meter in the last section, ending the poem where it began.

Although at first glance, Poe's "The Raven" seems drastically dissimilar from "Out of the Cradle," the two poems hold prosodic similarities. Firstly, Poe's refrain operates like Whitman's anaphora in the first section of "Out of the Cradle." In fact, in the sixth and last two stanzas, Poe uses anaphora, also. Whitman's anaphora and Poe's refrain glue each poem together, creating not only a rhythmic pattern, but also a sound-base. In addition to this sound-base, both poems use alliteration. Poe's sounds, of course, are slightly more extreme than Whitman's, but the sonics in both poems paste the pieces together. Here are a few stanzas from Poe's poem to illustrate:

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and  
weary,  
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten  
lore--  
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a  
tapping,  
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber  
door--

"'Tis some visiter," I muttered, "tapping at my chamber  
door--

Only this and nothing more."

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December;  
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the  
floor.

Eagerly I wished the morrow;--vainly I had sought to  
borrow

From my books surcease of sorrow--sorrow for the lost  
Lenore--

For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name  
Lenore--

Nameless here for evermore.

And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple  
curtain

Thrilled me--filled me with fantastic terrors never felt  
before;

So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood  
repeating

"'Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber  
door;--

Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber  
door;--

This it is and nothing more."

(Collected Works 1: 1-18)

Like Whitman's poem, "The Raven" is in falling measure,  
specifically trochaic octameter. This falling meter marches

each poem along, allowing both poets to stack dependent clause upon dependent clause. Whitman's falling measure, in "Out of the Cradle," mimics not only the sea and the boy walking, but also the rocking of the cradle. Poe's falling meter, likewise, produces a rocking motion, for different purposes, to create fear and suspense in the reader. Robert F. Faner and others (see note 4, Chapter 4) have noted the recitative-aria structure of Whitman's "Out of the Cradle." The falling measure and sound repetition, I believe, increase the poem's operatic quality. Similarly, Gay Wilson Allen points out the syncopation of Poe's meter, where the line-lengths, double rhyme, and alliteration add another counterpointing rhythm to create an overpowering musical effect (American Prosody 75-76). Ironically, Whitman detested Poe's prosody, and here both poets seem to be working along the same lines.

Another Whitman poem which is prosodically similar to Poe's work is "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry." Although not a part of the "Sea-Drift" collection, this poem deals with the ocean as subject matter, and prosodically functions in much the same manner as "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking." Section 1 is significant for setting up certain prosodic ideas:

Flood-tide below me! I see you face to face!

Clouds of the west--sun there half an hour high--I see  
you also face to face.

Crowds of men and women attired in the usual costumes,  
how curious you are to me!

On the ferry-boats the hundreds and hundreds that cross,  
returning home, are more curious to me than you  
suppose,

And you that shall cross from shore to shore years hence  
are more to me, and more in my meditations, than  
you might suppose.

(CRE 1.1-5)

The epistrophes, in this first section, work mimetically. The "you suppose" and "you might suppose" are metrically and semantically different. Nevertheless, they are similar phrases that symbolize the speaker's connection with the ferry's future passengers. Likewise, to add to the speaker's connection with future people, the "Clouds" of line 2 are similar to the "Crowds" of line 3 in sound and spelling.

In section 2, Whitman describes the ferry moving the waves out of the way, continuing on its journey. Likewise, mimetically, Whitman's anaphora pushes the verse paragraph along. Mimetically, the verse paragraph's form represents time, pushing through the waves toward the future ferry passengers Whitman feels a commonality with:

The impalpable sustenance of me from all things at all  
hours of the day,

The simple, compact, well-join'd scheme, myself  
disintegrated, every one disintegrated yet part of  
the scheme,

The similitudes of the past and those of the future,  
The glories strung like beads on my smallest sights and  
hearings, on the walk in the street and the passage

over the river,  
The current rushing so swiftly and swimming with me far  
away,  
The others that are to follow me, the ties between me  
and them,  
The certainty of others, the life, love, sight, hearing  
of others.

Others will enter the gates of the ferry and cross from  
shore to shore,  
Others will watch the run of the flood-tide,  
Others will see the shipping of Manhattan north and  
west, and to the heights of Brooklyn to the south  
and east,  
Others will see the islands large and small;  
Fifty years hence, others will see them as they cross,  
the sun half an hour high,  
A hundred years hence, or ever so many hundred years  
hence, others will see them,  
Will enjoy the sunset, the pouring-in of the flood-tide,  
the falling-back to the sea of the ebb-tide.

(CRE 2.6-19)

But in section 6, Whitman tames the anaphora and uses  
simple grammatical clauses to advance the line:

It is not upon you alone the dark patches fall,  
The dark threw its patches down upon me also,  
The best I had done seem'd to me blank and suspicious,  
My great thoughts as I supposed them, were they not in  
reality meagre?

Nor is it you alone who know what it is to be evil,  
I am he who knew what it was to be evil,  
I too knitted the old knot of contrariety,  
Blabb'd, blush'd, resented, lied, stole, grudg'd,  
Had guile, anger, lust, hot wishes I dared not speak,  
Was wayward, vain, greedy, shallow, sly, cowardly,  
          malignant,  
The wolf, the snake, the hog, not wanting in me,  
The cheating look, the frivolous word, the adulterous  
          wish, not wanting,  
Refusals, hates, postponements, meanness, laziness, none  
          of these wanting,  
Was one with the rest, the days and haps of the rest,  
Was call'd by my nighest name by clear loud voices of  
          young men as they saw me approaching or passing,  
Felt their arms on my neck as I stood, or the negligent  
          leaning of their flesh against me as I sat,  
Saw many I loved in the street or ferry-boat or public  
          assembly, yet never told them a word,  
Lived the same life with the rest, the same old  
          laughing, gnawing, sleeping,  
Play'd the part that still looks back on the actor or  
          actress,  
The same old role, the role that is what we make it, as  
          great as we like,  
Or as small as we like, or both great and small.

(CRE 6.65-85)

Section 9 picks up, again, the free-flowing movement  
found in section 1, beginning with three stresses, instead of

two this time. Here are the first few lines:

Flow on, river! flow with the flood-tide, and ebb with  
the ebb-tide!

Frolic on, crested and scallop-edg'd waves!

Gorgeous clouds of the sunset! drench with your  
splendor me, or the men and women generations after  
me!

Cross from shore to shore, countless crowds of  
passengers!

(CRE 9.101-04)

Although in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," and "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," the anaphora allows each line to visually resemble a sea-wave, "Patroling Barnegat" (1880) takes a more conventional prosodic approach to the whole sea-meter idea. In the first few lines, Whitman writes:

Wild, wild the storm, and the sea high running,  
Steady the roar of the gale, with incessant undertone  
muttering,  
Shouts of demoniac laughter fitfully piercing and  
pealing,  
Waves, air, midnight, their savagest trinity lashing,  
Out in the shadows there milk-white combs careering....

(CRE 1-5)

These beginning lines are mostly in falling measure. In line 1, the many stresses mimic the violence of the waves ("Wild," "wild," "storm," "sea," "high," run[ning]"). The meter here, like the waves themselves, are bent out of shape. Line 2, which exemplifies the gale's steadiness, also is metrically

steady. The first three feet are dactylic, followed by a trochee, then two dactyls. Whitman uses this continuous traditional measure to show the storm's incessant impact. Line 3 is mostly dactylic as well, with two trochees instead of one added. This meter creates a weird tone to the poem, one which reinforces the constant "demoniac laughter" of the wind and waves. Line 4 starts with three stresses, each accent metrically mimicking the trinity of the "waves," "air," and "midnight" the poem describes. Since the remainder of the line is also in falling measure, the initial stresses depict the storm's violence disrupting the calm which came before it. However, in the next line Whitman works against metrical mimesis. Describing the rapid breaking of combs, Whitman, one would expect, would use a quick meter such as dactylic or trochaic. Of course, the first two feet are dactylic, but when we encounter the description of the combs and their speedy breaking there is a spondee and two trochees. The spondee ("milk-white") and the first stress of the following trochaic foot ("combs") slows the line too much to mimetically illustrate the waves' rapidity. Thus, Whitman overlooks an important prosodic instance and works against metrical mimesis.

The next three lines begin with a rising meter:  
On beachy slush and sand spirits of snow fierce  
    slanting,  
Where through the murk the easterly death-wind  
    breasting,  
Through cutting swirl and spray watchful and firm  
    advancing....

(CRE 6-8)

Although line 6 starts with an iamb, it ends with a falling measure, the accents exemplifying the storm's violence, the alliteration of the soft "s" showing the relatively soft weight of the snow itself. Line 7's first half is rising meter as well, and Whitman dexterously interrupts this by throwing in the harsh stresses of "death-wind breasting." Once again, metrically, the poem shows how the storm (represented by stresses) has interfered with the peace of the sea (represented by the constant rising iambs). The same thing happens thematically and metrically in line 8 with its three initial iambs, followed by one dactyl and two trochees.

The poem's final section shifts location, with the coast patrol on the lookout for wrecked ships. As the section changes, so does the meter, Whitman using a falling measure once again:

(That in the distance! is that a wreck? is the red  
signal flaring?)

Slush and sand of the beach tireless till daylight  
wending,  
Steadily, slowly, through hoarse roar never  
remitting....

(CRE 9-11)

Line 10 is for the most part dactylic-trochaic, but the two stresses in "red signal" interrupt the line. Metrically, Whitman is commenting on the "red signals'" warning that danger is in the air. Such danger signs always turn the stomach of a witness, as today the sight of red lights fears the observer. The stresses of "red signals" mimic this

physiological response.

In the poem's last three lines, more stresses show disruption and fear:

Along the midnight edge by those milk-white combs  
    careering,  
A group of dim, weird forms, struggling, the night  
    confronting,  
That savage trinity warily watching.

(CRE 12-14)

Line 12 initiates a rising meter, ending with a falling one. Once again, Whitman repeats the idea of the breaking combs, and in the process overlooks his opportunity for metrical mimesis. In line 13, which also begins with a rising meter, Whitman tosses in four consecutive stresses, and just as the "weird forms" struggle, the line, under this stress-weight, fights to reach its end. The last line returns, as many of Whitman's last lines do, to a semblance of order. It begins with an amphibrach, then leaves off with the falling measure of two dactyls and one trochee.

In "Patrolling Barnegat," Whitman undoubtedly uses metrics to exemplify the violence of a sea-storm. The meter, in a sense, makes the reader feel as if he or she is there, observing the storm with the speaker. But, as we have noticed, Whitman does ignore two instances where metrical mimesis could have occurred, and quite ironically, in regards to his sea-meter theory, these instances are specifically places where he is describing the waves of the ocean.

Actually, Stephen Cushman has noticed this irony about sea-metrics in two other Whitman poems, pointing out that

although the poet in his prose statements associates sea-waves with non-metricality, he often uses perfect iambs when describing the ocean (Fictions 195, n.2). Cushman notices the "And rhythmic rasping of thy sands and waves" in "With Husky-Haughty Lips, O Sea!" (CRE 15) as well as "Or breathe one breath of yours upon my verse,/And leave its odor there" from "Had I the Choice" (CRE 8). Cushman, however, does not discuss how this later poem is Whitman's call to the sea to give him a new prosody, one that has no resemblance to the classical measure of poets that have come before him. The entire poem reads:

Had I the choice to tally greatest bards,  
To limn their portraits, stately, beautiful, and emulate  
at will,  
Homer with all his wars and warriors--Hector, Achilles,  
Ajax,  
Or Shakspere's woe-entangled Hamlet, Lear, Othello--  
Tennyson's fair ladies,  
Metre or wit the best, or choice conceit to wield in  
perfect rhyme, delight of singers;  
These, these, O sea, all these I'd gladly barter,  
Would you the undulation of one wave, its trick to me  
transfer,  
Or breathe one breath of yours upon my verse,  
And leave its odor there.

(CRE 1-9)

This Whitman prosodic statement is extremely ironic. With a few extra, unstressed, hoving syllables at the ends of lines, and with a few cases of initial trochaic substitutions--

something very common to traditional prosody--this entire poem is in perfect iambs, each line of various lengths. To fit the measure, a few syllables need to be compressed (the last syllable of "Hector" and the first syllable of "Achilles" in line 3, for example), but this scanning practice has always appeared in conventional metrical verse. In fact, "Had I the Choice" is one of Whitman's most formal compositions.

So, what are we to make of this? Is Whitman once again contradicting himself, writing a poem on his unique prosodical approach and mistakenly utilizing traditional measure? Or is Whitman creating metrical mimesis here, again? Cushman seems to believe the former. Nonetheless, the poem's speaker suggests that the sea and its unique meter have not yet been passed on to his prosody, a curious statement since Whitman wrote the poem in 1885, years after his groundbreaking experimentation in free verse. Still, at this point in his career--as I will examine in the next chapter--Whitman was much more formal in his metrics. Just possibly, this poem is a cry for help to the sea, to bring Whitman out of his continuous return to form, to make him prosodically young again. This, I believe, is Whitman's statement in "Had I the Choice," and quite ironically his "The Spirit that Formed This Scene," discussed below, also poses similar questions about what Whitman does in his poems and what he claims to do. In the next chapter, we will examine how, first of all, Whitman continued to take notes for traditional poems throughout his career, and how his later poems slant in this direction. As old age approaches,

the youthful Whitman gives way to physical illness and a more conventional attempt at poetic mimesis. The later poems are more formal than his earlier ones, but at the same time, just as profound, both metrically and in the message which they convey.

CHAPTER VI.

FULL CIRCLE: THE CONVENTIONAL METRICS OF  
WHITMAN'S POST-WAR POEMS

Aye, merchant, thou hast drawn a haughty draft  
Upon the centuries yet to come  
Yet hitherto unborn--the Americas of the future:  
The trick is...*Will they pay?*

"My Own Poems"

(All is a procession,  
The universe is a procession with measured and perfect  
motion.)

"I Sing the Body Electric"

1.

It has been the general consensus among scholars that Whitman suffered a decline in poetic talents as he aged and his health worsened.<sup>1</sup> Critics argue that the poems composed during the last twenty-seven years of his life are stylistic and sometimes thematic failures due to Whitman's many strokes and episodes of depression.<sup>2</sup> In this light, the three post-war editions of Leaves of Grass, as well as the Annexes of the Deathbed Edition of 1891-1892, show a poet tired with his vision. It is true that Whitman sprinkled these late poems with archaic words ("thou" and "thee," for example (Warren,

"Style and Technique(s)" 695), references to classical poets he once denounced, and thematic repetitions to the point of annoyance (the "sea" and "ship" poems, for example), but the most striking oddity of these short lyrics is their regularity in measure. In the majority of the post-war poems, Whitman uses an iambic base. Often, he also composes poems which swing from an iambic to trochaic measure, or on a few occasions, the reverse. Although his short poem grows confined, he still uses the expansive sentence common to his earlier work, but it is, for the most part, tamed. Although the argument that Whitman's choice of the short lyric occurs out of ill health and his inability to create longer poems in the 1870s, 80s, and 90s may be partially unerroneous, the poet himself noted that Poe was right in his statements that the longer poem was not truly possible in American poetry. In "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads," after denouncing Poe's use of musicality (a passage quoted in my Drum-Taps chapter), Whitman discusses Poe's influence:

But I was repaid in Poe's prose by the idea that (at any rate for our occasions, our day) there can be no such thing as a long poem. The same thought had been haunting my mind before, but Poe's argument, though short, work'd the sum out and proved it to me.

(PW 2: 723)

In actuality, the Drum-Taps poems and Whitman's later pieces are mostly short in length. Although in Drum-Taps, Whitman relies more than not on an iambic base measure, the post-war poems are mostly iambic, and in many instances in perfect iambs. The substantial difference in this post-war verse,

however, is that the measure is so consistent one finds the traditional usages of elision ("i," for example) and the compression of syllables in a small percentage of the poems.

Whitman had not completely stopped considering whole conventional poems throughout all his years of free-versing, as his uncollected and unpublished poetry notebooks attest to. Around 1865, Whitman attempted a strange, little ballad written on letterhead of the Attorney-General's Office in Washington (CRE 697). In the mid-1860s he also wrote an off-rhyme free verse sonnet as an inscription to precede the 1867 edition of Leaves of Grass. Of course, this poem was never used, since the poet substituted the "Inscriptions" readers are familiar with today (CRE 668-69). Still, since "Inscriptions" was to announce the role of himself as America's poet, and to propose his possible immortality through his work (see "When I Read the Book" and "Poets to Come"), that he was considering a traditional poem for this job suggests he may have believed such conventional poems might earn him a place in the American canon before his less formal verse would. Though not in conventional form, the quotation from an unpublished poem which introduces this chapter reflects Whitman's fear that his free verse may not be accepted by later readers.

During the 1870s, Whitman still was composing formal works. In 1876, for instance, Whitman worked on a series of conventionally metric rally poems for the United States' Centennial celebration (CRE 672-73). Among these were "Hands Round," "Starry Union" (two versions survive), and "What the Word of Power." Whitman's attempts to write traditional

patriotic poems conflicts with how his early free verse resulted from his belief that all people, the world round, should have political independence. Furthermore, as we have seen, "O Captain! My Captain!," the patriotic elegy written on Lincoln's death, is extremely traditional in its metrics.

Whitman's mixed emotions over conventional prosody and free verse never really ended. In his later years, Whitman was somewhat embarrassed with his more traditional prosody and lack of poetic output due to his failing health. As Donald Barlow Stauffer has noted, two days after the three June strokes in 1888 that almost killed him (106), Whitman said this to his biographer, Horace Traubel:

I often ask myself, is the expression of the life of an old man consonant with the fresher, earlier, delvings, faiths, hopes, stated in the original Leaves? I have my doubts--minor doubts--but somehow I decide the case finally on my side. It belongs to the scheme of the book. As long as I live the Leaves must go on. Am I, as some think, losing grip?--taking in my horns? No--no--no: I am sure that could not be. I still wish to be, am, the radical of my stronger days--to be the same uncompromising oracle of democracy--to maintain undimmed the light of my deepest faith. I am sure I have not gone back on that--sure, sure. The Sands have to be taken as the utterances of an old man--a very old man. I desire that they may be interpreted as confirmations, not denials, of the work that has preceded.

(WWC 1: 271)

With Traubel, Whitman is remarking upon the Sands of Seventy

cluster, a series of sixty-five, mostly short lyrics first published in the November Boughs volume in 1888. That Whitman believed these new poems somewhat prosodically different from the rest of Leaves of Grass is obvious since Sands of Seventy became the First Annex to later editions of the collection, whereas Good-Bye My Fancy (1891), another new cluster, became the Second Annex.

As Donald Barlow Stauffer also mentions in his writings on the poet's post-war poems (107), Whitman even brings up this fear of losing poetic power in "As I Sit Writing Here," a short poem first published in the New York Herald, May 14, 1888, and included in the November Boughs volume:

As I sit writing here, sick and grown old,  
Not my least burden is that dulness of the years,  
    querilities,  
Ungracious glooms, aches, lethargy, constipation,  
    whimpering *ennui*,  
May filter in my daily songs.

(CRE 1-4)

In this poem, Whitman's spondees show the harshness and immediacy of old age and approaching death, a mimetic technique, as we shall see, which appears quite often in later poems.<sup>3</sup>

2.

In the late 1860s, Whitman's poetry becomes more traditional, prosodically. Yet, there is no great leap from the metricality of these poems and the prevalence of iambs in

Drum-Taps.<sup>4</sup> One of the most rhythmically formal poems of the late 1860s is "The Singer in the Prison." First published in the Saturday Evening Visitor in December of 1869, the poem was even more traditional with its two-line iambic trimeter refrain after the first canto and quatrain of the hymn. For the 1881 edition, Whitman deleted the refrain, possibly to lessen the poem's traditionally prosodic impact. One of the most conventional pieces in Leaves of Grass, the poem speaks of a 1869 Parepa-Rosa concert which Whitman is believed to have attended.<sup>5</sup>

"The Singer in the Prison" begins with two lines of perfect iambic trimeter, then picks up a trochaic base blended with dactylic feet. In the work's second section, Whitman starts an iambic measure, and the first instance of mimesis takes place. In fact, the second section's whole first stanza uses back-to-back stresses to show the confinement of the prisoners in jail:

The sun was low in the west one winter day,  
When down a narrow aisle amid the thieves and outlaws of  
the land,  
(There by the hundreds seated, sear-faced murderers,  
wily counterfeiterers,  
Gather'd to Sunday church in prison walls, the keepers  
round,  
Plenteous, well-armed, watching with vigilant eyes,)  
Calmly a lady walk'd holding a little innocent child by  
either hand,

Whom seating on their stools beside her on the platform,  
She, first preluding with the instrument a low and  
musical prelude,

In voice surpassing all, sang forth a quaint old hymn.

(CRE 2.8-16)

This whole section works with metrical mimesis. In line 8, with three consecutive stresses ("west one winter") Whitman depicts the physical falling of the sun toward earth. The three stresses weigh down the line to reinforce the idea of the sun's weight as it plummets to earth. Basically, the line is iambic pentameter with one extra syllable. Whitman is so conventional here he employs a technique often used by poets writing in traditional prosody--he precedes the spondee of "west one" with a pyrrha. Line 9 begins with a "walking-meter" of perfect iambic octameter to mimic the lady walking into the prison's Sunday church. The syntax here works mimetically as well. We do not know someone is walking until line 13, for the clauses preceding this line are stacked up to represent the steps the lady is taking before the prisoners actually spot her. Furthermore, in several lines, the accented syllables show the prisoners' dangerous demeanor. These stresses add anxiety to the lines and imitate the anxiety in the prison. To describe metrically the prisoners' guilty weight for their crimes, for example, Whitman uses stresses, as in "sear-faced murderers" (2.10). That there might be conflict is also represented by the stresses Whitman gives to the anxious guards ("well-armed, watching"; 2.12). Still, the lady with child has no fear, is calm, and Whitman metrically shows this by the use of

dactylic meter in line 13. To relieve the stress-anxiety and dangerous prison environment, Whitman uses the triple-meter with its many unstresses. This loosens the line from the poem's previous metrical tension, metaphorically pointing out the loosening of the stress inside the prison.

The last line, in this section, is in perfect iambic hexameter with two spondaic variations. The two spondees ("sang forth" and "old hymn") foreshadow the fierce power of the voice about to break forth in song. Importantly, too, the hexameter, a classical measure used to show heroism, anticipates the lady's bravery over entering the prison environment, as well as her heroic singing. Often in classical, quantitative measure, the first four feet were either dactylic or spondaic. Thus, Whitman mimics this meter by placing a spondee in the fourth foot location. Furthermore, in the classical meter the last foot was mostly spondaic, as it is here in Whitman's poem.<sup>6</sup> Ironically, in this post-war piece, Whitman alludes to measures he completely discarded in the first edition of Leaves of Grass.

Section 2 ends with the prison lady's hymn in singsongy, rhymed iambic tetrameter, but with metrical variations. The first two stanzas are mimetically significant:

A soul confined by bars and bands,  
Cries, help! O help! and wrings her hands,  
Blinded her eyes, bleeding her breast,  
Nor pardon finds, nor balm of rest.

Ceaseless she paces to and fro,

O heart-sick days! O nights of woe!  
Nor hand of friend, nor loving face,  
Nor favor comes, nor word of grace.

(CRE 2.17-24)

In this passage, Whitman metrically creates a false sense of harmony, only to be shattered. For example, line 17 is in perfect iambic tetrameter, giving a false sense of peace. This false harmony is interrupted by the two initial spondees of the following line. The two spondees metrically describe the anguish of a woman locked in jail and her fierce cries for help. In line 18, the poet uses two trochaic substitutions to add more distress to the conventional meter ("Blinded" and "bleeding"). In addition, the "b" alliteration carried throughout the whole line and into the next one ( along with the metrical substitutions) shows the violence of the prisoner blinding her own eyes.

The second stanza's first line begins with a trochaic substitution. As in most conventional poetry, the trochee pushes the line into motion. Quite appropriately here, Whitman describes the pacing of the locked up female. The "s" repetition also implies quick movement, and when the poet picks up the iambic beat again in the later half of the line we feel the pacing of the girl through the movement of the meter. Then, in line 22, Whitman uses a spondee in the second foot to show the discomfort of prison life:

The last stanza also has metrical meaning:  
Dear prison'd soul bear up a space,  
For soon or late the certain grace;  
To set thee free and bear thee home,

The heavenly pardoner death shall come.

(CRE 2.29-32)

Lines 29 through 31 are iambic tetrameter, with one trochaic exception. But in line 32, Whitman illustrates metrically the prisoner's release of pain through death. After the initial iamb, the pyrrha's unstresses depict a physical release of the soul from the body. Then, like the trochaic variations above to show movement, we get two anapestic substitutions, illustrating the soul leaving the tormented body behind on earth. The stanza ends on an iambic foot, a technique that Whitman (and conventional poets, for that matter) often uses to express harmony. In fact, the next two lines of the section's last stanza are in perfect iambic tetrameter, exemplifying their subject matter, the soul leaving the body to join God:

*Convict no more, nor shame, nor dole!*

*Depart--a God-enfranchis'd soul!*

(CRE 2.33-34)

Here is the beginning of section 3, which also holds metrical mimesis:

The singer ceas'd,

One glance swept from her clear calm eyes o'er all those

upturn'd faces,

Strange sea of prison faces, a thousand varied, crafty,

brutal, seam'd and beauteous faces,

Then rising, passing back along the narrow aisle between

them,

While her gown touch'd them rustling in the silence,

She vanish'd with her children in the dusk.

(CRE 3.35-40)

Appropriately, line 35, in its shortness, depicts the ending of the singing: "The singer ceas'd." In line 36, Whitman uses stresses differently than before. In order to exemplify the quick movement of the singer's eyes into the crowd of prisoners, Whitman throws in three stresses, one group at the line's beginning, the other toward the middle: "One glance swept," and "clear calm eyes." And when the singer walks out of the church, Whitman utilizes the iambic "walking-meter," once again: "Then rising, passing back along the narrow aisle between them." Furthermore, when the singer's gown touches the prisoners, the poet makes four spondees convey this action: "gown touched them rustling."

In the second part of the next stanza, more mimetic variations arise:

(Convict forgetting prison, keeper his loaded pistol,  
A hush and pause fell down a wondrous minute,  
With deep, half-stifled sobs and sound of bad men bow'd  
and moved to weeping,  
And youth's convulsive breathings, memories of home,  
The mother's voice in lullaby, the sister's care, the  
happy childhood,  
The long-pent spirit rous'd to reminiscence....

(CRE 3.42-47)

Now, as the metrics show, the guards are relaxed. In line 42, the first foot's triple-meter imitates a release from the base meter's tension up to this point. Just as the guard forgets his "loaded pistol," Whitman, in this line, forgets

the anxiety of repeated stresses in the poem's first half when the prisoners and guards both were nervous and on-guard. Then, in line 43, Whitman breaks the perfect iambic meter, pausing the line with "pause fell down." In the next line, stress-abundance illustrates the prisoners' release of tears and sobs, pouring out violently. To show the harmony of the prisoners' pleasant memories of home, the peaceful memories of mothers' singing, Whitman makes these next two lines harmoniously in perfect iambs. The next line, with its stresses, shows the prisoners' release of pent-up emotions ("long-pent spirit") as well.

The poem's ending is worth noting as well:

Resumed, the large calm lady walks the narrow aisle,  
The wailing melody again, the singer in the prison  
sings,

*O sight of pity, shame and dole!*

*O fearful thought--a convict soul.*

(CRE 3.50-53)

Line 50, with its four consecutive stresses, not so much emphasizes the singer's walking, but her calm demeanor. Whitman slows the line to depict the lady's slowed down emotions. She has sung; she has succeeded psychologically in doing good for the tormented prisoners. In fact, Whitman communicates this psychological well-being for the whole involved crew by writing the next line with harmonious iambs. The poem ends with a mixed refrain, however. The convict's soul is "fearful," yet its evil has been released by cathartically witnessing the singing. In perfect iambic

tetrameter, the poem ends on a metrical, thematic, pleasant note.

With a similar theme, another short, yet prosodically notable lyric Whitman wrote during the late 1860s is "The Last Invocation." In this poem, the speaker prays to have his body released and his soul continue to live on:

At the last, tenderly,  
From the walls of the powerful fortress'd house,  
From the clasp of the knitted locks, from the keep of  
the well-closed doors,  
Let me be wafted.

Let me glide noiselessly forth;  
With the key of softness unlock the locks--with a  
whisper,  
Set ope the doors O soul.

Tenderly--be not impatient,  
(Strong is your hold O mortal flesh,  
Strong is your hold O love.)

(CRE 1-10)

According to John Livingston Lowes, if the reader "let[s] the words beat their own time" (CRE 454), he or she will notice the accentual, rhythmical patterns in this poem's stanzaic arrangement. Quite nicely, in fact, the first two stanzas each have fifteen stresses. The third and final stanzas, however, consist of eleven. This accentual-stanzaic pattern holds mimetic importance. The whole poem depicts the soul's fight to overcome the mortal body. Metrically, this

struggle is evident in the first stanza which deals with the locked door to the soul (implying the body will live awhile longer, is in no hurry to let the soul break free); and the second stanza which discusses the breaking of the body's door so the soul can be released. The body and soul, at this point in the poem, are locked in a philosophical struggle where there will be no winner. This idea, significantly, Whitman represents by the fifteen accents in the separate stanzas. In terms of its number of stresses, even the last stanza fits into this symbolic picture. The stanza's first two lines have four beats, metrically symbolizing the tug-of-war between the soul and the body still being fought. Not until the last line do we find only three stresses. After having spoken to the body about its strong hold on him, Whitman addresses the soul as a personification of "love." Since the last line is shorter than the previous one on the body, the poet metrically runs out of breath. His prayer fails. This very moment, he will not die; he will have to wait with his "mortal flesh" until his soul has the power to break free. If we perceive each line as a breath, then the one dealing with the body has life in it, length-wise.

Visionally, these last two lines are an "eye-couplet," although hidden in their placement in the stanza's triad structure. Whitman, by setting the two lines off with apostrophes, shows their formal connection. The triadic structure itself, framed with the first and last line addressed to the soul, implies that in the long run the soul will win the battle, though it may take some time. Furthermore, the last two stanzas' triadic structure

illustrates the equality of the soul and the body in this fight. With its four lines, the first stanza metrically implies that one of these contestants will win, will break into a four-line existence and be one line up on the other. This, as we shall see later, will be the soul. If we group the first two stanzas together accentually, we have a visional pulling down the page. If, however, we group the last two stanzas together in terms of their line numbers, one stanza representing the body and one the soul, while the first stanza in this prayer represents physically on the page as well as symbolically the sky or transcendence. Thus, Whitman seems to be foreshadowing different postmodern ways of looking at poetic stanza and visual structure.

Throughout "The Last Invocation," the specific meter hints at this dual struggle. The poem's first line mirrors itself metrically, consisting of an anapestic foot, followed by a dactyl. This triple-meter of two feet foreshadows the triad of the last two stanzas, and since it is broken into two feet the anapest stands for the body while the dactyl, with its falling meter of reversed quick movement, represents the soul breaking free. As an argument, this makes sense since the rest of the first stanza deals with the body and has an anapestic base mixed in with iambs. In the third line, while describing the "well-closed doors" the soul cannot break free from, Whitman breaks his base with three ending stresses. These three stresses mimic the soul thrusting (three times in this case) up against the doors of the body, unsuccessful in trying to break them down and become free. Seen in another metrical, mimetic light, the

three stresses depict the firmness of doors shutting tight--  
three slams, if you will.

Line 4 is also noteworthy. First, it is the independent clause of the first two lines. Dexterously, the meter turns along with the independent clause, a falling meter of one dactyl followed by a trochee. This is the first truly metrical turn of the poem, and it turns right where the thought turns.<sup>7</sup>

Stanza 2 also uses falling meter to represent the soul's need to break free from the body:

Let me glide noiselessly forth;  
With the key of softness unlock the locks--with a  
whisper,  
Set ope the doors O soul.

(CRE 5-7)

In this stanza, the trochaic base, in the first and last lines, show the soul's need to win the battle with the body. But the second line is basically anapestic and iambic and stands for the soul in our metrical diagram. Thus, where the speaker is praying for the soul to free itself from the body (the falling meter), Whitman throws in a metrical reminder that the body is still locked up.

Here is the poem's last stanza:  
Tenderly--be not impatient,  
(Strong is your hold O mortal flesh,  
Strong is your hold O love.)

(CRE 8-10)

Falling meter, at poem's end, tells the story of how the soul

will one day win the battle. Line 8 is a dactylic falling foot, followed by a spondee, and an amphibrach. This line can also be scanned as a falling meter of one dactyl, followed by an antibacchius. The poem's last two lines are falling meter as well. In other words, there are more instances of falling meter in the poem than there are rising meters. Line 9 consists of a dactyl, a trochee, and a cretic. The last line consists of a dactyl and a cretic. It must be noted that a cretic is essentially a falling-rising foot, so Whitman adds more of a prosodic puzzle to the picture. The poem's last foot is a falling-rising foot, and if the poem ends on a rise then the body wins the metrical battle. In fact, in the poem it does. The poem ends by an invocation to the soul to hurry up and break free from the body, but the time frame of the poem is not the appropriate time. This idea Whitman gets across in the metrics as well.

Metrically, the last two lines form an unusual couplet. The only difference resides in the fact that the first of these lines holds the extra trochaic foot, which symbolizes the soul metrically. The "mortal flesh" addressed in this line holds the soul in its grasp. The "mortal flesh" also holds the trochaic foot or the metrical representation of the soul in the poetic line itself. For the trochaic foot is buried or held in the middle of the line, surrounded by one dactylic rising foot on one side, and the other mixed falling-rising meter.

In closure, in "The Last Invocation" Whitman uses meter and sound-patterns to exemplify the soul's battle to break free from the aging body. The first stanza, with its

cacophony, depicts the harshness of the soul enclosed in the tiny space of the human body. The second stanza, sound-wise softer, represents the soul being peacefully released from the body. Above, I noted how the stresses of line 3 mimic the soul pounding on the doors of the body, violently attempting to break free. But in terms of the sounds, the hard "k's" represent the body and not the soul. The soul needs to be peacefully set free. Thus, here, in "The Last Invocation," we find Whitman using the duality concept again, accents to show a violent breaking away of the soul from the body, and sounds to say exactly the opposite.

"A Noiseless Patient Spider" is soul-oriented as well and also utilizes a mimetic prosody. One of Whitman's most anthologized poems, it may have its inception in the mid-1850s, the poet working on it some more in the early 1860s, finding publication finally in 1868. This poem, too, has a dual structure, the first stanza speaking of the spider's work, the second stanza that of the soul. The first stanza reads:

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

(CRE 1-5)

Like the spider, line 1 is "noiseless" in its "s's" and three iambic feet followed by the peaceful, hovering, unstressed syllable. The metrical tone shifts, however, in line 2.

Line 2 begins with an iamb, followed by a trochaic substitution, three iambs, a pyrrha, a spondee, and an amphibrach. Thus, metrical chaos enters the line to anticipate the anxiety that will come in the next stanza when the speaker addresses his soul to try to catch itself onto the divine. The spondee, in the line's next to last foot, mimetically emphasizes the spider's isolation. Line 3 has an initial trochaic substitution, followed by the triple-meter foot (anapestic), then picks up the rising meter of iambs again. Significantly, line 4 uses the "f" alliteration and meter to show the incessant activity of the spider launching "forth filament." The first three stresses ("launched," "forth," "filament") illustrate the spider struggling to get out the filament, in much the same way the soul in the next stanza will struggle with its own work. Then, Whitman throws in three anapests to show the movement of the "filament" once the spider releases it. This line, like the first one, ends with a neutral amphibrach. The next line also uses a mixture of duple and triple measure to depict movement. The first two feet are dactyls, followed by a trochee, another dactyl, and a final cretic, which mirrors the amphibraches Whitman has been using to end the line. Here, the falling meter is accentuated by the "ing" verb-endings.

The opposing stanza discusses the soul's role to find something to connect to:

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.

(CRE 6-10)

This last stanza's first line metrically mirrors the first stanza's first line enough to show the similarities in the work of the spider and the work of the soul. Line 6 starts with an iamb, followed by a trochee, a spondee, and a final iamb. The spondee echoes the spondee in line 2 of the poem to depict the spider's isolation. Metrically, as well as thematically, Whitman matches the spider's quest and the soul's quest. Line 8 mixes duple and triple measure to illustrate the soul's movement through space and time in its quest to find the divine. Its falling meter is changed in line 9 when Whitman throws in a rising measure of anapests and iambs. Line 10 starts with two anapests as well, then an iamb, a trochee, a spondee, and a final iamb. The third and fourth feet are mimetic, since the first one ends with a stress and the following one starts with a stress ("fling," "catch"), the stresses themselves catching hold in the line. Quite beautifully, this is exactly where Whitman describes the soul catching onto the divine. The following spondee reinforces this idea. The final iamb is merely Whitman returning to the initial iambic base set up in the poem's first line.

Whitman presents this mirroring technique in another later poem, "Two Rivulets," first published in 1876, but excluded from the Deathbed Edition of Leaves of Grass.

Whitman's ambiguity about this poem's merit is obvious. Whitman included lines 10-12, along with various lines from "Or From That Sea of Time," in "As Consequence," which started the "Autumn Rivulets" cluster of the 1881 edition. "As Consequence," however, is not as prosodically interesting as "Two Rivulets," and thus not as strong a poem. In the earlier version's first stanza, Whitman begins the metrical mirroring effect:

Two Rivulets side by side,  
Two blended, parallel, strolling tides,  
Companions, travelers, gossiping as they journey.

(CRE 1-3)

Line 1 has two initial stresses which mirror the idea of "Two Rivulets." In addition, the line's second half also contains two stresses in two iambic feet. To carry this symbolism further, these two stresses are the same word repeated ("side" and "side"). Furthermore, the "s" alliteration adds to this duality. Whitman also begins the second line with two back-to-back stresses ("Two blended"). In addition, the two "l's" of "parallel" visually foreshadow the two "l's" of "strolling." Also, the two "t's" of "Two" and "tides" work in a similar manner. In fact, the first two lines mirror one another. Line 2 is metrically similar to line 1, except for a slight variation of the third foot and the extra cretic ending the second line. No doubt, in line 3 Whitman comments on his mirror-prosody, claiming how the two brooks--and the two first lines in this case--are "Companions" "gossiping" to one another.

Whitman eases up on this prosodic duality in line 4,

then in line 5 starts with two stresses ("These ripples"):

For the Eternal Ocean bound,  
These ripples, passing surges, streams of Death and  
Life,  
Object and Subject hurrying, whirling by,  
The Real and Ideal....

(CRE 4-7)

Line 5 is of the same metrical make-up for the first three feet as lines 1 and 2, but Whitman adds three iambs to finish it. In line 6, Whitman, as he does in many poems, combines dactylic and trochaic feet (plus the ending cretic) to show movement, and movement indeed is this line's subject matter. Whitman continues his dual theme by describing the two brooks as "Death and Life," "Object and Subject," and the "Real and Ideal."

Then, doing something he seldom does between stanzas, Whitman ends the stanza with a comma, and not a period. Thus, the two stanzas run into one another in the same way the two rivulets will eventually run into one another in the "Eternal Ocean."

In the second stanza, Whitman combines duple and triple meter again:

Alternate ebb and flow the Days and Nights,  
(Strands of a Trio twining, Present, Future, Past.)

(CRE 8-9)

With all the dual symbolism up to this point, and the mention earlier of the third entity, the "Eternal Ocean," it is difficult not to see this duple and triple metrical mixture symbolizing the trinity.

In the next stanza, Whitman introduces his poetic persona and the reader as possible entities which hold the flow of the brooks and ocean inside them as well as Leaves of Grass, carrying this duality a step further:

In you, whoe'er you are, my book perusing,  
In I myself--in all the World--these ripples flow,  
All, all, toward the mystic Ocean tending.

(CRE 10-12)

Whitman ends the poem with the shore, as lover, opening up to hold the incoming ocean waves, waves which probably hold some of the water of the two rivulets:

(O yearful waves! the kisses of your lips!  
Your breast so broad, with open arms, O firm, expanded  
shore!)

(CRE 13-14)

These two lines are perfect iambs, showing the harmony of love and acceptance.<sup>8</sup> Still, juxtaposed to the previous line, the last line is "expanded" by several iambic-based feet in the same way that the shore has "expanded" since it has stretched open its arms. Curiously, as well, this expanded line echoes the poem's first two lines where the second line is metrically expanded, and line 5, where the expansion bounces metrically off the first two lines.

Yet, the poem's stanzaic pattern is also mimetic. The three lines of the first stanza imitate the poem's trinity theme, whereas stanza three with its two lines mimics the duality of the two rivulets. Stanza four carries on with the trinity structure, and the last stanza returns to the duality

of two lines.

In contrast, "To a Locomotive in Winter" (1876), first published the same year as "Two Rivulets," is more akin to Whitman's earlier work. In one of his most anthologized poems, Whitman shows the same stylistic dexterity as in his early Leaves of Grass poems, although by this time he was still somewhat feeble from his previous stroke a few years previous. "To a Locomotive in Winter," as an *ars poetica*, is much more prosodically interesting than Whitman's other statements on form in poems like "Had I the Choice" and "Spirit that Form'd This Scene." Although "To a Locomotive in Winter" utilizes a traditional iambic base, Whitman uses the spondee for suggestive mimetic impact, much as he does in earlier work. Notice, first, how the anaphora and iambic push of the first section moves the poem along in a constant momentum similar to the movement of the train which Whitman addresses:

Thee for my recitative,  
Thee in the driving storm even as now, the snow, the  
    winter-day declining,  
Thee in thy panoply, thy measur'd dual throbbing and thy  
    beat convulsive,  
Thy black cylindric body, golden brass and silvery  
    steel,  
Thy ponderous side-bars, parallel and connecting rods,  
    gyrating, shuttling at thy sides,  
Thy metrical, now swelling pant and roar, now tapering  
    in the distance....

(CRE 1-6)

With its constant "b" and "p" alliteration adding force to the line, "To a Locomotive in Winter" reminds one of Whitman's earlier poems. In addition, the long "e" musically pastes the lines together, creating an undercurrent of sound in these first few lines which moves through the poem like the sound of the train moving through space.

Metrically, line 3 is noteworthy. In a general prosodic note, Joseph Andriano finds the "systolic and diastolic rhythm of the heartbeat" in "To a Locomotive in Winter" (726).<sup>9</sup> Although this scholar may be referring to the contraction and expansion of the poem's lines, line 3 specifically depicts the activity of the heart. The line's first few feet are iambic, but with the phrase "dual throbbing" the meter turns on itself for a few falling feet, as if it were not only illustrating the train's sound but the sound of the human heart slowing. At line's end, Whitman returns to an iambic base and the train and the heart continue to beat in proper rhythm.

Line 6 is also significant, for it shows Whitman using the one proper way to illustrate movement in a poem, by an iambic base, a metrical structure which swells, pants, and roars through the line like the train swells, pants, and roars through the countryside. This, undoubtedly, is a different prosodic utterance from the ones calling for the growth of free metrical laws Whitman discusses in his prose statements. Truthfully, this is another indication that the older Whitman sees, at least sometimes, the return to traditional prosody as a positive prosodic move. In the last

part of this first section, Whitman asks the train to merge with his verse and to give him a new prosody to exemplify it with, but the mimetic quality of the prosody stays intact:

Thy great protruding head-light fix'd in front,  
Thy long, pale, floating vapor-pennants, tinged with  
    delicate purple,  
The dense and murky clouds out-belching from thy smoke-  
    stack,  
Thy knitted frame, thy springs and valves, the tremulous  
    twinkle of they wheels,  
Thy train of cars behind, obedient, merrily following,  
Through gale or calm, now swift, now slack, yet steadily  
    careering;  
Type of the modern--emblem of motion and power--pulse of  
    the continent,  
For once come serve the Muse and merge in verse, even as  
    here I see thee,  
With storm and buffeting gusts of wind and falling snow,  
By day thy warning ringing bell to sound its notes,  
By night thy silent signal lamps to swing.

(CRE 7-17)

Line 7 uses a visual prosody of sorts. Describing the "head-light" "fix'd" on the train, Whitman fixes the three stresses of "head-light fix'd" in the middle of the line, as well. Furthermore, in line 8, the consecutive stresses "belch" out the clouds rising from their "smoke-stack." And in line 11 the iambs mirror the happy movement of the train-cars following one another throughout the countryside.

But sound equally plays a part in this prosody. As

noted earlier, Whitman disliked "pretty sounds" for ornamental sake. Yet, in lines 16 and 17 the poet uses the "s," along with an iambic base, to imitate the tinkling of bells. Quite ironically, Whitman detested Poe's overuse of "jingle-sounds," denouncing the poet's verse for too much musicality and not enough content. This irony gets reinforced by the final section of Whitman's "To a Locomotive in Winter:"

Fierce-throated beauty!  
Roll through my chant with all thy lawless music, thy  
    swinging lamps at night,  
Thy madly-whistled laughter, echoing, rumbling like an  
    earthquake, rousing all,  
Law of thyself complete, thine own track firmly holding,  
(No sweetness debonair of tearful harp or glib piano  
    thine,)  
Thy trills of shrieks by rocks and hills return'd,  
Launch'd o'er the prairies wide, across the lakes,  
To the free skies unpent and glad and strong.

(CRE 18-25)

The cacophony and consecutive stresses, the "lawless music" in this part of Whitman's poem, counterbalances his more Poe-like, traditional abuse of musical sounds in earlier lines. Once again here, Whitman suggests, as he does in his early poems, that musicality--what he denounces in his prose statements as "stock 'poetical' touches" (PW 1: 22)--is fine within limits, and that cacophony is just as significant, maybe more important, than pretty, softer sounds and rhythms. Or maybe Whitman is, once again, contradicting himself. In

fact, a fine line exists between the two extremes in this Whitman poem. His line "No sweetness debonair of tearful harp or glib piano thine" echoes the statement in "To a Certain Civilian," in which he tells the reader who doesn't accept his harsh sounds and measure to "...go lull yourself [themselves] with what you [they] can understand, and with piano-tunes" (CRE 9). This Whitman poem--although prosodically bordering on such traditional measure and musicality itself--uses the cacophony and overloaded-stress line to balance between the two extremes. Thus, in one sense the young Whitman weds the new, more conventional Whitman of later years. Along with the earlier Whitman anaphora, this equilibrium is why "To a Locomotive in Winter" succeeds as an *ars poetica* truly describing Whitman's verse, whereas "Had I the Choice" and "Spirit that Form'd This Scene" (as we shall soon see) both fail.

Whitman's "To a Locomotive in Winter" has often been compared with Emily Dickinson's poem 585, "I like to see it lap the miles." Critics, however, have been negligent about their metrical differences. Prosodically, both poems utilize an iambic base (Dickinson's is in her typical 4/3 hymnal meter). Dissimilar from Whitman's, Dickinson's metrical mimesis had a major impact on visual enjambment, a technique that significantly impacted later free verse poets.<sup>10</sup> Here is the poem in its entirety:

I like to see it lap the Miles--  
And lick the Valleys up--  
And stop to feed itself at Tanks--

And then--prodigious, step

Around a Pile of Mountains--

And supercilious peer

In Shanties--by the sides of Roads--

And then a Quarry pare

To fit it's sides

And crawl between,

Complaining all the while

In horrid--hooting stanza--

Then chase itself down Hill--

And neigh like Boanerges--

Then--punctual than a Star

Stop--docile and omnipotent

At it's own stable door--

(2: 1-17)

In the first stanza of "I like to see it lap the miles," we find visual mimesis in Dickinson's enjambed lines. For instance, the very last word, "step," literally "steps" from the first to the second stanza. Since "steps" is the last word on the right side of the page, the reader's eye needs to "step" "around" in order to begin reading the left-justified, second stanza. At the same time, Dickinson is visually mimicking the train's stepping "Around a Pile of Mountains."

In the second stanza, the end-word of line 5 ("peer") also operates in this visual, mimetic way. Here Dickinson is comparing the train to a horse. Like the horse and train she

describes peering into the "Shanties--by the sides of Roads," the reader needs to "peer" into the next line, since the word "peer" is also right-justified.

When, at poem's end, Dickinson mentions the train/horse arriving to stop at its final destination, she uses dashes (as well as the two consecutive stresses which start line 16) to slow down the measure, thus imitating metrically the stopping of the train/horse. Dickinson does these prosodic techniques throughout the body of her work, but it is something which only occurs occasionally in Whitman's poetry.

In "Youth, Day, Old Age and Night," Whitman uses stresses more dismally than in many of his poems, slowing the line in the same fashion that age slows a man's body. Revising a part in the last section of the first edition of Leaves of Grass ("Great are the Myths"), Whitman deletes the conjunctions found in the earlier version to get to this prosodic mimesis. Here, first of all, are the lines from the first edition:

Youth large lusty and loving....youth full of grace and  
force and fascination,  
Do you know that old age may come after you with equal  
grace and force and fascination?  
Day fullblown and splendid....day of the immense sun  
and action and ambition and laughter,  
The night follows close, with millions of suns, and  
sleep and restoring darkness.

(LG 1855 12.19-22)

In this instance, the conjunctions and ellipses symbolize the speed in which old age approaches youth, but these techniques



commas and the abundance of stresses slow the line even more.

In line 2, once again, the poet removes the conjunction, slowing the line to exemplify how old age, before one realizes it, creeps upon a person. In line 3, for the same reasons, Whitman also omits the "ands." Yet, in the last line the tone of the poem changes. Here, Whitman is stating that although old age is upon us before we know it, this is, after all, a positive thing. The night still has its "suns," and the "restoring darkness" is good to rejuvenate. Old age and death may always be present, and quick to find us (an idea represented by his deleting the comma after "close" so the line, like approaching death, moves quicker), but in Whitman's mind--as he mentions in many of these later poems--the soul will survive and this is something to look forward to. Prosodically, Whitman depicts the soul's survival by the soft "s's" ("follows," "close," "millions," "sleep," "restoring," "darkness"), and his decision to leave the "ands" in the second half of the line, conjunctions which show the repetition of the soul's life, ones he deleted from all previous lines in the poem. In this regard, the poet keeps the prosodic tone of the 1855 edition and the positive attitude as well.

In another affirmative old-age poem, "Halcyon Days," Whitman employs similar prosodic techniques. Published in the New York Herald in January of 1888, and later included in the "Sands at Seventy" annex of the Deathbed Edition of Leaves of Grass, the poem takes its title from a bird name which according to ancient legend nests at sea during the winter solstice, calming the waves during incubation. Here,

though, used as an adjective, "halcyon" means "calm,"  
"peaceful," "happy," and/or "prosperous":

Not from successful love alone,  
Nor wealth, nor honor'd middle age, nor victories of  
    politics or war;  
But as life wanes, and all the turbulent passions calm,  
As gorgeous, vapory, silent hues cover the evening sky,  
As softness, fulness, rest, suffuse the frame, like  
    fresher, balmier air,  
As the days take on a mellower light, and the apple at  
    last hangs really finish'd and indolent-ripe on the  
    tree,  
Then for the teeming quietest, happiest days of all!  
The brooding and blissful halcyon days!

(CRE 1-8)

At first, Whitman lists the various prosperous assets one may have accomplished by old age. Quite importantly, he specifies "love" first in its own separate line of iambic tetrameter. Although it may be the most consequential entity to have in old age, love is not the only thing. Thus, by noting other qualities, Whitman lengthens the second line into a perfect iambic nine-foot measure. In the third line, the poet breaks the meter mimetically, slows it to illustrate the body slowing during old age. Just as a traditional poet would, Whitman starts the line with a pyrrha to balance the following spondee in the second foot. Then, there are three feet of iambs, followed by a cretic foot. The cretic foot, since it begins with a stressed syllable, reinforces the ictus of the iambic foot before it, thus slowing the line

even more. It is significant here that when Whitman mentions life waning, the line wanes as well. Furthermore, the "turbulent passions" of energetic youth are prosodically filled with energy, too, with their iambic, moving feet. Then, at line's end, when the poet discusses the calming of the passions during old age, the line, with its stresses, likewise calms.

Line 4's stresses also create mimesis, though not in regard to old age. If the two last syllables of "vapory" are compressed, four perfect iambic feet begin the line. Then, the trochaic foot of "cover" briefly interrupts the meter, before it resumes the iambic measure. The first ictus of the trochaic foot here works with the ictus of the previous iamb to pull the line together, to "cover" it in the same way the "hues" cover the "evening sky."

In line 5, a curious tension arises. Although the line is in perfect iambic octameter (if we compress the last two syllables of "balmier"), it only holds four monosyllabic words, something uncommon for a traditional iambic line this long. The polysyllabic words scan iambically, but visually on the page they look as if they should be read slower than iambically. The many consecutive nouns remind us of traditional poems where nouns following one another are mostly monosyllabic and stressed. Thus, Whitman visually tricks us into this perfect iambic measure. The prosodic tension here imitates the tension between youth and old age. As in "Great are the Myths," Whitman again shows that while in youth one does not deem aging as a positive thing. Here, this hidden need for the line to be spondaic comments on this

idea. The sounds also point in this direction. The many "s's" depict old age's pleasant quality, but the "f" and "t" create the opposite effect.

Line 6 mixes duple and triple feet, producing a swinging feel, a meter of happiness to represent old age. The old apple, a metaphor for the poem's speaker, "hangs" from a tree at which point the meter, with its one-after-the-other stresses "hangs" as well. Oddly, this dual "hanging" foreshadows death, and conjures up "hanging" someone for a crime. In terms of sounds, though, the line is pleasant; the "m's," "l's," and short "a's" symbolize the inner peace the speaker has found in old age.

As in traditional prosody, line 7 has two words compressed ("quietest, happiest") to keep the line iambically paced. In addition, in the last line, Whitman changes the meter to one iamb, an anapest, another iamb, then another anapest. This combination of duple and triple feet, also, creates a happy-meter. Thus, we are left with pleasant images of old age, images that metrically remind us of swinging from a tree during childhood. Thus, in "Halcyon Days," Whitman once more uses meter and sound-patterns to play a prosodic tug-of-war with what he wants to say.

In several of his later poems, however, Whitman gives a less optimistic view of old age. "The Dismantled Ship" is one such piece:

In some unused lagoon, some nameless bay,  
On sluggish, lonesome waters, anchor'd near the shore,  
An old, dismantled, gray and batter'd ship, disabled,  
done,

After free voyages to all the seas of earth, haul'd up  
at last and hawser'd tight,  
Lies rusting, mouldering.

(CRE 1-5)

Prosodically, everything is conventional until line 3. Line 1 is perfect iambic pentameter; line 2, significantly, is iambic hexameter, or heroic measure, implying that Whitman is going to look back heroically on the life of a ship, much in the same manner which "The Beauty of the Ship" does. Nothing, however, is further from the truth, thematically and prosodically. Line 3 holds the clue to the poem's meaning. Eight stresses break up this line ("old," "dismasted," "gray," "batter'd," "ship," "disabled," "done"). In this line, Whitman shreds the iambic meter just as the old ship is torn into shreds. The ship symbolizes the poet's body, as it does in many of Whitman's post-war poems. Destroyed by its harsh patterns of "d's" and "t's," this line shows metrically how both the ship and the body have physically declined during a long hard life. The next to last line is important, as well. As if to see how long the reader can tolerate the impact of stresses, Whitman starts with a trochaic variation, and then a spondee. Here he really wants us to see the violence done to the body at old age. Then, with metrical compression, he follows with an anapestic foot and two iambs, an attempt to rescue the poem with conventional measure. But, just as it is too late to return to the journeys of youth, it is too late to go back to traditional metrics. Thus, the poet tosses in the spondee of "hauled up," and then three iambs. Seen another way, Whitman cripples the line to

exemplify the crippled ship and the dilapidated body of the poet.

Whitman does not stop here, by any means. The poem's last line slows first with two stresses, and then a cretic foot. This last cretic is an attempt on the poet's behalf to bring some iambic youth and order back into the line. It is too late. The ship is destroyed, the body of the poet is dying, and the line deconstructs itself.

Concerning old age, there is similar line-violence in Whitman's 1888 "A Carol Closing Sixty-nine". With perfect iambs, the poet begins the first two lines optimistically, both thematically and metrically:

A carol closing sixty-nine--a *resume*--a repetition,  
My lines in joy and hope continuing on the same....

(CRE 1-2)

But then, in line 3, we find the spondee of "God, Life." Line 5 also uses several consecutive stresses for pause. Whitman, often in these later poems, utilizes spondees to describe approaching death, or death itself.<sup>11</sup> These early instances in the poem foreshadow the most significant example of old age and approaching death, which we find in line 7. Yet, before we reach this line on the old, dilapidated body about to die, Whitman throws in a line of perfect iambs to mimic the beating of the human heart. Here is the remainder of the poem:

Of ye, O God, Life, Nature, Freedom, Poetry;  
Of you, my Land--your rivers, prairies, States--you,  
mottled Flag I love,

Your aggregate retain'd entire--Of north, south, east  
and west, your items all;  
Of me myself--the jocund heart yet beating in my breast,  
The body wreck'd, old, poor and paralyzed--the strange  
inertia falling pall-like round me....

(CRE 3-7)

Line 7 breaks the poem's harmonious iambic base, but in its second half, which mentions the "inertia falling," Whitman turns this plummeting on its head by using the rising meter of iambs. In this regard the poetic line imitates the poem's theme of fighting death. Here are the last two lines, where this struggle continues:

The burning fires down in my sluggish blood not yet  
extinct,  
The undiminish'd faith--the groups of loving friends.

(CRE 8-9)

In the fourth foot, line 8 has a pyrrhic substitution, preceded by two trochees and a cretic. The blood is not yet extinct, but this line-variation suggests that one day soon it might be. Nonetheless, the poem's subject matter ends on an optimistic note with the poet among friends. Likewise, the meter in perfect iambs ends optimistically. Here, Whitman looks toward death in a positive light.

As we have seen, Whitman's post-war prosody is more conventional, yet the poet was constantly either denying or fighting against it, in both his poetry and prose writing. Witness this from "An Egotistical Find," published in Specimen Days, an entry that originates out of Whitman's trip West in 1879, implying that his prosody is like the

abandon of nature:

"I have found the law of my own poems," was the unspoken but more-and-more decided feeling that came to me as I pass'd, hour after hour, amid all this grim yet joyous elemental abandon--this plentitude of material, entire absence of art, untrammel'd play of primitive Nature--the chasm, the gorge, the crystal mountain stream, repeated scores, hundreds of miles--the broad handling and absolute uncrampedness--the fantastic forms, bathed in transparent browns, faint reds and grays, towering sometimes a thousand, sometimes two or three thousand feet high--at their tops now and then huge masses pois'd, and mixing with the clouds, with only their outlines, hazed in misty lilac, visible. ("In Nature's grandest shows," says an old Dutch writer, an ecclesiastic, "amid the ocean's depth, if so might be, or countless worlds rolling above at night, a man thinks of them, weighs all, not for themselves or the abstract, but with reference to his own personality, and how they may affect him or color his destinies.")

(PW 1: 210-11)

Poetic twin to this prose passage, "Spirit That Form'd This Scene" is one of the few poems in which Whitman discusses prosody and mentions his free verse approach to measure. Nonetheless, this later poem with its iambic base still shows mimetic instances.<sup>12</sup> As the headnote informs, the poem was written in Platte-Canon, Colorado. It too deals with Whitman's 1879 western jaunt:

Spirit that form'd this scene,  
These tumbled rock-piles grim and red,  
These reckless heaven-ambitious peaks,  
These gorges, turbulent-clear streams, this naked  
    freshness,  
These formless wild arrays, for reasons of their own,  
I know thee, savage spirit--we have communed together,  
Mine too such wild arrays, for reasons of their own;  
Was't charged against my chants they had forgotten art?  
To fuse within themselves its rules precise and  
    delicatesse?  
The lyrist's measur'd beat, the wrought-out temple's  
    grace--column and polish'd arch forgot?  
But thou that revelest here--spirit that form'd this  
    scene,  
They have remember'd thee.

(CRE 1-12)

Stephen Cushman, in his chapter on Whitman in Fictions of Form in American Poetry, rightfully notices the metrical irony of this poem (41). Written with an iambic base, the poem aims to defend the lawlessness of free verse. Cushman mentions that it is possible Whitman is playing a joke on the reader, "demonstrating that he can toss off metrical verse as easily as anyone in order to suggest that technical achievement without spirit is bankrupt" (41). In "Spirit That Form'd This Scene," Cushman sees Whitman confessing to the canyon that he has not been able to forget conventional prosody altogether, nor the spirit of free verse which in his old age he fears he might lose (41). Likewise, as my chapter

has demonstrated, Whitman does not forget the lawlessness of his early verse, but his mind now is much more set on the traditional side of prosody than his youthful spirit would ever have imagined. Appropriately, Whitman leaves "Spirit That Form'd This Scene" in the "From Noon to Starry Night" cluster of Leaves of Grass. In the starry night of his life, Whitman mellows prosodically, but even as he approaches his deathbed, he feels slightly guilty over rebelling against his younger self.

Whitman, in fact, illustrates his mixed feelings about health and old age, and his worry about losing his rebellious, poetic qualities, in a statement from "An Old Man's Rejoinder," found in Good-Bye My Fancy (1891), in which the poet adamantly denies any connection to traditional prosody:

I have not only not bother'd much about style, form, art, etc., but confess to more or less apathy (I believe I have sometimes caught myself in decided aversion) toward them throughout, asking nothing of them but negative advantages--that they should never impede me, and never under any circumstances, or for their own purposes only, assume any mastery over me.

(PW 2: 656)

Regardless of what he says he does prosodically, Whitman works out his conflict of form miraculously in these later verses. And, as I will indicate in my final chapter, Whitman's personal, prosodic quest, which lasted his entire career, becoming dominant during the later years of his life--whether to write in iambs, etc, to give in to the ancient,

feudal system, or to utilize free verse--is a struggle which poets from various camps are still dealing with today.

Whitman, no doubt, is responsible for the problem facing Pound, Eliot, and Williams during the Modernist period. Like a Whitman catalogue, the argument continues. Some poets and critics understand it; some are not so attuned.

CHAPTER VII.

ENVOI

Poets to come! orators, singers, musicians to come!  
Not to-day is to justify me and answer what I am for,  
But you, a new brood, native, athletic, continental,  
    greater than before known,  
Arouse! for you must justify me.

"Poets to Come," Walt Whitman

I MAKE a pact with you, Walt Whitman--  
I have detested you long enough.  
I come to you as a grown child  
Who has had a pig-headed father;  
I am old enough now to make friends.  
It was you that broke the new wood,  
Now is a time for carving.  
We have one sap and one root--  
Let there be commerce between us.

"A Pact," Ezra Pound

It has been one-hundred and forty-five years since Whitman's Leaves of Grass broke the mode of traditional prosody, but, as we have seen, conventional measure plays a considerable role in his new poetics. As this study has shown, metrical mimesis functions in a traditional way in the majority of Whitman's verse. Nonetheless, Whitman--more

rebellious than he could have imagined--initiated the debate concerning the superiority of free verse or formal poetry which still continues today. Although free verse is the dominant form being written by poets now in America, traditional metrics never did completely vanish.

During the Modernist Period, Pound, Eliot, and Williams struggled over whether to further break Whitman's fractured line, to prosodically repair it, or to write poems which combined both formal and free qualities. In terms of fusing the two drastically different forms, Pound is the master. Yet, in his quest to bring a new prosody to America after Whitman, Williams is most courageous. In this passage for the Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, for instance, Dr. Williams discusses free verse in relation to his concept of the line, the variable foot:

The crux of the question is measure. In f[ree] v[erse] the measure has been loosened to give more play to vocabulary and syntax--hence, to the mind in its excursions. The bracket of the customary foot has been expanded so that more syllables, words, or phrases can be admitted into its confines. The new unit thus may be called the "variable foot," a term and a concept already accepted widely as a means of bringing the warring elements of freedom and discipline together. It rejects the standard of the conventionally fixed foot and suggests that measure varies with the idiom by which it is employed and the tonality of the individual poem. Thus, as in speech, the prosodic pattern is evaluated by criteria of effectiveness and

expressiveness rather than mechanical syllable counts. The verse of genuine poetry can never be "free," but f[ree] v[erse], interpreted in terms of the variable foot, removes many artificial obstacles between the poet and the fulfillment of the laws of his design.

(289)

Williams is right in that free verse can never be "free," but he is also historically confused. In the Modernist Period, bringing the "warring elements of free verse and discipline together" is basically what Whitman did. Besides his astonishment with Whitman, however, Williams fails to point out that the term "variable foot" originates with Poe.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, Williams sees that the normal foot has been expanded. Still, what exactly is Williams' variable foot, and how do we scan it? Since Williams only gives us clues about this meter, we can determine that, besides the possibility of a pseudo-quantitative form influenced by speech-time--which is not wholly original, either--the innovations in Williams' poetry are not in feet but in different types of measurements: a prose-measure, a visual measure, and a sound-translated measure.

Whereas Williams' and the Modernists justifiably quarreled with Whitman's prosody,<sup>2</sup> the Formalists of the 1950s decided to return poetry to its English roots. Following Frost, poets like James Merrill and Richard Wilbur wrote poems in classical measures and often about classical themes. Elizabeth Bishop, for instance--highly influenced by Marianne Moore's work--uses both syllabism and accentualism

in her poems. For these writers, poetry, since Whitman, had gone astray; the classics--as translated through England--were, after all, the most important prosodic models.

In the 1960s, however, in rebellion to this return to metrical form, the Black Mountain Poets, the Confessional Poets, the Beat Poets, and the New York Poets, started believing, once again, that free verse was the appropriate means of expression in poetry. Thinking likewise, and drawing on their translations of Pablo Neruda, poets from the Deep-Image School such as Robert Bly and James Wright began writing surrealist, free verse poems. In addition, Allen Ginsburg, influenced by Blake and Whitman, expanded the poetic line once again. All these poets were directly at odds with the formalists of the 1950s. In fact, by the 1970s poetry was as open prosodically as it has ever been. Daniel Halpern's anthology, The American Poetry Anthology, published in 1975, for example, highlights the best of contemporary free verse poetry. Poets like Larry Lewis were not only breaking down meter, they were also using the sentence as a new prosodic unit of measure, a technique that still continues today.<sup>3</sup>

In response to these movements against Merrill and other traditional poets of the 1950s, the New Formalists in the 1980s rallied for a return to a formal prosody. The New Formalists want a formal poem with colloquial language similar to the work of Frost and Auden, but even more contemporarily sounding. Of course, this idea goes back to Wordsworth before them, rebelling against the traditional

poems before 1800. Neo-Formalists such as Timothy Steele, Dana Gioia, and Frederick Turner, have been accused of creating works which prosodically reflect the political atmosphere of Reaganomics.<sup>4</sup> This, however, is a gross overstatement. The fact that Timothy Steele, a leading proponent of bringing formal verse back to American poetry, only touches upon Whitman in his New Formalist manifesto, Missing Measures, further hides the truth of the movement. Steele deals extensively with Pound and Williams' quest to somehow compete with vastly popular fiction writers during their time, both poets having difficulty accepting a nation of wholly free verse or formal poets.

In fact, Steele and other New Formalists are just as guilty of trying to overcome Whitman's influence as the Modernists, though they, unlike the Modernists, shy away from confronting the "good gray poet" directly. One of the arguments behind this 1980s movement is the belief that it is impossible in free verse to create metrical variation, something we have seen from this study to be a mere illusion. Unfortunately, critics believe that free verse cannot work mimetically since no dominant structure exists to break away from in order to create meaning. As we have seen with Whitman, this is far from the truth. Thus, in the 1980s, contemporary American poets, in magazines such as Tendril and Poetry East, argue over the merits and shortcomings of free verse prosody.<sup>5</sup> The most meaningful insights arising from this discussion deal with new approaches to scanning or perceiving the free verse line.<sup>6</sup>

One such interesting strategy to free verse scansion has been proposed by Alice Fulton in her 1986 essay named after Whitman's poem: "Of Formal, Free, and Fractal Verse: Singing the Body Electric." In this piece, Fulton discusses contemporary free verse poetry's resemblance to the scientific theories of the mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot. According to Mandelbrot's 1975 theories, "certain chaotic structures....contain a deep logic or pattern" (Fulton 209). In this regard, the mathematician termed these configurations as fractals from the Latin *fractus*, meaning "broken" or "fragmented" (Fulton 209). Although Fulton does mention Whitman in the context of her article, it is only in passing, a progenitor of free verse poetry. Nonetheless, her statement that "the deep logic of a poem may be based upon such concepts as the microcosm moving toward macrocosm" (Fulton 203) seems especially appropriate to Whitman's first edition of Leaves of Grass. Fulton sees the answer to free verse prosody lying in the idea of fractal science, yet her approach takes more knowledge of mathematics than Fulton and most other poets and prosodists, for that matter, possess.

Fulton's ideas are beneficial to the future of American prosody, yet there are critics who refuse to see the prosodic past as significant to free verse. For example, Charles Hartman, in his book Free Verse: An Essay in Prosody, believes that such an accentual-syllabic approach, as this study takes with Whitman's verse, is forced, finding the needles, if you will, that do not exist in the prosodic haystack.<sup>7</sup> Hartman argues that:

The concept of the foot has meaning only metrically-- that is, within a numerically regular system. When feet vary ad hoc in both number and kind, they lose metrical significance. To calculate, as Barry<sup>8</sup> does, the percentage of iambs in the line and of pentameters in the poem--often less than half in both--is not to render the poem metrical. However interesting and useful, statistics are not prosody.

(117)

At any rate, metrical feet do sometimes exist in free verse prosody, specifically that of Whitman's, and they do hold metrical mimesis. Undoubtedly, we must still approach free verse prosody in an accentual-syllabic matter when appropriate, and carry new forms of scansion dealing with new forms of free verse into the future.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, it is a healthy sign that poets and critics from both the free verse and formal camps are still discussing prosody. In a university setting where cookie-cutter Masters of Fine Arts Programs abound, and where English studies have ventured into new areas of interest, prosody is no longer an intellectual household word. Quite sadly, Walt Whitman (or Walter, depending on what camp you fall under) is somewhat to blame for this turn of events, or at least the misconceived notion that follows him, that free verse is really free, and operates according to no set laws. This idea, no doubt, is the product of the democratization of American poetry, something Whitman would have desired, but with it the

unfortunate arrives with the good. In future years, we can only hope that serious students of poetry, as well as their teachers, continue to look into the arguments concerning free verse and formal metrics in and outside academia. In recent years, there have been a handful of important studies concerning new ways to look at the free verse line as it has evolved since Whitman. We can only applaud these successes and wish for the poets and scholars who come after our time to continue their endeavors, as Whitman--if only secretly--would have wanted.

## NOTES

### I. "TO BE IN ANY FORM, WHAT IS THAT?"

<sup>1</sup> From the partial title of this study's first chapter, I take Whitman's quotation: "To be in any form, what is that?" It is, in fact, line 1 from section 27 of "Song of Myself." See CRE 57.

In addition, the epitaphs beginning each chapter are noted here. For the epitaph beginning chapter 1, see PW 2: 473. The Whitman quotation is from the "1876 Preface to Leaves of Grass and Two Rivulets." Composed by Whitman in 1871, the quotation which begins chapter 2 is from NF, Part II, item 38, 63-64. This Whitman quotation introducing chapter 4 is from WWC: 2, 52-53. "My Own Poems," which introduces chapter 6 is from CRE 680. The second quotation from "I Sing the Body Electric" is lines 89-90, section 6. See CRE 98. This first stanza from "Poets to Come," epitaph to the last chapter, can be found in CRE 14. For Ezra Pound's "The Pact," see his Personae 89.

<sup>2</sup> For an in-depth study of Whitman's relationship to the "Young Americans," see David S. Reynolds' Walt Whitman's 81-82; Zweig, Walt Whitman 54-57. For sources specifically on this group, see Stafford; Yannella 63-81.

<sup>3</sup> Stovall (123-24) mentions a newspaper review of Tocqueville's The Old Regime and the Revolution, translated

by John Bonner and printed in 1856, in Bucke's list of Whitman's clippings, on which the poet wrote, "Deserves Re-reading." Nonetheless, there is no proof that Whitman ever read Democracy in America.

<sup>4</sup> For two remarkable studies on the prosodic rebellion in late eighteenth and nineteenth-century England, see Omond and Paul Fussell's Theory. For a complete study of nineteenth-century American prosody, and its similarities to English verse, see Allen's American Prosody.

<sup>5</sup> Although Samuel Johnson did metrically waver from the iambic line in his poetry, he nonetheless stayed within the bounds of syllabism. In fact, Johnson was dubious of mimetic, metrical variations. In one of the essays in the Idler, he spoofs metrical mimesis, through the critic, appropriately named Dick Minim, who discusses how the words "bubble and trouble" create "a momentary inflation of the cheeks by the retention of the breath, which is afterwards forcibly emitted, as in the practice of blowing bubble" (qtd. in Frye 259). However, when Pope pointed out the mimetic, metrical variation in his translation of Homer's line ("Thunders impetuous down, and smoaks along the ground"), Johnson accepted mimetic, metrical variations as a prosodic possibility, though he remained somewhat of a skeptic (qtd. in Frye 259).

As a side note, it would be interesting to study Johnson's prosodic beliefs in light of his affliction with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD). His strict adherence to a duple metrical norm may be the direct result of this

affliction which uses the repetition of physical and cognitive rituals to create order. Nonetheless, people with OCD often see their rituals take on symbolic natures. One could also see how mimetic instances and/or varying the meter with trisyllabic feet could have fit perfectly into the symbolic order of Johnson's unique mental chemistry.

6 For general comments on how Whitman's prosody reflects Blake's see Guthrie, who states that in both Blake and Whitman "thought and passion create rhythms that shall not disguise, but reveal, them, in absolute nakedness; that shall set them in the most promulgatory light" (23). See also, for general claims, Leonard, who believes that Whitman was not the first person to write in free verse (MacPherson's Ossian poems and Blake's "Marriage of Heaven and Hell" came first), but in a sense was the forerunner of the new school in America poetic art (222). Importantly, as a statement that looks forward to contemporary arguments on form, Leonard says that "there seem to be about as many kinds of free verse as there are persons who write it" (223). In addition, for a discussion of both Blake and Whitman's sexual and political freedom, and their pantheistic views illustrated in verse, see Swinburne's William Blake. Swinburne's mixed emotions concerning Whitman, as well as Whitman's attitude toward Swinburne's work, will be dealt with in chapter 4 of this study.

7 Whitman seemed genuinely happy about Norton's review in Putnam's Monthly. In fact, he quoted it in the supplement to the second issue of the 1855 Leaves of Grass, and reprinted

it in Leaves of Grass Imprints 36-38.

8 Although today no one would deem Whitman's poetry as wholly "prose," this was the general consensus behind one early camp of Whitman prosodists. Whitman, himself, as the following quotation (similar to Bryant's quote mentioned in chapter 1 in its reference to the importance of technology) shows, helped perpetuate this idea:

In my opinion the time has arrived to essentially break down the barriers of form between prose and poetry. I say the latter is henceforth to win and maintain its character regardless of rhyme, and the measurement-rules of iambic, spondee, dactyl, &c., and that even if rhyme and those measurements continue to furnish the medium for inferior writers and themes, (especially for persiflage and the comic, as there seems henceforward, to the perfect taste, something inevitably comic in rhyme, merely in itself, and anyhow,) the truest and greatest Poetry, (while subtly and necessarily always rhythmic, and distinguishable easily enough,) can never again, in the English language, be express'd in arbitrary and rhyming meter, any more than the greatest eloquence, or the truest power and passion. While admitting that the venerable and heavenly forms of chiming versification have in their time play'd great and fitting parts--that the pensive complaint, the ballads, wars, amours, legends of Europe, &c., have, many of them, been inimitably render'd in rhyming verse--that there have been very illustrious poets whose

shapes the mantle of such verse has beautifully and appropriately enveloped--and though the mantle has fallen, with perhaps added beauty, on some of our own age--it is, notwithstanding, certain to me, that the day of such conventional rhyme is ended. In America, at any rate, and as a medium of highest aesthetic practical or spiritual expression, present or future, it palpably fails, and must fail, to serve. The Muse of the Prairies, of California, Canada, Texas, and of the peaks of Colorado, dismissing the literary, as well as social etiquette of over-sea feudalism and caste, joyfully enlarging, adapting itself to comprehend the size of the whole people, with the free play, emotions, pride, passions, experiences, that belong to them, body and soul--to the general globe, and all its relations in astronomy, as the savans portray them to us--to the modern, the busy Nineteenth century, (as grandly poetic as any, only different,) with steamships, railroads, factories, electric telegraphs, cylinder presses--to the thought of the solidarity of nations, the brotherhood and sisterhood of the entire earth--to the dignity and heroism of the practical labor of farms, factories, foundries, workshops, mines, or on shipboard, or on lakes and rivers--resumes that other medium of expression, more flexible, more eligible--soars to the freer, vast, diviner heaven of prose.

(PW 2: 519-20)

For additional critics who argue that Whitman's poetry is not poetry, but prose, or a verse which lapses into prose--

lines, see Norton; James Wood Davidson 110-13, 146-47; P.K.; and Lowell. Some critics joined this debate, claiming that Whitman was not writing prose, nor poetry, but something in between. For this take, see Querist. Ross, for example, suggests that Whitman's verse differs from prose even more than traditional verse does, since "Whitman's verse is composed in lines," whereas conventional poetry is "composed in sentences" like prose (363).

<sup>9</sup> Curiously, Emerson, and not Whitman, was almost the first poet to initiate the whole free verse movement in America, not in his prose statements but in his poetry itself. As Allen demonstrates, many of Emerson's first drafts of poems were written in free verse then later worked into more conventional forms. Allen gives the 1845 journal entry for the poem Merlin (1846) as one example. Here is a reproduction of that work, in which Emerson, through his subject matter and prosody, miraculously calls for a free verse measure for the United States:

I go discontented thro' the world  
Because I cannot strike  
The harp to please my tyrannous ear;  
Gentle touches are not wanted,  
These the yielding gods had granted.  
It shall not tinkle a guitar,  
But strokes of fate  
Chiming with the ample winds,  
With the pulse of human blood,  
With the voice of mighty men,

With the din of city arts,  
With the cannonade of war,  
With the footsteps of the brave  
And the sayings of the wise,  
Chiming with the forest's tone  
When they buffet boughs in the windy wood,  
Chiming with the gasp and moan  
Of the ice-imprisoned flood.  
I will not read a pretty tale  
To pretty people in a nice saloon  
Borrowed from their expectation,  
But I will sing aloud and free  
From the heart of the world.

(qtd. in Allen, American Prosody 119)

For the complete story on Emerson's free verse rough drafts, see Allen's American Prosody 118-21.

<sup>10</sup> Whitman did, indeed, see Leaves of Grass as the New American Bible. In a 1857 notebook, Whitman scribbled this entry concerning the construction of Leaves of Grass: "The Great Construction of the New Bible/Not to be diverted from the principal object--the main life work" (NUPM 1: 353). Furthermore, in "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads," the poet discusses the Old and New Testament as early influences on his poetry. See PW 2: 722; 732. See also Whitman's essay "The Bible as Poetry" in PW 2: 541-49. Although a flock of critics reinstate Allen's theories on Whitman's Biblical prosody, the majority do not add to the discussion. For a critic who ties in Whitman's prosody to his idea of a New

American Bible, see Hodder.

11 Quaker minister Elias Hicks had a big impact on Whitman's ideas. With his parents, the poet saw Hicks speak at Morrison's Hotel Ballroom in Brooklyn in November 1829. Whitman wanted to write a book about Hicks, and although this did not happen, the poet, nonetheless, produced an essay, "Elias Hick" in November Boughs. See PW 2: 626-53.

Father Taylor, best known as the inspiration for Melville's Father Mapple in Moby-Dick, served in Boston at the Methodist Seamen's Bethel. Whitman wrote "Father Taylor (and Oratory)" also for November Boughs in 1888. See PW 2: 549-52.

12 For additional accentual-syllabic discourse on Whitman's verse, see Schyberg; Wright; Asselineau; Mitchell; Sutton 10-24; Bollabas 59-117; Bidney; and Edwin Fussell 123-34.

13 For another presentation of the New Critics' attempts to keep the nationalistic, free verse Whitman out of the American Poetry canon, see, Golding 88-113. Among other things, Golding sees Pounds and Eliot's dislike of Whitman influencing the New Critics Allen Tate and Robert Penn Warren. See, also, in this regard, Brooks and Warren's anthology Understanding Poetry, in which these New Critics show their dislike of Whitman by only including "Pioneers! O Pioneers!," one of Whitman's most metrical constant poems.

14 Without opening a can of prosodic worms by tracing the various arguments concerning Old English prosody, I will point out that it is very common to discover hypermetrical

variations in Old English verse, specifically Beowulf. Like most accentual-syllabic prosodists, Wimsatt and Beardsley's knowledge of the debates in Old English scansion is limited. To merely reduce Anglo-Saxon poetry to a Norton anthology statement of a stress-measure is to be unfamiliar with the complex work of scholars like Sievers, whose five-types of feet found in poems like Beowulf allow for elision as well as a variable amount of unstressed syllables. Furthermore, most scholars now agree that Old English poetry utilized not only stress patterns, but also the length of long and short vowels, thereby creating an alliterative-accentual-quantitative measure. Like many critics before and after them, Wimsatt and Beardsley mistakenly compare Whitman's verse to Old English metrics, without having first-hand knowledge of the ancient prosodic systems. Furthermore, although Old English poetry uses appositive structures (key-phrases inserted into a given poem to make it easier to remember and therefore recite, as one argument goes), and has a set-aside metrical structure to insert for rhythm's sake, neither significantly impact overall prosodic patterns. It is not, as Fussell quotes Wimsatt and Beardsley as saying, similar nor as constant as the parallel structure found in Hebrew verse and Walt Whitman. Fussell and his sources, quite frankly, miss the mark concerning this discussion.

For other critics who attempt to connect Whitman's prosody with a oversimplification of Old English measure, see Bernbrock; Catel; Bradley; and Matthiessen. For a survey of Old English prosody (one which, nonetheless, resembles the various arguments concerning Whitman's verse in many odd

ways), see Luecke 1-30. For important presentations from various camps, see Sievers; Baum; Bliss; Cable; Hoover; John Collins Pope; F.H. Whitman.

## II. FEUDAL, BUT FREE-BOUND

1 As editor of Whitman's The Early Poems and the Fiction, Brasher says that "the kindest remark one can make about Whitman's early verse is that it was conventional" (xv). Furthermore, Brasher wrongfully challenges the notion discussed by some critics that Whitman, in these early poems, was adequate at writing in conventional prosody (xvi). He claims that "Whitman's handling of conventional metrics was awkward and inexpert" (xvi) until in 1850 he started writing in less traditional metrics. Similarly, as David S. Reynolds points out in his Walt Whitman's America, biographer Paul Zweig did not start documenting Whitman's life until 1848, thus ignoring the earlier poems and fiction (84). On a different note, for an interesting, gay studies' approach to Whitman's early verse, see Fone 36-46.

2 For Whitman's early readings and influences as well as his general state of mind during these formative pre-Leaves years, see Stovall; Asselineau, "European"; Price, "Whitman's" 127-32; David S. Reynolds' Walt Whitman's.

3 For discussion of "Resurgemus" and Whitman's first free verse poems as representing his political desire for freedom as well as Whitman's Biblical prosody, see Larry J. Reynolds.

4 For dialogue on how Whitman's prosody reflects the freedom

of the newly founded United States, see Avi-Ram; Tapscott; Cushman's Fictions; Sutton. For early mention of this idea, see Holloway; Querist.

<sup>5</sup> Chesin's argument concerning the later editions of Leaves of Grass differs from mine, however. Chesin sees the same organic approach operating in subsequent editions, whereas I believe Whitman, after 1855, started examining more closely the prosody of individual lines. For the possible influence of Christian C.J. Bunsen and Maximilian Schele de Vere on Whitman's theory of organic form, see Warren's "Organic Theory" 516-21.

For critics who have discussed Whitman's organic form, see Killingsworth's The Growth; Larson; Allen's New Walt Whitman Handbook; Bradley's "The Fundamental Metrical"; Christensen; De Selincourt; Kennedy.

Warren, however, descends from the scholarly acceptance of Whitman's organic theory. In "'The Free Growth of Metrical Laws,'" Warren sees Whitman's "organic form" theory as a way for the poet to "remain silent about his formal innovations" whereas he "protects himself from being tied to any formal tradition those innovations might call upon" (27). Apart from accepting the Biblical prosodic theory, though not the four types of syntactic parallelism Gay Wilson Allen describes, Warren sees Whitman's poems often consisting of a 3-4 beat accentual measure. By substituting meter for rhythm, the poet, Warren believes, uses syntactic parallelism in his catalogues to create "a rhythmical frame for the 'free growth' both of Whitman's 'metrical laws' and of his complex

poetic self" (41).

<sup>6</sup> For treatments on nineteenth-century, American writers' rebellion against English literature, see Weisbuch; Matthiessen; David S. Reynolds' Beneath the American Renaissance.

<sup>7</sup> For analysis of Whitman's ideas on Manifest Destiny and National Expansion, see Renner; Smith.

<sup>8</sup> For Whitman's journey motif, see Allen's "Walt Whitman's Long Journey"; Lewis' "Walt Whitman"; Mason.

<sup>9</sup> On Whitman's printing career, see David S. Reynolds' Walt Whitman's; Traubel's WWC, Vol. 1; Whitman's Walt Whitman's New York.

<sup>10</sup> Johnson treats Whitman's dots/ellipses in the first edition of Leaves of Grass. Also, in "Rhetoric, Elocution, and Voice in Leaves of Grass," Hollis traces the poet's use of dots to the "many texts and guides to elocution, rhetorical grammar, and oratory in early nineteenth-century America" (1).

<sup>11</sup> In chapter 5 I will deal with Whitman's "sea-prosody."

<sup>12</sup> Whitman's use of the present participle to show time's progression into the future has been noted by several critics. For how the "ing" endings in Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" create a sense of the "ever-returning life" as well as the "inexorability of the natural and verbal order the poet invokes" (33) see Blasing's "Whitman's 'Lilacs'". For more on this connection, see,

also, Hollis' chapter "Speech Acts and Leaves of Grass," in his Language and Style in Leaves of Grass (65-123).

13 Chari; Crawley; and Berkove all deal with Whitman's views on Pantheism and the Poet as God.

### III. SEX PROSODY

<sup>1</sup> Written on July 21, 1855, congratulating Whitman on the first edition of Leaves of Grass, Emerson's famous letter from Concord reads:

Dear Sir,

I am not blind to the worth of the wonderful gift of "Leaves of Grass." I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit & wisdom that America has yet contributed. I am very happy in reading it, as great power makes us happy. It meets the demand I am always making of what seemed the sterile & stingy Nature, as if too much handiwork or too much lymph in the temperament were making our western wits fat & mean.

I give you joy of your free & brave thought. I have great joy in it. I find incomparable things said incomparably well, as they must be. I find the courage of *treatment*, which so delights us, & which large perception only can inspire.

I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere, for such a start. I rubbed my eyes a little to see if this sunbeam were no illusion; but the solid sense of the

book is a sober certainty. It has the best merits of fortifying & encouraging.

I did not know until I, last night, saw the book advertised in a newspaper, that I could trust the name as real & available for a Post-office. I wish to see my benefactor, & have felt much like striking my tasks, & visiting New York to pay you my respects.

R.W. Emerson

(Corr. 1: 41)

Whitman, without Emerson's permission and somewhat to his dismay, republished this letter in the New York Tribune on October 10, as well as excerpts from it on the spine of his 1856, second edition of Leaves of Grass, reprinting the entire letter in an appendix inside, along with his unmailed response. For Whitman's complete response to Emerson's letter, see CRE 730-39.

<sup>2</sup> David S. Reynolds has written extensively about Whitman's desire to write against his time period's repressed sexuality, as well as to fight against the lewd depiction of sexual relations by sensational writers like George Thomas. For discussion about how Whitman rebels against the established sexual attitudes of his time, see, Reynolds, "Whitman and Nineteenth-Century" and "Sex Is the Root of It All: Eroticism and Gender," in Walt Whitman's 194-234. Concerning Whitman's rebellion against nineteenth-century attitudes of sexuality and masturbation, see Killingsworth, "Whitman's Love-Spendings." See, also, for the most recent work in this regard, Pollak, who "link's Whitman's critique

of American sexual ideology and practice to the underlying anxieties of his personal life" (xiii).

<sup>3</sup> Whitman, in this entry to his 1855-56 notebook, describes the need to rediscover the power of lost language in a passage that sounds very similar to the one above from "A Song of the Rolling Earth," written around the same time period: "Only first rate/The best poems have/the quality of arousing in/men and women who hear them/or read them those thoughts/that no words can ever/describe--great effects,/proportioned to the ideas,/images and characters/of the poem" (An 1855-56 Notebook 16).

<sup>4</sup> For studies on Whitman's fusion of sexuality and mysticism, see Killingsworth's Whitman's Poetry, specifically chapter 3 (89-130), which deals with the third edition of Leaves of Grass (1860) and its quest for sexual-mystical wholeness. See also Aspiz, "Sexuality." In a similar vein, for its concern with Whitman's belief that a healthy body breeds a healthy soul, see Aspiz, Walt Whitman 239-48.

<sup>5</sup> The whole representation of a "violent prosody" continues years after Whitman's death. A contemporary poem which throws violence into the line to illustrate physical violence is Theodore Roethke's "My Papa's Waltz." Critics, unfortunately, have argued repeatedly over whether Roethke's poem is playful or depicts domestic violence. The answer, of course, rests in the prosody:

The whiskey on your breath  
Could make a small boy dizzy;  
But I hung on like death:

Such waltzing was not easy.

We romped until the pans  
Slid from the kitchen shelf;  
My mother's countenance  
Could not unfrown itself.

The hand that held my wrist  
Was battered on one knuckle;  
At every step you missed  
My right ear scraped a buckle.

You beat time on my head  
With a palm caked hard by dirt,  
Then waltzed me off to bed  
Still clinging to my shirt.

(45)

In "My Papa's Waltz," it is easy to see only the surface of the drunk's behavior, and likewise only the surface of the poem's words. Beneath the singsongy iambic trimeter (with various feminine-endings in alternate lines), however, a violence apart from the poem's illusion of happiness and play resides in the metrical variations: "beat time," "palm caked hard." For, either the father lacks drumming skill, or is so inebriated he can't keep a beat. Or, as I will argue, Roethke is metrically illustrating domestic violence. These spondaic variations prove the poem is, indeed, about child abuse.

In the 11th line, furthermore, we see how specific

metrical variations can follow subject matter. If we are bold enough to revise Roethke's poem, we can substitute "each" for "every" so that the line misses a beat, has five syllables instead of the normal six. This metrical beat-missing would depict the father missing a beat when he is dancing drunk. The stresses of "each step" could be seen as the physical action of the father's foot stumbling, scrapping the floor twice in his intoxication. In this sense the poem's line would follow content even more than it does in its present version.

Yet, there is a good possibility that Roethke did not use "each" because without it the line becomes ironic, like the poem's singsong meter. Furthermore, since a knowledgeable and attuned reader will expect "each," its absence creates meaning--something we, as readers, expect does not happen--a tension in the line similar to the anxiety one feels being around an alcoholic, expecting him to become violent, and shocked when he does not. Thus, we never know what to expect out of Roethke's meter, in the same sense we never know what to expect out of a drunk. They can be gentle (the base meter); they can be brutal (the stress variations).

6 Many women critics have written about Whitman's themes of equality between the sexes. For these discussions, see Fern; Erkkila's Whitman 308-23; Pollak's "'In Loftiest Spheres.'"

7 The controversy over Whitman's sexual preference begins with John Addington Symonds' famous letter to Whitman in 1890 asking the poet specifically about the gay content in the "Calamus" cluster. Whitman, in a somewhat discontented reply, speaks of the six children he had fathered out of

wedlock. For Whitman and Symonds' correspondence, see Symonds, The Letters of John Addington Symonds.

The sexual preference debate continued when Emory Holloway noticed that in the manuscript for "Once I Pass'd through a Populous City," (from the "Children of Adam" cluster), Whitman had originally addressed the poem to a male. Holloway, after extensive research, believed that Whitman was truthful in his response to Symonds, and published Free and Lonesome Heart to back up the poet's claim.

For the recent biography which approaches Whitman's life as a homosexual, see Schmidgall. For the problems of reconstructing Whitman's sexual life, see Kaplan, "Biographer's." For a full discussion on how the poetry reflects Whitman's homosexual tendencies, see Martin, Homoerotic. See also Fone; Erkkila and Grossman, specifically Moon and Sedgwick 23-29, Yingling 135-46, and Michael Davidson 220-37.

<sup>8</sup> Whitman's starting and ending his poems in perfect iambs is an obvious prosodic practice which looks forward to poems by William Carlos Williams. In fact, Whitman begins his 1855 Leaves of Grass' with perfect iambic trimeter, in what later becomes "Song of Myself."

Finch notes Whitman's frequent use of an iambic pentameter measure in the first two lines of his poems:

Among the 396 separate poems of Leaves of Grass, over 15 percent (61 poems) begin with scannable iambic pentameters. In an additional 27 poems, for example

"Passage to India," which opens "Singing my days,/Singing the great achievements of the present," the second line is a pentameter. 24 further poems have the line I call an *embedded iambic pentameter*--a scannable pentameter forming the beginning or end of a longer line--as the first or second line. An example is the first line of "O Magnet-South": "O magnet-South! O glistening perfumed South--my South!" where a pentameter with one trisyllabic substitution in the fourth foot constitutes the portion of the line before the dash. Thus, an iambic pentameter appears in the first two lines of 112 poems, well over a quarter of all the poems in Leaves of Grass.

(43)

<sup>9</sup> In chapter 5, I will deal with Whitman's "walking prosody." For now, though, it is important to note that in an early version of "In Paths Untrodden," Whitman mixes up the various feet, but still sticks to an iambic base to describe "walking." Notice specifically the iambic base of the first and last line of the passage below. The last line speaks of giving up walking completely if a loved one is not there to follow. Notice how Whitman depicts the sadness and fear of walking through life alone by bruising the iambic base of the line with two spondees ("care not," "dear friend") and one trochaic foot ("walk by"):

Was it I who walked the earth disclaiming all except  
what I had in myself?

Was it I boasting how complete I was in myself?

O little I counted the comrade indispensable to me!  
O how my soul--How the soul of man feeds, re-joices in  
its lovers, its dear friends!  
And now I care not to walk the earth unless a lover, a  
dear friend, walk by my side.

(Whitman's Manuscripts 68)

10 Whitman also mimetically uses this anapestic "strut-rhythm" in line 19 of "Song of Myself." In that instance, we find five anapests followed by an amphibrach: "I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked." See CRE 29.

#### IV. THE POETIC NOISE OF WAR

1 For Whitman's views on the English Romantics, see Price, "'An American Bard.'"

2 In "Poetry To-day in America--Shakspeare--The Future," Whitman criticizes poets for focusing on pleasant sounds for the ear. For Whitman, there are other demands on a poet than those of sound, specifically the subject matter and meaning the poem conveys. The poet writes:

Leaving unnoticed at present the great masterpieces of the antique, or anything from the middle ages, the prevailing flow of poetry for the last fifty to eighty years, and now at its height, has been and is (like the music) an expression of mere surface melody, within narrow limits, and yet, to give it its due, perfectly satisfying to the demands of the ear, of wondrous charm,

of smooth and easy delivery, and the triumph of technical art. Above all things it is fractional and select. It shrinks with aversion from the sturdy, the universal, and the democratic.

(PW 2: 481)

In another passage on "verbal melody," Whitman writes: Longfellow in his voluminous works seems to me not only to be eminent in the style and forms of poetical expression that mark the present age (an idiosyncrasy, almost a sickness of verbal melody), but, to bring what is always dearest as poetry to the general human heart and taste, and probably must be so in the nature of things.

("Death of Longfellow" PW 1: 284)

To give an example of "sickness of verbal melody," one which goes along with the above discussion of birds and sound patterns, it is appropriate to show Sidney Lanier's poem "The Mocking Bird," published in 1877. Sound-wise, it is, for Lanier, actually quite tame:

Superb and sole, upon a plumed spray  
That o'er the general leafage boldly grew,  
He summ'd the woods in song; or typic drew  
The watch of hungry hawks, the lone dismay  
Of languid doves when long their lovers stray,  
And all birds' passion-plays that sprinkle dew  
At morn in brake or bosky avenue.

Whate'er birds did or dreamed, this bird could say.  
Then down he shot, bounced airily along  
The sward, twitched-in a grasshopper, made song

Midflight, perched, primped, and to his art again.  
Sweet Science, this large riddle read me plain:  
How may the death of that dull insect be  
The life of yon trim Shakspere on the tree?

(Poems 1-14)

<sup>3</sup> A member of the Rhymer's Club, Ernest Percival Rhys was influential in getting three of Whitman's volumes published by the Walter Scott firm in England. In 1886, this firm published a one-shilling edition of Leaves of Grass as part of their Canterbury Poets series, selling eight thousand copies in just two months. Rhys also helped publish Specimen Days in America in 1886, and Democratic Vistas (1887) as part of Scott's Camelot Series. On his trip to America in 1887, Rhys stopped in on Whitman, and the two men immediately bonded.

<sup>4</sup> Whitman often compared his poetry to music, as in this passage written around 1855-56:

My poems when complete should be a unity, in the same sense that the earth is, or that the human body, (senses, soul, head, trunk, feet, blood, viscera, man-root, eyes, hair) or that a perfect musical composition is....

(NF 55)

Nonetheless, in this passage and others like it, Whitman is using music as an analogy for poetic structure, and not as a prosodic model.

Critics, regardless, have tried diligently to fuse the two genres together, specifically the recitative-aria

structure in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd." The most significant study of music's influence on Whitman's prosody is that by Faner. See also De Selincourt who compares the repetitions of phrases in Whitman's poetry to the repetitions of musical structure. Also, for importance, see Louise Pound; Kramer; Sequeira; Chase; Stefanile.

5 Besides reviewing collections of speeches and oratory textbooks as a journalist, Whitman wrote various lectures on a whole spectrum of topics. The general consensus among Whitman scholars is that his attendance at various lectures helped form the oratory style of Leaves of Grass. For the most developed discussions on this influence, see Hollis, Azarnoff, and Finkel.

6 Although in "Eighteen Sixty-One" and "To a Certain Civilian," Whitman protests against using traditional prosody to depict the horrors of war, some of the Drum-Taps poems are more metrically conventional than work in the earlier editions of Leaves of Grass. As always concerning prosody, Whitman was contradictory. Since he perceived old-time feudalism as always being exemplified by traditional prosody, Whitman did not want the war poems to be wholly formal. Nonetheless, the poet saw the Civil War as a feudal battle and uses traditional prosody, in its feudalistic context, in parts of Drum-Taps as well.

One later prose passage records Whitman's belief that conventional prosody was feudal in nature:

The New World receives with joy the poems of the

antique, with European feudalism's rich fund of epics, plays, ballads--seeks not in the least to deaden or displace those voices from our ear and area--holds them indeed as indispensable studies, influences, records, comparisons. But though the dawn-dazzle of the sun of literature is in those poems for us of to-day--though perhaps the best parts of current character in nations, social groups, or any man's or woman's individuality, Old World or New, are from them--and though if I were ask'd to name the most precious bequest to current American civilization from all the hitherto ages, I am not sure but I would name those old and less old songs ferried hither from east and west--some serious words and debits remain; some acrid considerations demand a hearing. Of the great poems receiv'd from abroad and from the ages, and to-day enveloping and penetrating America, is there one that is consistent with these United States, or essentially applicable to them as they are and are to be? Is there one whose underlying basis is not a denial and insult to democracy?

(PW 2: 720)

For Whitman's view that the Civil War was indeed a feudal battle, unfortunately fought in a similar manner to old European wars, see Whitman's own "A New Army"; for an interpretation of Whitman's ideas concerning feudalistic combat during the Civil War, see Thomas 178-204.

<sup>7</sup> While hinting at the "walking-meter" concept I will deal with in chapter 5 of this discussion, Allen, in his New Walt

Whitman Handbook, notices how Whitman uses more metrical lines in Drum-Taps, the scholar connecting this prosodic conformity with Whitman's depiction of war's pain:

Apparently the poet found more conventional metrics either convenient or necessary for the expression of his experiences and emotions connected with the war. Even "Pioneers! O Pioneers!" is a marching poem. But what is more natural than that the poet's heartbeat would throb to the rhythms of marching feet--especially a poet who aspired to give organic expression to his own age and country?

(241-42)

Finch accepts Allen's argument, pointing out that throughout Leaves of Grass Whitman uses the pentameter to express war, pain, death, and imprisonment. She notes such poems, in and out of Drum-Taps, as "A Song of Joys," "The Artilleryman's Vision," "The Centenarian's Story," "You Felons on Trail in Courts," "As I Ebb'd With the Ocean of Life," "Thy Mother with Thy Equal Brood," and "Song of Myself" (50).

Both Allen and Finch are correct. In various parts of this study, however, I merely suggest that Whitman often, in his poems, uses perfect iambs to bring harmony to a painful or death situation.

<sup>8</sup> A curious exception to the strict end-rhymes of Civil War poems, and thus a complement to Whitman's "Eighteen Sixty-One" and "To a Certain Civilian," From Battle-Pieces, Herman Melville's "A Utilitarian View of the Monitor's Fight," an

anti-war piece, deals with the May 9, 1862 inconclusive battle between the Union ironclad Monitor and the Confederate ironclad Virginia:

PLAIN be the phrase, yet apt the verse,  
More ponderous than nimble;  
For since grimed War here laid aside  
His Orient pomp, 'twould ill befit  
Overmuch to ply  
The rhyme's barbaric cymbal.

Hail to victory without the gaud  
Of glory; zeal that needs no fans  
Of banners; plain mechanic power  
Plied cogently in War now placed--  
Where War belongs--  
Among the trades and artisans.

Yet this was battle, and intense--  
Beyond the strife of fleets heroic;  
Deadlier, closer, calm 'mid storm;  
No passion; all went on by crank,  
Pivot, and screw,  
And calculations of caloric.

Needless to dwell; the story's known.  
The ringing of those plates on plates  
Still ringeth round the world--  
The clangor of that blacksmiths' fray.  
The anvil-din

Resounds this message from the Fates:

War yet shall be, and to the end;  
But war-paint shows the streaks of weather;  
War yet shall be, but warriors  
Are now but operatives; War's made  
Less grand than Peace,  
And a single runs through lace and feather.

(1-30)

For Melville, the war-cries are best left to the makers of ships, and not poets. If poets chose to write on the war, they should use a clumsy measure to connote seriousness. As the first stanza of Melville's poem suggests, in such poems there is no room for the banging cymbal of rhyme overdone. Appropriately, rhyme is not abused in this poem, and in two stanzas only occurs once. Although many of Melville's war poems abuse rhyme, this one controls it. Thus, like Whitman, Melville perceives that prosody must change along with the times, be used to somehow mimic the tragedy of war. Undoubtedly, rhyme is used--as Melville points out in this poem, and as Whitman mentions in many of his writings--for a light, sometimes humorous topic, one therefore not suited for the weighty subject matter of the Civil War.

For comparisons and differences in techniques, themes, tone, and subject matter between Whitman's Drum-Taps and Melville's Battle-Pieces, see Hibler; McWilliams; Hudson.

<sup>9</sup> For the most in-depth analysis on the Civil War's influence over Whitman's political beliefs, see Erkill,

Whitman 190-225; and Thomas 178-204.

10 Sullivan sees various instances of symbolic drum-tapping important to Whitman's whole Drum-Taps cluster. He writes:

....I wish to suggest that the title of "Drum Taps" and the drum motif throughout the group are not derived solely from the subject-matter of this military experience. The taps change tempo, as I have suggested before, and in many places in the poems there are taps of other kinds and of other names. Drum tapping, and striking, and finally beating, are all forms of rhythm; the bugles blowing are rhythmic; the banner and pennant both are flapping and thereby contribute to the rhythm. With these observations, we should pause to reflect that rhythm has been an important concern since the Greeks claimed it as the motivating force in the soul, and is an especially important romantic concern. Rhythm and pulsation in "Drum Taps" are expressed therefore in more sophisticated and significant ways.

(45)

Sullivan believes Whitman's symbolic beat, in Drum-Taps, changes according to the speaker's emotional mood as the cluster develops. Although not prosodically driven, Sullivan's argument deserves attention.

On a similar note, Davis utilizes Derrida's essay, "Tympan," to shed light on Whitman's use of the "tympanum" in Drum-Taps. An interesting but vague connection, nonetheless, Davis writes:

The tools of the trade in Whitman's catalogue of arming

in "Drum-Taps" may remind us that the tympanum is a term not only from anatomy (the inner ear), percussion (the head of the drum), and architecture (a recessed panel), but a term from the printing press--and a term that Whitman, a trained printer, certainly knew.

(171)

Unique insights, but not much in the way of prosodic analysis. Possibly, for my own study, Davis' theory into how Whitman "occupies a middle ground rendered untenable by the oppositional politics of the Civil War" (164) is significant. For Whitman's prosody works in much the same manner throughout his career, beginning in the first edition of Leaves of Grass with a completely free verse measure and slowly coming round to more traditional forms.

11 Picker has formulated the same thematic argument on "Dirge for Two Veterans," and I am gratefully indebted to his work. Picker argues that in this poem the music of the march depicts the speaker's positive acceptance of death. Picker brings up the importance of sound-patterns to mimesis in Whitman's Drum-Taps, but only generally. Although the scholar points out in an endnote that articles by Borroff and Tsur may help one studying the sound-mimesis in Drum-Taps, Picker does not develop a detailed analysis of how these sound-patterns fit the meaning in Whitman's collection. While discussing "Dirge for Two Veterans," he writes:

The 'blows' of music 'strike' him in a way which wounds but also heals; for although he is struck 'through and through,' Whitman nevertheless finds their power

attractive: 'O strong dead-march you please me!' (29).

The music acts as a sedative which, with moonlight and Whitman's emotional response, brings tranquility to what would otherwise be an emotionless, empty funeral: 'And the bugles and the drums give you music,/And my heart, O my soldiers, my veterans,/My heart gives you love' (34-36). Like the musical dirge itself, the poem is a moving and beautiful evocation of loss and sorrow.

(234)

12 For Whitman's positive attitudes toward the new medium of photography, see Folsom, "Whitman" and Walt Whitman's 99-126. Importantly, this visual quality in Whitman's work anticipates Williams and the Imagist movement in the next century. For discussions of Whitman as a Pre-Imagist poet, see Cederstrom; Schwiebert; Sutton 250-53; and Edwin Fussell 135-50.

13 For both how Whitman hated and promotionally used "O Captain! My Captain!," see David S. Reynolds, Walt Whitman's 531, 533, 547, and 575.

14 In William Carlos Williams, Cushman sees Whitman's visual stanzaic pattern in "O Captain! My Captain!" as a precursor to Williams' triadic line. As Cushman notes, Whitman only uses a mimetic visual prosody on rare occasions. The critic quotes from William Carlos Williams' essay "E.E. Cummings's Paintings and Poems" (1954): "We (as all poets feel) are free to cut diagonally across the page as if it were a field of daisies to lie down among them when the sun is shining "to loaf at our ease" (71). Then, Cushman, quoting from the last

section of the last stanza of "O Captain, My Captain"--

Exult O shores, and ring O bells!

But I with mournful tread,

Walk the deck my Captain lies,

Fallen cold and dead.

--says: "Here Whitman does a little diagonal loafing of his own, cutting a path across the field of daisies for the triadic line to follow one hundred years later" (72).

#### V. A WALKING, SEA-DRIFTING RHYTHM

<sup>1</sup> Later in his essay, Lewis gets more specific in showing how Whitman's prosody, like his life, consists of an ebb and flow rhythm. Lewis correctly discusses Whitman's use of falling and rising rhythms to depict life's ebb and flow. Concerning the ending of "There was a Child Went Forth," when the child and the world have "been bought fully to interdependent life" (17), Lewis is insightful. After a complete poem of rising and falling rhythm to mimic the happy rise and fall of life, Lewis believes that the poet "settles back in a line that neither rises nor falls; a line that rests in a sort of permanent stillness; a subdued iambic of almost perfectly even stress" (17). Unfortunately, Lewis fails to mention that for Whitman to end (and begin, for that matter) a poem in iambs is a common occurrence (see note 8 for chapter 3 of this study). And, more importantly, the last two lines of "There was a Child Went Forth" are not iambic, anyway. No matter how one scans the lines "There became part of that child who went forth every day, and who

now goes, and will always go forth every day" (CRE 39), spondaic repetition is the overriding meter. Furthermore, Lewis's strange scansion symbols are incomprehensible. For more insight on iambs as a base norm in Whitman see Cristanne Miller and Finch 31-56.

2 Curiously, Symonds mentions the idea of "lame" walking meter in his Studies of the Greek Poets (1880) to describe the choliambi of Hipponax:

In order apparently to bring the metre still more within the sphere of prose and common speech, Hipponax ended his Iambics with a spondee or a trochee instead of an iambus, doing thus the most utmost violence to the rhythmical structure. These deformed and mutilated verses were called [choliambi] (lame or limping Iambics). They communicate a curious crustiness to the style. The Choliambi are in poetry what the dwarf or cripple is in human nature. Here again, by their acceptance of this halting metre, the Greeks displayed their acute aesthetic sense of propriety, recognizing the harmony which subsists between crabbed verses and the distorted subjects with which they dealt--the vices and perversions of humanity--as well as their agreement with the snarling spirit of the satirist. Deformed verse was suited to deformed morality.

(175-76)

It is true, Symonds deeply admired Whitman, but this passage is not Whitman-influenced. The idea of meter as being "walking" goes back in time. In fact, Greek scansion,

by which we get our basic feet terminology for accentual-syllabicism, refers to a trochee foot as "a running." The choliambus, as Symonds rightly notices, the Greeks called a "scazon," which translates into "limping." Unlike Whitman's idea on sea-prosody, there is no known source where the poet may have come across the connection between meter and walking. For Symonds' relationship with Whitman, see chapter 3's note 7.

<sup>3</sup> In Democratic Vistas (1871), Whitman also ironically criticizes "the smooth walks, trimm'd hedges, poseys and nightingales of the English poets" (PW 2: 417). Furthermore, as Cushman notices, this quotation is odd in the light of the fact that Whitman refers to his own metrics as being similar to the "carefully cultivated (the chestnut excepted), and even (in the case of lilacs and roses) ornamental, products of gardens, groves, and orchards" (Fictions 25).

<sup>4</sup> Behind many arguments even today concerning the superiority of formal verse over non-metrical poetry is the notion that a poet cannot adequately create, out of chaos, mimetic metrics in free verse. This argument maintains that if one writes in traditional metrics one will be more able to break the rhythm of a poem to create meaning. In light of this belief, there should be many mimetic metrical variations in Whitman's "Pioneers, O Pioneers!," but this is far from the case. In the traditional metrics of "Pioneers, O Pioneers!" Whitman, although breaking the trochaic meter in several spots, never uses a substitute foot to illustrate his subject matter. In this poem, metrical mimesis is never

found within the line.

Jannacone claims that Whitman, in the last line of "Pioneers, O Pioneers!," by switching from trochaic to dactylic measure, creates a change "as swift and as concise as a war order...As though to muster and incite humanity to the eternal struggle" (33). This observation, in any event, comes from an overactive mind desperately trying to find metric mimesis where it is not present. Here is the poem's last stanza:

Till with sound of trumpet,  
Far, far off the daybreak call--hark! how loud and clear  
I hear it wind,  
Swift! to the head of the army!--swift! spring to your  
places,  
Pioneers! O pioneers!

(CRE 101-04)

In my mind, the most important metrical substitution in "Pioneers" is actually an addition of four stresses to the 42nd line. This stanza reads:

Raise the mighty mother mistress,  
Waving high the delicate mistress, over all the starry  
mistress,  
(bend your heads all,)  
Raise the fang'd and warlike mistress, stern, impassive,  
weapon'd mistress,  
Pioneers! O pioneers!

(CRE 41-44)

The phrase "bend your heads all" interrupts the metrical flow, but its significance looks forward to the page as a

field of prosody (a phrase Charles Olsen later uses in his essays on Projective Verse) since it is a visual technique and not a metrical one. In other words, one may see the placement of this phrase (though possibly accidental) as the soldiers bending their heads to worship the American flag which the passage describes. Visually on the page, the whole stanza itself could be the body of one of the soldiers, and having the phrase indented from the beginning of the line visually represents his head. Of course this is a run-on line so it will be indented when printed. Still, the indentation works visually to show the bending of the soldier's head while worshipping the American flag. One can never prove that Whitman was aware of this, but even so it turns out to be a happy, mimetic accident. The whole stanza (as well as the other stanzas), in fact, visually represents the American flag which Whitman is describing, as the lines wave in different lengths across the page. The same form, however, is used to no effect in his later poem, "Eidolons." In fact, these visual techniques are rare in Whitman's work.

For other discussions of the trochaic meter in "Pioneers," see Allen's "On the Trochaic Meter," a response to Fletcher's essay.

<sup>5</sup> Emerson, referring to Poe's obnoxious meter, called Poe the "jingle-man." Whitman--as noted in the previous chapter--was not too fond of Poe's noisy prosody, either. In "Edgar Poe's Significance," dated January 1, 1880, Whitman writes that "Poe's verses illustrate an intense faculty for technical and abstract beauty, with the rhyming art to

excess, an incorrigible propensity toward nocturnal themes, a demoniac undertone behind every page" (PW 1: 231). In his own long-winded way, Whitman continues:

The inevitable tendency of poetic culture to morbidity, abnormal beauty--the sickliness of all technical thought or refinement in itself--the abnegation of the perennial and democratic concretes at first hand, the body, the earth and sea, sex and the like--and the substitution of something for them at second or third hand--what bearings have they on current pathological study?

(232-33)

Likewise, in Horace Traubel's With Walt Whitman, the poet, when asked to respond to Edmund Gosse's statement of Poe's great influence on English poets, says this:

He [Edmund Gross] means in technique--of all things, metrical niceties! Gosse's applause of Poe is like admiration for a shop window crowded with delicacies: is like a polite Episcopal preacher's estimate, analysis, of a Catholic priest.

(2: 518)

<sup>6</sup> A myriad of critics have reiterated, in very general terms, Whitman's quotation on how the sea influenced his prosody. As friends of the poet, many of these earlier scholars were trying desperately to improve Whitman's poetic reputation. Nonetheless, even recent critics buy into this general argument started by Whitman. None of these authors truly scan the poems to show exactly how the ocean is translated into Whitman's prosody. Since these critics often

mention other general approaches to Whitman's prosody, the sea-meter concept may only be dealt with in passing. For these general arguments, see Burroughs; Scott; Noyes 46-101; Gummere 96-148; Boynton; Kalita; Bush; Quinlan; Olney 1-43.

<sup>7</sup> Wiley has written that epanaphora (or *anaphora*, the more common term) "appears in some form in 262 of the 403 poems that make up the latest edition [Holloway's 1927 version] of Leaves of Grass" (161). Unfortunately, like many Whitman prosodists who deal only with statistics, Wiley does not discuss the mimetic importance of epanaphora. In this statistical regard, her article is similar to Erskine's numeral approach to the run-on lines in Leaves of Grass, from which she readily quotes. Erskine basically re-breaks Whitman's lines so they utilize run-on endings and medial periods. If Whitman desired run-on endings and medial periods in his poems, however, he would have printed them that way.

For another scholar's syntactical mapping of anaphora in Whitman's verse, see Magnus.

<sup>8</sup> One critic who gives a more specific twist to Whitman's sea-metrics, Weeks writes:

....And though Whitman was aware that he had not perfected this fresh poetic form, he rough-hews for us its basic element. His lines rise, break, and slip back; rise, break, and slip back--now short and sharp, now long and slow, but ever beating, beating, beating, like the moving sea. His rhythmic unit is the vocal wave. And for all the *verse libre* writers who have

followed him, he has written:

Murmuring under, pervading all, I bring the  
rustling sea sound

That ceaselessly sounds from the two great seas of  
the world.

This wave has two forms, one of which includes the other as a billow carries ripples on its surface: the stanza and the phrase. The whole poem, composed of these shorter units each complete in itself, each having a certain rising and falling movement, possesses a large oceanic rhythm. The stanzas of "The Last Invocation" ebb and flow in regular sequence, the pitch of the voice, the emphasis, the tone volume mounting up broad level steps from comma to comma, till at the end of each stanza, emphasis and tone volume slip quickly downward with the gliding motion of a crested wave that, trembling one moment at the full, slides back upon itself and melts in the general surface of the sea. Stanza one is a longer, heavier wave than two and three, but the similarity in stanza plan, the up-movement with the apex toward the end, gives unity to the structure of the poem.

At the last tenderly  
From the walls of the powerful, fortified house,  
From the clasp of the knitted locks, from the keep  
of the well-closed doors,  
Let me be wafted.

Let me glide noiselessly forth;

With the key of softness unlock the locks, with a  
whisper  
Unlock the doors, O Soul.

Tenderly, be not impatient.  
Strong is your hold, O mortal flesh  
Strong is your hold, O love!

(15)

Weeks sees at least one occurrence where a phrasal structure, the "emphasis foot," corresponds to iambic rhythm in Whitman, as in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry." However, she feels it wise to question such a rising succession of phrases and sentences in the English language, ones which would appear "wearisome, strained, tense, and un-English" (18).

## VI. FULL CIRCLE

<sup>1</sup> The view that Whitman's poetic talents waned, for various reasons, is expressed in the relatively recent scholarship by Hutchinson; Killingsworth, Whitman's Poetry; Greenspan; Bauerlain.

<sup>2</sup> Whitman's first stroke occurred on January 23, 1873, leaving him paralyzed. In June 1888, he suffered another, this one turning him into a semi-invalid needing care for the remainder of his life.

<sup>3</sup> Bidney sees Whitman's spondees as a significant device even in the early poems, specifically what subsequently becomes section 33 of the 1855 version of "Song of Myself."

Bidney claims the spondee is a part of Whitman's plan to add a conversational tone to American poetry. He writes that "a poetic voice that delights in spondees is one that favors robust, natural talk, forthrightness, and a bit of swagger" (92).

<sup>4</sup> With its rhyme scheme, "Ethiopia Saluting the Colors" (1867), which Whitman in 1881 placed in the Drum-Taps cluster, is another example of the poet's move to formal prosody during this time period:

Who are you dusky woman, so ancient hardly human,  
With your woolly-white and turban'd head, and bare bony  
feet?

Why rising by the roadside here, do you the colors  
greet?

('Tis while our army lines Carolina's sands and pines,  
Forth from thy hovel door thou Ethiopia com'st to me,  
As under doughty Sherman I march toward the sea.)

*Me master years a hundred since from my parents  
sunder'd,  
A little child, they caught me as the savage beast is  
caught,  
Then hither me across the sea the cruel slaver brought.*

No further does she say, but lingering all the day,  
Her high-borne turban'd head she wags, and rolls her  
darkling eye,

And courtesies to the regiments, the guidons moving by.

What is it fateful woman, so blear, hardly human?

Why wag your head with turban bound, yellow, red and  
green?

Are the things so strange and marvelous you see or have  
seen?

(CRE 1-15)

In this poem, Whitman wavers between an iambic heptameter and an iambic hexameter base measure. For Whitman, this exotic meter illustrates the exoticism of the woman described in the poem. Whitman, in many prose statements, spoke of the comic effect of traditional meter and rhyme. Thus, the meter and rhyme in this poem add a comic effect and help intensify the woman's strangeness. Furthermore, line 11's stresses mimic the lady's head wagging, possibly implying mental illness.

<sup>5</sup> For Whitman's attendance at Parepa-Rosa's performance in "Sing Sing Prison," see Traubel's In Re Walt Whitman 370.

<sup>6</sup> Whitman's allusion to classical measure predates by many years Pound's technique of mimicking a whole history of meter in various passages in the Cantos. For a discussion of Pound's metrical dexterity, see Davie 77-98.

<sup>7</sup> This is proof that critics who scan Whitman according to syntactical structures and "thought-measure" are often right. Mostly, though, these scholars do not notice the metrical significance of any given poem.

In terms of Whitman's "thought-measure," Kennedy has one

of the earliest notes. In a footnote to the following passage, he cites the opening lines of the Sapphic "Hymn to the Aphrodite," claiming the law of "thought-measure" has always required a certain set of syllables, even in Greek prosody:

But Whitman never breaks a verse on the wheel. So far as I can discover, about the average number of syllables required to express a single poetical thought is from sixteen or twenty to twenty-five. I at least affirm that about one half of all simple poetical thoughts require that much articulated breath to get them uttered. Every one of Whitman's lucid Greek pages illustrates the statement. His work is nearly always blocked out into lines of periods the length of which corresponds with the natural length of the thoughts.

(169)

In my opinion, to compare Whitman's prosody to Greek qualitative measure, is a prosodic pipe-dream. Obviously, Kennedy is inflating Whitman's reputation in an attempt to place the poet in the canon of great American poets and thinkers. Essentially, nothing is wrong with this comradeship, but in terms of a scientific theory of Whitman's prosody, Kennedy's analysis is lacking, to say the least.

Blasing also picks up this idea of a "thought-measure." Blasing sees Whitman's line units as thoughts based solely on the phonetic, syntactic, and semantic parallelism of the Old Testament. Nothing, however, is new to Blasing's approach to Whitman's poetics. In contrast, Bollobas is more insightful. Although she basically rehashes the most dominant approaches

to Whitman's measure--most importantly Sculley Bradley's "hoving stress" theory--her discussion is in-depth and well-thought out, giving a new perspective to previous scholarship.

<sup>8</sup> Whitman, in his short lyric, "The Beauty of the Ship," uses perfect iambs to create harmony, as well. This short poem-- which blends many meters together for four lines to show the ship's destruction endured during its long life-- ends in perfect iambs, suggesting that now that its journey is over the poet sees only the positive aspects of the ship, its beauty. Here is the poem in its entirety:

When, staunchly entering port,  
After long ventures, hauling up, worn and old,  
Battered by sea and wind, torn by many a fight,  
With the original sails all gone, replaced, or mended,  
I only saw, at last, the beauty of the Ship.

(CRE 1-5)

<sup>9</sup> In later poems, Whitman does associate iambic measure with the human heart-beat. For example, in "The Mystic Trumpeter," in a line of perfect iambic pentameter, with one final hovering unstress, Whitman describes the beating of lovers' hearts: "The glow, the blush, the beating hearts of lovers" (CRE 37). For a discussion of Whitman's heart-beat prosody, see Snodgrass, as mentioned in this study's introduction.

<sup>10</sup> Later poets like William Carlos Williams were quick to reproduce Dickinson's visual mimetic prosody, but poets

writing in both form and free verse today often use this technique so excessively that it appears as a cheap prosodic trick.

11 Once again, in "The Mystic Trumpeter" (1872), for example, uses the spondee "long dead" to show the fierce impact of death on life: "Ladies and cavaliers long dead, barons are in their castle halls, the troubadours are singing" (CRE 24).

12 In a letter dated October 18, 1882 to Bridges, Gerard Manley Hopkins wrestles with "The Spirit That Form'd This Scene." In order to show Hopkins' mixed feelings about his own prosody being associated with Whitman's, as well as the on-going debate--at that time--concerning whether Whitman's verse is indeed verse or merely prose, I quote from a large section of the letter:

...Now prose rhythm in English is always one of two things (allowing my convention about scanning upwards or from slack to stress and not from stress to slack)--either iambic or anapaestic. You may make a third measure (let us call it) by intermixing them. One of these three simple measures then, all iambic or all anapaestic or mingled iambic and anapaestic, is what he in every case means to write. He dreams of no other and he *means* a rugged or, as he calls it in that very piece 'Spirit that formed this scene' (which is very instructive and should be read on this very subject), a 'savage' art and rhythm.

Extremes meet, and (I must for truth's sake say what sounds pride) this savagery of his art, this rhythm in its last ruggedness and decomposition into common prose, comes near the last elaboration of mine. For that piece of mine is very highly wrought. The long lines are not rhythm run to seed: everything is weighed and timed in them. Wait till they have taken hold of your ear and you will find it so. No, but what it is like is the rhythm of Greek tragic choruses or of Pindar: which is pure sprung rhythm. And that has the same changes of cadence from point to point as this piece. If you want to try it, read one till you have settled the true places of the stress, mark these, then read it aloud, and you will see. Without this these choruses are prose bewitched; with it they are sprung rhythm like that piece of mine.

Besides, why did you not say *Binsey Poplars* was like Whitman? The present piece is in the same kind and vein, but developed, an advance. The lines and the stanzas (of which there are two in each poem and having much the same relation to one another) are both longer, but the two pieces are greatly alike: just look. If so how is this a being untrue to myself? I am sure it is no such thing.

The above remarks are not meant to run down Whitman. His 'savage' style has advantages, and he has chosen it; he says so. But you cannot eat your cake and keep it: he eats his off-hand, I keep mine. It makes a very great difference. Neither do I deny all

resemblance. In particular I noticed in "Spirit that formed this scene' a preference for the alexandrine. I have the same preference: I came to it by degrees, I did not take it from him....

(156-57)

## VII. ENVOI

<sup>1</sup> Speaking with Walter Sutton in 1961, Williams mentions his variable foot (a term originally used by Poe) in the context of free verse:

If you want to talk about the variable foot, which is very dear to my heart, I'll begin by saying something about free verse. But, to my mind, there is no such thing as free verse. It's a contradiction in terms. The verse is measured. No measure can be free. We may say Whitman's verse is a typical example of what is spoken of as free verse. It was a term originated I think in France by Paul Fort, who was an innovator, a poet who wrote in the manner of Whitman. And the variable foot is measured. But the spaces between the stresses, the rhythmical units, are variable. Whitman's verse could be counted as spaced, let us say, spaced long or short, but variable.

(Interviews 38)

Here Williams implies that free verse does have a measure, but one which is not consciously planned by poets or readers, and therefore not ordered, and this is its flaw. According to Williams, all poetry is patterned if we take the time to

scan it in various ways. Furthermore, since poets must scan their measure, they no longer need free verse or Whitman's inability to theorize. Whitman, Williams says elsewhere, stumbled across something like the variable foot, but out of metrical laziness, he did not consciously recognize it.

For Williams' essays which deal with Whitman, see "America, Whitman"; "Against the Weather" 70-78; Spring and All 38, 84. Williams' Introduction to The Illustrated Leaves of Grass, is extremely significant, however. Here, Williams finally owes up to Whitman's contribution to American prosody, writing that only in the present time period has it "been realized how deep Whitman had disturbed the prosody of past ages by his instinctive release under the primitive conditions in his native country, an idiom which he adopted without question" (10). Concerning meter, Williams writes that "all modern American poets must acknowledge that they date, when it comes to the measure of their verses, from Whitman" (12).

For how Williams often misunderstands or overlooks Whitman's prosodic flexibility, specifically in Drum-Taps, see Tapscott 109-25. For the most important study of Williams' prosody and its relationship to Whitman's, see Cushman's William Carlos Williams.

<sup>2</sup> As further proof the Modernists were struggling with Whitman's prosody--what exactly it was, and where prosodically to go from free verse and *ver libre*--see Lowell; Monroe.

<sup>3</sup> For me, personally, contemporary poetry is scanned

occurring to the length of the sentence. My theory is that although contemporary poets do not know it, their short poems are measured unconsciously by the sentence-flow or rhythm.

This, we must leave, for another study, however.

<sup>4</sup> For views of these writers and other Neo-Formalists on prosody, see Feirstein.

<sup>5</sup> See Mariani and Murphy's compilation for Tendrils.

Observe, specifically, Levertov, Ryan, and Simic. For the relevant issue of Poetry East, see Jones and Daniels. From this issue, the work of Levertov, McGrath, Revell, Shapiro, Oresick, and Fulton is noteworthy.

<sup>6</sup> For a survey of scholarship over the most recent prosodic approaches to the free verse line, see Berry. Also, for a series of contemporary essayists who speak of free verse prosody in unique ways, see Frank and Sayre. Besides these editors' introduction, specifically examine Perloff. For a discussion on the sentence as the unit of measure in prose and how it relates to free verse today, see McCaffery. For discussion of the 1960s free verse revival, see Hongo.

<sup>7</sup> Sutton is another contemporary prosodist who believes traditional accentual-syllabic scansion is not appropriate to Whitman (245). Sutton argues for different approaches to free verse prosody. In his book, however, Sutton contradicts himself by noting the trochaic/dactylic meter of "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" (249).

<sup>8</sup> The "Barry" who Hartman refers to is Sister M. Martin

Barry, O.P, who throws a prosodic light on the myriad of ways iambic verse can be loosened. Hartman feels that Barry's demotion and promotion of syllables often get in the way of how she scans a line, "forcing her to overlook regularities that the lines do exhibit" (116).

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VITA

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Doctor of Philosophy

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