

國立政治大學英國語文學系碩士班碩士論文

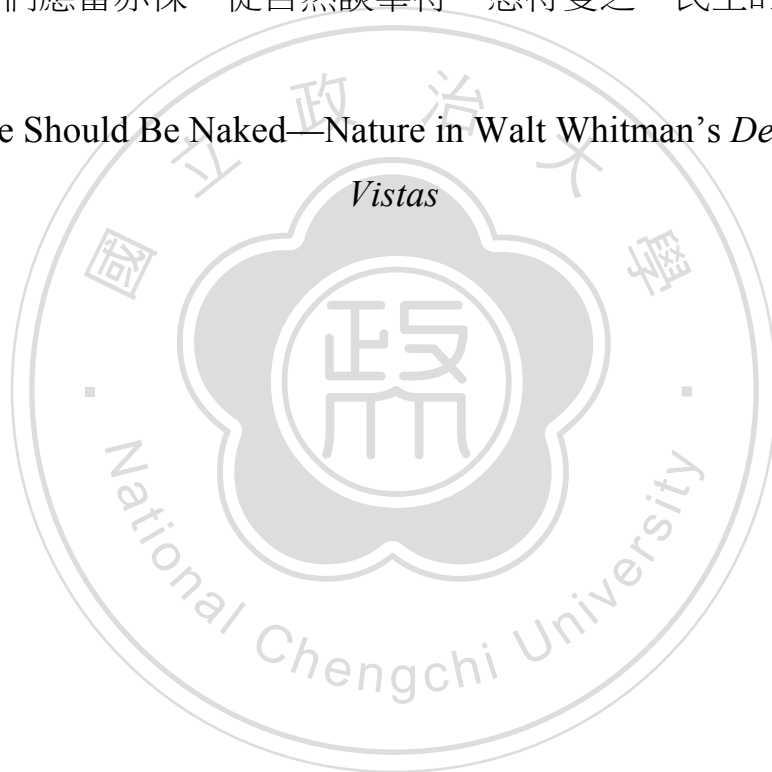
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為何我們應當赤裸——從自然談華特·惠特曼之「民主的展望」

Why We Should Be Naked—Nature in Walt Whitman's *Democratic*

Vistas



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中華民國 101 年 1 月

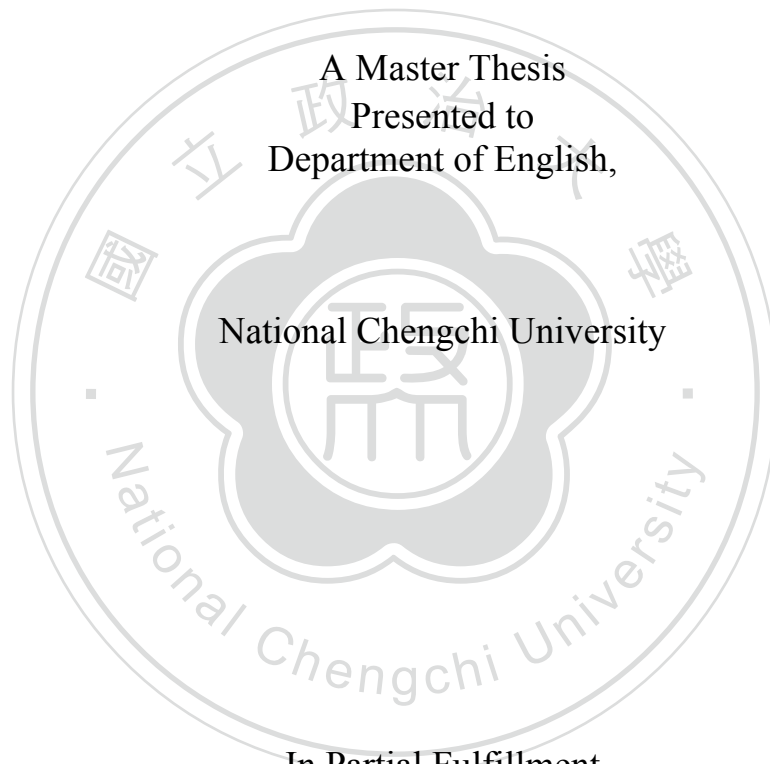
January 2013

Why We Should Be Naked—Nature in Walt Whitman's *Democratic*

Vistas

A Master Thesis
Presented to
Department of English,

National Chengchi University



In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
Lin, Hsin-mei

January 2013

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank Prof. Thomas J. Sellari, who has trusted my ability of conducting this research with tremendous patience and democratic support every step of the way. I also want to thank Prof. Jed Deppman, who has been a great inspiration for me on the studies of Walt Whitman and has generously provided insightful guidance for my thesis and displayed enthusiasm that would stimulate the love for literature in any individual.

With the selfless assistance from these two distinguished professors, Whitman's song of democracy is sung here again.

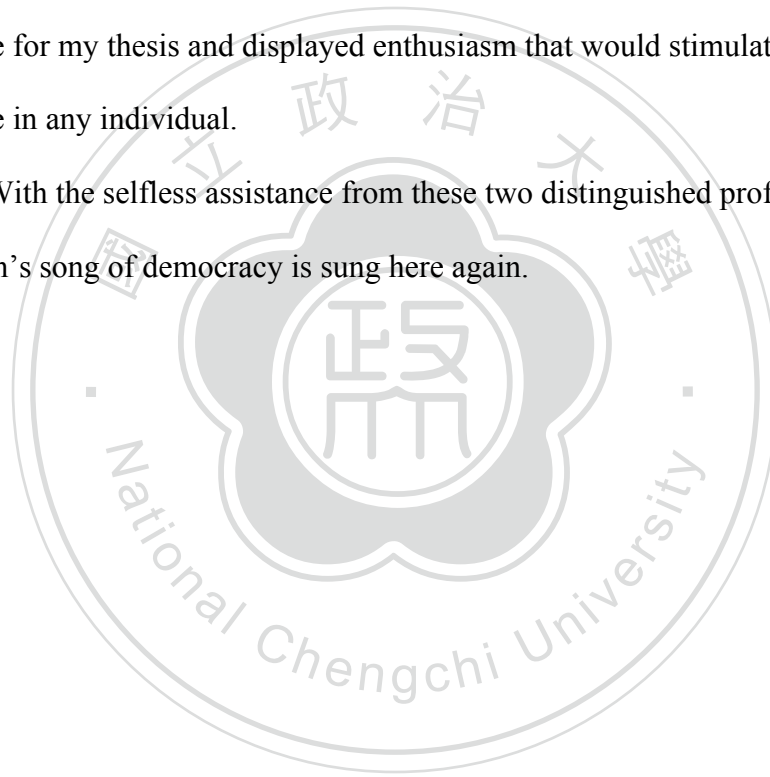


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國立政治大學英國語文學系碩士班
碩士論文提要

論文名稱：為何我們應當赤裸——從自然談華特·惠特曼之「民主的展望」

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論文提要內容：

在歷史上，民主被賦予多元的體現和闡述的概念。華特·惠特曼對於民主在他所處的十九世紀美國之養成，別有一番見解。惠特曼式的民主源自於他在身體、自然和詩作方面的哲學，他認為民主並不須侷限於一種政府的形式。他的詩作往往展現了吸引人以及包羅萬象的特質，而這也是他民主觀念所承襲的特點。因此，他所寫的關於身體和自然的詩和他民主觀念的形成有著密切的關係。當然，當這些有關身體和自然的詩被個別詮釋時，這些詮釋已對於惠特曼式的超驗主義產生了多元的洞見，並進一步將他超驗主義的觀念和浪漫時期詩人與拉爾夫·沃爾多·愛默生等人的超驗主義作所區別。為了要更進一步去探索惠特曼式超驗主義不同的特質，我分析了他所寫的有關身體和自然的詩作，探討這些詩作在他歌頌民主時，所共同表達的強而有力的聲音。

我已證實，一旦我們對於「民主的展望」一文的了解越過了單一政治性思考之藩籬，我們便可以理解這篇散文對於惠特曼在詩學、自然的領略，和人類身體等觀念，有十分重要的貢獻。

Abstract

Democracy, a concept that has been embodied and expounded greatly in history, is presented in an idiosyncratic manner in Walt Whitman's nineteenth-century America. Instead of viewing democracy simply as a form of government, Whitman's democracy resides in his philosophy of the body, Nature, and poetry. While his poetry demonstrates an absorbing and embrative quality that his concept of democracy inherits, his poems about the body and Nature should be understood as retaining a close relation to his democratic ideation. The independent interpretations of the poems of the body and Nature have certainly generated diverse insights into Whitmanian transcendentalism, distinguishing his transcendental notion from that of the Romantic poets and of Ralph Waldo Emerson. To further explore the distinct attributes of Whitman's transcendentalism, I have analyzed the poems of the body and Nature as a collective voice that produces a powerful sound in his song of democracy. I have proved that once our understanding of *Democratic Vistas* is expanded beyond the field of politics, we can see how fundamental this essay is to Whitman's poetics, theories of Nature, and the human body.

CHAPTER 1

The Creation of America—From Nakedness to Democracy

“[Democracy] is, in some sort, younger brother of another great and often-used word, Nature, whose history also waits unwritten”

—Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas*

In the previous criticism, scholars have commented on the philosophical quest in Walt Whitman’s concept of nature, regarding him as the “protégé” of Ralph Waldo Emerson (Field 223). Emerson’s transcendentalism can be viewed as the foundation of Whitmanian philosophy. Their shared conception of nature serves as the common ground from which their expectations of America take off. The connection between the two epochal American voices is also manifested in their view of democracy. For both writers, democracy is not an idea independent from other subjects in the creation of the culture and history of America; it is an element that is immersed in the life of America. In contrast to how modern people consider democracy as a system under human civilization which departs from nature, Emerson and Whitman both believe that the word ought to carry certain implications of or associations with nature in terms of its origin and realization. As the purpose of my thesis is to discuss the indispensable relation between American democracy and nature from Whitman’s point of view, it is necessary to look into the history of the nation before resuming a detailed explication of the two concepts established in his works. American history, according to Larzer Ziff, “must be the history of nature speaking through men, not of men shaping nature” (12), an outlook which distinguishes the history of America from that of Europe. In an antecedent view, the term “storied associations,” coined by Washington Irving in *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon*, cannot produce a vision that is ample enough to portray the natural scenery of America. In the book, “Rip Van Winkle” demonstrates the characteristics of writing about natural landscapes in the form of a story. The story begins with naming the landscape with reference to its historical and cultural background:

Whoever has made voyage up the Hudson must remember the Kaatskill mountains. They are a dismembered branch of the great Appalachian family, and are seen away to the west of the river, swelling up to a noble height and lording it over the surrounding country.

(Irving 27)

The history of the Hudson River is closely associated with the story of Rip Van Winkle. The Kaatskill mountains are in relation to the histories of the Appalachian family. Irving has utilized the approach established by writers when depicting the Old-World nature. However, other American writers of the nineteenth century soon found out that a new perspective needed to be constructed for the New World.

Because of the varied historical backgrounds—the ancient and long-lasting past of Europe and the new and fast-thriving “present” of America, writers in the nineteenth century felt trapped in the predicament where they strove to develop a way to present their America in a unique manner. Among them, Emerson had transformed the European way which is “based on the domestication of nature” into the “discovery of a culture rooted in nature” to witness his nation “discovering its intellectual identity” (Ziff 12). He stresses the notion that nature, culture, and national identity are interrelated and cannot continue their distinct American orientation when separated. Nature, for Emerson, is not compelled to trace its presentation back through the European cultural history in order to be meaningful. In contrast, it is the people that make nature cultured in America. It is the daily lives of Americans that carve out the landscape of the nation.

Strongly influenced by Emersonian philosophy, Whitman adopted Emerson’s perception of nature in America and transformed Emerson’s theory of nature and men into his conception of democracy in nineteenth-century America. The nineteenth-century American political scene has inspired and accommodated the contributions of numerous domestic and even foreign writers. To research into the subject, one cannot neglect

Whitman's works as they not only showcase the lives of common people, the soldiers, and the great figures of American history, but also create the real America, independent from European history. In Whitman's America, "the objects," every component of the nation, are recognized self-sufficiently, and the anonymous individuals are identified from the "American crowd" for the first time (Ziff 24). The sole foundation of Whitman's system of naming individuals is based on his position in American democracy.

Our understanding of democracy is quite different from that in nineteenth-century America. According to Sean Wilentz's book *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln*, we have categories under the so-called democratic institutions today, but we cannot impose these categories on the past, blocking the understanding of how "our own, more elevated standards originated" (Wilentz xviii). Wilentz defines democracy as "a historical fact, rooted in a vast array of events and experiences, that comes into being out of changing human relations between governors and the governed" (xviii). Democracy is then interpreted as a dynamic phenomenon, a constantly revised thought. Wilentz also argues that democracy should always be fought for, as it is an idea that greatly concerns the welfare of the citizens of the nation. Democracy should be "rooted in the lives and expectations" of the citizens in order to "succeed or survive" (xix). This individual-centered point of view has a lot in common with Whitman's democratic philosophy. Unlike the sovereignty advocated by Thomas Hobbes where expectations of the citizens were to be suppressed and should not form enough power to influence the state, discrepancy was a significant factor regarding the realization of democracy in nineteenth-century America.

Whitman was among the advocates of American democracy in his age and also one significant figure that established his own promising future of democracy unprecedented by his contemporaries and emulated by later generations. Reviewing the quote from

Democratic Vistas from the beginning of this chapter, we can perceive Whitman's intention to display democracy and nature in a similar fashion in his work. Just as Wilentz points out that democratic ideas should be "refreshed, fought over, and redefined continually" (xxiii), Whitmanian philosophy regards democracy and nature as family because the two subjects share something in common—the features of renewal and reconstruction, which are particularly applicable when situating Whitman the transcendentalist in postbellum America.

The essay *Democratic Vistas* incorporates everything Whitman intends to write about democracy through a nineteenth-century point of view. It serves as an artistic discipline to guide his contemporary or modern readers to commence a journey to the genesis, promulgation, and dissension of democracy. Although Whitman's prose works are oftentimes undervalued in comparison to his poetry, *Democratic Vistas* is considered crucial by Whitman scholars not only due to its contribution to the political insight into the future of America but also because of the documentation of the democratic progression of American history. Revised and published three times, the final version of the essay appeared in 1871, as a fully established democratic "yawp" in response to Thomas Carlyle's anti-democracy essay *Shooting Niagara: And After?* Here, Carlyle harshly rebuts the Second Reform Act, which enfranchised the urban male working class in his contemporary England and Wales, and considers it a phenomenon of "Swarmery" (4), a massive group of people with single-minded and impetuous actions. Whitman, on the other hand, celebrates the "greatness and health" conceived in the "mass" (972) in *Democratic Vistas*. His epoch-making piece of politically and culturally appurtenant prose work has secured its place in both the fields of nineteenth-century literature and history. It is these democratic visions divulged and pursued in the essay that create the frame of America, giving the new birth of democracy to the postbellum nation. With respect to the foreground of the essay which presents Whitman's dialectics with the diary-

like and epistolary form, the purpose of my thesis is to represent nineteenth-century democracy from Whitman's eye through his significant prose work *Democratic Vistas* in which his philosophical meditation of the political, natural, literary and cultural aspects of nineteenth-century America is manifested, and finally, to argue that to interpret Whitmanian democracy, we must start with the comprehension of his ideas about nature.

A distinguished scholar of Whitman, David Reynolds, once mentioned in an interview that the works of Whitman should not be categorized into schools of theories or defined within one ideological realm. He insisted on the importance of reading Whitman's works as "the narrative of the poet's life," which he considered "a window on the nineteenth-century America" (Weinreich 1). Reynolds' opposition to the approach of interpreting Whitman's works as race, class, or gender-oriented allows more freedom from theoretical restrictions for Whitman studies. Due to this freedom introduced by Reynolds, I feel encouraged to discuss the two major focuses demonstrated in Whitman's writing—democracy and nature—as two sides of a coin circulated in the poet's vision of America. The prose work, *Democratic Vistas* conspicuously represents Whitman's democratic outlook while it further implies the indispensable role nature plays in the realm of democracy. Just as Emerson claims that nature in America is to be explored and appreciated in the culture of men, Whitman, in *Democratic Vistas*, introduces the progression of American civilization—democracy—with his insight into Nature¹ as the root.

"Democracy," Whitman claims in *Democratic Vistas*, "is a word the real gist of which still sleeps, quite unawaken'd, notwithstanding the resonance and the many angry tempests out of which its syllables have come, from pen or tongue. It is a great word, whose history, I suppose, remains unwritten, because that history has yet to be enacted"

¹ Nature is capitalized in my thesis in specific reference to the Whitmanian concept and in distinction from the past definition of European nature.

(984). This statement appeared in the essay in 1871 and has been the foundation of his poetry writing. Roberto Mangabeira Unger and Cornel West call *Democratic Vistas* “the secular bible of democracy” (11). Alfred Kazin argues that the essay “is his poetry in a slightly lower voice” (52). A recent article by Robert L. Pincus addresses the importance of the distinct “critical voice” in the essay “as one distinguishable from that of his poetry” (23). With reference to Unger, West, and Kazin, it is apt to assume that the formation of American democracy and culture as demonstrated in the essay can be attributed largely to Whitman’s concept of democracy. I intend to discuss more on account of Pincus’ observation in terms of Whitman’s writing styles of poetry and prose. To switch from one style to another allows Whitman to illustrate democracy in varied tones of voice as well as points of view. While the essay is set out to explicate his idea of democracy, to understand it requires more than just researching his political program and patriotic beliefs. Perceptions of personalism, poetry, and Nature embedded in the essay have not received enough attention regarding their relations with the idea of democracy in our criticism. By analyzing the relations between democracy, individuals, poetry, and Nature, I plan to do a close reading of the political essay in terms of its implications for Nature.

When speaking of Whitman, we remember him as a prolific poet, an enthusiastic patriot, and an ardent transcendentalist. In the history of American literature, a lot of discussion has been conducted about his innovative style and technique in modern poetry writing. His free verse demonstrates both the construction and culture of his poetic language. While his poems have been recognized worldwide, his prose works from which his critical voice is heard have received relatively less attention from readers. The “jottings,” a word which Whitman uses to refer to his prose writing, contain an “abundance of thought” (Lewin 441) in spite of their convoluted style. Of all his prose works, according to Lewin, *Democratic Vistas* is “the best thing Whitman has produced

in prose” (441) It “consists of jottings on the future of democracy, and, incidentally, on many topics not suggested in the title” (441).

The approach of the essay in discussing the ideas of Nature is particularly interesting because Whitman’s concept of Nature can be regarded as the center of his philosophy from which his writings of transcendental perception and the democratic style of his poetry are projected. He urges his readers to appreciate that it is the liberation that men can achieve both physically and mentally from Nature that helps them comprehend the foundation of political implications of his poetry in a more complete manner.

Relieved from the criticism conducted in gender studies concerning mostly the sensuality in his writing and in nationalism viewing his works in constricted political theories, the Whitmanian freedom actually endows the concept itself with a larger room for interpretation by borrowing the force of Nature. For Whitman, liberation acquired by staying in contact with Nature is a tremendous source of inspiration, purification, and revolution. Freedom is viewed as the basic of a democratic system. To achieve democratic success, one needs to return to Nature with an aspiration to comprehend the true liberation and inspiration and to cleanse the old self for the coming of the next revolution on the path of democracy.

In order to get closer to Nature, Whitman encourages his readers to become “naked.” Nakedness, according to the *OED*, can refer to “the state or condition of being unclothed,” “freedom from ostentation or unnecessary ornament,” and “openness to attack or injury.” Or, more specifically, “naked” can indicate “words or languages [that are] free from concealment or reserve.” While Whitman applies the terms “unclothed,” “natural” and “decent” to describe nakedness in the essay “A Sun-Bath—Nakedness,” a prose work written in 1877, he also attempts an alternative and playful exposition of the word based on its literal as well as metaphorical meanings. It does not take much for one to find the emphasis on and encouragement of being naked in both Whitman’s poetry and

prose writings. The idea appears early in “Song of Myself.” Right in the beginning of the poem, Whitman proclaims, “I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked” (27). Having stated his resolution to “strip” himself in *Leaves of Grass* in 1855, Whitman continues to pursue this goal in his later productions by putting it into “practice.”

In “A Sun-Bath—Nakedness,” he describes his experience of nakedness when he situates himself amid natural surroundings as “Two months have I absorb’d them (“creek-shore, wood and field”), and they begin to make a new man of me” (830). He is amazed at Nature’s power to purify human beings just as all the other creatures dwelling in Nature’s realm. Relieving himself of all the responsibilities that men are expected to undertake, he learns how to live a life in seclusion with Nature as he manages to spare “every day at least two or three hours of freedom, bathing, no talk, no bonds, no dress, no books, no *manners*” (830). Here bathing, an act to cleanse oneself, is significant because it is the moment where the bare skin of men makes direct contact with water, a vital resource in Nature as well as in Whitman’s poetry. While uttering words, reading books, and abiding by manners make us sophisticated in mental and social aspects, Whitman attempts to get rid of all the sophistication. Being completely open-minded and physically naked to Nature, Whitman has access to the freedom Nature offers in return, a naked truth arousing sincerity in men, which is more valuable than the complex and sophisticated operations undertaken throughout the history of the human world.

Also, through nakedness Whitman discovers an alternative manifestation of his identity. Man is not the only title he identifies with any more. He writes, “Nature was naked, and I was also” (831). Barriers between him and Nature and also between him and other lives are removed because of the nakedness they share, which harmonizes every element of the world, merging all the identities. He said, “I seem’d to get identity with each and every thing around me, in its condition” (831). To Whitman, being naked

is a necessary and straightforward way to connect us to natural conditions, and, to our innate qualities. “Perhaps the inner never lost rapport we hold with earth, light, air, trees, &c., is not to be realized through eyes and mind only, but through the whole corporeal body” (831). Whitman considers being naked in body and free in mind essential for us to reach the natural world in all aspects. He believes in the power of Nature to purify human beings and to guide us to understand “what faith or art or healthy really is” (832). In order for a civilization to be successful in its own terms, Whitman cites the examples of “the old Hellenic race” (832) to stress the significance of Greeks’ basing the foundation of a civilization on “Nakedness” as the source of the “natural and religious idea” (832). Whitman’s understanding of nakedness contains a larger scope than that formed by the modern people after him. He sees nakedness of men as “decency” concerning human existence in Nature. In contrast, the attempt to clothe ourselves and cover our bodies suggests indecency, insincerity, and hypocrisy. For Whitman, sophistication fails a civilization because it causes human beings to diverge from the simplicity of Nature, impairing the genuineness of humanity.

In addition to obtaining the idea of nakedness prevalent in Greek civilization as the prototype of a prosperous and highly influential culture, Whitman’s perception of Nature is also inspired by the preceding transcendentalist Emerson. Absorbing the Emersonian interpretations of human beings and the world, Whitman evolves Emerson’s characteristics in acknowledging the power of men, writing with the cataloguing technique, and elaborating on the relation between men and nature. In “Self-Reliance,” Emerson encourages his readers “to believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men,—that is genius” (175). To depend on the instinct of the self remains the focal point of how Emerson looks at the capacity of an individual. He stresses the importance of self-reliance by preaching to his readers “Trust thyself,” the voice which resonates throughout the essay. Correspondingly, Whitman

wrote “Song of Myself” in celebration of the infinite possibility of an individual. What marks the difference of Whitman’s singing for individuality is the first-person narrative style he applies to the verse. Starting off by writing a long poem presenting his view and vision of the world ranging from an “atom” (27) to an individual, Whitman’s active narration encourages his readers to look into themselves just as he does. Along with the oratorical style of the poem itself, the “I” voice boosts a compelling and compassionate energy so inclusive of the readers that the work distinguishes itself from the sermonic humdrum of “Self-Reliance.” The self-centered focus in Whitman’s writing is representative not only of the poet but of the self in every person. The enunciating “I” is so absorptive that it encompasses every atom of the universe. The inclusiveness manifested in the poem can be attributed to another characteristic of Whitman’s style, the cataloguing technique, a democratizing device which enunciates items in his poetry in a manner of enumeration. Similar to Emerson’s prose of cataloguing technique (Buell 3), Whitman’s catalogue is arranged in a stylistic form through his poetico-oratorical expression, an approach which is more inviting to the readers as it attempts to embrace both high and low cultures and people from different strata of societies. Whitman writes every piece of his work without differentiating his readers while Emerson characterizes his audience (since many of his essays were originally speeches) and addresses them differently.

Being a transcendentalist, Whitman certainly shares some characteristics with Emerson as well as other transcendentalists in their perceptions of Nature. However, what differentiates Whitman from other transcendentalists is his emphasis on the importance of the body when confronting Nature. When Emerson discusses the significance of each individual, he focuses on the human soul and its relationship with God, as exemplified in “The Oversoul,” where he explores the potential of an individual by encouraging his readers to look into themselves in search of their own soul so that

they can reach out and access a larger and more accommodating spiritual force that draws them closer to Nature. While Emerson introduces the notion of soul as a bridge connecting human beings to Nature, Whitman, acknowledging the power of mind, advances Emerson's theory by viewing human bodies as a microcosm of Nature where both the mortal and spiritual parts of life are given and nurtured. To Whitman, both body and soul should be completely exposed for an individual to "feel" Nature. Only when we are physically and spiritually naked, which implies being open and defenseless, can we embrace and, further, represent, Nature. With the presupposition of the tightly knit relation between nakedness and Nature in Whitman's writing, one can proceed to study the connection between Nature and literature, especially poetry, as illustrated in *Democratic Vistas*.

In order to expose our body and mind naturally, Whitman calls for literature, especially poetry, as a necessary cultivation. He reads poetry as a culture's language that "embodies both cosmic and local expressions of nature" (Setzer 10), developing the responsibilities of poetry writing beyond just a literary genre or style. Its "sound and rhythm rendered" by Nature "can marshal individual places and spirits into grand march of national, and even universal unity" (Setzer 10). Considering Nature as the greatest source for poetry and literature per se, Whitman writes with the tremendous inspiration of sound he has found in Nature, creating his works spontaneously both in content and in style. It is the raw energy produced through his down-to-earth writing style that makes its impact on the representations of not only individuals but also the universe.

The wide range that Whitman's writing can take up is not just limited to his magic of making poems lyrical. His imagery is no less engaging than his sound. In "Song of Myself," Whitman presents his imagery with the "visual and tactual," while manifesting "his power to project his landscapes" (Matthiessen 601). He "was not thinking there of painting, but directly of the forces of nature" (601). Having applied the source of Nature

to the oratorical creation in his poetry, Whitman also excels at presenting landscapes as not just how they seem but also how they “feel,” infusing the power of Nature into his readers’ minds. Images become vivid when being observed by Whitman, who presents them with an abundance of visually and sensually descriptive words. Only when truly immersed in Nature as the subject depicted can a writer infuse vigor to his description instead of just preserving the still image. Whitman remains the creator of spontaneous language by devoting himself to producing poetry, a genre which is considered by him the most inclusive, self-sustained, and natural.

In similar fashion, his rival in both the literary and political fields, Thomas Carlyle, asserts the duty of a poet and the connection between poetry and Nature in *Heroes And Hero Worships*. In the chapter “The Hero as Poet,” Carlyle argues that the sound of Nature is music in its perfection and poetry is “musical Thought” (99). A poet, for Carlyle, should be a person who acts as the observer and transcriber through which the musicality of Nature is made known. A poet also possesses “the power of intellect,” and the “sincerity and depth of vision” of a man who sees deeply enough to find poetry. As Carlyle suggests, in the heart of Nature lies music. To achieve music demands a poetic nature in man. Whitman as a poet manifests Carlyle’s expectation and Whitman’s poetry overflows with oratorical and musical performance. Furthermore, Whitman endeavors to justify poetry as the requisite to apprehend not only literature but also Nature and democracy. He illustrates the significance of poetry in both the literary field and the real world in *Democratic Vistas*. He views Nature as “the only complete, actual poem,” and “existing calmly in the divine scheme, containing all, content, careless of the criticisms of a day, or these endless and wordy chatterers” (1012). Because of the structure and attributes shared by Nature and poetry, Whitman believes that to get closer to Nature, the first step is to embark upon poetry, the divine language which has served to be the guidance and reliance for us in the universe.

With the purpose to advance the discussion to the affinity between Nature and democracy in *Democratic Vistas*, I must remind the readers to bear in mind Whitman's regard of poetry and Nature as two subjects that are identical. Reviewing the preceding criticism on *Democratic Vistas*, the representative prose work which projects Whitman's disappointment and expectation for the contemporary development of democracy in America, I have noticed that former critics tend to regard this work as it is entitled—a nationalistic and politically oriented pamphlet, narrowing the approach of reading the work to its literal meaning and purpose. The work itself surely lives up to what it has intended: its applicability to the governance of America as well as its stimulation to the realization of the democratic system. It contributes a sharp observation of Whitman's America.

In "What Whitman Knew," David Brooks analyzed *Democratic Vistas* and suggested, "It is misleading to think one can arrive at a single, consistent judgment about the United States" (32). In the essay, Brooks, a political and cultural commentator in our era, advocates that twenty-first century Americans should read *Democratic Vistas* to know what the United States is all about. Closely tied in with its origin, which traces back to immigrants from all over the world, America has fulfilled the concept of a salad bowl, a notion which signifies the various and juxtaposed American cultures and is reflected by Whitman's cataloguing in "Song of Myself" and the complexity of *Democratic Vistas*. The invigorative flow of American history and culture has been carried on with diversity, controversy, and constant dynamics throughout the country since its birth. In a country used to coping with fluctuation in all aspects, Brooks proposed that the argument, "[e]xtremes must be accepted without regard for consistency" (2), is embedded in *Democratic Vistas*. While Brooks has made a discovery of how to apply the visions in the essay to his contemporary America, this discovery appears familiar in almost every piece of Whitman's writings. To encompass every atom

in an individual, the aforementioned concept that is centered in Whitmanian philosophy, is the way to the realization of democracy. Whitman manifestly “knew” more and deeper than the connection made by Brooks between the vistas and the States. Brooks’ interpretation explains the perennial value of the essay in terms of its political outlook, yet he does not delve into why Whitman’s democracy has sustained the various political trends until now.

As a defender of democracy in America, Whitman has actively participated in writing about literary, cultural, and political criticism and has produced prolifically in each field. The origin of his democratic concept is not just political. While Brooks establishes the essential understanding of the essay in terms of its political and cultural function, Edward F. Grier responds to more than just the political outlook of the essay. Acknowledging the fact that Whitman was struggling with his publishing career during the time when the essay was written, Grier discusses his observation of the reality that Whitman dealt with when he wrote the essay, and probes further into the intrinsic motivation that underlies the essay.

Grier points out that *Democratic Vistas*, “despite the external opportunism connected with its genesis, was the result of long and deep thought by Whitman” (13). The essay should be considered as a conceptual display of the accumulation of Whitman’s contemplation of the democracy of America and also as the poet’s insight into literature and, further, into Nature, which will be explained later in the paper. Upon drawing to the surface the fact that the profound Whitmanian democracy has been nurtured and presented in the essay, Grier associates literature with democracy because “Whitman explained that ‘Orbic Literature’ dealt with the nature of, and necessity for, an American literature which would express and sustain democratic idealism” (Grier 17). “Orbic Literature,” the circulation of ideas in literary works, serves as the backbone of Whitman’s democratic conception. It is the all-in-one philosophy, just as every atom

belongs to an individual. Just as trivia can embody the majority, so can greatness be seen in minutiae. Grier perceives this focus implanted in the essay and asserts the significance of literature in his discussion of Whitmanian democracy.

The concept of “Orbic Literature” indicates that democracy and literature rely on and benefit each other. In “Sermon on A Text from Whitman,” Lionel Trilling reemphasizes the notion of “Orbic Literature” by employing it to the administrative operation under a democratic system. He proposes, “Democracy can exist only if authority can organize diversity; but democracy dies if authority encroaches on personalism” (215). Trilling’s argument is based on the logic of Whitman’s “Orbic Literature” for it is a kind of literature that feeds on the continuity and circulation of ideas which do not interfere with and are able to accommodate each other. To really accommodate various ideas, Whitman thinks that contradiction should be allowed as it is natural for all phenomena in the world. His idea of “Orbic” is to focus on the endless circulation of everything, including discrepancy in his writing where he claims, “Very well then...I contradict myself” (Whitman 87). Therefore, democracy can truly be sustained under the organic circumstances, echoing with Wilentz’s emphasis on the dynamic feature of democracy mentioned in the beginning of the chapter.

By equating the importance of authority and personalism, Trilling points out another function of *Democratic Vistas*; that is, in addition to its literary exploration into democracy, the essay is also pertinent to the discussion of placing individuals as the essential part of the entire structure of a democratic system. Individuals are the ones that endow the literature of democracy with thought and substantial realization. In Trilling’s words, the individuals on whom Whitmanian democracy depends can be understood as the agents of “a certain condition of mind or state of being for which literature had a responsibility” (216). The relation between literature, individuals, and democracy is clarified as a significant conception reflected in *Democratic Vistas* for the first time. Yet,

the criticism of the essay still remains underwritten as Trilling notes: “[i]t is not possible in short space to suggest the full richness and complication of *Democratic Vistas* or even to paraphrase all that Whitman says in it about literature” (215). It is precisely the reason why I discuss the essay and conduct a close reading of it in five chapters.

The complexity and multiple directions of Whitman’s concept of democracy have not been rewarded with a more detailed criticism that is relatively complete and diverse in interpretation. In spite of Trilling’s attempt to examine literature, individuals, and democracy as a whole in *Democratic Vistas*, a step which is important in deciphering the essay, there is still more illumination needed in order to interpret the work appropriately. The connections between literature, individuals, and democracy mentioned by Trillings are not consolidated enough and vague in their exposition at the same time. While the concept of individuals suggests a crucial approach to understanding the poet’s philosophy, it is even more significant to adopt Whitman’s understanding of Nature as the agent that combines the three before beginning further discussion.

To honestly present Whitmanian democracy in America, one needs to attain the comprehension of Nature, which contains the essence of literature, of the individual body and mind, and of American patriotism. In the “Preface” of *Leaves of Grass* (1855), Whitman introduces Americans as people who “of all nations at any time upon the earth have probably the fullest poetic nature” (5). His poetic creation is in accordance with his anticipation of the New World literature concerning its political and social functions for America. According to Shira Wolosky, “Whitman’s poetic conduct is most obviously radical in its formal experimentation, its abandonment of meter and rhyme” (384). American literature, Whitman argues, should endeavor to break through the old European tradition and stand on its own.

Different from the British Romantic poets, Whitman writes about his interaction with Nature while he does not completely reject industrialism, a product of civilization.

He still approves of the artificial achievement of America and intends to embrace it within his philosophy. He considers America “the greatest poem” (5), written by “the common people”(6), and this poem “the new frame of democracy” (959). In this manner, the nature of the nation is understood as obtaining the inherent qualities of poetic disposition, which is an apt requirement to realize his views on democracy. Stressing the importance of literature to direct us in the democratic realm, Whitman regards poetry as the most proper guidance for his conception of American democracy. Regarding poetry as the literary genre that retains the closest relation to Nature, Whitman demonstrates the inclusiveness emphasized in his democracy by presenting his cataloguing style as a democratic manifestation in literature.

The all-encompassing and spontaneous train of thoughts exemplified in his writing goes hand in hand with the elements of natural surroundings. Resulting from Whitman’s Orbic Literature approach, the counterpart of the argument in which poetry resembles Nature is attested by the previously mentioned example from *Democratic Vistas* where Nature is deemed as the only integral and genuine poem. The mutual dependence of Nature and poetry in Whitman’s philosophy also sheds light on his political outlook, a formulation embedded in *Democratic Vistas* and in need of more discussion. The thesis is to be conducted by analyzing Whitman’s poetry in relation to Nature, poetry, and democracy, the central themes discussed in *Democratic Vistas*. I intend to prove how the prose work *Democratic Vistas* can be applied as the artistic discipline for introducing the wide scope of the Whitmanian ideation of Nature from the basic ideas to the political ideas of nakedness embedded in his poetry. The essay manifests the naked body of democracy that can be inspected through the poetic eye and the embracing touch of Nature established in Whitman’s writing.

To demonstrate the importance of nakedness in the realization of American democracy, in addition to the first chapter as introduction and the last chapter conclusion,

I am to present the body of the thesis from chapter two to chapter four where the progression from nakedness to democracy will be secured stage by stage. Each chapter of the thesis is to be divided into three parts. In the first I will present passages from *Democratic Vistas* that are in need of further explication. In the second, I will use poems in association with the passages to help interpret the concepts that remain obscure in the essay. Finally, by using criticism of the poems as well as historically relevant knowledge pertaining to the time when Whitman produced his works, I will argue how the essay can assist readers to appreciate his poems with regard to Nature from three different approaches—body politic, transcendentalism, and ecopoetics, a study on poetry with an ecological message and emphasis.

In order to demonstrate the approach, one passage from the essay is especially adopted in the discussion of the concept of body and soul in Whitmanian transcendentalism. While Whitman celebrates the prominent progress of the technology of his time in America, he is also concerned about the emptiness of the soul resulting from the overemphasis on materialistic realization. As he cheers for the joy of material achievements, he also argues that “the soul of man will not with such only—nay, not with such at all—be finally satisfied; but needs what, (standing on these and on all things, as the feet stand on the ground,) is address’d to the loftiest, to itself alone” (960). It is evident that the soul cannot be nurtured by material fulfillment only. For Whitman, to satisfy the soul demands something more pertinent to the physical interaction between people.

In the poem “I Sing the Body Electric,” he instructs his readers how to seek and further cultivate the soul. Composed in a detailed and descriptive style, the poem is split into sections in which Whitman illustrates carefully every part of the human body through his poetic observation. In Section Four, he talks about the sensuality of physical contact with men and women. He encourages the readers to stay “close to men and

women” and look “on them, and in the contact and odor of them, that please the soul well” (253). He points out the place where we can find the soul. It is simply the contact of men and women and their natural physical state that reflect the soul in them or even the larger soul above them, among us. By addressing to his body, Whitman discovers the soul. “O my body!” he hailed, “I believe the likes of you are to stand or fall with the likes of the soul, (and that they are the soul,)” (257). Here, body and soul become one. Opposing the other contemporary transcendentalists, both body and soul are considered divine by Whitman.

The perplexity of the passage cited from *Democratic Vistas* is eased through the interpretation of this poem. The idea of the body politic is based on the sacredness of the body in Whitman’s works, a concept explored by Betsy Erkkila in *Whitman the Political Poet*. This concept can be applied to every single body, including people from different strata of a society, especially fitting for America, where immigrants from all over the world gather. Huck Gutman wrote an article commenting on how the “bodies” in the poem are important in their practice concerning politics. Because of the sacredness of the bodies as well as the equality between them, Gutman argues, all bodies in the nation have their places “in the democratic procession” (297). Endowed by the poet with a divine mission, the corporeality of the body exercises its power in the realms of thought, politics, and to be more specific, democracy in America. This is the democracy Whitman anticipates, the nakedness of thought performing the highest force of the soul. The state of the human body in its most natural presentation reaches out to the true Nature of the Whitmanian American democracy.

In the second chapter, I will analyze Whitman’s poems in terms of their political connotations revealed through the discussion of Nature in *Democratic Vistas*. His perception of Nature, as presented in the prose work, responds to individuality, poetry, and patriotism. Starting from the point of view as an individual as well as a

transcendentalist in Nature, Whitman's ideas of Nature in association with his advocacy of the body being placed as high as the soul will be examined. The chapter will first establish the significance of *Democratic Vistas* by referring to Thomas Carlyle's *Shooting Niagara: And After?* as the motive of and the target for the finalized version of the essay and explain how Carlyle's opinions of democracy are different from Whitman's. Second, I will discuss examples of Whitman's mentioning the notion of body in his prose work and allude to the poems relevant to the poet's conception of corporeality and the necessity of equating tangibility with spirituality in his transcendentalism. The distinction between Whitman and other transcendentalists is to be exemplified in the course of the discussion through the interpretations of the selected poems. The sections drawn from the essay in relation to the theme will be mirrored and explained by the poems with the purpose to demonstrate specifically the ideas of body and Nature implanted in the democratic pamphlet.

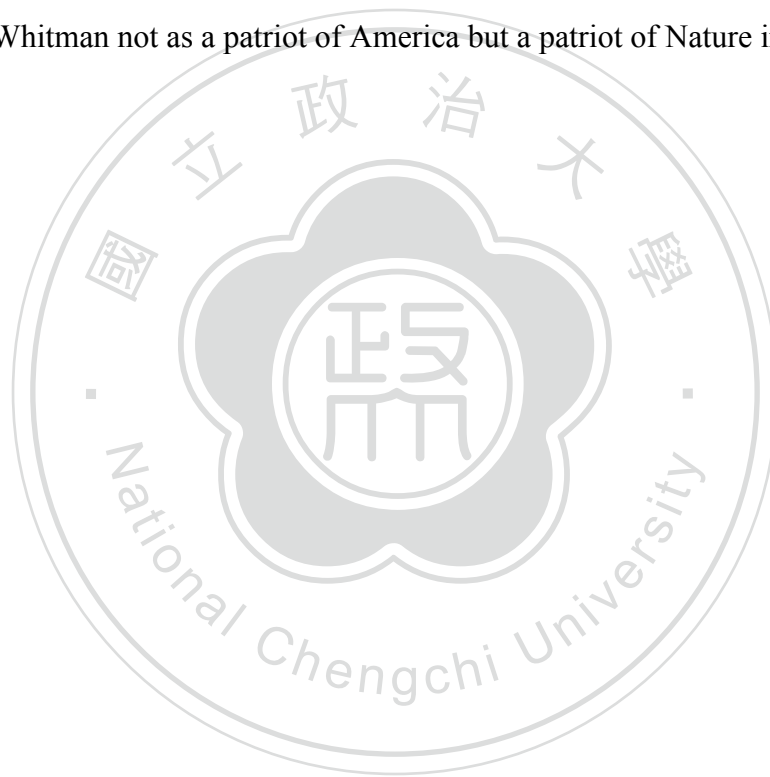
As demonstrated in the methodology, the discussion of the body will include Betsy Erkkila's concept of the body politic, an approach to illustrate the relation between the human body and democracy of America in Whitman's writing. To introduce the body politic approach to deciphering Whitman's *Democratic Vistas*, I intend to start the discussion with Erkkila's interpretation of "Song of Myself" as Whitman's poetic demonstration of the body politic concept. She compares the body, the content of the poem, with the land of America, and the politic, the body's mechanism, with the democratic system of the nation. Next, I will build my argument upon her criticism concerning Whitman's poetry and bring the concept of the body politic to the interpretation of *Democratic Vistas* by employing Harold Aspiz's approach, in which the structure of the essay is regarded as a manifestation of the body politic theory. Agreeing yet unsatisfied with Aspiz's interpretation, I will argue that the body politic notion is embedded not only in the structure but also in the content of the essay. At the end of the

argument, an individual as the very basic element of a democratic system, ought to be understood as a corporeal body as everlasting as the soul that contains and represents Nature.

In the third chapter, upon the recognition of Whitman's transcendentalist view on the relation between body and Nature, I will discuss Nature from the point of view of Whitman the poet. The chapter will attempt to present Whitman's apprehension of the strong kinship between poetry and Nature. The images of Nature, especially the usage of water in his poetry, are to be discussed. Whitman has acquired the name as the poet of the sea due to his expansive application of the sea or the ocean in his writing. In *Democratic Vistas*, he uses the sea as a metaphor to suggest the idea of how literature has carried wisdom and knowledge from different eras. The sea is to be viewed as an agent that carries the old and accommodates the new. According to Whitman, poetry, compared with other literary genres, retains the closest relation with Nature. The sea poetry especially manifests this concept. By researching Whitman's sea philosophy, the chapter proposes that Whitman, as a poet and an embracer of Nature, considers poetry as a bridge that joins the history of man and of Nature together.

In the fourth chapter, arriving at a conclusion from the last chapter that poetry enables man to be completely open in Nature as Whitman describes, "Nature was naked, and I was also" (831), I will discuss specifically Whitman's poetry as national literature, and the poet as a patriot of the cosmos. While announcing his patriotic sentiment and enthusiasm, Whitman inclines to apply objects of natural surroundings such as stars, birds, trees, and flowers to represent political figures and to depict the political situations of his time. For instance, in his famous poem "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," Whitman compares Lincoln to the "powerful western fallen star" (459) and himself to a warbling bird. He believes that the force of Nature can be as sturdy as required in a political model from a patriot's point of view or as versatile as possible

concerning the idea of spontaneity in transcendentalism—an analogy which brings his readers back to the starting point of the man-oriented Nature in America. Paralleling the two, Whitman begins the poem by juxtaposing Nature and democracy through the instrument, poetry, builds up the relative course and phenomenon in both realms, and eventually integrates the two and achieves unification. This method can be perceived in *Democratic Vistas* where Nature and democracy seem to be separately mentioned but closely tied with each other in an obscure manner. By explaining the metaphors pertinent to Nature (which contain political implications to American democracy) in this chapter, I propose to look at Whitman not as a patriot of America but a patriot of Nature in a universal manner.



CHAPTER 2

“Germs of All”—Whitman The Transcendentalist of Reconstruction

“I extend my arm and half enclose [a handful space] with my hand,
That containing the start of each and all, the virtue, the germs of all.”

—Walt Whitman, “Germs”

When Ralph Waldo Emerson put forth his philosophy of American transcendentalism exclusively based on the people and culture that provided the nation with a new life independent from its British heritage, especially with his renowned essay *Nature* published in 1836, the soil of America was turned over for the first time after the Declaration of Independence. Emersonianism has continued to inspire the posterity to continue the mission of fertilizing the land of the New World. As slow as it was for America to march into a new era where the nation struggled to be free of the cultural and historical influences from the Old World, the journey had been worthwhile. Walt Whitman as a recognized follower of Emerson, with the belief that “a leaf of grass is no less than the journeywork of the stars” (57), composed the poem “Song of Myself” in 1855 as his initial attempt to sing as an individual of the nation and for every individual in the universe. While stars can be seen by people from different corners of the world, the leaves of his poetry are expected to travel to every individual in the universe. He does not restrain his visionary ideas of America but revitalizes them with a magnifying glass which helps him look over the world. He sees all the particles in the universe as “germs” (409), encompassing all the “forms, qualities, lives, humanity, language, thoughts, stars” (409), and more. These “germs” are delivered by and in us, through the infinite space between different parts of the body.

The emphasis on the body in Whitman’s works has established its indispensable place in his democracy for America. The prevalence of corporeality expressed in his poetry surpasses its homoerotic manifestation, and further, complements his political validity due to the individuality demonstrated through the bodies of every individual as

the essential elements of democracy. His poetic works should not be understood as voices interpreting various subjects but as a grand and lengthy song that has its beginning, transition, and end, constituting the structure of his philosophical evolution. It is important not to read Whitman's poems separately but to comprehend them collectively. His poetry altogether suggests the change of his democratic thought. In order to understand this train of thought, we need to use *Democratic Vistas* as the guidance of Whitman's poetic arts. With regard to the democratic outlook of America, the essay represents not only Whitman's collected political thoughts but also serves as the artistic principle guiding the readers to comprehend his ideas of Nature, poetry and democracy in a unified but organic manner which resembles the mechanism of our body.

Scholars have introduced the idea of the body politic as a major approach to interpreting Whitman's works. Betsy Erkkila, the author of *Whitman The Political Poet*, broke new ground in her exegesis of *Leaves of Grass* by paralleling democracy with the body through the application of the body politic concept to the poems. In the essay "Leaves of Grass and the Body Politic," Erkkila legitimizes her approach by pointing out that Whitman himself has spoken of "the analogy between the individual and the body politic." She quotes a passage from *Leaves of Grass* (1855):

What is any Nation, after all—and what is a human being—but a struggle between conflicting, paradoxical, opposing elements—and they themselves and their most violent contests, important parts of that One Identity, and of its development?

(87)

By quoting the passage above, Erkkila exemplifies the origin of her body politic approach to interpreting Whitman's poetry. She also perceives "an organic self" created by Whitman to represent himself in his democratic prospect as he "seeks to manage and resolve poetically the conflicting and paradoxical energies of the nation" (Erkkila 93).

Juxtaposing the performances of the body of both male and female with the political conflicts of the nation, “the danger of democracy with the danger of a sexually unruly body” (105), Erkkila clarifies Whitman’s attempts to push forward “the level of sex and the body” (105) presented in the poetry to reflect his democratic theory of America. She focuses on the exploration of the manifestation of the body in Whitman’s poems in the essay. The body encompasses people of different races and sexes, nations of every continent, and even the entire creation of Nature. According to Erkkila, the formation of the body in Whitman’s poetry serves as his plan to reconstruct democracy in nineteenth-century America.

While Erkkila makes the first connection between the body politic and the poetry of Whitman, the interpretation which creates a different point of view for the readers to look at the poems in a politico-corporal fashion, Harold Aspiz, another recognized Whitman scholar, takes the body politic notion further to decipher the poet’s prose work. Five years after Erkkila proposed the body politic as the demonstration of both Whitman’s poetry and democratic outlook, Aspiz further emphasizes that the body politic is embedded not only in the performance of Whitman’s poetic language but also in the structure of his significant prose work *Democratic Vistas*. In “The Body Politic in *Democratic Vistas*,” Aspiz considers the concept revealed in Whitman’s writings more of an abstruse technique than a perceptible scheme, owing to the fact that the term “the body politic” never appears in his writings. He envisages the *Vistas* as a political, social, and physiological essay, which incorporates the body politic (a term with or without Whitman’s validation) as “a unifying structural metaphor” (Aspiz 105).

Aspiz contributes a crucial interpretation by elucidating the nature of the essay. For more than a century, critics have commented on the inapplicability of the essay to its contemporary political reality. It is also a reason why Whitman is categorized by literati as an idealist. Aspiz intends to redefine the constitution of the essay as an attempt to

fortify “an intuitional faith” rather than produce “a political program” (110). This intuition, according to Aspiz, operates in a spiritual manner in each “self-reliant” individual, “who is attuned to an influx of nature’s evolutionary law” (111). With men as the major participants in the law of Nature to carry on the “intuition” for the duration of time and across places, “the poetic-political theory” (Aspiz 111) underlying *Democratic Vistas* is realized through the human body.

In addition to the connection made between the nation and the body, Aspiz further points out that the “physiological upgrading” and “poetic renaissance” (112) performed in Whitman’s writings construct an analogy between the body and literature. By employing the body politic as a metaphorical device to interpret *Democratic Vistas*, Aspiz views the body, poetry, and the nation as three parallel streams of thought in the essay. His interpretation echoes the poem “I Sing The Body Electric.” The electric, organic body, as I tend to put it, symbolizes the reviving, revolutionary, and dynamic idea of the body politic. Stressing the influence of physiology in *Democratic Vistas*, Aspiz directs the readers to understand Whitman’s democratic prospect from an alternative standpoint to the monotonous study of the political system, reassuring the significance of the body in Whitman’s prose writings. However, the projected body as an analogy to Whitman’s poetry writings and “institutional faith” remains meager in comparison to the grand and all-encompassing style and content of Whitman’s works. The connections between the body, the poetry, and the nation have not been explained in detail. In my thesis, I intend to look at Aspiz’s inspiring essay as the cornerstone on which I will attempt to construct and elaborate on the discussions of the body, poetry, and the nation in this order in each chapter, with the initial exploration of the fundamentals of Whitman’s concept of the body by referring to Emerson’s *Nature* and Carlyle’s essays, *Characteristics* and *Shooting Niagara: And After?*

The brief quote in the beginning of the chapter intends to set up the foundation of Whitmanian philosophy of Nature and the world we share with it. Whitman regards the circulation of human bodies and Nature as the ultimate law. It is the law that dominates the course of every institution in the world. It is the law that ought to be studied and applied to the practice of democracy as the manifestations of democracy are “the warranting results like those of Nature’s laws, reliable, when once established, to carry on themselves” (Whitman 966). For Whitman, the body, Nature, and democracy share the same principles. The focus of the chapter is to take the readers upon an alternative passage to reread the essay *Democratic Vistas* and to argue that the core value of Whitmanian democracy should be traced back to the root of his philosophy—Nature. The conception of Nature in the essay can be understood as a revision and a revolution from Emersonianism while the expectation of democratic ripeness is mirrored and motivated by Thomas Carlyle’s rebuttal of democracy in *Shooting Niagara: And After?*

In the first part of the chapter, reflecting on the incitement of the full version of *Democratic Vistas*, which has been revised and republished thrice, I intend to explore the origin and the creation of the essay by referring to Carlyle’s essay, which approves Aristocracy instead of democracy. Written against the Second Reform Act in 1867, *Shooting Niagara: And After?* consists of Carlyle’s prediction of the disappointment and failure of democracy, which he terms “Swarmery,” a group of people with imprudent and undiscerning actions. It serves as his social commentary of nineteenth-century England in political and cultural aspects, which are contrasted with the *Vistas* finalized by Whitman in 1871. In this section, I will attempt to dwell on the arguments about democracy provided in the two essays and employ Carlyle’s reasons of disagreement as the ground to tackle the *Vistas* and to prove why the significance of the essay is unailing with respect to democracy in America.

Through the discussion based on Carlyle's commentary, in the second part of the chapter I will argue how the understanding of the *Vistas* should rely on Whitman's ideas of Nature applied in the essay. To interpret Whitmanian Nature as an adaptation of Emersonian transcendentalism and a built-up discourse of the physiologico-political view in Carlyle's *Characteristics*, I will discuss the fundamental ideas of Nature in Whitman's transcendentalism by resorting to the efficacy of body utilized as the starting point for Whitman to illustrate the development of poetry and the nation of the postbellum era in the essay. Since *Democratic Vistas* was written after the Civil War, I intend to focus on Whitman's transcendental thoughts that have participated in rebuilding and revitalizing the nation. In this chapter, the word Reconstruction is to be understood as the period of time after 1865, the end of the American Civil War. By representing the essay as a democratizing body of reformation, signifying Whitman's response of nineteenth-century Reconstruction America to Carlyle's essays and Emerson's transcendentalism, the chapter aims to show that to interpret *Democratic Vistas* properly as to realize its democratic implications, one must initiate the argument through the concept of body as the foundation of Whitman's ideas of Nature embedded in the essay.

Democratic Vistas, a long prose work compiled from a trilogy of essays intended for publication in the *Galaxy* magazine, represents Whitman's accumulated thoughts on democracy after the American Civil War. The first two essays "Democracy" and "Personalism" were published respectively in the magazine in 1867 and 1868 while the third "Orbic Literature" failed to attain the goal in the first attempt (Wrobel 176). Although *Democratic Vistas* is the compilation of three individual complete essays, the current version of the prose work had undergone several revisions before it was finalized. The main reason for Whitman to complete the essay was the publication of Carlyle's *Shooting Niagara: And After?* in 1867. Carlyle witnessed the trend of democracy arriving at his own country, shaking the ancient, noble, and long-lasting tradition of

England, particularly resulting from the Second Reform Act. At first, the Reform Act was to enfranchise the urban male working class in England and Wales as an adoption of democratization in politics. It eventually led to the enfranchisement of all the male householders, an outcome which was intended to help the Conservative Party.

The Act induced various oppositional voices in England. Among them, Carlyle expressed his indignity confronting the situation by producing the well-known *Shooting Niagara* to harshly attack and criticize the “Devil-appointed” (4) path of democracy. In the essay, he regards democracy as “Swarmery” (4), or the “Gathering of Men in Swarms” (4), and the practitioners merely a group of people “in the habit of doing, believing, when thrown into that miraculous condition” (4). In his point of view, the believers of democracy are ignorant, blindly following a trend that would eventually lead the country backward.

As Carlyle points out the naivety to believe in “the equality of men” (4), he further reassures the natural existence of “servantship” and “mastership” with reference to the “Nigger Question” as one of the “smallest” problems (5) of the American Civil War. According to Carlyle, the order and rank of a society as well as the intellect of a man hold the key to the improvement of a country. He argues that the Aristocracy of all classes in England should be “looked up to” because of “their good qualities and good fortune” (17), in contrast to the emphasis on the commonality of every individual in the democratic notion. This elitist view is also extended to his argument of arts. Literature, especially poetry, is wasted in the region of democracy and falls “inane in our mad era” (Carlyle 27). Carlyle laments the loss of faith in his contemporary poetry writings. He argues against the oral quality of poetry, deeming that speech has been prevailing and superfluous. The “non-vocal” school department, the type of writing which is pious, is needed to direct the future generations to acquire and retain their “right conduct” and “wise, useful behavior” (Carlyle 45). For Carlyle, only art pertaining to Fact is worth

producing or continuing its existence, a feature which he compares to the religious work, the Bible. With regard to the contemporary literary scene of his time, Carlyle conveys his distress of the failing culture and society as a result of the political revolution and his expectation for the Heroes to come in the future (31).

In reaction to the democratizing movement of his age, Carlyle refutes, in a hardened manner, the fault of the enfranchisement in England, and the misconception of liberalization as a positive movement. Refusing to change the conventional approach of developing a country so as to refine its culture and social progress under a hierarchical system, Carlyle is rendered powerless and wretched by the impending force of democracy. He mocks the foolishness of his country as if it were to make a leap over Niagara, embracing the impossible. Democracy, the term toyed with by Carlyle, is purely a beautified and believed-to-be concept that cannot maintain a substantial and sustainable institution to lead a country toward its stable progress and prosperity. For Carlyle, neither culture nor art can endure the undiscerning acts of people resulting from the operation of democracy. Of all the genres of literature, poetry is discussed particularly for the contemporary speech/song-like writing style. Carlyle disdains this movement because it lowers the art itself and preserves nothing but transient mortality that will eventually be washed away by the currents of time. Due to the aggressive commentary by Carlyle, Whitman, starting from the same year of 1867, completed and published his trilogy of essays on the merits of democracy in 1871, as the recollected postbellum thoughts of men, literature, and America.

While it was inevitable for Whitman, as a volunteer in the camps and hospitals to take care of the soldiers during the American Civil War, to reveal the trauma and damage the country suffered during the War, the newly kindled hope can still be seen conspicuously in his essay. In *Democratic Vistas*, instead of revolving around the postbellum disillusion, Whitman aims to introduce to his countrymen and readers a

different method derived from his transcendentalist philosophy to comprehend the working of democracy. In the beginning of the essay, he suggests that we learn “the greatest lessons of Nature,” in other words, “the lessons of variety and freedom” (953). The lessons should be viewed as the fundamental principles of democracy. The characteristic of variety implies the possibility of constant change, competition, and revolution. The instability is therefore one important factor to the success of a democratic government. This argument contrasts the old, traditional world Carlyle recalls in his essay as he regards “Swarmeries” as temporary mistakes made by the ignorant believers that shall cease to have influence before long. However, for Whitman, any movement or principles produced under a democratic system should always stay dynamic. Unlike Carlyle who supports the stability of ranks and power distribution in the aristocratic structure, Whitman considers the incessantly evolving points of view or regulations the essential contribution to the realization of democracy. The perceptual discrepancy resulting from the attachment to the Old World and the aspiration for the New World therefore sets the two patriotic literati apart.

For Whitman, democracy is “not the result of studying up in political economy, but of the ordinary sense, observing, wandering among men” (954). It takes one to preserve a compassionate state of mind to understand the “ordinary,” commonplace manner of men so as to realize the importance of the observance. As a man who had been accustomed to the existence of the Parliament and its sovereignty, Carlyle might find it baffling to have sympathy with the egalitarian mindset of democracy. The Prime Minister and government in England are elected through the members of the Parliament but not the common people. While election in England is considered a democratic institution, this democracy is performed by selected individuals instead of the general public. The monarchical system contradicts the ordinariness promulgated in Whitman’s democratic system.

In the poem "To a Common Prostitute," Whitman "salute[s]" the prostitute "with a significant look" to indicate that the prostitute is no less important than any other individuals and he will not "exclude" the prostitute "till the sun excludes" her (512). Being a poet, Whitman confesses that he is "liberal and lusty as Nature" (512), a characteristic which can be associated with the primal nature of prostitution. He considers that Nature endows us with the collected idiosyncrasies that culminate in a certain innate sense of equality of all the creatures in addition to that of human beings. According to Whitman, Nature, regardless of who we are or what we do, treats and nurtures us as equally as any other animate or inanimate beings. With the aspiration to live peacefully with and emulate the force of Nature as the origin of everything, Whitman encourages his readers to embark on the practice of the egalitarian and accommodating concept acquired from Nature as the essential initial step toward the realization of democracy.

Besides the significance of variety in the working of democracy, the other indispensable element is certainly freedom. While Carlyle justifies the existence of servanthship and mastership, Whitman, on the other hand, does not approve Carlyle's reference to slavery in America as the "smallest" problem. As a matter of fact, Whitman sympathizes with the slaves and their suffering. In "Song of Myself," Whitman claims, "I am the hounded slave" (225). He does not only reveal his condolence to the slaves but further identifies himself with them. Being a white man, a symbol of superiority and freedom in his time, Whitman is not satisfied with the privilege possessed by his race. Instead, he chooses to place himself amid the slaves. He desires not to "ask the wounded person how he feels," but to "become the wounded person." He recalls the shared feeling of sufferance when he writes, "[m]y hurts turn livid upon me as I lean on a cane and observe" (225). Whitman applies the universal first-person narrative to describing the pain he suffers as a slave. By using "I" to identify himself with the slaves, he renders the

first-person narration a personal yet universal voice. In an attempt to dwell in the society from the point of view of the slaves, Whitman experiences the oppressed sphere of slavery and calls for that experience in the song of “himself.” It is his gesture to proclaim the identification that he has found with the slaves from the contact he had with them and to disapprove the contemporary situation of slavery. Without doubt, Whitman anticipates the liberation of the slaves in the New World.

Adopting from the essay “Personalism,” Whitman emphasizes the development of not only the freedom of an individual but also “the pride and centripetal isolation of a human being in himself” (982). Every individual, as stated in *Democratic Vistas*, should obtain a unique and independent character that plays a critical role in the progression of democracy. Freedom in democracy is given to the individuals in order to establish their value and contribution to the democratic system. During the process of the establishment, Whitman stresses the cruciality of literature, songs, and other arts because “they furnish the materials and suggestions of personality for the women and men of that country, and enforce them in a thousand effective ways” (982–83). With the immersion of literature anticipated by Whitman, the “pride” and distinct characteristic of every individual can be cultivated and cast certain influence on democracy in its “embryo condition” (983). The capability to foster the advancement of a country is no longer an aristocratic entitlement as Carlyle suggests. The potential of providing something valuable and perspicacious dwells in every single person of all the strata of society.

Aspiz suggests in his essay that *Democratic Vistas* can be viewed as a physiologically and politically combined prose work in its structure, an adaptation from the body politic concept embedded in Whitman’s poetry discussed in Erkkila’s previous research. I am tempted to extend Aspiz’s discussion of the prose work to a grander scale by analyzing the source of the conceived body in Whitman’s works. To explore the origin of the body notion, it is imperative that we look into Whitman’s conception of

Nature, that is to say, the Emersonian philosophy of Nature. In the significant prose work *Nature*, Emerson breaks new ground in “Americanizing” the New World and marches American culture out of the European atmosphere to its independence. Contrasted with the “storied associations” which characterize the natural scenery in Europe, Emerson declares that Nature in America should not refer to the history but to the men of the country. Unlike Europe where the culture resides in the historical events of the landscape, American culture, relatively new as it is, lives and is manifested in every individual of the land. He laments for the truth that “few adult persons can see nature” (38) and encourages his readers to go into solitude in the woods where “we return to reason and faith” (39). Emerson believes that Nature nurtures our soul, as our soul cultivates the capability to comprehend the force of Nature in us. In order to get in touch with the soul, we ought to preserve “the spirit of infancy” and carry it with us into adulthood. In “Song of Myself,” Whitman compares the grass with a child, “the produced babe of vegetation,” and the symbol of perpetual life. For Whitman, there is no real death as he considers life is circular and after death comes life, just as he swears, “there is nothing but immortality” (557). This immortality is appurtenant to the soul in Emerson’s philosophy. Evidently, in Emerson’s contact with Nature, the physical body is never given a significant role. He focuses more on the immersion of the human soul amid the natural surroundings so as to turn into “a transparent eyeball” (39), transcending everything and becoming “nothing.”

Adopting the major part of the Emersonian concept of Nature, Whitman distinguishes himself from Emersonian transcendentalism by highlighting the importance of the working of human bodies and their capability. In *Democratic Vistas*, Whitman realizes, as he wanders in New York City, that “not Nature alone is great in her fields of freedom” but “the artificial, the work of man too is equally great.” He sees men move in “electric crowds” in the midst of their creations profuse in “teeming humanity” (963). To

Whitman, the physical existence of men and their “conscious” development are so powerful that they reflect greatly on the divine force of Nature and its “unconscious” evolution. I find it apt to borrow the definitions of “conscious” and “unconscious” in the discussion of society from Carlyle’s *Characteristics* and will elaborate on the interpretation later. By stressing the participation of mankind in the working of Nature, Whitman accommodates the concept of Nature stated by Emerson as including natural forms changed by humans and blurs the line between the artificial and the natural worlds, incorporating the two. This is the perception that can be employed in the relation of democracy and Nature.

In *The Transcendentalist*, Emerson mentions the two sects of mankind: “Materialists and Idealists” (239). He supposes that the first class relies on “experience” and thinks from the information collected by the “senses,” and the second class resorts to their “consciousness” and considers that senses are not “final” but just “representations” of things (239). According to Emerson, the materialists follow their animalistic instinct and the idealists depend on “Thought” and “Will” (239). In the essay, neither of the two classes has the absolutely right answer with regard to their viewpoints of the world. He does not deny the influence of circumstances on men while he also disapproves the idea of men being governed by circumstances. Although the prioritization of the two classes seems to remain a gray area, Emerson appears more inclined to render the so-called idealists a higher position by viewing ideals as calls for action. He claims that “You think me the child of my circumstances: I make my circumstance” (243). The spirit of men, the soul, for Emerson, should possess the higher command of an individual.

Recognized as a pupil of Emerson, in his note “Emerson’s Books (the Shadows of Them),” Whitman esteems him as the greatest teacher ever, “provid[ing] for his pupils setting up independently” (1079), and allowing no one to be just his follower. Whitman views Emersonianism as a self-contained form of philosophy, creating its own beginning

and end. Utilizing the independence from Emersonianism, Whitman produces his argument against the superiority of the soul over the body. In his view of democracy, the prospect of it is demonstrated by employing the idea of the body. In the *Vistas*, he regards the expanding land of America as the “more and more thoroughly-appointed body” (962). Identifying the territory of the country with the human body, Whitman endows the land with a dynamic and organic attribute. It remains constantly evolving, for better or worse, overthrowing the old and adopting the new.

In fact, the body politic approach appeared earlier in Carlyle’s *Characteristics* in 1831. In the essay, Carlyle argues that the Physician’s Aphorism has a lot greater and wider significance than it has been given. It serves not only as “corporeal therapeutics,” but also “moral, intellectual, political, poetical” (Carlyle 1) principles. He suggests that we can diagnose a country by its “health,” namely the development in all aspects concerning the progress of the country. This concept is taken to its more complete interpretation in Whitman’s *Vistas* as he is deeply concerned with the sickness suffered by America. He considers only by being part of the “mass” can one stay great and healthy because “nothing will do as well as common ground” (972), a statement which is contrasted with Carlyle’s aristocratic leadership idea presented later in *Shooting Niagara*. While Carlyle suggests that only the intellectuals and people of higher social status should have a say in politics, Whitman proclaims that songs of every individual should be heard in American democracy. For Whitman, America should be viewed as a giant and congruous body where the independent physical bodies of every individual come across each other.

In “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” Whitman observes the crowds on the ferry and ponders his relationship with them. He writes, “In the day among crowds of people sometimes they came upon me//In my walks home late at night or as I lay in my bed they came upon me” (310). Because of the daily routine and common places they share as

commuters of the city, Whitman feels the image of the crowds compels a strong influence on him. Even when he is alone, he cannot escape the persistent questionings of the relationship between him and the crowds, an idea which shows that his life is closely tied to the lives of the crowds he encounters every day. The crowds and he, therefore, become identical. The crowds and he have the same experience as individual bodies wandering in and adapting to the city. He considers that the crowds have “receiv’d identity” by their bodies as he has by his body (310). The reciprocal relation between Whitman’s body and the physical bodies of the crowds devises the identical body from the shared experiences and things among them, in other words, the “common ground” (972), the well-being of the country depends on. For Whitman, the collective identity of the mass public contributes to the health of a democratic body.

Another point proposed by Carlyle in *Characteristics* is the “dualism of Soul and Body” of Man. He regards this idea itself as “the symptom of disease” (5) that ought to be cured by the “unity” (5) of the two. He supposes that this treatment can also rest the long-standing dispute between the materialists and spiritualists. Though guided by Emerson’s concept of the soul as the only crucial agent for us to contact Nature and thus deemed higher than the body, Whitman partakes in the argument with a voice similar to but more forceful than Carlyle’s. Unlike Carlyle who diagnoses and treats this symptom through the viewpoint of the aristocratic system where people were divided into different strata, Whitman’s approach to this argument is embracive. Envisaging the future for America, Whitman anticipates “in every young and old man, after his kind, and in every woman after hers, a true personality, develop’d, exercised proportionately in body, mind, and spirit” (993). With the participation of the physical, intellectual, and mental parts of an individual, America is to create its own “new standard” independent from the theory of “feudal aristocracies” or “merely literary standards” (993). Though it is mentioned in the essay that the proper proportions of different elements of men should all be factored

into maintaining the health of the country, the share of each proportion in the formula is not explicit. Yet, we may find further insight into the discussion in “I Sing The Body Electric.”

In the poem, Whitman questions, “[I]f the body were not the soul, what is the soul” (250)? His tendency to identify one with another is ubiquitous. In Section 9, he lists various parts of the body and their functions and asserts that they are “not the parts and poems of the body only, but of the soul” (258). He showcases the corporeal features as the fundamental structures of the larger possibilities above the physical body. Every part of the body is paralleled with the institution of human life, projecting perceptive and organic thoughts and emotions. When he describes how one can feel “the curious sympathy [...] when feeling with the hand the naked meat of the body” (258), Whitman conjures up the working of thought from the physical sensation caused within the body itself. Near the end of the section, he reveals that whatever the body produces and receives is also of the soul, and that whatever is within and outside the body is the soul itself. In Killingsworth’s review of *Whitman’s Poetry of the Body: Sexuality, Politics, and the Text*, he argues that in the poem, “sexuality and the physical body are represented as a moral force, a source of human bonding and sympathy, and a force finally for political transformation that overcomes traditional bounds of race, class, gender and creed” (46). Resorting back to Carlyle’s disapproval of the dualism of the body and the soul, it can be inferred from the above discussion that Whitman not only shares the disagreement but also further identifies one with another.

In Whitmanian philosophy, the physiologico-political theory of Carlyle’s *Characteristics* and the ideas of Nature in Emersonian transcendentalism are combined and advanced to the poet’s nineteenth-century democratic outlook of America. As Carlyle considers that “Society” is “endowed with life” and an analog of the body, he divides the society into two parts—“Unconscious” and “Conscious.” While the

“unconscious” represents the “natural state,” which is the dynamic “animal body,” the “conscious” refers to the “artificial state” of the society, manifested by “Morality” and “Wisdom” (15). From Whitman’s point of view, the natural and artificial both exist in the human body and rely on each other for the development of the body. On the other hand, as Emerson argues that the soul of men elevates and brings us toward Nature just as he marks that the spiritual side of men is dominated by their consciousness in *The Transcendentalist*, he views the experiences collected from senses as the materialistic side of us. Given the previous example from “I Sing the Body Electric” where the consciousness is stimulated by the physical sensation acquired from the hand and the naked body, Whitman resists the binary oppositions proposed by both Carlyle and Emerson, and regards these two factors as identical twins of Nature in his philosophical quest.

This chapter has been divided into four stages as my exposition of the implications of the body politic originating from the concept of Nature in *Democratic Vistas*. First, upon exploring the origin of the body concept in Whitman’s writing, I intend to place the body concept at the center of his philosophy of Nature where his democratic faith is built. While Carlyle’s *Shooting Niagara: And After?* is the cause for the completion of *Democratic Vistas*, Carlyle’s arguments against the trend of democracy have been presented with their counterarguments found in Whitman’s essay to form a didactic method of interpretation. Second, through the understanding of why Whitman produced the essay in 1871 in order to show his fellow citizens the significance of democratic progress in nineteenth-century America, I have attempted to explicate how the democratic progress should depend on the concept of Nature in Whitman’s writings. To interpret his philosophy of Nature, I have looked into how he has been enlightened by Emerson’s ideas of Nature and transcendental aspects of the world as he receives his initial comprehension of Nature and the soul from Emersonianism and applies them to

his political contemplation. Third, I have presented the fact that Carlyle's essay *Characteristics* also remains crucial to Whitman's interpretation of the body, which suggests the significant influence of both Carlyle's political and cultural essays on the thoughts of Whitman's *Democratic Vistas*. Finally, through the preceding stages of interpretation, I have reached a conclusion that the conception of Nature in *Democratic Vistas* is an extension of Carlyle's body politic theory as well as an elevation of Emerson's transcendentalism, and that Whitman's democratic outlook lies with the revitalized perception of Nature, the physical body—the "germs of all."



CHAPTER 3

“A Leaf for Hand in Hand”—Whitman The Democratic Poet of Nature

“Murmuring out of its myriad leaves,
Down from its lofty top rising two hundred feet high,
Out of its stalwart trunk and limbs, out of its foot-thick bark,
That chant of the seasons and time, chant not of the past
only but the future.”

—Walt Whitman, “Song of The Redwood-Tree”

While the body is to be viewed as the essential agent for us to contact Nature in Whitman’s works, the realization of this idea remains inert for the public in nineteenth-century America. As not only a transcendentalist but also a poet, Whitman has recognized the duty that he and other poets ought to assume in order to establish the channel to comprehend and further embody Nature in every individual. In “The Hero as a Poet” of *Heroes And Hero Worships*, Thomas Carlyle argues that the sound of Nature is music in its perfection and poetry is “musical Thought” (99). He regards a poet as the person that acts accordingly as the observer and the transcriber through whom the musicality of Nature is made known. As Carlyle claims that in the heart of Nature lies music, he encourages men to look inwardly into their poetic nature to achieve the music. According to Carlyle, poets not only possess the keenest relationship with Nature but also are capable of delivering the sound of Nature to men. The poets and their works serve to be the inspirations for us who have left the wisdom of Nature behind. The downfall of the enthusiasm toward Nature is in need of salvation from the heroic poets.

A passage from Whitman’s “Preface” resonates with Carlyle’s idea and narrows it down to the American version. While Carlyle emphasizes the heroism of poets and their ability to reproduce the music in Nature, Whitman adapts Carlyle’s ideas to the new and democratic American nation. By doing this, Whitman generates new challenges and opportunities in terms of the relationship between democracy and Nature. Poetry is no longer just “musical thought” of Nature. As Whitman regards America as “the greatest

poem” and Americans as people who have “the fullest poetic nature” (5), he connects America with poetry and American individuals as the foundation of his body politic with poetry. I intend to exemplify the concept of paralleling the new and democratic nation with poetry through first, Whitman’s ideation of Nature concerning its relation with literature; second, the discovery of how the characteristics of democracy are analogous to those of Nature from Whitman’s point of view and how the concept of the body, instead of religion, remains essential to his democratic poetry; finally, the teleological view of Nature that results in a unity between the natural and democratic world in *Democratic Vistas*.

Whitman attributes the outlook of democracy in the essay to the very root of his philosophy—Nature. Unlike William Wordsworth and Ralph Waldo Emerson who regard Nature as “a benevolent goddess” and “the tyrannous circumstance,” concepts which place Nature superior to the human world, Whitman demonstrates the juxtaposition of both natural and artificial worlds in his writing and views them as equally important. In the essay on “Nature” in the Whitman Encyclopedia, Martin K. Doudna’s interprets the two aspects of Nature in Whitman’s writing: “the material world of objects and phenomena (*natura naturata*)” and “the force—usually personified as feminine—that pervades and controls that material world (*natura naturans*)” (Doudna 451). Doudna points out that the *naturata* side dominates Whitman’s pre-Civil War writing while the *naturans* side prevails in the later works such as *Democratic Vistas* and “Passage to India.” The abstraction of the force as a feminine personification has been manifested in Wordsworth’s “benevolent goddess,” an idea which is revealed in his poems *The Prelude* and *Tintern Abbey*, regarding Nature as the source of love and worship. The sense of piety obtained from Nature has given Wordsworth tranquility in life due to its consistency and coherence. For Wordsworth, the material world is often

seen as the foil of the almighty Nature and does not play a significant role in his writing, which mainly focuses on the image of pious women and harmony that Nature represents.

Emerson, on the other hand, holds a different point of view of Nature than Wordsworth and has an interpretation closer to that of Whitman's. In the essay *Fate*, Emerson indicates the "negative" side of Nature, an idea which contrasts with Wordsworth's positive view of Nature. While Emerson calls Nature "the tyrannous circumstance" (369), he argues that the tyranny is necessary for our life to proceed. He intends to remind us of the intimidating power that actually serves as the drive to push us forward in the river of time. According to Emerson, "the book of Nature is the book of Fate" (369). Our life is to be viewed as leaves turned by Nature in her arbitrary manner. In brief, Nature decides the fate of each phenomenon that we cannot comprehend the causes of. For Emerson, the "negative" and cruel power of Nature is considered essential to the progress of all species, cultures, landscapes, and even the abstract element of life—Fate. While Emerson calls Nature "she," his conceptual force of Nature does not share the concrete metaphors of female love such as motherly love and goddess-like worship from Wordsworth's point of view. The indicated female power in Emerson's essay retains a more indirect and subtle relation with the images of women throughout the history and demonstrates a force that is more indifferent, oppressive, and free of direct reference to female traits.

From a scientific standpoint, Emerson overturns the concept of beautified Nature and reveals a more merciless side of Nature. Though the interpretations of the *naturans* side of Nature differ, Emerson and Wordsworth both seem to convey less regard for the material world of the objects in their works. While the abstraction of force certainly plays a significant role in Whitman's writing, the artificial world and its production are also indispensable to the conception of Whitmanian Nature. In light of the previous explanation of the tightly-knit relation between the body and Nature, an idea which can

be understood as the backbone of the *naturatas* side of Nature, the notion of the body shall be extended further to the discussion of its larger influence on civilization, a mechanism resulting from the congregated bodies of the human world.

From the poem quoted in the beginning of the chapter, the redwood tree's "chant" symbolizes the connection between the human and natural worlds through the shared sound. This chanting embodies the relationship between literature, especially poetry, and Nature. In the critical essay on "Song of the Redwood Tree," Steven Olson views the poem as a celebration of "the popular nineteenth-century ideology of human progress and its culmination in the New World" (664). In the poem, the poet "hears the tree's voice in his 'soul' and thus internalizes the emotions and essence of nature" (664) as a tree speaks for his brother trees. The tree acknowledges that it will disappear from the earth and provide itself for mankind. The succession of lives of different species from varied parts of the earth suggests that there is no death for the poet. The chanting of the tree will be passed on to the leaves of the poetry of the New World. Whitman describes the tree's chanting "not of the past only but the future," paralleling Nature with America. Olson regards the poem as Whitman's manifestation of his political outlook, which is also "the popular ideology, or myth" (664), of his time—"America is the spiritual union of humankind and nature" (664). The statement echoes Whitman's approach toward Nature in his writing. Different from Wordsworth and Emerson, Whitmanian Nature does not personify benevolence or cruelty but holds a more neutral ground where everything in Nature, especially literature, is comprehended in an objective and empirical manner.

In the poem "A Leaf for Hand in Hand" written in 1860 and 1867, Whitman the poet intends to send out the message embedded within the poem to convince his fellow Americans of uniting each other in spite of their diverse geographical and social backgrounds. He believes that the bridge to bring them together is the leaf in his hand. In

the essay “Seeds of Quakerism at the Roots of *Leaves of Grass*,” Susan Dean analyzes the concept of Quakerism implanted in Whitman’s poetry. She argues that there are stages of Whitman’s poetry writings that resonate with the principles of the unorthodox faith of Quakerism. Dean considers “A Leaf for Hand in Hand” one of the representative poems of Whitman’s attempt to “enact in public his version of ‘Friendly Persuasion’: writing and publishing poems in which young men signaled in their actions the love they enjoyed for one another” (194). From a historical point of view, Dean parallels the history of Quakerism with the poetic development of Whitmanian Nature. She views the “seeds” of Quakerism as the “roots” of Whitman’s leaves in *Calamus*, overturning the same-sex love that is constantly discussed as homoeroticism in gender studies. She regards the men’s love written in the poems an embodiment of the “brotherly love” (195) in Quaker ideas.

While Dean’s interpretation of the poem reveals the historical and religious inspiration to Whitman’s works, it also neglects the significant concept of the body in Whitman’s poems that are relevant to Nature. In the previous chapter, I have explored and proved that to understand Whitman’s poetry of Nature, we should resort to examining its relation with the body, the source of Whitmanian philosophy as a whole. In “A Leaf for Hand in Hand,” the contact between the bodies of young men is to be initiated by Whitman’s hand-holding with them and then accomplished by their walking hand in hand. Whitman believes that with the leaf he has received from Nature as a transcribing poet to channel the voice of Nature to men in his poems, he is able to join the American mass together, starting from the contact of the bodies and consummated through the relay of the leaf between hands. While the contact of bodies is not to be necessarily interpreted as the indication of homoeroticism, the importance of the physical contact still remains essential to the understanding of the poem. Dean’s explanation of the brotherly love among the young men in the poem demonstrates the historical

relevance of the concept “hand-in-hand,” but she does not illustrate the symbolic “leaf” but views it simply as a metaphor of pages of poetry. The “leaf,” namely the poem itself, is an agent employed by Nature to travel between and join the hands of men. It will not rest until the public acknowledges and embraces each other, a fundamental belief of democracy which treats individuals equally and as a whole. Because of his faith in the democratic success of America, Whitman desires to “infuse” himself among his fellow Americans until he witnesses them “walk[ing] hand in hand” (284).

Another connection between Whitman’s poetry of Nature and its political outlook can be perceived in the poems of the sea. When David Kuebrich discusses the symbolism of the sea, he considers the sea’s functions as symbols of “the divine source of humanity and the rest of creation” in “both Whitman’s poetry and prose” (622). For Kuebrich, the divinity of the sea imbues the cyclic concept of “death and rebirth” in Whitman’s writing (623). In the form of death and rebirth, Kuebrich claims, “the poet returns to the spiritual source of his being and reemerges in a more pure and noetic state” (623). Owing to this observation, Kuebrich suggests that in Section 22 of “Song of Myself,” “it is appropriate that Whitman immerses himself in the sea just prior to his explicit celebration of the sanctity of his body and sexuality” (623). For Kuebrich, the sea possesses the power of cleansing in Whitman’s poetry. The cleansing power serves as greater significance in a time of destruction. It is the revitalization of the body after demolition that Kuebrich detects in the poem. Though published for the first time in 1855, the poem seems to anticipate a kind of realism that would later become essential to American history after the Civil War. In spite of the praise of the newborn American literature and culture and the optimistic prospect of American democracy, “Song of Myself” does not only represent Whitman the feverishly patriotic man but also the scrutinous poet as he questions himself and his readers in the same section, asking if they “fear some scrofula

out of the unflagging pregnancy” (209) or “guess the celestial laws are yet to be work’d over and rectified” (209).

In the essay “The Civil War, Lincoln, And Reconstruction,” David Reynolds writes that “Civil War was not what Whitman has wanted or expected, but it turned out to be what he needed—and, he came to believe, what the nation needed” (123). While the Civil War brought tremendous damage to the nation, this damage was necessary for the following reconstruction and rebirth of America. Therefore, the New World projected in *Leaves of Grass* ought to be understood from the postbellum disintegration of the nation’s political and cultural aspects. Kuebrich’s argument on the sea image of the poem fails to identify the importance of “death” before the cleansing power of the sea and the consequent “rebirth.” While he concludes the essay with the idea that the sea power is so “pervasive” and rich in multiple meanings that it “whispers [...] messages of divine love, of immortality, of personal renewal, and of the sanctity of the body, manly love, the democratic nation, and the entire creation” (623), he emphasizes the feature of producing but not of receiving of the sea. Nonetheless, for Whitman, the capability to accommodate the new results from obliteration is especially valued, as he writes in Section 6 of “Song of Myself” that the grass “seems to [him] the beautiful uncut hair of graves.”

Kuebrich’s conclusion, however, brings forth the application of the sea in Whitman’s concept of democracy. The message that the sea philosophy contributes to the democratic nation is conveyed in *Democratic Vistas*. To initiate the democratic program of the New World, Whitman first points out the lack of originality in America. Due to the inheritance in almost every aspect from the Old World, Whitman diagnoses that “America has yet morally and artistically originated nothing” (985). For him, to produce a society and a system of democracy that is exclusively American, the word “culture” (986) of the nation is in its dire need to be fostered. He continues to argue about the essence of culture as he is concerned that his contemporary Americans mistake the

advancement of the social development of civilization for the intellectual and artistic achievement of culture. He therefore asks, “You can cultivate corn and roses and orchards—but who shall cultivate the mountain peaks, the ocean, and the tumbling gorgeousness of the clouds” (986)? The finest of culture does not rest on the artificial carving and plantation on the surface of the earth but more intrinsically, on the natural landscape that has manifested the Earth long before human existence.

The contact with Nature remains significant for America to develop its culture. The constant evolution of Nature carries American culture, especially the literary achievement, through tides of time. This concept is projected in *Democratic Vistas* when Whitman compares literature to “the little ships” in the “century-stretching seas” (996). The essay performs an important function of referring the democratic outlook to Whitman’s poetry writing. His sea poems reflect on the paralleling of literature and ships in the essay. This organic relation between his prose and poetry yields an alternative interpretation for the poems. While the sea is viewed as the cleansing power of spirituality and the natural force greater than any man-made success, it is the drive that pushes American culture toward maturity. Whitman declares that these little ships bear “the freight so dear—dearer than pride—dearer than love. All the best experience of humanity, folded, saved, freighted to us here” (996). The sea is regarded as the medium for the freight—the wisdom of humanity, delivered by the ships—the literary works, possessing the power of connecting the past and the present. The sea poems, consequently, should assume not only the various demonstrations of the sea symbolism as works of literary presentation but also the poetic position of linking Whitman’s former and later poetic thoughts throughout his career of writing. In the *Sea-Drift* collection, the poems “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking” and “As I Ebb’d with the Ocean of Life” are examples of Whitman’s mature pieces and deliver his sea-philosophy in a more personal manner. In these two poems, Whitman’s writing of the sea image can be viewed

as a narrative of his own life. Just as the sea carries literary works and the culture of America through the tide of time, it has also served as a private stage onto which the poet's diary-like recollection of life enters and exits. Owing to the infinitely persistent power of the sea, the sea poems of all the Nature poems serve as the most appropriate example to represent Whitman's expectation of American democracy and construct a bridge of intertextual interpretation between the essay and his poetry.

In the essay, Whitman has claimed that Nature is "the only complete, actual poem" (1012). To comprehend Whitmanian democracy in the essay, the understanding of his Nature poems becomes crucial. His democratic ideas produced in nineteenth-century America certainly have little resemblance to the more intricate system of democracy established today. Yet, the path to the success of democracy has been well-developed in Whitman's writings. By depicting different phenomena of Nature in his poems and applying the philosophy behind them to his writing of the democratic essay, Whitman has exemplified his perceptivity of the complex mechanism of democracy in a simple and truthful fashion. While critics have viewed Whitman as a novice in politics and regarded his democratic program for America idealistic, they have simply overlooked the fact that all lives originate from Nature, including the life of mankind. Whitman's paralleling Nature with democracy, a product of civilization, demonstrates the importance of how artificial laws should emulate the laws of Nature—the constant destruction, evolution, and revitalization. Yet, while Natural Selection is essential to evolution in the natural world, Whitmanian Nature is not to be understood as completely identical with Nature from a scientific point of view. With reference to Emerson's argument presented earlier, Nature is regarded as the tyrannous circumstances that are arbitrary and cruel. However, according to Emerson, this seemingly negative and possibly hostile force is a mechanism designed by Fate for the progress of every aspect of life. He thinks that the tyrannous force is necessary to make our world a better place, a

theory which reveals a teleological side of Nature, sharing a similar perception with Whitmanian philosophy in both Nature and democracy. Therefore, this reading of *Democratic Vistas* is essential because the essay introduces the approach of understanding Whitman's concepts of Nature and democracy together and utilizing the Nature poems as mirrors to reflect Whitman's political outlook.

In addition to the concept of Whitman's poetry of Nature as a guide to comprehend *Democratic Vistas*, poetry, the leaves of books, also serves as the encoded message from Nature to the human world. With reference to Carlyle's viewpoint, the poet who creates the vehicle is the decipherer of the message for the common men. The message from Nature is to be absorbed to help establish democracy in America. In *Democratic Vistas*, Whitman claims that poetry is to "become the justification and reliance, (in some respects the sole reliance,) of American democracy" (975). The reason for relying on poetry to construct a democratic world rests on the immortality of poetry. Just as the lover that "will live forever" in Shakespeare's "eternal verse,"² for Whitman, the "immortal Judah" and "Greece" live in poems despite that their physical existence has long turned into ashes. As long as there are poems singing for them, their lives will be preserved by literature through generations. For Whitman, the New World literature should embark on the imagination and innovation of America instead of the retrospective inspiration and resplendent tradition of the Old World literature of Europe.

The power of "imagination" (957) is retained most in poetry and should work as the drive for democratic improvement as Whitman writes, "What I say in these *Vistas* has its main bearing on imaginative literature, especially poetry" (958). Whitman's imagination in poetry should not be mistaken as the manifestation of the otherworldly ideas. In the essay "Poetic Theory," Robert Johnstone points out that "poetry above all else must be true to life is Whitman's principle" (526). He sees Whitman's poetry as "a

² Check Shakespeare's "Sonnet 18."

deeply mimetic, realist commitment” (526), with the language, forms, and content of poetry all drawn from real life. While poetry is the genre of literature considered most imaginative by Whitman, Johnstone suggests that Whitman’s poetic imagination must come from the immersion of poetry in life. In *Democratic Vistas*, Whitman analyzes the failure of his contemporary democracy that results from the increasingly popular concept of materialism created under the capitalist society. The scientific method applied to different aspects of life takes American citizens from their democratic path to success. He expresses his worry and further explains why poetry remains most important under the circumstances. Poetry, of all genres of literature, must always be resorted to by “wealth, science, materialism,” and “even this democracy” because it “feed[s] the highest mind, the soul” (Whitman 1010). “A poetry worthy the immortal soul of man, and which, while absorbing materials,” will have “a freeing, fluidizing, expanding, religious character [...] fructifying the moral elements” (1010). Whitman’s sense of morality here should not be regarded as a set of principles to distinguish right from wrong. For Whitman, poetry serves as the immortal guide that transcends the common elements of morality and religion. While embracing materials, poetry is capable of delivering and developing the non-material part of our life. It is more of the mental and spiritual manifestation of art in the New World.

In the essay “The Poetry of Democracy,” Edward Dowden comments on the thought of the soul of man in *Democratic Vistas* and identifies the drive of poetic creation of Whitman as “the recognition of new forces in language, and the creation of a new manner of speech which cares less for what it actually realizes in definite form than “for impetus and effects, and for what it plants and invigorates to grow.” While poetry can adumbrate a certain margin for American democracy to be set within, it does not indicate the precise steps of democratic progress. Whitman being a poet of Nature, according to Norman Foerster, is “substantially right in his criticism—you must not be

too precise or scientific” (738) when it comes to the observation of Nature. When Whitman applies the law of Nature to American democracy, he does not intend to do a scientific study on Nature in order to create a democratic program that abides by the science of Nature completely.

Just as Dowden defines the poetic drive and Foerster comments on the approach to Nature of Whitman in their essays, Whitman has also propelled the poetic drive inspired by the observation of Nature toward the cultivation of democratic success. The formality and precision had never been a concern for Whitman as the poet, the prose writer, and the democrat in the nineteenth century. It was a time when democracy was still struggling to make its birth legitimate and beneficial to the world, and the state of democracy was dynamic throughout Europe and America because of its ceaseless vigor and evolution. It was also the period of time in which Whitman established his faith and prospect for democracy. Although political parties, economic success, laws and regulations, and technological advancement had not yet achieved their sophistication, their importance had gradually taken off during the time.

This is not to say that political parties were not of great importance in the nineteenth century. In fact, it was a time when American people started to get involved in more political activities and campaigns. Whitman was one of the activists. He was “the one-time master of editorial-page hyperbole, the ex-Locofoco Democrat enthusiast, the ardent Free Soiler and Lincoln devotee” (Natanson 14). Yet, at “the Democratic-Republican war” (14) in 1884, Whitman was “one of the non-voters in that election” (14). A significant number of the key voters in the Republican Party did not vote. Due to the immaturity of the democratic scene of the nation at that time, Whitman expressed his disappointment by acknowledging that “American politics were devoid of legitimate issues, responsible candidates, and genuine concern for American ideals” (14), a worry which is conveyed in *Democratic Vistas*. For Whitman, culture, literature, and arts

seemed to be left with more power to contribute to the world. This is what Whitman has anticipated for America—the diversity of voices and faces that are not confined within certain time and space but disperse and congregate in a nomadic fashion throughout the country.

This concept can be perceived in his signature poem “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” written in 1856. The poem displays Whitman’s imagination based on the aspirations for morality and Nature during his life in New York. As a seer in the poem, Whitman addresses in the beginning that he sees the tide and clouds by calling them with the personified “you” (307), a device which directs the readers to think of themselves as the subjects addressed to by Whitman in the poem. Throughout the poem, Whitman has embedded dialogues with the readers by asking “Who knows, for all the distance, but I am as good as looking at you now, for all you cannot see me” (312)? As Whitman attempts to involve his readers across time and space by claiming that he’s looking at them, he also encourages the readers to bring him to the future when reading the poem:

“What is more subtle than this which ties me to the woman
or man that looks in my face?

Which fuses me into you now, and pours my meaning into
you?”

(312)

Through the imagined dialogue, Whitman demonstrates that the poem can be an agent that connects him to the encounters with other individuals. In the essay “On Time and Form in Whitman’s ‘Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,’” Paul A. Orlov suggests that “those imaginative crossings pass through the barriers of time and space” (12). According to Orlov, Whitman has attentively designed the poetic form in order to perform the imagination in the poem, a statement which contrasts with the criticism generally received by Whitman in terms of the poetic structure. He argues that “it is precisely

through a strategic and careful poetic form that he achieves in this poem a crossing that involves poet and reader alike in a timeless voyage of being” (12). The present and future, as Orlov points out, merge in the poem, an intention which makes the line “face to face” more immediate to the readers. Orlov’s interpretation of imagination in the poem rests on Whitman’s manifestation of timelessness created by the ingeniously developed form—“the parallelism between present and future” presented through “two ferry-boat crowds” (13). He considers that Whitman’s literal description of the present crowd should be understood as an image mirroring the imaginary crowd of the future.

Orlov’s criticism has its main focus on the “crossing” instead of the “ferry.” While he suggests that it is the juxtaposition of the literal and imaginary crossings of individuals that renders the poem its permanent power, he does not specify that for Whitman, this kind of timeless crossing only takes place aptly on the sea, or any water, the medium for ferries to carry their passengers—the subjects of the crossings. Being the sea poet, Whitman has constantly utilized the sea philosophy in his aspirations of poetry writing as well as democratic establishment. In the sea of literature, which is a larger manifestation of the river in the poem, Whitman has embedded the idea of circulation that can be physically applied to any other types of water and metaphorically formulate the intersections of individuals traveling through it. Howard Nelson has written an essay on the poem with an explication that is more comprehensive than Orlov’s particular emphasis of time and form.

Nelson claims that the poem has offered at least three ways for “one to go beyond individual identity, flux, and time [...]”—through “the physical world itself,” “shared human nature and experience,” and “works of art and especially this work of art” (157). With reference to Orlov’s essay, the literal description of the present crowd constructs the physical world as the actual scene on the ferry when Whitman wrote the poem, a device which serves as the foil of the imaginary crowd. The imaginary crowd, on the

other hand, symbolizes the shared human nature and experience beyond the limits of time and space. Orlov states that the image of the crowd remains long-lasting for readers of different generations because Whitman has captured the eternal movement between the individuals on the ferry as he addresses to the readers, “What thought you have of me now, I had as much of you.”³ The dynamic relations and the common “thought” of men therefore dwell perpetually in the poem, a quintessential demonstration of the “shared human nature and experience.”

The emphasis of “works of art” seems absent in Orlov’s interpretation. According to Nelson, works of art are able to transcend time. The “artistic control” of “crossing” applied to the poem is especially accredited to Whitman’s sophisticated design—the “theme, imagery, rhythm, and symbolism,” constituting a constantly “imitable, streaming, never-falling, living” (Nelson 158) poem. Nelson’s interpretation of crossing resides in the artistic and poetic manifestation of employing the literal, metaphorical, cadent devices. Similar to Orlov’s essay, he attempts to justify the attentiveness in Whitman’s poetry writing. Yet, in a more panoramic manner, he discusses the highest value of all the merits of the poem—the foremost purpose intended by Whitman through his writings—the fathomless influence of art.

While Nelson’s essay touches on the three ways embedded by Whitman in the poem to elevate us beyond the limits of identity, flux, and time, his approach to the third remains disappointing. The “artistic control” of crossing is an innovative insight yet to be developed further. However, this idea can only be realized when the poem is read together with the essay *Democratic Vistas*. In the essay, Whitman frequently utilizes “ships” as an analogy to the New World literature. Due to the capability of ships to sail wherever and whenever there is water, the time-enduring image of ships is compared to that of the New World literature, absorbing the past and the present and sailing towards

³ Check “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” Section 7.

the future. The ferry, which serves a similar purpose of carrying freight and passengers as ships do, ought to be comprehended as an implication of literature in the poem. As the crossing of individuals suggests the succession of experience through generations, the ferry on which the crossing takes place becomes the vehicle of the experience.

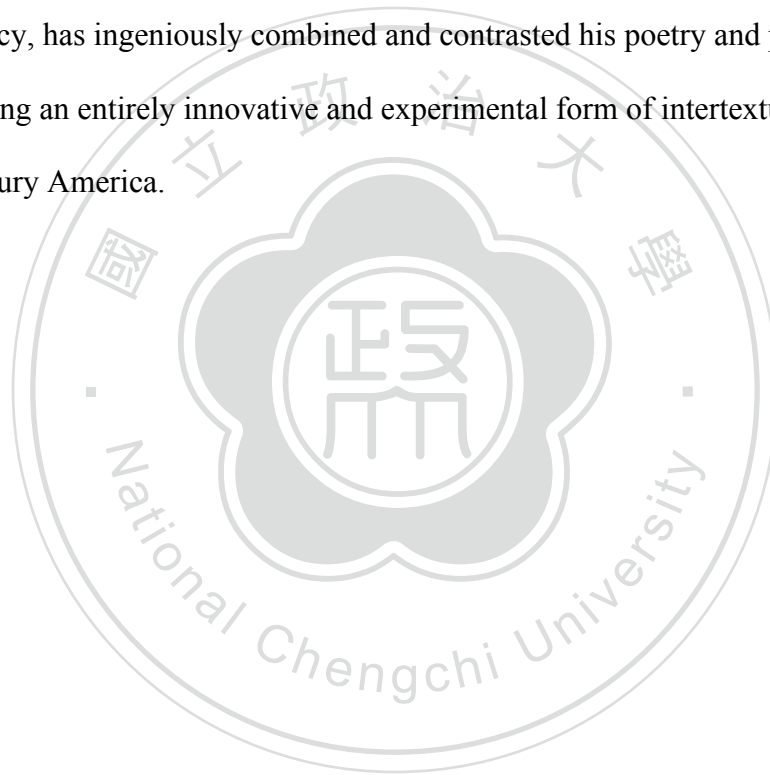
Whitman points out in the essay that literature, in a form of “the little ships,” “compass[es] what measureless values of reminiscence, contemporary portraitures, manners, idioms and beliefs, with deepest inference, hint and thought, to tie and touch forever the old, new body, and the old, new soul” (996)! The goal of the New World literature is to embrace and extract the essence from the history of literature and the contemporary writings in order to create a literary scene that is revolutionary and American. The ships of the New World have traveled from the past through various bodies of water just as literature did according to Whitman. Without water as the medium as well as the symbol of circulation linking the old and new bodies together, the ships, the literary works, would not have made their journey to us. The poem “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” produced in the nineteenth century might not have crossed our line of sight as twenty-first-century readers. Therefore, while the critics consider the art of crossing timelessly clever, I intend the readers to also focus on the ferry as the vehicle of the crossings, and the river as the sole occasion for the crossings to happen in the poem. The readers should always keep the river setting in mind when they read the poem because the poem is to be understood as Whitman’s grander design of argument in art—the intertextual interpretation between his prose and poetic works. Without having an insight acquired from *Democratic Vistas* in terms of the power of the sea, or more inclusively, of water, one may feel apt to cease discussing the importance of works of art in “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” as soon as he or she deals with the extensive and intricate interpretation of the crossings. The larger frame of the “artistic control” lies in the river, or even water per se. The dynamic and everlasting flow of life detected in the poem

results from the quality of circulation, restoration, and revitalization of water—the essential and underlying concept of Whitman’s art. Referring to the passage from *Democratic Vistas*, to Whitman, the art of literature is “measureless” just as the nature of water is. Only by starting from this point of view can the crossings of individuals go beyond identity, flux, and time.

Democratic Vistas, as the significant essay that demonstrates Whitman’s thought of democracy, should also be appreciated as the artistic guide for his other writings. His democratic ideas are not based on a political program or system that is independent from other aspects of life such as art and Nature. In fact, his concept of democracy derives great inspiration from Nature as well as literature, especially poetry. While the essay certainly provides the political outlook of American democracy, the drive to realize the prospect comes from the “chant” of the Redwood-Tree. The sound of Nature has never ceased working its way from the past to the present and more importantly, the future. The vitality of democracy ought to sustain the erosion of time when Whitman sings “Beat! beat! drums!” to his fellow Americans. The beating of the New World force is preserved through his leaves of poetry. The anticipated democratic progression relies on the passing of the leaves from hand to hand. The organic concept of “hand in hand” constructs the American mass that enjoys the shared experience through the leaf produced by Whitman. The leaf, namely the poem itself, is a symbol of true democracy. Its imaginative journey among men sheds light on the realistic view of politics of the nation. To this point, Whitman’s poetry can also comment on and help understand his political essay.

The intertextual interpretation between his essay and poetry is further exemplified when it comes to his sea poetry, or poetry that has water as its setting. The circulating and cyclic characteristic of water manifests the concept of constant and energetic flow of life. Recognized by Whitman as a poem itself, America is just like a gigantic ship carrying passengers from one historical shore of aristocracy in the Old World, across the

river of time to a new shore of democracy of the New World. The crossing beyond identity and time should also be understood as the development of true democracy that cannot be altered by short-lived and name-making political trends because of their incapability to survive the perpetually flowing water. With reference to the poems of Nature, the democratic ideas in *Democratic Vistas* can be understood and further realized in an alternative manner. On the other hand, in light of the carefully-designed argument presented in the essay, the Natural poems are endowed with grander and more political-relevant interpretations. Whitman, the democratic poet of Nature and the commentator of American democracy, has ingeniously combined and contrasted his poetry and prose writings, constructing an entirely innovative and experimental form of intertextuality of the nineteenth-century America.



CHAPTER 4

“O Powerful Western Fallen Star”—Whitman The Patriot of Kosmos

“I will plant companionship thick as trees along all the rivers of America, and along the shores of the great lakes, and all over the prairies,
I will make inseparable cities with their arms about each other’s necks,
By the love of comrades,
By the manly love of comrades.
For you these from me, O Democracy, to serve you ma femme!
For you, for you I am trilling these songs.”

—Walt Whitman, “For You O Democracy”

In a letter dated in 1856 to Thomas Carlyle, Emerson wrote, “One book, last summer, came out in New York, a nondescript monster which yet had terrible eyes and buffalo strength, and was indisputably American.”⁴ The 1855 *Leaves of Grass* was appreciated and recommended for the first time by Emerson while this “monstrous” verse was looked down upon and seen as nonsense by many literati at that time. The formless, almost madly structured poetry of Walt Whitman was distasteful to the nineteenth-century literary circles. Yet, because of the coarseness and farfetchedness that were demonstrated nakedly in his poetry, this seemingly anachronistic nineteenth-century poet turned out to be the prophetic and epoch-making poet of America.

In the wake of the English Civil War, Thomas Hobbes wrote his major political-philosophical work, *Leviathan*, published in 1651. In the book, Hobbes argues that a civil government of absolute sovereignty is needed to appease men’s fear of one another. As the founder of the social contract theory, Hobbes coined the term “the state of nature” to indicate the human condition without any political order. Without sovereignty of the government, human beings would live under the fear of poverty, solitariness, brutality, and so on. The natural freedom that human nature desires would eventually devour individual freedom and create massive conflicts. Hobbes discusses the function of fear among men living in the state of nature, in comparison with that among men living under

⁴ Check Letters LXII in *The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle*.

the Leviathan, the sovereign state. While the English Civil War resulted in the political crisis of England, Hobbes regarded the sovereign state at that time a monstrous force that regulated the primitive human needs or passion and was necessary to the escape from the state of nature. The monster, from Hobbes' point of view, symbolized the power of discipline or authority in the artificial society of seventeenth-century England. It was to improve and represent the government of sovereignty needed to ensure the commonwealth of the people.

It is therefore interesting that two centuries after Hobbes published his book with the intention for the sovereign state to regain the monstrous control for the betterment of England, Emerson called for a monster with “terrible eyes and buffalo strength” to represent and recapture the American political spirit—*Leaves of Grass*, Whitman's major poetry collection, first published in 1855. The book, while serving as the agent between Nature and men for Whitman, also manifests Whitman's idea about the relation between Nature and democracy. In the poems, we are encouraged to emulate animals in order to be less sophisticated and “civilized” in this already highly civilized society. Primitive human nature and needs should be recalled to balance the over complicated and artificial system of politics in the country. Many scholars have understood the philosophy in *Leaves of Grass* as the demonstration of Whitman's Kosmos concept. In *Democratic Vistas*, disappointed at the postbellum America, Whitman applies the word “leviathan” to suggest the significant problems the nation has encountered after the war. He questions the shared characteristics of the contemporary American public and compares the nation's democracy with the “deadliest plants and fruits of all” (1014). To “bridle leviathan” (1013), Whitman suggests that American democracy develop along but not against the course of “the physical kosmos” (953). He asks his readers to note that true democracy or democratic success is not “the result of studying up in political economy, but of the ordinary sense, observing, wandering among men, these States, these stirring

years of war and peace” (954). For Whitman, a democratic government needs to grow, develop, and improve through the ordeals of time and space. American democracy needs constant challenges, or even failures, to inspire revolutions.

Another monster lurking in Whitman’s poetry, the one recognized by Emerson as the true American voice, signifies the shared mind of all individuals. In terms of its poetic value, this monster represents Whitman’s appeal for the freedom of the body regardless of the restrictions of the environment, the freedom in verse, and eventually the freedom of the mind. In the essay “History,” Emerson wrote, “There is one mind common to all individual men” (149). History, for Emerson, is written through this mind. In *Leviathan* and *Leaves of Grass*, the monsters have been created by this mind in different eras. They serve as the symbols of struggling against and for freedom, reflecting on different social and political contexts. For Hobbes, the Leviathan represents the sovereign state, a government of absolute sovereignty to regulate the natural needs of human beings. The monster in *Leaves of Grass*, however, should be understood as the voice singing for the immediate reconstruction of the democratic system. For Whitman, in an age where the economy, the law, and social status were established under the capitalist prospect, human nature and instinct, which were once closer to animals’, seemed to be suppressed. He intended to encourage his readers to release the monster in them as they read his innovative, secular, formless, yet honest verse.

From Hobbes’ Leviathan to Whitman’s “monstrous” poetry collection, the literary symbols of monsters have progressed with time and space. The once excessive freedom considered by Hobbes concerning the monarchy of England has been transformed to the necessary freedom of democracy for Whitman in America after two centuries. When Emerson scouted Whitman’s outrageous poetry in the nineteenth century, he actually discovered his identical twin in the field of poetry. In the essay “History,” Emerson wrote, “To the poet, to the philosopher, to the saint, all things are friendly and sacred, all

events profitable, all days holy, all men divine” (155). He places poets, philosophers, and saints on the same scale and claims their significant roles to carry on the history of mind. For Emerson, life produces no ranks. Everything is equal, and by being equal, each thing is a manifestation of other things. The monster in *Leaves of Grass* demonstrates the emancipation of human suppression from freedom given by Nature. As a transcendentalist, Emerson believes that “every chemical substance, every plant, every animal in its growth, teaches the unity of cause, the variety of appearance” (155). He understands the working of the universe as one unifying platform where every particle merges and manifests each other. Human beings are not the only intelligent or superior ones capable of passing down ideas and knowledge. Everything from trivia to greatness shares the same cause yet just differs in appearances in this “universal nature” (Emerson 151), a notion which is to be reflected upon later in the chapter.

Emerson’s concept of the “mind history” (149) echoes the patriotic sentiment perceived in Whitman’s works. While Emerson’s “mind history” dwells at the borders of Nature and literature, Whitman’s democratic aspirations for America are inspired by his ideas about poetry and Nature. As Emerson quoted what Napoleon said about history being “a fable agreed upon,” the subjectivity becomes a necessity for the universal mind that is shared by individuals of each generation. Being a poet, a philosopher, and a patriot at the same time, Whitman’s subjectivity and its significance in history lie in his democratic vision for nineteenth-century and future America. Regarding the former interpretation of poetry as the agent between Nature and democracy in Whitman’s works, in this chapter, I elucidate the relationship between Nature and democracy by situating Whitman as a “natural patriot” whose patriotic sentiment for America demonstrates the microcosm of his concept of the cosmos. In “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d,” Whitman compares Lincoln to the “powerful western fallen star” (459), to which he, being the thrush in the poem, sings. While Lincoln is a consequential figure for

American democracy, his influence goes beyond the merely political. Whitman looks up to him as a star situated in the universe as the perennial exemplar guiding his future generations. Whitman's patriotism demonstrated in his homage to Lincoln manifests something grander and more accommodating than simply American sensibility.

Because of Whitman's idiosyncratic take on patriotism, critics have commented on Whitman's idealistic and far-reaching writing in terms of his predictions regarding future democracy in America. His discussion of American politics and democratic development has seldom been particularly valued for its political or historical contribution. Being the father of free verse, Whitman was torn between artistic achievement and political formality when displaying his democratic outlook for America in poetry. Stephen John Mack, in his book *The Pragmatic Whitman: Reimagining American Democracy*, points out that Whitman was troubled by his "doubleness" and "turned to prose in an attempt to resolve the contradiction between the obligations that democracy entails and the freedom it necessitates" (133). Mack argues that in order to take both promise and failure of democracy into consideration, Whitman reconstructed his democratic vision and therefore produced "his very complex and difficult essay *Democratic Vistas*" (133).

Mack's interpretation of Whitman's transition from writing about democracy in free verse to formalizing his democratic thoughts in prose reemphasizes the significance of the essay regarding Whitman's political conception and patriotic enthusiasm. In *Democratic Vistas*, in order to vivify "new blood, new frame of democracy" (959), Whitman suggests that "should some two or three really original American poets, (perhaps artists or lecturers,) arise, mounting the horizon like planets, stars of the first magnitude, that, from their eminence, fusing contributions, races, far localities, &c., together they would give more compaction and more moral identity, (the quality to-day most needed,) to these States" (959). For Whitman, the national poets he was expecting must possess American originality and cosmic vision in terms of their poetry writing. As

a patriot, Whitman believes that these two essential characteristics help produce and then promulgate the moral identity needed for nineteenth-century America. The passage quoted shows that the essay itself is not only the result of Whitman's attempt to articulate his political outlook in a more realistic and formalized manner as Mack has argued but also the discipline of Whitman's artistic performance in poetry writing and a refreshed standpoint to guide the readers to interpret his poems in alternative ways.

As a philosopher, Whitman not only conceives of theories but also intends to realize them. While he anticipated a new order of literati that was going to infuse new blood to American democracy, he also worked diligently to live up to the expectation he held for rising poets. In the poem "For You O Democracy," he manifests the morality that ought to be shared by his fellow Americans—"the love of comradeship." During the discussion with Horace Traubel recorded in the book *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, Whitman explains that comradely love remains "the significant thread—by which the nation is held together, a chain of comrades...I know no country anyhow in which comradeship is so far developed as here—here, among the mechanic classes" (342–43). As a poet, Whitman established his American originality through his emphasis on comradeship. When he expresses his wishes to spread the concept of comradeship across the country "by the love of comrades" in the poem, his oration to American democracy has somehow been misconstrued in an anachronistic manner.

In *Mystical Ethics of Comradeship: Homosexuality and the Marginality of Friendship at the Crossroads of Modernity*, Juan A. Herrero Brasas argues that Whitman rarely "seems to make the concept of comradeship extensive to women; generally speaking the poet's ideal of comradeship, as delineated in "Calamus," is exclusively masculine" (96). Brasas appears more inclined to interpret the comradeship in Whitman's works as an indication of Whitman's homosexual tendency. When he quoted the poem "For You O Democracy" in the chapter "The Love of Comrades," he used the

following quote as an epigraph: “I will make divine magnetic lands/With the love of comrades/With the life-long love of comrades.” Quoting these lines alone seems out of context when interpreting the idea of comradeship in this poem. Probably, the line “the manly love of comrades” could also have led Brasas to draw the conclusion by interpreting the comradely love as homosexual. In his book, Brasas criticizes David Reynolds and Ed Folsom for their “wishful thinking” in order to “save the poet’s reputation.” (90–91). Yet, the reason why Brasas suggests that the Whitman scholars have intended to create certain “positive” images for Whitman remains curious to me.

As Whitman is a philosopher of the cosmos, he could not realistically be categorized or labeled in the eyes of the people of his generation, not to mention in the eyes of modern people like us. In the poem “Kosmos,” Whitman personifies the cosmos as an omniscient figure, who “includes diversity and is Nature” (516). The personified cosmos, according to Whitman, contains “the theory of a city, a poem, and of the large politics of these States” and “all other theories” (517). The cosmos is beyond the limits of time and space and embraces “not only in our globe with its sun and moon,” but also “other globes with their suns and moons” (517). Timelessness has always been Whitman’s aspiration for writing poetry as well as the realization of true democracy. It appears to me that Brasas has unintentionally been trapped in the contemporary theoretical frames created by other theorists and has attempted to apply those theories such as gender studies to the poet who absorbs and denies them all. One may find it fitting to assert that Whitman views “For You O Democracy” as one of his songs of which the “lyrics” have been specifically designed with certain democratic intentions. While the love of comrades is evidently the central thought of the poem, the method of how Whitman wishes to establish this love is equally important. In the poem, Whitman sings to “Democracy” by laying out his goals to be reached for the coming of democracy in America. “Democracy” is personified by Whitman as “ma femme,” meaning “my

woman/wife.” The personification can be associated with Whitman’s understanding of how democracy has actually entailed great resemblance to Nature. In *Democratic Vistas*, Whitman claims that in Nature, “Death is not the ending, as was thought, but rather the real beginning” (1012). The phenomena of dying and being born are in fact the circulation of endless life. Women, as the ones to conceive and deliver new lives to the world, are identical with “Democracy” in this poem. Whitman has transformed Nature, the hotbed for “the real beginning,” into the role of his “femme” and “Democracy” here.

The parallel of “femme” and democracy in the poem demonstrates the idea that “the love of comrades” or even “the manly love of comrades,” is to be utilized as the foundation of American democracy, the political counterpart of Mother Nature. This original kind of love with rugged Americanism infused, is the love Whitman has learned from his experience with the working class. By interpreting “the manly love” literally from a twenty-first-century point of view, Brasas fails to recognize the language usage and the culture of Whitman’s contemporary society. In *Walt Whitman: Lives and Legacies*, David Reynolds illustrates Whitman’s concept of comradeship by relating it to Emerson’s essay “Friendship.” Reynolds points out that in the essay, Emerson addresses his friends as his “excellent lovers.” While Emerson wrote the essay to thank his great “lovers” for the support they had provided for his poetry, Whitman composed this poem to call for the “love” of his comrades to support his democratic prospect. Reynolds argues that the sexual or homosexual connotations were not established until the late nineteenth century. For example, it was not until the 1890s that the phrases “to sleep with” and “to make love to” were given their sexual connotations (Reynolds 120). Therefore, it is befitting not to associate Whitman’s idea of comradely love or manly love with contemporary conceptions of homosexuality considering that the poem was first published in 1860.

Reynolds also indicates that Whitman has intended his readers to look at “the social dimension of comradeship” as it remained “crucial” to the nation in the nineteenth century. He believes that Whitman understood that this kind of extensive and fervid friendship was imperative for his contemporary America where the “latent” love of the young fellows and “the affection of man for men” were to surface and resolve the conflicts that had been forewarned by Lincoln—“A house divided against itself cannot stand” (121–22). The social façade of the comradely love ought to be comprehended and dwelt upon more deeply than the erotic association of it.

Compared to Emerson’s love received from his circle, Whitman had expected such a grand amount of love from his comrades that his patriotic enthusiasm intensified his poetic language. Being the forerunner of modernist poetry, Whitman exceeded the other literati in nineteenth-century America. Rebellious from his contemporaries, Whitman was unencumbered with the restraints of conservative doctrines, and moreover, his mind surpassed the customary senses of value and points of view as a well-rounded pioneer. His anti-capitalistic, anti-authoritative, and sensational poetic language do not make him homosexual because he, as a living philosopher of his life, has never been contained in the common social frame. It is highly probable that he has intended nothing akin to the presupposition we acquire from reading his usage of language. In order to decipher Whitman, critics should first recognize his reality by taking into consideration the contexts of the works in their interpretation. When Brasas argues that Reynold’s “good-willed attempt” is a means applied to “save the poet’s reputation” from being homosexual, he also falls for the common perception of the binary oppositions. However, as a cosmic philosopher, Whitman does not really believe in such a notion. Brasas’ anachronistic criticism with regard to his proof of whether Whitman had been involved in any romantic relationships with women struck me as rigid and ironic for such a freedom-loving and all-embracing poet.

Whitman's patriotism not only rests on American comradely love but also derives its root from Nature. In *Democratic Vistas*, he declares that America, as the land where everything old has been "written, sung, or stated," needs a revolution from the old and traditional concepts that have prevented the nation from making progress and returning to its origin. Anticipating the rise of the States, Whitman asks his readers to contemplate the mission of being human "in the universe of material kosmos" (1017). He states that "after meteorological, vegetable, and animal cycles, man at last arises, born through them, to prove them, concentrate them, to turn upon them with wonder and love—to command them, adorn them, and carry them upward into superior realms" (1017). The "meteorological, vegetable, and animal cycles" which we are "born through" are phenomena of Nature. For Whitman, human beings are seen as both the learners and the educators in the universe. While human thought and emotional capabilities make mankind superior to other beings, human existence took place on Earth posterior to those beings. Whitman regards humans as children of the cycles and human life as an imitation of those beings, a concept which parallels the relation between democracy and Nature in his philosophy.

In "Capitalist Vistas: Walt Whitman and Spontaneous Order," Thomas G. Peyser points out that opposite to most essayists, Whitman claims in *Democratic Vistas* that he intends no orderly or clear structure and statement because he feels impelled to create something "that mirrors the complex, apparently disorderly character of the world he is analyzing" (265). As Mack has attempted to present the pragmatic value of Whitman's prose writing by using *Democratic Vistas* as an example, Peyser's argument further illustrates the pragmatism manifested in the essay.

With its clear focus on the discussion of democracy in America, the political discussion in the essay relies on Whitman's perception of Nature. As Whitman intends for the entire nation to be "re-written, re-sung, restated" (1017) by poets, who are the

spokesmen for Nature to the human world, he places Nature and America on one hand while the human world and democracy on the other. America, in Whitman's eye, is the representation of Nature in the artificial world. Democracy, therefore, is the sound of Nature conveyed through the art of poetry. In the artificial world, harmony is to be fought for, just as conflicts between lives of different beings are to be resolved in the natural world. In Nature, discrepancies are normal and necessary. To Whitman, a democratic country also ought to accommodate discrepancies, which are essential to help the country remain "democratic." Peyser's observation of how Whitman's view of the world affects his style of essay writing serves as a good example of Whitman's democratic expression in literature—to write about variations that constantly occur in a democratic system, it is inadequate to maintain consistency and order in the writing.

Basing the origin of the democratic prospect on Nature, "For You O Democracy" and *Democratic Vistas* should be interpreted with mutual reference to each other as a demonstration of Whitman's concept of the cosmos realized in his patriotic thought. His cosmic idea is an adaption from his philosophy of Nature. To Whitman, the body, the physical and subsequently, mental freedom, and the monstrosity have been lurking in us, waiting to awake upon the sounding of his poetry. In the realm of his philosophy, mankind still needs to undergo these stages before they attain liberation. These stages mirror and imitate the phenomena of meteorological, vegetable, and animal cycles. Whitman encourages his readers to participate in the cycles as we were all "born through them." Human beings, just like clouds, plants, and animals, are children of Mother Nature and cannot grow up without the cultivation of it. Since civilization has gradually led us apart from the cultivation of Nature, the poetry of democracy written by Whitman is meant to guide us back to our roots and beginnings from the civilized world. By comprehending his democratic outlook, we as readers will be allowed to recapture the patriotic sentiment of America that bears its origins in Nature.

In “Whitman as A Poet of Nature,” Norman Foerster analyzes how Whitman confronts Nature in his poems. He presents the natural symbols applied in Whitman’s poetry and divides them into five categories: the five senses of the human body. Foerster regards Whitman’s observation acquired from the five senses as a manifestation of his attitude towards the depiction of Nature. According to Foerster, Whitman believes that one must be not precise but “heedless” in encounters with Nature and that there should always be a certain “free margin” (738). Echoing with Whitman’s poetry writing, which has its main cause to sing for freedom, for Whitman, the free margin in Nature is to allow the observers more enjoyment. In a similar fashion, to render the concept of the cosmos to Whitman’s patriotism shall create a freer and more well-rounded democratic institution that can be as accommodating and adaptable as the universe.

Foerster’s criticism sheds light on the essence that Whitman has envisioned to be shared by democracy and Nature. However, Foerster’s argument hasn’t really touched upon the subject of democracy in Whitman’s writing. He has proved it to be significant that Whitman utilizes natural elements in his poetry, such as birds, trees, and stars, etc., through the contact made by the five senses of the body. While he connects Whitman’s concept of the body to Nature by means of poetry, he does not carry on this discussion further with regard to Whitman’s democratic writings. “For You O Democracy” serves as an apt example of Whitman’s poetry that demonstrates the merging of Nature and American democracy in terms of Whitman’s patriotic conception.

The poem is undoubtedly a paragon of the democratic spirit of America. Although most scholars are drawn to either the homosexual or homosocial implications of the comradely love as the thematic focus of the poem, such interpretations tend to neglect the personification of democracy. From an ecocritical point of view, there is a particular interpretation relevant to the concept of personification in Whitman’s poetry. Yet, in this view, Whitman’s application of personification has been denied. In *Walt Whitman and*

The Earth: A Study in Eco-poetics, M. Jimmie Killingsworth argues that “Whitman follows Wordsworth in resisting the personification of abstractions—treating ideas as if they were people. As like Marx, he resists the treatment of people as if they were objects...as well as the treatment of abstractions as reified objects” (15). In his eco-poetic study, Killingsworth’s discussion has its emphasis on the poetry of Nature. The poem “For You O Democracy” certainly incorporates the characteristics of both natural and democratic poetry. Evidently, Whitman apostrophizes to “Democracy,” viewing it as his “femme” that he wishes to serve. Within a few lines of this poem, Whitman has presented the abstract concept of democracy by endowing it with a female identity, and addressing it as “ma femme.” In the poem, Whitman not only personifies but also feminizes the concept of democracy, a fact which contradicts Killingsworth’s eco-poetic ground.

Ecocriticism is a theory that is relatively recent in terms of its application in literature. As Whitman has employed many natural elements in his poems, his poetry is accordingly considered a legitimate candidate for the study of eco-poetics. While it is already dubious for critics to adopt certain theoretical approaches that are produced independently from the text written by the authors or the context of it, Killingsworth’s endeavor to criticize Whitman’s poetry from an eco-poetic standpoint seems anachronistic and imposing. While Whitman has definitely played a part in writing about Nature and the “moral identity” we should learn from it, he does not study the natural surroundings in a scientific manner. In addition, he does not reject the idea of identifying himself or mankind with other beings in Nature. He embraces the notion of writing for personal as well as public purposes, a feature which can be differentiated from the persistently ecological or natural reflections in the writings of eco-poetry.

Whitman, as a significant transcendentalist of America, has not, as Killingsworth has presumed, “anticipated a recent theoretical trend in literary and cultural studies” (16).

The natural elements in his poems are coherent with the unique vistas of Nature in the New World, a new concept of Nature which has been redefined by Emerson as exclusively American. It is true that Nature remains the source that Whitman constantly refers back to in his writings. However, just as Nature is free from restrictions and deliberations in its course of progression, Whitman's writing has emulated and accommodated that carefree and spontaneous train of thought. Therefore, the personification of democracy is a natural approach adopted by Whitman in the poem. By associating the femaleness and motherliness of Nature with democracy, Whitman employs his concept of the cosmos inherited from Emerson's transcendentalism in this poem of democracy.

Emerson's friend and literary executor James Elliot Cabot perceived the shared philosophy in Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* with Emerson's writing. He replied to Emerson's recommendation of Whitman's poetry collection by writing to Emerson that, "There is a good deal of echo about him, & many of his good things *you* may recognize as very intimate acquaintances" (Gougeon 38). By reemphasizing Emerson's philosophy of the history of mind, I propose to look at this passage as the foundation of Whitman's concept of the cosmos:

To the poet, to the philosopher, to the saint, all things are friendly and sacred, all events profitable, all days holy, all men divine. For the eye is fastened on the life, and slights the circumstance. Every chemical substance, every plant. Every animal in its growth, teaches the unity of cause, the variety of appearance.

(Emerson 155)

Emerson's perception of the "universal Nature" (151) demonstrates an inclusive and egalitarian point of view. Hierarchies, species, and appearances do not matter in the material universe through Emerson's eye. This is true egalitarianism envisaged by a true

American transcendentalist. As Emerson's disciple, Whitman attempts to realize this vision through his democratic outlook embedded in both his prose and poetry. In accordance with the subjectivity required in Emerson's history of mind, "For You O Democracy" ought to be understood as Whitman's subjectivity as an ardent patriot, growing and fattening under the infusion of Nature, aspiring to predominate the nineteenth-century democracy of America.

To celebrate American democracy, Whitman urges his readers to admire American landscapes because they serve as the nationalistic foundation of the country. Trees, as a grown-up version of grass, are compared to the "companionship" that is to be "plant[ed]" on the land abundant in water. The water images, the "rivers" and the "great lakes" in the poem, are often viewed by Whitman as vehicles that connect the past, present, and future together. By planting the companionship performed "by the love of comrades" along the rivers and lakes, Whitman seems to suggest that water, as a natural element here, plays a significant role in producing and nourishing the brotherly love that will in return glorify the nation. The thickness of trees can be interpreted as a product of the healthy water, a symbol which is to anticipate the robustness of camaraderie in the new democratic institution.

With the comrades' "arms about each other's necks," the solidarity can be achieved through the uniting of the cities. The consummation of Whitman's patriotism depends on the body politic discussed in an earlier chapter. Each body represents an individual identity that is to be harbored in this democratic nation. Collectively, the bodies form a corporate entity with a resemblance to a human body. The democracy system of America necessitates, on that account, a commensalism between the landscapes and everything that dwells in them. Through personification and the concept of the body politic, Whitman establishes a close relationship between democracy and Nature in the poem. It is a poem that should not be comprehended only as the poet's homosexual tendency

concealed under his democratic oration. Upon the use of comradely love in the poem, Carol M. Zapata-Whelan comments, “this poem of ‘comrades’ transcends all convention [...] as it incites an exuberant uprising of solidarity and love” (226). The comradely love in the poem pertains more closely to Whitman’s cosmic and all-encompassing kind of love. Written in a more conventional form, “For You O Democracy” is a demonstration of “the rally-and-flag-waving nature of the patriotic verse” (Zapata-Whelan 226) sung by the poet of the cosmos.

In this chapter, “For You O Democracy” has been given an unconventional explication by using the concept of the cosmos discussed in *Democratic Vistas* as a basis. Treating the essay as a guideline to his political beliefs, Whitman intends to fulfill his mission as a democratic poet just as he wishes to perform his duty as a human being in the cosmos. For Whitman, the path to the democratic success of America is paralleled with the forming of a new order of literati for the nation. Being a true patriot, Whitman’s patriotic sentiment derives from his conception of the cosmos, a state where everything is seen equal regardless of its forms and origins. In *Democratic Vistas*, Whitman informs his readers of “a moral purpose” that underlies the cosmos. He argues that “within the purposes of the Kosmos, and vivifying all meteorology, and all the congeries of the mineral, vegetable and animal worlds—all the physical growth and development of man, and all the history of the race in politics, religions, wars, &c., there is a moral purpose, a visible or invisible intention, certainly underlying all” (1011). Every aspect of life complies with the working of the cosmos. Democracy is no exception. From the monstrous freedom in poetry to the regulated freedom of democratic discourse in prose, this chapter has examined how Whitman’s freedom in poetry is actually a reformation of the concept of the cosmos utilized in the argument of democracy. The idea of the cosmos sheds light on the universal Nature suggested by Emerson and carried on by Whitman in his democratic writings. His writings have been proved too “monstrous” for many

contemporary critical theorists, who insist on looking through lenses that are simply too narrow for him. With reference to the incessant cycles of the cosmos, Whitman attempts to employ this kind of endlessness and vigor in his realization of patriotism. With Nature, the redefined and universal one, as the prototype, Whitman the patriot transcends all and “contain[s] multitudes” (87) in this material cosmos. These reductive responses from contemporary critical theorists to Whitman’s writing only further demonstrate how his writings transcend and contain them.





CHAPTER 5

The Future of America—Poetry of The Universal Nature

“We sail a dangerous sea of seething currents, cross and under-currents,
vortices—all so dark, untried—and whither shall we turn?”

—Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas*

Democracy, a concept that has been embodied and expounded greatly in history, is presented in an idiosyncratic manner in Walt Whitman’s nineteenth-century America. Instead of viewing democracy simply as a form of government, Whitman’s democracy resides in his philosophy of the body, Nature, and poetry. While his poetry demonstrates an absorbing and embracive quality that his concept of democracy inherits, his poems about the body and Nature should be understood as retaining a close relation to his democratic ideation. The independent interpretations of the poems of the body and Nature have certainly generated diverse insights into Whitmanian transcendentalism, distinguishing his transcendental notion from that of the Romantic poets and of Ralph Waldo Emerson. To further explore the distinct attributes of Whitman’s transcendentalism, I have analyzed the poems of the body and Nature as a collective voice that produces a powerful sound in his song of democracy. I have proved that once our understanding of *Democratic Vistas* is expanded beyond the field of politics, we can see how fundamental this essay is to Whitman’s poetics, theories of Nature, and the human body.

To establish Whitman’s transcendentalism and its unique premise, I have discussed Emerson’s transcendentalism by referring to his essays *Nature* and *The Transcendentalist* as the ground where Whitman’s transcendentalism takes off.

Emerson’s concept of Nature depends mainly on the cultivation of the human soul as a means to build an intimate relation with Nature. Whitman, on the other hand, considers the body as the foundation for transcendental experiences. His body concept is based on the organic quality between different parts of the body. Betsy Erkkila utilizes the body

politic concept to interpret Whitman's conceptions of the body and democracy in his works. Democracy, just like the human body, is organic and dynamic. By juxtaposing the performances of the body of both male and female with the political conflicts of the nation, Erkkila explores the political manifestation of the body in Whitman's poetry and analyzes it in the context of American democracy. Harold Aspiz advances this analysis and applies it to *Democratic Vistas*, arguing that "the poetic-political theory" (Aspiz 111) underlying the essay is realized through the human body. For the first time, Aspiz parallels democracy and the body as two main focuses of Whitmanian philosophy embedded in the essay.

To situate the body concept in the realm of democracy, the essay is represented in my thesis as a democratizing body of reformation, signifying Whitman's response of nineteenth-century Reconstruction America to Thomas Carlyle's *Shooting Niagara: And After?* While Carlyle emphasizes the necessity to maintain the social rank in England so as to allow only the intellectuals and aristocracy to have an influence on politics, Whitman hopes for egalitarianism in American democracy and embraces the mass public. According to Whitman, in order to reconstruct the postbellum nation, America should rely on incessantly evolving points of view and regulations as the crucial contributions to the realization of democracy. Whitman develops his notions of democracy together with his post-Emersonian thoughts on Nature.

Rejecting Emerson's philosophy of placing the soul higher than the body and Carlyle's analysis of the dualism of the soul and the body in *Characteristics*, Whitman proclaims that the body is the soul by saying, "[I]f the body were not the soul, what is the soul" (250)? The essence of Whitman's Nature lies within the body, an identical twin of the soul, which can be found in every individual and serves as the origin of his democracy. Upon the discussion regarding Emerson and Carlyle's essays, I infer that the conception of Nature in *Democratic Vistas* is an extension of Carlyle's body politic

theory as well as an elevation of Emerson's transcendentalism, and that Whitman's democratic outlook is rooted in the revitalized perception of Nature, the physical body—the “germs of all.”

The significance of the body concerning Nature in Whitman's works is promulgated through his democratic poetry. According to Whitman, poets ought to assume the duty of establishing the channel to comprehend and further embody Nature in every individual. Whitman regards America as “the greatest poem” (5) and Americans as people who have “the fullest poetic nature” (5). The concept of paralleling the new and democratic country with poetry is illustrated through the teleological view of Nature that results in a unity between the natural and democratic world in *Democratic Vistas*.

While Martin K. Doudna points out that the *naturans*, the force of Nature, prevails in *Democratic Vistas*, Whitman views the artificial world as indispensable in the essay as he writes, “the artificial, the work of man too is equally great” (963). The artificial product, especially poetry of all genres of literature, is considered the greatest man-made achievement and serves as a bridge to connect mankind with Nature. In “Song of the Redwood Tree,” the poet “hears the tree's voice in his ‘soul’ and thus internalizes the emotions and essence of nature” as a tree speaks for his brother trees. Whitman describes the tree's chanting “not of the past only but the future,” paralleling Nature with America. Steve Olson regards the poem as Whitman's manifestation of his political outlook, which is also “the popular ideology, or myth,” of his time—“America is the spiritual union of humankind and nature.” Also, Whitman the poet intends to send out the message embedded within “A Leaf for Hand in Hand” to convince his fellow Americans of uniting with each other in spite of their diverse geographical and social backgrounds. He believes that as a transcribing poet that has received the leaf from Nature to channel the voice of Nature to men in his poems, he is able to join the American mass together,

starting from the contact of bodies and consummated through the relay of the leaf from hand to hand.

Another connection between Whitman's poetry of Nature and its political outlook can be perceived in the poems on the sea. David Kuebrich discusses the symbolism of the sea and considers the sea's functions as symbols of "the divine source of humanity and the rest of creation" in "both Whitman's poetry and prose" (622). Using "Song of Myself" as an example, Kuebrich suggests that the poems of the sea possess the cleansing power to heal the postbellum nation. He knits the relation between the power of the sea and the rebirth of the nation tightly in his interpretation of the poem, regarding this organic relation as the principle of Whitman's democracy. Kuebrich's interpretation of the sea in the poem stresses on the perception of Nature in its purest form and most powerful working, an idea which is discussed in *Democratic Vistas*.

Concerned about the fact that his contemporary Americans mistake the advancement of the social development of civilization for the intellectual and artistic achievement of culture, Whitman therefore asks, "You can cultivate corn and roses and orchards—but who shall cultivate the mountain peaks, the ocean, and the tumbling gorgeousness of the clouds" (986)? For Whitman, the essence of Nature and the finest of culture are to be understood and preserved by men through the guidance of poetry. The sea poems, consequently, should assume not only the various demonstrations of the sea symbolism as works of literary presentation but also the poetic position of linking Whitman's former and later poetic thoughts throughout his career of writing. Owing to the infinitely persistent power of the sea, the sea poems of all the Nature poems serve as the most appropriate example to represent Whitman's expectation of American democracy and construct a bridge of intertextual interpretation between the essay and his poetry.

The power of “imagination” (957) is retained most in poetry and should work as the drive for democratic improvement as Whitman writes, “What I say in these *Vistas* has its main bearing on imaginative literature, especially poetry” (958). Whitman’s imagination in poetry should not be mistaken as the manifestation of otherworldly ideas. Robert Johnstone views Whitman’s poetry as “a deeply mimetic, realist commitment” (526), with the language, forms, and content of poetry all drawn from real life. A similar idea is presented in *Democratic Vistas* when Whitman declares that poetry must always be resorted to by “wealth, science, materialism,” and “even this democracy” (1010). It is this realistic side of Whitman that makes his belief in poetry as the cure to American democracy an apt thought for and contribution to nineteenth-century America. Focusing on ideation rather than the physical system of democracy, Whitman does not study the laws of Nature as the foundation of the operation of democracy in a scientific and precise manner. Formality and precision are never a concern for Whitman the poet, the prose writer, and the democrat of the nineteenth century. He has anticipated for America the democratic diversity of voices and faces that are not confined to a certain time and space but disperse and congregate in a nomadic fashion throughout the country and the centuries.

The characteristic of timelessness in Whitman’s philosophy is demonstrated in his works where the metaphors such as the water image, ships, and ferries are utilized. In *Democratic Vistas*, Whitman states that literature, in a form of “little ships,” “compass[es] what measureless values of reminiscence, contemporary portraitures, manners, idioms and beliefs, with deepest inference, hint and thought, to tie and touch forever the old, new body, and the old, new soul” (996). The goal of the New World literature is to embrace and extract the essence from the history of literature and contemporary writings in order to create a literary scene that is revolutionary and American. According to Whitman, just like literature, the ships of the New World have

traveled from the past through various bodies of water. While many critics have commented on the timelessness of the crowds presented in “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” I think that the act of the crossing the river deserves equal attention in criticism. The concept of water being able to bear and pass down the history and knowledge reflected in Whitman’s poetry of Nature remains significant to his aspiration to restore and pass on American democracy to future generations. The circulating and cyclic characteristic of water manifests the concept of the constant and energetic flow of life. Recognized by Whitman as a poem itself, America is just like a gigantic ship carrying history, past experiences, and its people, sailing through the currents of democracy.

As Whitman regards the poetry of Nature as an essential element to the reconstruction of American democracy in the nineteenth century, his patriotic sentiment delivered through the democratic poetry originates from his concept of the cosmos. In *Democratic Vistas*, Whitman suggests that American democracy develop along but not against the course of “the physical kosmos” (953). He asks his readers to note that true democracy or democratic success is not “the result of studying up in political economy, but of the ordinary sense, observing, wandering among men, these States, these stirring years of war and peace” (954). For Whitman, a democratic government needs to grow, develop, and improve through the ordeals of time and space. American democracy needs constant challenges, or even failures, to inspire revolutions.

Influenced by Emerson’s idea of “the mind history” (149) in the essay *History*, an approach which indicates that in the history of different eras, there has always been subjectivity produced by contemporary poets, philosophers, or saints. This subjectivity is considered necessary for the universal mind that is shared by the individuals of each generation. Being a poet, a philosopher, and a patriot at the same time, Whitman’s subjectivity in terms of its significance in history lies in his democratic vision for nineteenth-century and future America. Through the discourse on the relation between

Nature and democracy, I have situated Whitman as a “natural patriot” whose patriotic sentiment for America demonstrates the microcosm of his concept of the cosmos.

In *Democratic Vistas*, in order to vivify “new blood, new frame of democracy” (959), Whitman suggests that “should some two or three really original American poets, (perhaps artists or lecturers,) arise, mounting the horizon like planets, stars of the first magnitude, that, from their eminence, fusing contributions, races, far localities, &c., together they would give more compaction and more moral identity, (the quality to-day most needed,) to these States” (959). For Whitman, the national poets he was expecting must possess American originality and cosmic vision in terms of their poetry writing. As a patriot, Whitman believes that these two essential characteristics help produce and then promulgate the moral identity needed for America.

In “For You O Democracy,” he manifests the morality that ought to be shared by his fellow Americans—“the love of comradeship.” While his love of comrades has often been misconstrued as conspicuously homosexual, Whitman as a philosopher of the cosmos could not realistically be categorized in the eyes of the people of his generation, not to mention in the eyes of modern people. As democracy is endowed with the female identity in the poem, the love of comrades in the poem should be understood as the foundation of American democracy, the political counterpart of Mother Nature. This original kind of love with rugged Americanism infused, is the love Whitman has learned from his experience with the working class.

Whitman’s patriotism not only rests on American comradely love but also derives its roots from Nature. In *Democratic Vistas*, he declares that America, as the land where everything old has been “written, sung, or stated,” needs a revolution from the old and traditional concepts that have prevented the nation from making progress and returning to its origins. Anticipating the rise of the States, Whitman asks his readers to contemplate the mission of being human “in the universe of material kosmos” (1017). For Whitman,

human beings are seen as both the learners and the educators in the universe. While human thought and emotional capabilities make mankind superior to other beings, human existence took place on Earth posterior to those beings. Whitman regards humans as children of the “meteorological, vegetable, and animal cycles” and human life as an imitation of those beings, a concept which parallels the relation between democracy and Nature in his philosophy. Since civilization has gradually led us apart from the cultivation of Nature, the poetry of democracy written by Whitman is meant to guide us back to our roots and beginnings from the civilized world. By comprehending his democratic outlook, we as readers will be allowed to recapture the patriotic sentiment of America that bears its origins in Nature.

The conception of the cosmos, deriving its roots from Whitman’s philosophy of Nature, determines his patriotic orientation. His patriotic sentiment for America is something grander than human loyalty or love of the nation. In the poem “Kosmos,” Whitman personifies the cosmos, similar to the method of personifying democracy, making it the subject that contains and encompasses all. Every aspect of life complies with the working of the cosmos. Democracy is no exception. Whitman describes the cosmos as “who includes diversity and is Nature,” “who contains believers and disbelievers, who is the most majestic lover,” and “who, out of the theory of the earth and of his or her body understands by subtle analogies all other theories” (516–17). From nakedness of the body and its significance in embodying Whitmanian Nature, to poetry as the agent between the natural and democratic realms and the notion of the cosmos as the source of Whitman’s patriotic sentiment, *Democratic Vistas* serves as a guide that manifests the closely-knit relations between the body, Nature, poetry, and democracy in Whitman’s philosophy, directing the readers to reinterpret Whitman’s poetry of Nature. While the interpretation of the poems also contribute to the new understanding of the essay, the cycle of the body, Nature, and democracy, which is based

on the cosmos idea rooted in Nature, seems to work its way back to where the dialectics between the three start. Whitman's philosophy of the circulation of life is therefore reflected upon his circulation of ideas, the working of Nature. Like Whitman's claim in "Song of Myself" that "I do not talk of the beginning or the end," the impact of *Democratic Vistas* on all aspects of America began in the nineteenth century and continues into the foreseeable future of democracy.



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