WALT WHITMAN'S ANOMALY

BY

W. C. RIVERS

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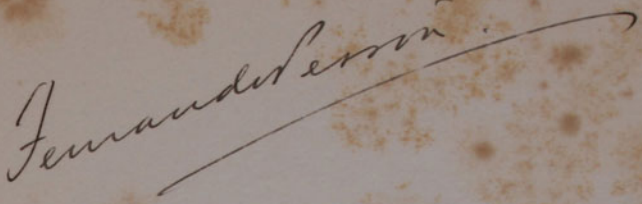

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WALT WHITMAN AND DOYLE

From a Washington photograph

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44 & 45 RATHBONE PLACE
1913

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CONTENTS

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I

INTRODUCTORY

THE present writer—a medical man—chanced one day to take up Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, and to open it at the *Calamus* poems. Almost immediately the strong similarity in sentiment to that of confessions of homosexual subjects recorded in text-books on the human sex-instinct became astonishingly evident; so evident, indeed, that it seemed fifty chances to one the thing must have been noticed before. However, for some time search proved negative. A psychopathical criticism was outside the compass of Whitman's contemporaries, because at that time scientific study of sex practically did not exist. Moreover, most of those interested subsequently by this poet

would naturally be Americans or British, and in both instances, although more so in the latter one, the modern literary attitude towards sexual phenomena is dumbfounded and nihilistic; in the case of inversion very markedly so. Macaulay, who set our present-day literary fashions in many respects, is typical still when, referring to charges made against Frederick the Great, he speaks of "vices from which History averts her eyes, and which even Satire blushes to name." Yet in the multitude of counsellors there is wisdom, and the first hint, so far as I see, comes from a reviewer in *The Gentleman's Magazine* for 1875, who wrote:

> "Elsewhere he speaks of the sick, sick dread of returned friendship, of the comrade's kiss, the arm round the neck—but he speaks to sticks and stones; the emotion does not exist in us, and the language of his evangel poems appears simply disgusting."

Then there is one passage from the pen of the late J. A. Symonds, who from his study of Whitman and correspondence with him, and from his collaboration with Havelock Ellis in a work on sexual inversion, was well qualified

to give an opinion. The passage,[1] though short, is plain enough:

"It is obvious that those unenviable mortals who are the inheritors of sexual anomalies, will recognise their own emotion in Whitman's 'superb friendship, exalté, previously unknown.' . . . Had I not the strongest proof in Whitman's private correspondence with myself that he repudiated any such deductions from his *Calamus*, I admit that I should have regarded them as justified;"

but judgment in the end getting the better of loyalty, he adds:

"and I am not certain whether his own feelings upon this delicate topic may not have altered since the time when *Calamus* was first composed."

So, too, a "well-known admirer and correspondent of the poet," who remarked:[2]

"The real psychology of Walt Whitman would be enormously interesting. I think the keynote to it would be found a staggering ignorance, or perhaps wilful non-perception, of the real physical conditions of his nature. But the truth about him (the innermost truth) escapes from almost every page for those who can read."

---

[1] *Walt Whitman: A Study*, by J. A. Symonds.
[2] Cit. by Bliss Perry, in appendix to *Walt Whitman*.

Meanwhile, from E. Carpenter and perhaps others of that kidney, indications of conscious possession of the secret are to be noted, and also some veiled defences from members of the poet's personal circle of friends and compatriots, such as Bucke and Donaldson: but to the consideration of all these we shall return later.

Havelock Ellis, as one might expect from the one and only, but home-unhonoured, British authority on sex, shows himself in the book just mentioned well aware of Whitman's true nature, although only touching the subject in passing. In a separate study of exclusively literary nature, it is on the defence—so evident in Whitman's work—of the thesis *naturalia non sunt turpia*, as applied especially to matters of sex, that he dwells; and the degradation of the sex-instinct by Christianity, especially in the past, is of course a point that Ellis has made with great cogency.

But all the above references put together amount to very little, and the searcher did not find much until he came to the three valuable works by Eduard Bertz—*pereat qui ante nos nostra dixit!*—which are in chrono-

logical order, *Walt Whitman, Ein Charakterbild; Whitman Mysterien, Eine Abrechnung;* and *Der Yankee Heiland.* Of these three, which are all probably familiar enough to a considerable number of those who read these words, only the second is to be found in the library of the British Museum. This latter fact may help to explain the jejuneness of English articles on Whitman (as found, say, in biographical notices in encyclopædias), which efforts, indeed, are very like a frame without the picture, containing as they do the bald outlines of Whitman's career and work, without a hint of that part of his spirit which is on the whole most characteristic. It is rather as a picture without a frame that the present study, which may help to reveal the size of the lacuna in such accepted literary criticism, is presented. In these days of an over-supplied need for a multiplicity of books, marked conciseness is a precious quality, whilst all ordinary biographical details are available already in half a dozen sources. For the ensuing matter, too, of course, a popular audience does not come into the question. The meritorious work of Bertz introduces a further and more particular limitation: one must not steal aught

of his thunder. Except, then, for one or two great features essential to any discussion of the subject, my remarks will as far as possible be supplemental to this last author's. For his case, well put as it is, can yet be strengthened. As an example take his argument on grounds of heredity. He mentions the passage from the poems describing the sudden love of the poet's mother for an Indian woman—which might point to inverted disposition in an ascendant, a feature known to occur in some homosexual histories—but omits the account (by the reliable Burroughs) of the highly masculine character of a paternal ancestress, who smoked tobacco and opium, rode astride, managing the most vicious horses, and could swear lustily at her slaves. This is obviously valuable corroboration.

For many reasons a defence of the scientific study of the human sex-instinct cannot be attempted here. For one thing, to do so would be an impertinence. It goes on, just as painting from the nude goes on, but there is likewise a considerable prejudice against it. How soon that prejudice will disappear depends upon the rapidity of the latter-day growth of the sense of the value of knowledge;

and a great impetus must have been given of late, as regards sex study, by the discoveries of the Freudian School, which, as has been well said, open a new window on the wonderland of the human mind. Fortunately, however, one tribute to scruple may be paid without any loss, and that is to state in advance that Whitman approved of the principle of close examination of an author's private life. We need not fear to trespass upon his privacy, for he himself wrote :[1]

"If Taine, the French critic, had done no other good, it would be enough that he has brought to the fore the first, last, and all-illuminating point, with respect to any grand production of literature, that the only way to finally understand it, is to minutely study the personality of the one who shaped it—his origin, times, surroundings, and his actual fortunes, life, and ways. All this supplies not only the glass through which to look, but it is the atmosphere, the very light itself. Who can profoundly get at Byron or Burns without such help?"

But before accepting the challenge, and profoundly getting at this fine artist in his own form, but poorest of prose writers, there is a fallacy to be defined; not at all a new fallacy,

[1] *The Critic*, December 3, 1881, cit. by R. M. Bucke.

but one of which, although quite aware of it, Bertz has perhaps not kept himself clear.

. . . . .

All through the ages—by Aristotle, by Dryden, by Pascal—it had been observed that men of genius were exceptionally prone to insanity. The idea gradually expanded, after the successive advents of Moreau, Lombroso, and Nordau, into the now familiar "degeneracy" doctrine, which doctrine attributes to great men more than their share of insanity, moral as well as mental, and indeed of almost any decadent physical or psychical anomaly; they—geniuses—being thus closely akin to the two other special classes of lunatics and criminals, in whom, or at any rate certainly in the former of whom, the same stigmata are found. This doctrine, it will be remembered, was very coldly received, and not only in consequence of the extravagance of some of its modern exponents. The strong flavour of determinism and pessimism was sure to antagonise many. Few could appreciate well the arguments used, because the outlying parts (everywhere undeveloped, owing to preoccupation with therapeutics) of the domain of medical science, were particularly undeveloped at the

point in question, namely where medicine marches with ethology. From the literary and philosophical sides, too, the matter seemed to be nobody's business. It ran counter altogether, as new subjects for investigation will, and as real investigators therefore must, to the existing division of intellectual pursuits. Between the literary and scientific camps there is small communication, and yet, even with the best intention and ability, any treatment of the subject at present must, owing to the practical difficulties of direct investigation, be of a somewhat literary and indirect nature. Faulty attempts in this kind by certain popularisers, in consequence of the unscientific, superficial, uncritical, assumption-making tone they adopted, repelled those with a right to speak as to the scientific method; and for this reason and other ones, such as the essentially revolutionary spirit of Lombroso, the degeneracy doctrine, or at all events the part of it we are discussing, has never had the faintest notice from orthodox British science, and not much from leading scientific workers elsewhere. Nevertheless, the idea that a strange and fearful price must mostly be paid for genius, and even for talent, continues to be met with in

literature; and on the whole is gaining in acceptance outside it. George Gissing truly said: "Experience offers proof on every hand that vigorous mental life may be but one side of a personality, of which the other is moral barbarism." Mr. Bernard Shaw showed that even he was not immune from what Meredith's Dr. Middleton describes as the general ailment of a bradypepsia of facts, by adding in 1907 a preface toning down some deal his 1895 answer to Nordau's *Degeneration;* and moreover by giving in the interval a picture (Louis Dubedat, in the play *The Doctor's Dilemma*) of a finely talented but physically unsound and decidedly non-moral artist, that combination familiar and depressing—depressing especially to the eugenist. In the work of continental authors the same theme may no doubt be found more frequently, for with them the obstacle of an optimistic and utilitarian national temperament does not exist. More than this, as mention of eugenics reminds one, orthodox science in our country has recently, although not quite consciously, contributed confirmation in some degree. Several years ago Havelock Ellis[1] made his generalisation of a

[1] *A Study of British Genius*, by Havelock Ellis.

tendency to multiform abnormality—of what he calls "variational diathesis"—on the part of eldest born children. Lunatics, idiots, criminals,[1] perhaps men of genius—all these special classes had been found by different observers to be largely composed of the eldest born, and it remained for Ellis to draw his notable inference. Some time later, the biometric school and its medical co-workers added the weight of mathematical authority to these findings, and also added another and definitely

[1] A recent report by Dr. Goring, of the Prison Medical Service, stating that no physical stigmata of degeneration occur in criminals, has been made the text of a good deal of comment unfavourable to Lombroso. But what has not had the same publicity is the fact that the following figures also rest on the authority of the same author:—

Criminals who are eldest born children

Expected number	58
Actual number	120

[Karl Pearson : Boyle Lecture, 1907.]

Now a similar, but not so great, excess of first born was, as is stated above, found by the biometricians among lunatics and consumptives ; and the report of any asylum will show that lunatics present a large number of cases of congenital physical defect. As therefore the same had been previously described among criminals by another medical man (Winter), who also too found eldest born excess, it seems unfair to accept at once a simple negative result as cancelling several previous positive ones. Possibly examination of Dr. Goring's criminals by others might have resulted differently.

pathological class, that of consumptives. The harmony of these results with the central idea of the degeneracy doctrine is too obvious to need elaborating. On the whole, then, the thesis that men of genius, men abnormal in favourable ways, are also abnormal in unfavourable ways, and ways which, to speak quite objectively, promote individual and racial decadence—although this thesis is not exactly demonstrated, it is considered by most judges of the question to be extremely likely to be true.

Hence the fallacy aforesaid. A third factor, genius, is present, and therefore Bertz's enumeration (following Hirschfeld's description of the sexual invert) of somatic and psychical stigmata is not strict evidence of homosexuality at all, or at any rate only corroborative evidence of minor value. It is true that the second greatest poet America has to show was as vain as a peacock, true that he went grey prematurely; but similar traits have been found in men of genius whom there is no reason at all to suspect of sexual abnormality. It will clarify the discussion, then, if we admit only such evidence as bears upon inversion, and inversion only.

And now to business: first of all by production of the *prima-facie* case, the evidence of the poems themselves, without which the man's disposition would not be worth considering in any detailed way.

II

THE PRIMA-FACIE CASE

It is a matter of coming across passages like the following:

"When I wander'd alone over the beach, and undressing, bathed, laughing with the cool waters, and saw the sun rise,
And when I thought how my dear friend, my lover, was on his way coming, O then I was happy;
O then each breath tasted sweeter—and all that day my food nourished me more—and the beautiful day passed well,
And the next came with equal joy—and with the next, at evening, came my friend;
And that night, while all was still, I heard the waters roll slowly continually up the shores,
I heard the hissing rustle of the liquid and sands, as directed to me, whispering, to congratulate me,
For the one I love most lay sleeping by me under the same cover in the cool night,
In the stillness, in the autumn moonbeams, his face was inclined toward me,
And his arm lay lightly around my breast—and that night I was happy."

. . . . . .

"Two sleepers at night lying close together as they sleep, one with an arm slanting down across and below the waist of the other,
The smell of apples, aromas from crush'd sage-plant, mint, birch bark,
The boy's longings, the glow and pressure as he confides to me what he was dreaming,
The dead leaf whirling its spiral whirl, and falling still and content to the ground,
The no-form'd stings that sights, people, objects, sting me with,
The hubb'd sting of myself, stinging me as much as it ever can any one,
The sensitive, orbic, underlapp'd brothers, that only privileged feelers may be intimate where they are,
The curious roamer, the hand, roaming all over the body—the bashful withdrawal of flesh where the fingers soothingly pause and edge themselves,
The limpid liquid within the young man. . . ."

. . . . . .

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

. . . . . .

"Clear to me that my Soul,
That the Soul of the man I speak for, feeds, rejoices most in comrades;

Here, by myself, away from the clank of the world,
Tallying and talk'd to here by tongues aromatic,
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,
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."

. . . . . .

"Or else, by stealth, in some wood, for trial,
Or back of a rock, in the open air,
(For in any roof'd room of a house I emerge not—
nor in company,
And in libraries I lie as one dumb, a gawk, or unborn,
or dead),
But just possibly with you on a high hill—first
watching lest any person, for miles around,
approach unawares,
Or possibly with you sailing at sea, or on the beach
of the sea, or some quiet island,
Here to put your lips upon mine I permit you,
With the comrade's long-dwelling kiss, or the new
husband's kiss,
For I am the new husband, and I am the comrade.

Or if you will, thrusting me beneath your clothing,
Where I may feel the throbs of your heart, or rest upon your hip,
Carry me when you go forth over land or sea;
For thus, merely touching you, is enough—is best,
And thus, touching you, would I silently sleep and be carried eternally."

[Compare the following confession[1] of an inverted literary man: "At the same time I had an ingrained feeling of my own physical smallness in relation to the limbs whose contact threw me into such paroxysms of delight. A new and sufficiently ludicrous invention took possession of me: I imagined myself strapped to the thigh (always, I think, the right one) of the man on whom I chose, for the time, to concentrate my desires, and so to be worn by him during his day's work, hidden beneath his garments."]

"Publish my name and hang up my picture as that of the tenderest lover,
The friend, the lover's portrait, of whom his friend, his lover, was fondest,
Who was not proud of his songs, but of the measureless ocean of love within him—and freely pour'd it forth,

[1] *Sexual Inversion*, by Havelock Ellis. Case XXVI.

Who often walk'd lonesome walks, thinking of his dear friends, his lovers,
Who pensive, away from one he lov'd, often lay sleepless and dissatisfied at night,
Who knew too well the sick, sick dread lest the one he lov'd might secretly be indifferent to him,
Whose happiest days were far away, through fields, in woods, on hills, he and another, wandering hand in hand, they twain, apart from other men,
Who oft as he saunter'd the streets, curv'd with his arm the shoulder of his friend—while the arm of his friend rested upon him also."

. . . . . .

"My songs cease—I abandon them;
From behind the screen where I hid I advance personally, solely to you.
Camerado! This is no book;
Who touches this, touches a man;
(Is it night? are we here alone?)
It is you I hold, and who holds you;
I spring from the pages into your arms—decease calls me forth.

O how your fingers drowse me!
Your breath falls around me like dew—your pulse lulls the tympans of my ears;
I feel immerged from head to foot;
Delicious—enough.
Enough, O deed impromptu and secret!

Enough, O gliding present! Enough, O summ'd up past!"

. . . . . .

It will be allowed that the above passages make out a case for investigation.

III

WHITMAN'S FEMININITY

WALT Whitman's personal character is almost completely in accordance with the tone of the extracts just cited, and typical of the male invert. If ever one had the woman's soul in the man's body, it was he. In almost everything except outward form he was a woman.

As witness a series of traits common in a German *Casuistik* of male homosexuality. He never smoked, as we know by his own telling and from the accounts of Traubel, his later historian, and of Doyle; the latter adding that the poet had a marked aversion to the habit, although it was so common then in Washington as to make people remark upon his singularity. His brother George said that he cared nothing for sport, and an old school pupil of Whitman's that he never played at ball, but associated more with the younger scholars, frolicking with them rather than playing games. In cooking he delighted, not as a sportsman sometimes will, but for its own

sake. He "would take pleasure," says E. Carpenter, "in preparing some little dish of his own devising for the evening meal." In his *Preparatory Reading and Thought* is found the strange note, "The regular time for baking bread is one hour," and an explanation of how a flurried hostess's badly-mixed dumplings came to "cook to tatters in the pot." He specifies the exact kind of cake he gives the invalid soldiers. Then he can talk about clothes with a woman's knowledge: here is a letter to Doyle (he is sending him some shirts) which might have been written by the matron of a boy's home:

"I hope they will fit—the blue one, it wasn't done till last night, is to wear over—I got the stuff, it is first-rate Middlesex flannel, cost $5 (same as my summer shirts are made of)—it is not intended to be washed often—but can be when necessary—must then be washed by someone experienced in washing nice flannels . . . perhaps you will need a pair of winter boots (or some good cotton flannel for underclothes—or something). . . ."

And again:

"I like the looks of them, the blue shirt collar turned down low with a nice black silk neck handkerchief, tied loose—over a clean white shirt without necktie—I think they are very becoming to young working men."

For nursing he had a truly feminine devotion and aptitude. All the other nurses of the soldiers he tended for three years *were* women. That Whitman was in his right place in a sick ward[1] was attested to by surgeons themselves, who are no fonder than other responsible persons of sharing credit. In the section of his poems inspired by his war experience—called *Drum Taps*, although there is very little of the conventionally martial about them, just as in his "carol of occupations" there is no real craftsman's enthusiasm—he does his personal service no more than justice. Yet feminine admiration and feminine pity for military suffering were undoubtedly his deepest motive in acting thus. "He looks so handsome as he sleeps," writes he to his mother of a patient, "one must needs go nearer to him,"[2] and records that the women nurses pay most attention to the good-looking ones (likely enough); admits, indeed, the temptation in his own case, but states that he resists it. No true man could feel like that, however full of compassion

[1] Compare the remark of a Swiss writer on inversion: "Can there ever be a more perfect sick-nurse than an Urning?"

[2] More than one woman upon whom R. L. Stevenson (*Familiar Studies of Men and Books*) tried the experiment of showing them Whitman's memoranda during this period, immediately claimed the writer for a fellow woman.

and patriotism. In the prose work *Specimen Days* there are other references to the physical beauty of the wounded soldiers, while he mentions it again in a letter to O'Connor. The beauty of men's bodies indeed attracted him strongly, just as it did another invert of genius, Michelangelo, and just as it does the commonplace one who frequents swimming baths in order to feast his eyes. Whitman had a picture of the male nude—Bacchus—in his room, while his poems contain many voluptuous images of male bathers—one striking passage (ll. 190–208 of *I Celebrate Myself*) describes a woman spying upon them—and several appreciations like this:

"The expression of a well-made man appears not only in his face;
It is in his limbs and joints also, it is curiously in the joints of his hips and wrists;
It is in his walk, the carriage of his neck, the flex of his waist and knees—dress does not hide him;
The strong, sweet, supple quality he has, strikes through the cotton and flannel;
To see him pass conveys as much as the best poem, perhaps more;
You linger to see his back, and the back of his neck and shoulder-side."

Of a piece with all this is his naturally

unnatural indifference to women—one might indeed almost say, other women. "I never knew a case," remarked Doyle, "of Walt's being bothered up by a woman. . . . His disposition was different. Woman in that sense never came into his head." Drs. Brinton and Platt came to the same conclusion, and so did his brother and the pupil above quoted. Though fond enough of company and recreation, he never went to dances—"awkward in the parlour, neither a dancer nor elegant," as he confirmatively says of himself, mistaking, as he often did, his inverted taste for a robustly masculine one. When a friend offered him a home, he found attractive the circumstances that the friend was a misogynist and there were no women in the house. All this, like nine-tenths of our knowledge of Whitman, comes from sources friendly to him, while the crowning testimony to his well-nigh complete inversion is out of his own mouth. Criticising Tennyson's work, he says:

"This love is the old stock love of playwrights and romances, Shakspere the same as the rest. It is possessed of the same *unnatural and shocking passion for some girl or woman. . . .*"[1]

[1] Italics supplied.

Indifference warms up here into the true *horror feminæ*. It is therefore not surprising to read that the only time his male nurse, the good-looking young man photographed with him on Camden Quay, ever made Whitman angry with him was by mentioning the name of a female acquaintance he had met. The old poet became furious, or rather furiously jealous, denouncing her in these curious and somewhat feminine terms—"a viper, a sneak, and a hell-cat." Indeed there can be few stronger proofs of the changed mental organisation underlying the phenomena of inversion, than the jealousy and distrust of women that male inverts show, recalling strongly the proverbial attitude of women towards one another. It is a much sharper pang to them to see their loved man attracted by a woman than by another man; at least, the jealousy one reads of in such cases is mostly aroused by a woman. Matters are quite "accordingly," to use a commercial phrase, in Whitman's case. Writing to Doyle that the ladies are paying him attention, he hastens to add that it is all platonic, "all on the square," with no passion about it; as though Doyle might get uneasy. For he unconsciously conceives Doyle to feel as in

similar case he would have felt himself. Yet without any such precaution he often, in these same letters, sends messages of affection to other men.

This fervour of feeling towards men, the well-known stigma, when associated as it is here, of *Freundsschaftsenthusiasmus*, is of course the *great* feminine feature in Whitman. The just-mentioned letters to Peter Doyle are love letters pure and simple. "But O, I need your dear loving face and hand and voice," he cries. Whose loving face and hand and voice? The object of these protestations, Doyle, was no more than an uneducated young Irishman, a soldier to begin with, but in the 'sixties a Washington tramcar conductor (the occupations are the customary ones, although it is not certain that he wore conductor's uniform), who in the latter capacity spoke to the poet one evening and made his acquaintance. Some of Whitman's side of the correspondence is extant, and his literary executors published it. The mixture of paternal and of feminine sentiment is like enough. As to the latter, one need only mention the rows of kisses marked upon the paper with crosses, the old question as to whose affection is the greater, and the quarrel followed

by renewal of love "more than before." At one time Whitman used to send this youth a bouquet of flowers every morning. Every evening they walked out together into the country, it might be as much as ten miles, although the younger man at any rate, with being on his legs all day, was tired after finishing work; we read of his waiting sleepily at Whitman's office until the latter was ready. If Doyle was the great affinity he was far from being the only one, as we have just seen, and as George Whitman expressly says. There is, for instance, almost as passionate a letter to a young soldier:

"But Douglass, I will tell you the truth. You are so much closer to me than any of them that there is no comparison—there has never passed so much between them and me as we have (*sic*)—besides there is something that takes down all artificial accomplishments, and this is a manly and loving soul."

And his desire to improve the education of these young men is also characteristic. A normal man with a male friend of lower social class likes him just as he is, mostly because he is just as he is, and therefore never thinks of trying to polish him up. But this is just what a woman who loves beneath

her does think of. These male friendships, it will be admitted, go far beyond the normal, and show an altogether feminine warmth of emotion.

To some extent Whitman was aware of all this himself. At least, on the rare occasions when he mentions women at all, it is generally to glorify the feminine nature present in himself. He described *Leaves of Grass* to Traubel, the devoted disciple of his later years, as essentially a woman's book:

> "The women do not know it, but every now and then a woman shows that she knows it: it speaks out the necessities, its cry is the cry of the right and wrong of the woman sex—of the woman first of all, of the facts of creation first of all—of the feminine. . . ."

The same thought must inspire his statement to E. Carpenter that "what lies behind *Leaves of Grass* is something that few, very few, only one here and there, perhaps oftenest women, are at all in a position to seize." In an unpublished letter cited in Bliss Perry's biography he wrote: "I think sometimes to be a woman is greater than to be a man—is more eligible to greatness; not the ostensible article, but the real one." Again to Traubel: "*Leaves of*

Grass is the flower of her [his mother's] temperament active in me." It was probably not merely in affectionate compliment to his mother that he told her the Whitman breed produced better women than men: nor perhaps was his great love for her—he said his loves for his mother and for the wounded soldiers were the two great loves of his life, and that nothing before in his life had affected him so much as her death, while we learn that to his father he was a mystery—entirely without special significance. At any rate the investigator is reminded of the Freudian doctrine that the aversion of homosexual males to women may be due to strong possession by the ideas of mother or sister, with whom, from infancy onwards, they associate all women. In the words of Stekel:[1]

"Die Homosexualität ist nur die gelungene Abwehr des infantilen Inzestgedankens. Homosexuelle Männer haben bei fremden Frauen nie eine erotische Empfindung; sie geben an, sie könnten für diese Frauen nur wie für eine Schwester oder Mutter fühlen. Das verrät uns die Wurzel der Homosexualität. Der Begriff 'Weib' ist mit den Begriffen 'Mutter' oder 'Schwester' unlöslich assoziiert. Aus der Abwehr

[1] *Nervöse Angstzustände und ihre Behandlung*, by W. Stekel, 1908.

der Inzestphantasie erfolgt die Flucht in die Homosexualität. Diese Transponierung wird natürlich durch ein entsprechendes somatisches Entgegenkommen ermöglicht. Auch der Homosexuelle leidet an den Reminiszenzen der Kindheit."

Or more cautiously, as is characteristic of the original discoverer compared with his disciple, in the words of Freud himself:[1]

"Although psycho-analysis has not yet given us a full explanation for the origin of inversion, it has revealed the psychic mechanism of its genesis and has essentially enriched the problems in question. In all the cases examined we have ascertained that the later inverts go through in their childhood a phase of very intense but short-lived fixation on the woman (usually on the mother), and after overcoming it they identify themselves with the women and take themselves as the sexual object; that is, following narcissism they look for young men resembling themselves in person, who shall love them as their mother has loved them. We have, moreover, frequently found that alleged inverts are by no means indifferent to the charms of women, but the excitation evoked by the woman is always transferred to a male object. They thus repeat through life the mechanism which gave origin to their inversion. Their obsessive striving for the man proves to be determined by their restless flight from the woman. It must be re-

[1] *Three Contributions to the Sexual Theory*, by S. Freud. Authorised translation by A. A. Brill, M.D. 1910.

membered, however, that until now only one type of inversion has been subjected to psycho-analysis, viz. that of persons with a general stunted sexual activity, the remnant of which manifested itself as inversion. The problem of inversion is very complex, and embraces many diverse types of sexual activity and development."

The point thus seems worth recording. Taken in conjunction with the many other characteristic details revealed, it may have significance, especially if it be true, as is said, that Oscar Wilde's mother, out of her wish for a girl child instead of a boy, feminised her son for some years as regards clothes and general upbringing.

It will be noticed that Freud's theory provides an explanation of the curiously detailed feminine traits of the male invert, who, from self identification with the woman, is said to copy her subconsciously from early life onwards. If this explanation be rejected the alternative one is rather startling on full examination. For here is the phenomenon of a man who, like a normal woman, is sexually attracted to males. That entitles us, if we leave out of question early influences like those invoked by Freud or the "suggestive" ones by other

writers, to say that such attraction is innate in him: because, on the one hand, he has not been brought up, as a woman has, to expect to mate with a man; and on the other, the attraction exactly similar to his own found in women is universally allowed to be a dictate of nature. But besides the direction of his sexual predilections there are incontestably other points of resemblance. He takes readily to cooking, nursing, needlework even, disliking manly sports and tobacco, and being unable to whistle, or even, maybe, to spit—doing all this, too, not from affectation, not with deliberate intention at all, but to all appearance by instinct. The percentage of cases showing deliberate, conscious aping is negligible. So that, granted all that has been said in the last few sentences, it becomes allowable to argue the other way, back from the invert to the woman, and to claim that if to be at home in the kitchen is innate in him, a sort of incomplete human female, even more certainly must it be inborn in the complete one, woman herself.

Thence, of course, a line of argument which reaches a long way: the list of psychical secondary sexual characters richly and curi-

ously enlarged beyond the few ascribed tentatively by Moebius and others; "cooking, clothes, church, and children" as a definition of woman's sphere not an old-fashioned error but on a firm biological basis; more, even a bearing on heredity. For although art is a part of nature and, as has been well said, a cathedral strictly therefore as much a natural object as a bird's nest, nevertheless the most thorough-going teleologist would hardly describe the female *psyche* as organised *ab initio* with reference to all this artificial detail, to have evolved to these arbitrary and seemingly triflingly particularised ends. If women are to be reckoned natural housewives, it looks, in short, like a case of inheritance of characters acquired through age-long use.

An explanation like Freud's, but seemingly nothing else, would knock the bottom out of all this, and on reflection he would seem near the truth. There must be an element of subconscious imitation. Nevertheless, there is also, no doubt, as Freudians elsewhere own, such a thing as a diathesis of inversion.

IV

EVIDENCE MAINLY INDIRECT

LET us look at the character of some—only some—of Whitman's admirers. A part of the poet's personal magnetism, described by Burroughs, the ablest of his personal circle, as incredible and exhaustless, must have been due to recognition in some way by others of a common abnormality, even if only a latent one. Edward Carpenter is the author of works (such as *Homogenic Love and its Place in a Free Society*, and *The Urning*) very similar to literature not uncommon in Germany, literature frankly apologetic for inversion: and in the first named he says that Whitman's "comradeship" is generic with the homosexual and a point of his resemblance to the Greek spirit. Carpenter's other ideals are very like those of Whitman. He is a poet of democracy, a revolutionary, and an enthusiast for friendship. He proved himself a pronounced adherent, for

he visited Whitman twice in America, gave him money, and wrote a book on him; visited, too, Burroughs when the latter came to England. The following discerning criticism[1] is Carpenter's:

"If you consider Whitman's life you will see that Love ruled it, that he gave his life for Love . . . it permeates like a flame his entire writings . . . after the war it united him in bonds of tender and lifelong friendship with many, both men and women. . . . He was a man in whom the power of love was developed to an extraordinary degree. Yet (thanks to him) this was no attenuated or merely spiritual love, but was a large and generous passion, spiritual and emotional, of course, but well rooted in the physical and sexual also."

Compare with this prose the following verse:

". . . Love, a god,
Arrayed in crystal sheen without a flaw,
Descends! his holy shrine, so long untrod,
Once more he paces, summons to his throne
Comrades and lovers!"

which opened the book *In re Walt Whitman*, edited by Whitman's literary executors. The lines are by the late J. A. Symonds, whom we may surmise to have been of slightly inverted

[1] *Days with Walt Whitman*, by E. Carpenter.

disposition—honourably restrained, no doubt—because he is known to have collaborated with Havelock Ellis in a book on sexual inversion, and the latter author speaks of the assistance of a literary friend who was himself inverted. On other grounds the supposition is quite likely. Even if it were not true, the significant fact remains that the writer of a book on Whitman should also have written on inversion generally, and on Michelangelo,[1] an example of homosexual feeling quoted in text-books. Symonds, although not thinking very highly of the social breeding of Whitman and his circle, yet had a deep admiration for his poetry. *Leaves of Grass*, he said, influenced him more than any other book he had read except the Bible. With no small literary name of his own, he could yet confess that he knew its only chance of immortality was through association with Whitman—perhaps, we may be permitted to add, rather doubtful amber to be preserved in. One may note, too, that Oscar Wilde—supercilious Oscar Wilde, who was anything but a democrat or an

[1] The fact that men of extraordinary ability are especially liable to inversion is additional evidence for its presence in Whitman.

altruist, and could therefore have been interested by only one thing in Whitman—addressed in a letter the man he had never seen, or written to more than once or twice, as "Dear, dear Walt." When in America he also visited Whitman.

Lastly, the work of a writer who could say that one of the things in Whitman he found nowhere else but in his own heart, was—"that tender and noble love of man for man . . . your large and beautiful sympathy for men . . . those subtle and wonderful physical affinities you describe"—must needs be of interest in the present connexion. That writer was the late Bayard Taylor. Taylor's honourable career puts him for present purposes in the same category with Symonds; from his poems his original disposition was plainly bi-sexual. Inordinate admiration for male beauty is seen in *Serapion*, *Hylas*, *The Picture of St. John*, and in many other passages. The following is surely an extravagant way for a man to address a youth, even in an ode:

> "When first, young Persian, I beheld thine eyes,
> And felt the wonder of thy beauty grow
> Within my brain, as some fair planet's glow
> Deepens, and fills the summer evening skies."

The *Poet's Journal* and *Love Returned* show that he would kiss male friends, while, for a minor poet, the woman's part in lovemaking is put with remarkable insight and sympathy in :

"Nay, nay! the longings tender,
The fear, the marvel, and the mystery,
The shy, delicious dread, the unreserved surrender,
Give, if thou canst, to me!
For I would be,
In this expressive languor,
While night conceals, the wooed and not the wooer;
Shaken with supplication, keen as anger;
Pursued and thou pursuer!
Plunder my bosom of its hoarded fire,
And so assail me,
That coy denial fail me,
Slain by the mirrored shape of my desire!
Though life seem overladen
With conquered bliss, it only craves the more:
Teach me the other half of passion's lore—
Be thou the man, and I the maiden!"

Again it happens that Whitman was somewhat aware of his own singularity; knew that he could only be thoroughly appreciated by the few, by the differentiated, by the minority to which he himself belonged. There is repeated evidence of this throughout *Leaves of Grass*. What but a consciousness of abnor-

mality could inspire passages like these subjoined?

"As if any man really knew aught of my life."

. . . . . .

"Whoever you are, holding me now in hand,
Without one thing, all will be useless.
I give you fair warning, before you attempt me further,
I am not what you supposed, but far different.

. . . . . .

"The whole past theory of your life, and all conformity to the lives around you, would have to be abandon'd."

. . . . . .

"Yet if blood like mine circle not in your veins;
If you be not silently selected by lovers, and do not silently select lovers,
Of what use is it that you seek to become eleve of mine?"

. . . . . .

"As if I were not puzzled at myself!
Or as if I never deride myself! (O conscience-struck, O self-convicted!)."

Often in conversation Whitman insisted that his message would only be understood, at first at any rate, by the few. Take such utterances as:

"I do not look for a vast audience—for great numbers of endorsers, absorbers—just now—perhaps

not even after a while. But here and there, every now and then, one, several, will raise the standard."

And:

"I ought to be very readily understood by young men and women, but—a few take it in; just a few. . ."

Bucke, whom we shall have cause to mention again, said, too, that Whitman would only be understood a hundred years after his death; and although in another sense than the critic intended, this observation seems true enough. At the present rate of progress, it will take a good many years yet before the general ignorance on the subject of sex disappears.

Another great feature calling for notice in the present connexion is Whitman's sexual hyperæsthesia. This of course often accompanies sexual inversion: the cross-sexed are often over-sexed as well. Hyperæsthesia I take to be the explanation of his so frequent phallic utterances, more frequent in this man of the nineteenth century than in many a writer of the plain-spoken Middle Ages—a point that O'Connor's long defence does not take note of. His emotions, as of admiration and affection, ran over into the physically sexual like an animal's, and his mind could and did form

sexual associations in the most extravagant way. With the male intensity of sex feeling he combined the female chronicity. To whom except to a stark erotomaniac, to what amorist poet in Herrick's or Swinburne's vein even, would it occur, when bathing, to hug the water with a lover's enthusiasm? Yet this is how an observer describes him as acting, and some passages in the poems are entirely confirmatory:

"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;
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."

. . . . . .

"The souse upon me of my lover the sea, as I lie willing and naked."

. . . . . .

"I will not strip the clothes from my body to meet my lover the sea;
I will not touch my flesh to the earth, as to other flesh, to renew me."

. . . . . .

"That this is no cheat, this transparent green wash of the sea, which is so amorous after me,
That it is safe to allow it to lick my naked body all over with its tongues."

This is a sexual rage for physical contact with the elements, not only the sea, but earth and air too; and although these have been poetic subjects since man became what he is, the passages we are quoting are probably a treatment of them unique — in intensity at any rate—in extant world literature. Bayard Taylor has a few lines (in *The Bath*) very similar, but these may have been derivative. Hear Whitman again:

"The atmosphere is not a perfume—it has no taste
of the distillation—it is odorless;
It is in my mouth forever—I am in love with it;
I will go to the bank by the wood, and become undisguised and naked;
I am mad for it to be in contact with me."

. . . . . .

"Winds whose soft tickling genitals rub against me,
it shall be you."

As the first quotation shows, such contact was enough to cause seminal emission. *A fortiori*, therefore, this could easily follow mere momentary contact with human beings. As he said in *I Celebrate Myself*, probably his most important poem:

"To touch my person to some one else's is about
as much as I can stand."

In the lines following this one there is a notable surge of lyric expression, such as the sexual, and particularly the homosexual, always inspired him with. Rarely do his other ideals carry him to the same height. Again, although it is known that the popular idea of sensual personal appearance as an index to intensity of sexual feeling does not generally hold good, yet there might be recalled the mention in Binns' eulogistic *Life* of "a good-natured but loose mouth, a faun-like expression upon its thick lips, which dismisses at once any fancy of the ascetic saint." By looking at the portrait of Whitman æt. 35, when he wore beard and moustache trimmed closely, in contrast to his highly professional, bardic tenue in later life, anyone may satisfy himself that this description is a fair one. Binns' discipleship did not blind him here; even allowing for colossal frankness, his master was distinctly oversexed, distinctly hyperæsthetic.

"Not those—but, as I pass, O Manhattan! your
frequent swift flash of eyes offering me love,
Offering response to my own—these repay me;
Lovers, continual lovers, only repay me."

. . . . . .

"My lovers suffocate me!
Crowding my lips, thick in the pores of my skin,
Jostling me through streets and public halls—coming naked to me at night,
Crying by day Ahoy! from the rocks of the river—singing and chirping over my head,
Calling my name from flowerbeds, vines, tangled underbush,
Lighting on every moment of my life,
Bussing my body with soft balsamic busses,
Noiselessly passing handfuls out of their hearts, and giving them to be mine."

. . . . . .

"But I was Manhattanese, friendly and proud!
I was called 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 ferryboat, or public assembly, yet never told them a word."

Just as a dog may be said to live in a world made up of odours, so Whitman's daily experience for the greater part of his life must have consisted largely of sexual appeals. And although one would not for a moment oppose Havelock Ellis' contention, which he makes Whitman illustrate, of the cleanness and naturalness of sex, the conception of which is so befouled by the half-lewd, half-prudish atti-

tude of the average man, the man of mediocre calibre still under the influence of survivals of mediæval theology; although, too, it is a striking thing to find Ellis and Freud essentially at one in denouncing the barriers of "shame, loathing, and morality," as set up by contemporary civilisation — granting all this, one must still stick to it that the Adamic utterances of Whitman, quite independently of inversion, go much too far. His *Kontrektationstrieb* was very over-easily excited by the various peripheral impressions, by those of sight, touch, and hearing. Sexually he was erethistic—until advancing years came to his relief. Then, one would think, he should surely have expressed himself on the subject of love as Plato relates the aged Sophocles did: "Hush! if you please: to my great delight I have escaped from it, and feel as if I had escaped from a frantic and savage master."

V

OBJECTIONS

But to preserve the objective and unprejudiced attitude, as is proper, it is high time to come to possible objections. We will take first one large group which, significantly or not, happens to present itself. Although, as has been seen, the case against Whitman had been little urged, yet nevertheless his friends and disciples seemed to feel themselves put upon their defence. At all events, without apparent adequate reason they have in effect defended him on several of the points above mentioned. The quality of this defence will perhaps appear as we go on. Donaldson, in *Walt Whitman the Man*, actually asserts that comradeship had no charm for the poet. After this (remember only, "O adhesiveness, pulse of my life!") any judicial attitude in his case becomes ridiculous. On one page we learn that Whitman was very modest over the exposure of any part of his body; and on a later one, that for several

years he used to go to a creek near a Camden farm and bask half naked in the sun. Which is right? Probably extracts already given are enough to decide. However, in a prose work the poet himself sneers at people too genteel to bathe naked, and Binns relates that as a lad, the praise that delighted him most was of his well-developed body as he bathed. The whole tenour of his writings is confirmatory of freedom from any bashfulness of this kind whatever. Again, the same chronicle also states that its subject cordially avoided effeminate men and mannish women. It is true that mostly, not always, Whitman sought out rough working men (a known proclivity, of course) but as to his preference in women, such as that was, the following deliverances are significant:

"They are tann'd in the face by shining suns and blowing winds,
Their flesh has the old divine suppleness and strength.
They know how to swim, row, ride, wrestle, shoot, run, strike, retreat, advance, resist, defend themselves."

. . . . . .

"The athletic American matron speaking in public to crowds of listeners."

"Where women walk in public processions in the streets, the same as the men,
Where they enter the public assembly and take places the same as the men."

In *Preparatory Reading and Thought*, the poet says again he liked the athletic, capable woman. What sort of woman was it towards whom, as he told Traubel, he had felt more glowingly than toward any other? It was Fanny Wright, a lady forgotten now, but who showed in her time considerable activity as a social reformer of a very downright kind, and a letter of whose exists inviting a political admirer to a sort of elopement. Granting Whitman to be a *weibling-urning*, as is here argued, the mannish female would be the very one to arouse his inclination, if any could; and conversely the affection of the "suffragette" leader (the not rare association of which movement with homosexual feeling Carpenter and others affirm, probably with reason[1]) for

[1] Before me is a German publisher's circular of books on inversion, many of them plainly apologetic or even laudatory. Four, or at any rate, three, of the whole number deal with the relation of homosexuality to the feminist movement; while two out of these four are written by women. Nearer home, there is a feminist publication the leading articles in which are plainly inspired by inverted feeling, once even to the

the feminine Whitman is explicable on other than social and political grounds. And this was the man with his conscious masculine pose who boasted:

"Washes and razors for foofoos—for me freckles and a bristling beard."

But his mostly unconscious, feminine one speaks louder.

To return to our protagonists. W. S. Kennedy explains the frequent allusions to food on the pathetic grounds of a poor digestion and of the wish to hide poverty by convincing friends of his ability to get a proper diet. But then Whitman often describes what he had to eat at the houses of other people, which is surely a little housewifely weakness fairly well known, and descants on food to his mother and to Doyle, who must have known his circumstances exactly. Bucke (a medical man, unfortunately) made a sad bungle of the case for the defence. The sentence may stand, for after examining what he wrote, it is nearly as hard to avoid the tone of a prose-

length of the interestingly mad statement, that were every man to perish off the face of the earth, women would manage somehow to continue the race themselves!

cuting counsel as it was in Donaldson's case. Having formerly spoken, understandably enough, of "passions, instincts, tendencies that unrestrained might well be called devilish," and of "the elements of a Cenci or an Attila," he could yet give his professional word as an alienist for it that "in Whitman's moral nature there were no perversions indicative of degeneration." On a semi-public occasion Whitman pointed to Bucke as his authorised explainer, and since privately to Traubel he belittled him as such, it is difficult to decide whether Bucke's exegeses are genuine, Whitman adopting them as convenient cloaks, provided by stupidity, for his real meaning; or whether Bucke, a resolute-looking man by his photograph, deliberately provided "blinds" with Whitman's connivance; or whether the poet had reservations not only from all his later friends but from himself too. For compare first, this rather formidable passage (ll. 52–57 of *I Celebrate Myself*, which also contains the fine line "I loafe and invite my soul") with, secondly, Bucke's interpretation thereof:

> "As the hugging and loving Bedfellow sleeps at my side through the night, and withdraws at the peep of day, with stealthy tread,

Leaving me baskets cover'd with white towels,
swelling the house with their plenty,
Shall I postpone my acceptation and realization, and
scream at my eyes
That they turn from gazing after and down the road
And forthwith cipher and show me (to) a cent
Exactly the contents of one, and exactly the contents
of two, and which is ahead?"

Now according to Bucke the above simply means: "Refreshed with sleep, I have all I need." This as a rendering reminds one, by contraries, of the long rigmarole M. Jourdain's befoolers gave him as the equivalent of the mystic words *Bel Men.* Any non-specially informed critic who does not proceed on the easy plan of accepting the necessity of frequent blanks in his comprehension of poetry, must of course be brought up short. But with the key of the knowledge of Whitman's inverted disposition the lines are clear enough. The purport of the first does not need enlarging upon, save to say that the 1855 version (M'Kay's variorum edition, 1900) runs:

"As God comes a loving bed-fellow and sleeps at my
side all night and close on the peep of day."

This is interesting as giving a good example of Maudslay's theme of the identification of

religious with sexual emotion. In the second, one catches another glimpse of the curious "housewifely" trait already noticed: in hot climates large square shapes of basket ware are often used as a towel-horse, and Whitman's feminine mind rejoices in the snowy display they make. There is nothing more than this in the line, nothing symbolic, nothing cryptic, no verbal magic even as in:

> "Three scythes at harvest whizzing in a row from three lusty angels with shirts bagg'd out at their waists"—

but just the typical thought of a woman. The remainder of the quotation completes this strange but characteristic picture (which no sexually normal man, whatever his powers, could have drawn[1]) of the fond, wistful reverie of a bride, left for the day by her husband, musing on the necessity of her love giving place for a while to the pre-occupations of life's daily task. In Whitman's case this daily task (at any rate, at the period of his

[1] For what it is worth, the optimist's claim holds good that inverts act as interpreters of one sex to the other; at all events that male inverts interpret the female sex—women being relatively deficient in the power of intellectual self-expression, and secretive to boot.

intimacy with Doyle) was represented by the work of a clerk, who has to cipher and balance accounts. How much rather would he have been housekeeping! On the whole, these defenders of Whitman had better have held their tongues.

O'Connor wrote a vindication called *The Good Gray Poet*, and sent it far and wide to contemporary literary celebrities. This, however, does not concern us at all, as it is quite beside the mark. Arguing from the examples afforded by many great writers, it defends Whitman's right to treat of the natural facts of sex. Great minds have an affinity for great issues: remember Shakespere and Dante—that is the sort of thing. The question of an inverted tendency is neither mentioned nor hinted at. This sustained and enthusiastic and rather erudite, but also rather unoriginal and monotonous effort, struck the only Frenchman (L. Bazalgette) who seems to have written on Whitman as—so hard is it to judge of style in a foreign language—being like the best French prose. Probably the content prejudiced him in favour of the form, because he is on O'Connor's side, being sympathetic to Whitman's preoccupation with sexuality. In-

version receives, however, a little notice. He thinks that to impute it is to go totally against the fact, because of the confession to being father to six children—he has a flourish about the poet carelessly sowing his race like some great oak tree—and the denial to J. A. Symonds, who plainly put it to Whitman that his teaching suggested the unspeakable, only to receive what reads like an anxiously complete disavowal. This same denial, as we learn from Havelock Ellis' book on inversion, and also from Bliss Perry's biography, some friends and admirers of Whitman do not accept. One goes so far as to consider it in hopeless conflict with the *Calamus* section of the poems. I have only two things to add to the strainings of my predecessors at the contents of this document: the one that Whitman may well have shared the popular idea of *pædicatio* as the only manifestation of real homosexuality, and have been repudiating with horror *pædicatio* and nothing else; secondly, that more stress should be laid on the fact that the letter was written by an old man about what he had produced thirty or forty years earlier. Take this most significant remark[1] made to W. R.

[1] Cit. by Bliss Perry, *loc. cit.*

Thayer six months before the poet's death: "There are things in *Leaves of Grass* which I would no sooner write now than cut off my right hand, but I am glad I printed them." In old age, of course, his nature cooled altogether. The *Sands at Seventy* poems show no trace of the sex motive and contain an appreciation of an emperor—this from the former contemner of "outside authority"! "I did think," he told Traubel, "Thoreau and Emerson, both of them, years ago, in the Brooklyn days, were a little bookish in their expression of love: I say I used to think so, for I don't know how the thing would strike me now." To Traubel, too, at the last, he was several times on the point of some personal confession, and regretted he had never married; could "see now" it would have been beneficial to his development. As happens with more normal persons (for in general homosexual obeys just the same laws as hetero-sexual love), the lyric hedonist gave way in due course to the moralist. Probably there will never be much more than this to say about the letter to Symonds. It need not be taken at all seriously, except perhaps as a disclaimer of *pædicatio*.

Schlaf[1] wrote a little brochure containing notices of two poets, the one Whitman, the other Verlaine—which latter, by the way, was of course a known invert. This production is of exclusively literary interest, touching very briefly on many of Whitman's themes, but not on that of sex. Elsewhere, arguing against Bertz's conclusion, Schlaf cites the friendship with Anne Gilchrist and the afore-mentioned fact that Whitman is credited with being a father. This last rests on the authority of Binns,[2] who states that during the poet's last illness a grandson came to visit him, and that a letter to Symonds existed owning to being father to six illegitimate children, two of whom were dead. The implication is that all were of one mother, and the times of their births are vaguely indicated by the words "young manhood, mid-age, times South." The lady was of higher social rank than the poet, and lived in New Orleans. A fairly circumstantial story, therefore, and yet Bliss Perry states, in a passage partly quoted before,[3] that a well-known

[1] *Walt Whitman, Lyrik des Chat Noir, Paul Verlaine*, von Johannes Schlaf, 1897.

[2] Who, however, never met Whitman.

[3] P. 3.

admirer and correspondent of the poet did not believe it. However, if true, it constitutes no disproof of inversion. Many male inverts, the subjects of psychic hermaphroditism, have been known to beget offspring. This is an unfortunate fact which may help to explain their continued appearance in the race. Moll[1] gives a list of twenty-seven such, of whom fourteen had children, in number thirty-six. Of two hundred other homosexual men, more than half were married. As to Anne Gilchrist, Doyle only mentions two female friends of the poet, and they distinctly platonic ones: neither of them was she. As has been seen, we have Whitman's own statement that the woman who attracted him far the most was the masculine Fanny Wright. The dates do not tally very well, but it might be worth investigation for someone to see if she could have possibly been mother to these, or some of these, very misty children.

Last of the defences and rejoinders comes an editorial in an American medical paper,[2] elicited by a short article of my own in an English one,[3] in which Whitman's homosexual

[1] *Untersuchungen über die Libido sexualis*, von A. Moll, Bd. i., s. 237.

[2] *Interstates Medical Journal*, March 1911.

[3] *The Hospital*, Feb. 11, 1911.

disposition was very briefly pointed out. There is a good deal of rhetoric in this editorial, but the only tangible argument one can make out is that Symonds praised Whitman's letters to Doyle as breathing a pure affection. It was unlucky, however, to quote Symonds, because, as has been seen, he had strong doubts on the subject, and indeed as good as says that Whitman was homosexual at the time of the composition of *Calamus*. A no more happy remark is the sneer that the prejudiced critic might even find suspicious the fact that Lord Bacon erected a costly retreat for study, to which he would bring a few young men of distinguished talents as the companions of his retirement. This is as it may be; but the writer clearly is unaware that "Lord Bacon, according to Aubrey's statement in *Short Lives*, was a pederast."[1]

This practically finishes objections found ready made. We now turn to others that undoubtedly exist. The frequent mention of the implements of manly toil seems a masculine trait at first sight, but not on nearer examination. Whitman had worked with his hands himself, certainly, but his mind runs on

[1] *Sexual Inversion*, by Havelock Ellis, p. 23.

planes and trowels because of their association with working-class men, whom he loved so well. What really attracted him about manual labour was the picturesque male images it called up. "To be lean'd and to lean on," is quite an unfatiguing use of the seven-pound felling axe. Then there is his robust aspect. President Lincoln's exclamation on first seeing him—"Well, *he* looks like a MAN!"—is much quoted by biographers. But masculine appearance is quite compatible with the *anlage* of inversion, as all authorities are agreed. This (like how much else!) was known to Balzac, who in *Le Père Goriot* and elsewhere gives us the burly, brutal Vautrin[1]—and even (in the scene following the arrest) makes another character remark upon him in almost Lincoln's very words. Whitman knew of his virile appearance, wrote about it, and relished it in a Narcissus-like way, but examination of some of the countless photographs of himself he had taken gives an impression different to that of the word-portraiture in the poems. "Deliberate picturesqueness" is much more

[1] The figurative character of *Candide* granted, it is still worth noting that Voltaire's example of inversion was a hirsute man six feet in height.

evident than manly carelessness. He had really a great regard for his clothes and appearance, his pose being the unconventional. As he notes of the youthful Jean Paul Richter, on whose model he would appear to have made up a little, he "stood out in costume." There are certainly passages in the poems, just one or two, expressing sex feeling for women, but of course overwhelmed by the number of corresponding ones of a homosexual type. Whitman made, too, the note to write a series of poems "the same to the passion of woman love as the *Calamus Leaves* are to adhesiveness, manly love"—but never did it. The one-tenth of normal sexuality Bertz allows him seems quite sufficient.

There is, however, another thing that cannot be quite accounted for. That is the absence of any recorded liking for literature of a type similar to his own *Calamus*, in spite of the fact, too, that the poet, although no scholar, did much desultory reading, and was always throwing out to his friends rather superficial appreciations of other authors. Yet although he talks about Socrates, and although translations and classical dictionaries must have been within his reach, and although plenty of

better-educated friends could have pointed out to him his forerunners, he has nothing to say of Sappho, of the *Banquet*, or of other Greek literature in which the influence of the homosexual may be seen. Several times he descants on Shakespere, but there is no word (or rather, no word preserved) of the *Sonnets*. On the other hand, we constantly hear of his admiration for Burns, whose sex feeling was quite normal in direction; but this may have been sympathy with Burns' exuberant sexuality. As Weininger has pointed out, the nature of most women is to like and approve sex-love—which is why they are always match-making—and secretly to admire a rake, because they would rather see excess of sexuality than deficiency of it. Sometimes, too, Whitman clearly feels that Burns' moral failings are some excuse for his own. But on the whole, if there has been no tampering with the record—and to do this in face of the published Doyle correspondence would be straining at a gnat—the absence of expression of sympathy with the Greek idea of love is remarkable. Burroughs could never understand Swinburne's temporary admiration for Whitman, and no more can this writer. For

the one was a scholar, a woman lover, and a very eminent metrist; the other, a sciolist and invert who, although he certainly had the poet's teeming brain, was without poetic form at all, except in details. Whatever Whitman wrote not in his own characteristic chant, or "yawp," as he too modestly calls it, was very poor stuff. The juvenilia were known and acknowledged by all, including himself, to be rubbish, but this has happened in the case of Dryden and other great poets. What is exceptional is that the same utter failure resulted whenever, at the height of his powers, he tried to write in rhyme; and it is interesting to observe that Whitman himself did not quite see this. Traubel had hard work to show him how inferior *My Captain* was to his other work. *My Captain* was the one favourable exception made by a popular American journal in summing up his work. A more glaring example of inferiority is the sentimental *Singer in the Prison*, which traverses all his "hill-top" utterances on criminals, and which, if a little neater, would about do for the poet's corner of an agricultural paper.

. . . . .

Real objections, then, do not exist. The note of conviction soon drowns the attempted note of impartiality whenever anything of an investigation is made. I trace this feeling of overpowering certainty in the already quoted words:

"But the truth about him (the innermost truth) escapes from almost every page for those who can read";

in the surely ironical query, made by a certain literary man, not mentioned here, of the Whitman Fellowship Circle, as to whether they were genuine disciples; and in the words with which Bertz not closes, but opens, his discussion of the subject:

"er war ein ausgeprägter Typus des Homosexuellen."

VI

FURTHER EXAMINATION, AND CONCLUSION

If Walt Whitman was homosexual, then, to what variety of male inversion did he belong? Essentially the *passive* kind, as one might expect from his pronouncedly feminine nature. In Ulrich's classification he would come under the *weibling*, not the *mannling-urning*.

". . . and withdraws at the peep of day, with stealthy tread,
Leaving me . . ."

"Not my enemies ever invade me—no harm to my pride from them I fear;
But the lovers I recklessly love—lo! how they master me!
Lo! me, ever open and helpless, bereft of my strength!
Utterly abject, grovelling on the ground before them."

In the same sense is the passage, "I mind how once we lay, &c.," and several of the

others already quoted. Doyle, a much younger man and of lower social class, touched him on the knee and made his acquaintance. The understanding was complete at once, but the one who made the first overt movement towards it was not Whitman. That his objects of affection were younger than himself does not speak for any trace of masculinity in him, as it does in the *zwischen-urning*, to use the same terminology, for Whitman liked rough, virile youths. Compare his account of one of them:

"A large, strong-boned young fellow, driver. Should weigh 180. Free and candid to me the very first time he saw me. Man of strong self-will, powerful, coarse feelings and appetites. . . . I liked his refreshing *wickedness*, as it would be called by the orthodox."

Feminine passivity partly explains what we get a hint of here, namely the often-expressed love for criminals, which is also due, however, to sympathy from consciousness of some degree of fellowship in guilt. It is a feminine trait to admire the enterprise and individuality which marks some criminals, as witness—for a recent instance—the offers of marriage received by the Captain of Koepenick, although

he had the severe handicap for a ladies' man of being well on in the 'sixties, and of humble origin to boot. Accordingly, admiration for criminals would be, and is, a characteristic of the *weibling-urning*. As Raffalovich says of the childhood of such a one:

> "When he was quite small he imagined that he had been carried off by brigands, by savages; at five or six he dreamed of the warmth of their chests and of their naked arms. He dreamed that he was their slave, and he loved his slavery and his masters. He has had not the least thought that is crudely sexual, but he has discovered his sentimental vocation."

This invariable passivity has a bearing on the question as to whether Whitman confined his feelings of affection for his own sex to the emotional sphere only, or whether they found physical vent. I say the question, because so the point apparently seemed to Bertz, who calls him an *Edel-Uranist*, although by a passage in the rejoinder to Schlaf, he seems subsequently to have changed his mind. Doubtless the second thought is the more correct, and the truth would appear to lie as Carpenter hints. For the most part, as in all the nursing episode, it was emotional, spiritual, wholly

altruistic: nevertheless it was "well rooted in the physical and sexual also," especially up to middle age. As Burroughs[1] says, from 1837 to 1848 "he sounded all experiences of life, with all their passions, pleasures, and abandonments." Partly on account of the passivity noticed, there is no need to charge the poet with the grossest unnatural indulgence of an active kind, but that he experienced orgasm seems certain, as has been discussed already when noticing his rage for the sea. *Spontaneous Me* and *So Long!* express actual sexual *verkehr* of some sort with males, probably masturbation. For Whitman mere contact would suffice. What, then, was his private moral self-evaluation? Enough has been already quoted, or will be within the remembrance of readers of him, or is easily accessible, to show his thorough consciousness of abnormality; which he sometimes rejoices in self-reliantly, sometimes repents of; the mean of his oscillation being on the whole much nearer confident avowal than shame. Just occasionally he abases himself with the criminals,

[1] *Walt Whitman as Poet and Person*, by Jno. Burroughs.

disguising[1] the confession with the pretext of large human sympathy, to which he could doubtless lay claim, too. But for the most part, of course, he preaches comradeship, manly love, the dear love of comrades and so on, to be, (and not only the spiritual part of it) on a higher ethical plane than the love of women.

"Fast-anchor'd, eternal, O love! O woman I love!
O bride! O wife! more resistless than I can tell, the thought of you!
—Then separate, as disembodied, or another born,
Ethereal, the last athletic reality, my consolation;
I ascend—I float in the regions of your love, O man,
O sharer of my roving life."

Inverts have been known so to speak before, but never (in modern times) with his genius. The idea of the above quotation, and indeed of the whole of *Calamus*, is, however, exactly put in the following extract from the bom-

[1] "What lies behind *Leaves of Grass* is something that few, very few, only one here and there, perhaps oftenest women, are at all in a position to seize. It lies behind almost every line; but concealed, studiedly concealed; some passages left purposely obscure. There is something in my nature *furtive*, like an old hen! I think there are truths which it is necessary to envelop or wrap up."—*Conversation with E. Carpenter.*

bastic confession of an actual patient of Moll's:

"Mein Doppelliebe ist der Quell aller der allgemeinen Liebe und Güte, von welcher die Welt so entblösst ist, dass sie einem ungeheueren Krankensaale gleicht. Das heisst die Doppelliebe muss resp. müsste im Laufe der Zeit dieser sittlichen Erhabenheit zueilen.

"Die edelsten Kräfte, o Plato, lässt man heute verkümmern; man brandmarkt ein welterlösendes Ideal."

It is only slightly more extravagant. Whitman expected a repellent and ridiculous sin against that supreme goddess, the Lucretian Venus, preserver of the race, to redeem the materialism of the American democracy; whereas the German member of a two per cent. minority says the evil and selfishness of the world. And although Whitman's message certainly comprised more than inversion, still, just as certainly, inversion was the core of it. "What comes before comradeship?" asked Traubel. The answer was, "Nothing." "And what after?" "Nothing again."

. . . . .

So that literature and philosophy must allow

medicine—the heavy-handed, the unromantic —to make a slight incursion here. Put my case to Bertz's, and it must be admitted that Walt Whitman was homosexual. The conclusion is as sound as an anvil.

Printed by Ballantyne, Hanson & Co.
Edinburgh & London


GEORGE ALLEN
& COMPANY LIMITED
PUBLISHERS LONDON
RUSKIN HOUSE