

AMERICAN VERNACULAR POETRY:
STUDIES IN WHITMAN, SANDBURG,
ANDERSON, MASTERS, AND LINDSAY

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ABSTRACT

AMERICAN VERNACULAR POETRY: STUDIES IN WHITMAN, SANDBURG, ANDERSON, MASTERS, AND LINDSAY

By

Philip Alan Greasley

Walt Whitman breaks with nineteenth century poetic orthodoxy and rejects American subservience to European literary modes. He works to create a new, distinctively American poetry. This poetry stresses simple language, rhythms based on American colloquial speech, common reference, and techniques which make it accessible to the masses. At the same time, however, Whitman demands that his poetry maintain sufficient density of literary technique to interest sophisticated genteel audiences.

Although Whitman's poetry is radically different from prevailing nineteenth century modes, the then-dominant literary styles do significantly affect Whitman's literary values and his poetic output. As such, Whitman's vernacular poetry selectively mixes techniques and characteristics of the three extant literary traditions--genteel, popular, and folk--as well as of the three modes of presentation characteristic of nineteenth century America--neoclassicism, romanticism, and realism. These traditional elements combine with Whitman's own innovations to produce a new poetic amalgam.

With this work, Whitman lays the groundwork for many commonplaces of twentieth century American poetry. These include concreteness, colloquialism, sophisticated non-syllabic rhythms, and highly-developed organizing techniques.

Whitman's oral vernacular techniques are adopted by the writers of the Chicago Renaissance--Carl Sandburg, Sherwood Anderson, Edgar Lee Masters, and Vachel Lindsay. These men write highly Whitmanic poetry, but they continue to adapt the mode to changing American conditions and literary values. Carl Sandburg continues Whitman's experimentation into oral forms and further develops the techniques of American vernacular poetry. Sherwood Anderson also inherits the complete Whitmanic tradition; he broadens the range of this poetry to include highly impressionistic writing. Edgar Lee Masters and Vachel Lindsay accept only limited aspects of Whitman's poetic theory. Therefore, their poetry often integrates Whitmanic and non-Whitmanic literary techniques. As such, Masters and Lindsay exemplify the process by which Whitmanic techniques move toward the mainstream of twentieth century American poetics.

This dissertation relies heavily on the contributions of Richard Bridgman's The Colloquial Style in America. In this book Bridgman sets forth the experiments in vernacular American prose which in turn influence Whitman's poetry. Bridgman also guides the methodology of this dissertation. He maintains that vernacular techniques must appear densely and interrelatedly before such a style can be asserted. Therefore, I have used Bridgman's techniques and examples in combination with examples of these same techniques

occurring in Whitman's best-known and most representative poetry. This juxtapositioning proves that Whitman's techniques are indeed those of the realistic prose experimenters. The use of well-known and representative Whitmanic examples makes it clear that these vernacular techniques form the core of Whitman's poetry.

The organization of the dissertation is roughly chronological. Chapter One focuses on the literary situation prior to Whitman's 1855 publication of Leaves of Grass. It explores the three simultaneously existing literary traditions--the genteel, popular, and folk--and the norms current in each. Whitman rejects some aspects of each literary tradition, while he puts greater emphasis on others in forming his own American vernacular poetic amalgam.

Chapter Two considers Whitman's interest in American speech patterns and his adaptation of prose techniques for simulating American vernacular speech. As such, the chapter introduces Bridgman's definitions and examples of techniques pioneered by American prose writers from the mid 1800's through the early 1900's. It then juxtaposes Bridgman's prose examples with representative Whitmanic usages of these techniques.

Chapter Three reverses the emphasis by stressing Whitman's efforts to reintroduce order and poetic quality to his vernacular prose-based verse. Whitman rejects rhyme and syllabic verse. He substitutes alliteration and assonance along with many types of repetition as form-inducing elements.

Chapter Four treats the poetry of Edgar Lee Masters and Vachel Lindsay, two poets who integrate Whitmanic and non-Whitmanic techniques and themes in their poetry. These two poets represent the early evolution of Whitman's poetics to meet changing American conditions. Masters and Lindsay discard those Whitmanic techniques unsuited to their increasingly pessimistic attitudes. Thus, for example, they shun Whitman's syntactically expanding, ecstatic catalogues while retaining his techniques for approximating vernacular speech. Finally, these poets' writings allow some insights into themes most fruitfully treated using Whitmanic forms. In the instances where theme, technique, and form coincide, they often create great poetry; in others, Masters' and Lindsay's experimentation is unsuccessful.

Chapter Five presents Carl Sandburg's poetry as the fullest embodiment of the Whitmanic poetic synthesis. Sandburg shares Whitman's philosophy and literary assumptions, and he consciously studies his mentor's work. Sandburg's dedication to Whitmanic poetry leads him to further develop oral vernacular poetic techniques.

Chapter Six views America's waning optimism and sense of purpose as they affect the Whitmanic tradition. Sherwood Anderson's literary assumptions follow directly from Whitman's, but the uncertain future and the possibilities of failure loom far larger on Anderson's horizons. Therefore, Anderson adopts Whitman's oral techniques almost entirely and modifies, through experiment, the aspects which conflict with his own developing philosophy.

The Appendix analyzes the limited role played by Reedy's Mirror, Poetry, and the Little Review in fostering the Whitmanic oral vernacular poetic mode. These magazines do not encourage dedication to specifically Whitmanic techniques. Instead, they use Whitman as the symbol of the "new" poetry while advocating the tenets of vers libre, imagism, and the French symbolist movement.

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By

Philip Alan Greasley

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To my wife, my mother, and my father
without whose help, encouragement, and forbearance
this would never have been written

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Although dissertations first appear to be solo efforts, in reality they pool the abilities of many people. This dissertation is no exception. Several individuals have contributed significantly. If Dr. Linda Wagner, my committee chairperson, had a dollar for each hour she spent on this dissertation, she would be a rich woman. I appreciate her mastery of the field, her intelligent direction, and most of all her unfailing kindness. Dr. David D. Anderson also deserves special thanks. Although he is a member of the Department of American Thought and Language and receives nothing for his efforts in the English Department, he, too, has devoted many hours and made innumerable helpful suggestions. Finally, Dr. Sam S. Baskett is the source of my original interest in the Chicago Renaissance poets, and his classes are responsible for my knowledge of the realistic prose experiments which underlie this dissertation. He, too, has often extended himself on my behalf. The efforts of these scholars as well as those of many others has demonstrated the meaning of the term "the Community of Scholars." I only hope that sometime I will be able to do as much for some graduate student as these people have done for me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	1
CHAPTER ONE AMERICAN WELLSPRINGS	14
Nineteenth Century Literary Traditions and Modes	
Genteel Romanticism	
Popular Neoclassicism	
Folk Realism and Stylization	
The Whitmanic Synthesis	
Post-Whitmanic Trends in American Literature and Experience	
CHAPTER TWO THE COMMON TOUCH	39
Democratic American Poetry	
The Colloquial Style: Stress, Fragmenta- tion, and Repetition	
Vernacular Speech Rhythms	
The Vernacular Narrator	
Balancing	
Stress on Words and Phrases	
Key Term Repetition	
Lists Set Off by Neutral Framing Words	
Juxtapositioning	
Simplification of Syntax	
Simplification and Repetition of Vocabulary	
Fragmentation of Syntax	
Short Syntactical Units	
Rambling or Periodic Sentences	
Paratactic Structure	
Directional Prepositions	
Rejection of Prepositions	
Non-Standard Punctuation	
Parenthesis	
Neutral Framing Words	
Repetition	
American Vernacular Rhythms	
Repetition and Controlled Variation	
The Chant	
Inversion	
Juxtaposition	

	Other Whitmanic Techniques	
	Rhetorical Questions	
	Run-On Sentences	
	Strong and Weak Words	
	Parenthesis	
	Restricted Vocabulary	
	Alliteration	
	Assonance	
	Key Word Repetition	
	Dynamic Repetition	
CHAPTER THREE	THE POETIC ORDERING	89
	The Biblical Hypothesis	
	Whitmanic Ordering Techniques	
	The Vernacular Narrator	
	Narrative and Lyrical Sections	
	The Sermon Form	
	Biblical Parallels	
	Large Scale Whitmanic Techniques	
	Subordination of Narrative	
	Balancing	
	Rhetorical Expansion	
	Key Term Repetition	
	Dynamic Repetition	
	Association of Ideas and Sounds	
	Refrain First	
	Multi-Line Lines	
	Small Scale Techniques	
	Repetition, Variation, Inversion, and	
	Juxtaposition of Words and Phrases	
	Balancing	
	Rejection of Subordination	
	Rhythm Breaking	
	Sound Repetition	
	Rejection of Rhyme	
	Neutral Framing Words	
	Association of Ideas	
	Punctuation	
	Prose Emphasis or Poetic Emphasis	
CHAPTER FOUR	MASTERS, LINDSAY, AND THE WHITMANIC SYNTHESIS .	128
	Edgar Lee Masters	
	Debt to Whitman	
	Genteel Romanticism	
	Philosophy	
	Influences	
	Walt Whitman	
	Carl Sandburg	
	William Marion Reedy	

	Page
- Selective Use of Whitmanic Techniques - Other Influences - Nicholas Vachel Lindsay - Oral Poetry - The Poe Influence - Subject Matter - Whitmanic Techniques - Other Influences - Theme, Technique, Philosophy	
CHAPTER FIVE	
SANDBURG AND THE WHITMAN TRADITION: TOWARD FORMLESSNESS AS THE EPITOME OF FORM	151
- Dedication to Whitman - Language Use - Whitmanic and Imagistic Poetry - American Vernacular Speech "Chicago" - Whitmanic Experimentation - Paragraphic Lines - Non-Parallel Elements - Alliterative Initial Sounds - Essential Aspects of Form - Precise Language - Parallelism - Alliteration - Key Word Repetition - Refrains - Epigrammatic Verse - Integration of Whitmanic and Imagistic Verse	
CHAPTER SIX	
SHERWOOD ANDERSON: WHITMANISM ON THE RAGGED EDGE	185
- Biography - Literature as Retreat and Purification - Pessimism - Imagination, Myth, and Impressionism "Crudity" - Anderson on Whitman <u>Mid-American Chants: Whitmanic Poetry</u> <u>Problems in Anderson's Whitmanic Style</u> <u>A New Testament: Biblical Poetry</u>	
CONCLUSION	233
APPENDIX	
"NEW" POETRY IN THE "LITTLE MAGAZINES"	240
Mistaken Assumptions	

<u>Reedy's Mirror</u>	
General Interest Magazine	
Advanced Literary Attitudes	
Advocacy of Masters	
William Marion Reedy	
<u>Poetry: A Magazine of Verse</u>	
Harriet Munroe	
Statement of Purpose	
Advanced Views	
<u>Vers Libre, Imagism, and the French</u>	
Symbolist Movement	
Articles	
Influences	
<u>The Little Review</u>	
Statement of Purpose	
The New Hellenism	
Art and Revolution	
Biases	
Imagism, Vers Libre, and the French	
Symbolist Movement	
Impressionistic Criticism	
Valid Criticism	
Conclusions	

BIBLIOGRAPHY	261
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PREFACE

Walt Whitman is partially responsible for America's legacy of innovative, democratic, distinctively American poetry. In an era of continuing cultural and literary subservience to Britain, Whitman's democratic leanings and nationalism led him toward American literary independence. He responded with poetry consciously embodying American experiences, values, speech patterns, and literary traditions. It was poetry for all Americans.

A howl of protest greeted the first publication of Whitman's poetry. Even the most sophisticated readers were not prepared for his break with literary tradition, as one typical reaction showed: "As one stumbles through the uncouth chants, the mixed metaphors, the ragged similes, and the rickety grammar of the 'Leaves of Grass,' he begins to feel that he is lost in a wild jungle and must trust to luck to get out."¹

Negative early responses were perhaps to be expected because so much of Whitman's poetry deviated from genteel romantic norms. European romanticism continued to dominate genteel American literature long after the British had begun to move toward new literary modes. American audiences, therefore, were accustomed to the subjects, language, and metrics of romantic poetry. As time went on the literary mainstream fully absorbed originally imaginative romantic language, attitudes, and subjects, and romantic poetry became

subject to trite rehash by less talented writers. Romanticism was moving toward rotten ripeness. Its long-standing popularity signalled its downfall as an impetus to creative effort.

Whitman's poetry, like the early experiments in prose realism, offered new subjects, language, and attitudes, but audiences accustomed to romantic effusions were aghast on first reading it. Instead of exotic settings, refined subjects, luxuriant language, and careful meter, the poems provided apparently amorphous, unmetrical, slangy prose, the least attractive aspects of contemporary society, and an anarchic vernacular narrative voice. Audiences accustomed to genteel romanticism were ill-equipped to recognize Whitman's real contributions to literature--his broadening the range of literary subjects, introducing American vocabulary and speech rhythms, and creating a densely-textured organic poetry. As time passed, however, Whitmanic poetic techniques have received ever greater admiration. Even more important, they have strongly influenced twentieth century genteel and popular literary canons.

Yet Whitman wanted more than a genteel audience. He democratized poetry, maintaining poetic density while replacing class oriented techniques and references with common subjects and language. Similarly, Whitman advocated poetic ordering techniques requiring only a good ear for rhythm--not extensive literary study. Carl Sandburg, Sherwood Anderson, Edgar Lee Masters, and Vachel Lindsay have followed Whitman's lead in bringing oral vernacular poetry to the people.

Although Whitman's innovations are extensive, his poetry is based on thorough internalization of European and American literary traditions. His poetry adopts many of the techniques and values of romanticism, neoclassicism, and emergent realism. It joins the folk, popular, and genteel poetic traditions as well. Consciously based upon American vernacular speech patterns and vocabulary, it simultaneously uses elite techniques to order and intensify experiences. It integrates focus on ordinary life and the overt didacticism of the poet-prophet. Whitman's desire to keep American poetry "coarse and broad"² is not, therefore, a desire for shallowness. It is rather a determination to create an aesthetically defensible poetry, accessible to all Americans, based on the American experience.

Whitman himself went a long way toward the achievement of his radical program, and in time other poets have recognized the artistic potential of American vernacular speech rhythms. As they have, the Whitmanic tradition has evolved to deal successfully with a wider range of moods and experiences. Especially evident in twentieth century poetry are such traits as Whitmanic concreteness, colloquialism, sophisticated vernacular rhythms, and highly specialized organizing techniques.

While most critics stress Whitman's importance to the developing "new" poetry, his specific contributions to modern poetry have usually gone undefined. Furthermore, the methods by which Whitman's techniques reach the mainstream of contemporary literary practice have been considered only superficially. The role of the "little magazines" of the early twentieth century has received much

attention. Closer study reveals, however, that while these magazines wielded great influence, their role in the transmission of Whitman's poetic synthesis was far more limited than was suspected. They gave homage to Whitman, but they "taught" the techniques of imagism, vers libre, and the French symbolist movement. This excessive emphasis on the "little magazines" has obscured the importance of Carl Sandburg's poetry, especially his first volume, Chicago Poems,³ in developing and transmitting Whitman's legacy.

This dissertation will consider Whitman's innovations and adaptations from literary tradition as well as the further development of oral techniques by the Chicago Renaissance poets. I will show these aspects of the Whitmanic tradition. First, vernacular American prose rhythms and vocabulary form the basis for Whitman's poetry. Second, this poetry's unconventional language and rhythms require such new techniques as repetition, variation, alliteration, and assonance to organize and intensify the poetic experience. Third, Whitman's poetry, though consciously reacting against accepted poetic norms, draws heavily from romanticism, neoclassicism, and realism as well as from the genteel, popular, and folk literary traditions. Fourth, Whitman strives to integrate the three American traditions--folk, popular, and elite--to produce a truly national American poetry, devoid of narrow class orientation. Fifth, the "little magazines" of the early twentieth century do not play so great a role in the transmission of Whitman's vernacular poetry as is generally believed. Sixth, Carl Sandburg and the other early inheritors of the Whitman tradition broaden Whitman's experiments and create a poetry with

mass appeal, artistic density, and applicability to a wide range of situations.

One important premise underlies this study--that both vernacular poetry and prose stylize common speech. It is easy to recognize poetry's modification of syntax, rhythm, and vocabulary, but readers do not understand that colloquial prose promotes the illusion of realistic speech through similar techniques. Richard Bridgman, in The Colloquial Style in America, emphasizes the importance of colloquial prose stylizing devices.⁴ These include emphasis on individual words, and phrases; fragmentation of larger syntactical units; and repetition of words, phrases, and sentences. More specifically, vernacular prose stylizing techniques call for vocabulary which is colloquial, slangy, or dialect; long, rambling, or periodic syntax; and repetition and variation of words, phrases, or clauses. These techniques are normally augmented by use of a vernacular narrator, and emphasis on the "here and now" rather than abstract theorizing. Once we recognize that prose does stylize common speech, it is possible to consider the modification of prose techniques for use in vernacular poetry.

Several studies have influenced this dissertation, most important being Bridgman's The Colloquial Style in America. Although Bridgman does not study Whitman's poetic structure extensively, he does analyze the evolution of American colloquial prose techniques and offers significant insights into the potential of the stylized vernacular which Whitman adopts and modifies. Edwin Ray Hunter's "The American Colloquial Idiom 1830-1860,"⁵ and Donald D. Kummings'

"The Vernacular Perspective in American Poetry: Philip Freneau, Walt Whitman, and William Carlos Williams"⁶ reinforce some of Bridgman's assertions. Kummings' dissertation emphasizes Whitman's interest in the American vernacular. However, it never treats Whitman's specific use of vernacular or the relation between vernacular speech patterns and the syntax of Whitman's poetic line. Two short articles further relate Whitman's interest in the American vernacular and prose techniques for approximating it in literature: "Whitman and the American Idiom," by C. Carroll Hollis, and "The Vernacular Tradition in American Literature: Walt Whitman and Mark Twain," by Leo Marx.⁸

Several studies which cite structural parallels between Whitman's poetry and certain books of the Bible have also influenced this dissertation. Gay Wilson Allen's work, especially "Biblical Analogies for Walt Whitman's Prosody,"⁹ and Meredith Posey's "Whitman's Debt to the Bible with Special Reference to the Origins of His Rhythms"¹⁰ are the most impressive in this field. At best, this criticism is very acute. The merit of this scholarship is vitiated, however, by the ability of vernacular prose techniques to duplicate the "Biblical" structures in Whitman's poetry as well as predict many other Whitmanic structures. Finally, use of vernacular prose techniques holds truer to Whitman's stated literary and democratic principles. He consistently advocates democratic literature and the use of American language, characters, scenes, and events. Such a philosophy allows little room for imitation of Biblical forms.

Sister Donez Mary Xiques' 1972 doctoral dissertation, "A Descriptive Analysis of Selected Elements of Walt Whitman's Prose Style in the 1855 Preface to the *Leaves of Grass*,"¹¹ stresses some of the structural techniques which I see characterizing his poetry in his prose. This similarity of technique casts further doubt on the validity of Biblical analogies. While the Bible undoubtedly has influenced American vernacular speech patterns, the Biblical elements had become common long before Whitman wrote Leaves of Grass. Bridgman's techniques of nineteenth century colloquial prose are those which appear in Whitman's prose and poetry. Thus similarities between Whitmanic and Biblical structures are neither conscious emulation of Biblical forms nor techniques exclusively characteristic of Whitman's poetry.

Whitman's use of vernacular syntactic patterns and his rejection of techniques associated with nineteenth century poetry demand some new means of ordering the prose base. These important articles deal with Whitman's structuring. Allen's "Whitman" chapter in American Prosody¹² has been followed by Autrey N. Wiley's "Reiterative Devices in *Leaves of Grass*,"¹³ James McNally's "Varieties of Alliteration in Whitman,"¹⁴ and Detlev W. Schumann's "Enumerative Style and its Significance in Whitman, Rilke, Werfel."¹⁵ Many significant qualities, however, still remain unidentified.

Unfortunately, many studies which consider Whitman's syntax and metrics have only limited value. Sculley Bradley's "The Fundamental Metrical Principle in Whitman's Poetry,"¹⁶ offers some insights, but his study is neither long nor detailed enough to make any major

contribution. Andrew Schiller's "An Approach to Whitman's Metrics"¹⁷ is equally short and inconclusive. Milton Hindus' "Notes Toward a Typical Poetic Line in Whitman"¹⁸ asserts a five beat metrical system accompanying a five unit structure, but his contention has received no further critical support.

Another group of studies has considered the relation between Whitman's poetic structure and nineteenth century rhetoric. They include Gerald P. Mohrmann's "The Impact of Rhetorical Theory upon the Poetry of Walt Whitman,"¹⁹ Peter G. Van Egmond's "Walt Whitman's Study of Oratory and Uses of It in Leaves of Grass,"²⁰ and Roy S. Azaroff's "Walt Whitman's Rhetorical Theory and Practices."²¹ While these studies show that Whitman does maintain a lifelong interest in American language and public speaking, they conclude that Whitman does not subscribe to genteel rhetorical standards. No discussion of Whitman's structural principles is included.

The many studies of Whitman's poetry which have titles including the words "structure" or "form" appear relevant to this topic. In general, however, they deal with the development of plot and theme rather than with Whitman's structuring of the poetic line and verse paragraph.

Many books and articles deal profitably with individual poets of the Chicago Renaissance, but only a few attempt to relate the work of Carl Sandburg, Sherwood Anderson, Edgar Lee Masters, and Vachel Lindsay. Of these, the most important is Bernard Duffey's The Chicago Renaissance in American Letters.²² Michael Yatron²³ and Dale Kramer²⁴ have followed Duffey's lead. Unfortunately, all three

books have one serious flaw: they consider only the milieu and the inducement to write; they say very little about specific writing techniques used by individual poets or shared by members of the "school." This same emphasis on theme rather than technique is shared by most studies on individual Chicago Renaissance poets.

Whitman's influence on twentieth century American poetry has received some critical attention, but much more detailed work must be done. Amy Lowell's Tendencies in Modern American Literature²⁵ and "Walt Whitman and the New Poetry"²⁶ and Clarence Brown's short, identically titled "Walt Whitman and the New Poetry"²⁷ are the best. Most other studies simply assert that a certain poet's style is "Whitmanic" without specifically identifying the shared characteristics.

Finally, Russel Nye's The Unembarrassed Muse: The Popular Arts in America²⁸ and Wilma Jean Clark's "The Levels of Poetry: An Exploration of the Dichotomy between Nineteenth Century Popular and Elitist Poetry"²⁹ detail the characteristics of elite, popular and folk literature. These studies are significant here because Whitman consciously reacts against limitations and unnecessary caste prejudices of nineteenth century elite poetry. He is simultaneously conscious of the potential of American speech as a literary medium and the importance of creating a truly democratic literature. Nye and Clark provide the necessary tools with which Whitman's work can be analyzed; their research allows me to show that Whitman attempts to integrate the folk, popular, and elite traditions in order to create national literature. Since Sandburg, Anderson, Lindsay, and

Masters adopt Whitman's integration of literary traditions to varying degrees, Nye and Clark also help me recognize small differences in emphasis among these later poets.

In order to present the Whitmanic oral vernacular tradition most clearly, I have chosen a roughly chronological approach. Chapter One introduces the American literary situation prior to 1855. It explores the three simultaneously existing literary traditions--the genteel, popular, and folk--and the norms current in each. Whitman reacts against some aspects of each tradition and gives others new emphasis in his amalgam of literary traditions and modes.

Chapters Two and Three develop the concept of the vernacular prose base and the creation of new organizing, poeticizing techniques. Chapter Two relates Bridgman's definitions and examples of American colloquial prose to the organization of Whitman's poetry. Chapter Three, based on Whitman's rejection of many traditional poetic organizational techniques, analyzes his emphasis on repetition, alliteration, and assonance.

Chapter Four treats the work of Edgar Lee Masters and Vachel Lindsay, two poets who integrate Whitmanic and non-Whitmanic techniques and themes in their poetry. They discard Whitmanic techniques unsuited to their increasingly pessimistic attitudes. For example, they avoid syntactically expanding, ecstatic catalogues while retaining techniques for approximating vernacular speech. Thus we see the evolution of Whitmanic poetry to meet the conditions of the new century. We see also the themes most fruitfully treated using Whitmanic forms.

In some cases, theme, technique, and philosophy coincide producing great poetry. In others, the experimentation is unsuccessful.

Chapter Five views Sandburg's poetry as the fullest embodiment of Whitman's poetic synthesis. Sandburg shares Whitman's philosophic and literary assumptions and consciously studies the work of his mentor. Sandburg's dedication to Whitmanic poetry leads him to further develop oral vernacular poetic techniques.

The sixth chapter considers America's waning optimism and sense of purpose as they affect the evolution of the Whitmanic tradition. Sherwood Anderson's literary assumptions follow directly from Whitman's, but the uncertain future and the possibilities of failure loom far larger on Anderson's horizons. Therefore, Anderson adopts Whitman's oral techniques almost entirely and modifies, through experiment, the aspects which conflict with his own developing philosophy.

The Appendix analyzes the limited role played by Poetry, Reedy's Mirror, and The Little Review. These publications do not encourage dedication to specifically Whitmanic techniques. Instead, they hold Whitman up as the symbol of the new poetry while fostering the tenets of vers libre, imagism, and the French symbolist movement.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Walter Kennedy, "Walt Whitman," North American Review, 138 (1884), 591.

² Walt Whitman, "Appendix to Second Edition of Leaves of Grass--Letter to Ralph Waldo Emerson," quoted in Edmund Wilson, ed., The Shock of Recognition: The Development of Literature in the United States Recorded by the Men Who Made It (New York: The Modern Library, 1955), p. 256.

³ Carl Sandburg, Chicago Poems (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1916).

⁴ Richard Bridgman, The Colloquial Style in America (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 10-11.

⁵ Edwin Ray Hunter, "The American Colloquial Idiom 1830-1860," Diss. Univ. of Chicago, 1925.

⁶ Donald D. Kummings, "The Vernacular Perspective in American Poetry: Philip Freneau, Walt Whitman, and William Carlos Williams," Diss. Indiana Univ., 1971.

⁷ C. Carroll Hollis, "Whitman and the American Idiom," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XLIII, No. 3 (Oct. 1957), 408-420.

⁸ Leo Marx, "The Vernacular Tradition in American Literature: Walt Whitman and Mark Twain," Die Neueren Sprachen, 1958, pp. 46-57.

⁹ Gay Wilson Allen, "Biblical Analogies for Walt Whitman's Prosody," Revue Angloamericaine, X (Aug. 1917), 490-507.

¹⁰ Meredith Posey, "Whitman's Debt to the Bible With Special Reference to the Origins of his Rhythms," Diss. Univ. of Texas at Austin, 1938.

¹¹ Sister Donez Marie Xiques, "A Descriptive Analysis of Selected Elements of Walt Whitman's Prose Style in the 1855 Preface to the Leaves of Grass," Diss. Fordham Univ., 1972.

¹² Gay Wilson Allen, "Whitman," American Prosody (Chicago: American Book Co., 1935).

¹³ Autrey Nell Wiley, "Reiterative Devices in Leaves of Grass," American Literature, I (1929), 161-170.

¹⁴ James McNally, "Varieties of Alliteration in Whitman," Walt Whitman Review, 13, No. 1 (March 1967), 28-32.

¹⁵ Detlev W. Schumann, "Enumerative Style and its Significance in Whitman, Rilke, and Werfel," Modern Language Quarterly, III (1942), 171-183.

¹⁶ Sculley Bradley, "The Fundamental Metrical Principle in Whitman's Poetry," American Literature, X (1938), 437-459.

¹⁷ Andrew Schiller, "An Approach to Whitman's Metrics," Emerson Society Quarterly, 22 (1961), 23-25.

¹⁸ Milton Hindus, "Notes Toward a Typical Poetic Line in Whitman," Walt Whitman Review, IX, No. 4 (Dec. 1963), 75-79.

¹⁹ Gerald P. Mohrmann, "The Impact of Rhetorical Theory upon the Poetry of Walt Whitman," Diss. Univ. of Florida, 1963.

²⁰ Peter George VanEgmond, "Walt Whitman's Study of Oratory and Uses of It in Leaves of Grass," Diss. Univ. of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1966.

²¹ Roy S. Azaroff, "Walt Whitman's Rhetorical Theory and Practices," Diss. (Speech), Univ. of Missouri, 1965.

²² Bernard Duffey, The Chicago Renaissance in American Letters: A Critical History (East Lansing: Michigan State Univ. Press, 1954).

²³ Michael Yatron, America's Literary Revolt: Carl Sandburg, Edgar Lee Masters, Vachel Lindsay (New York: 1959).

²⁴ Dale Kramer, The Chicago Renaissance: The Literary Life of the Midwest 1900 - 1930 (New York: Appleton-Century, 1966).

²⁵ Amy Lowell, Tendencies in Modern American Literature (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1917).

²⁶ Amy Lowell, "Walt Whitman and the New Poetry," Yale Review, XVI, No. 3 (April 1927), 502-519.

²⁷ Clarence Brown, "Walt Whitman and the New Poetry," American Literature, XXXIII (1961), 33-45.

²⁸ Russel Nye, The Unembarrassed Muse: The Popular Arts in America (New York: Dial Press, 1970).

²⁹ Wilma Jean Clark, "The Levels of Poetry: An Exploration of the Dichotomy between Nineteenth Century Popular and Elitist Poetry," Diss. Michigan State Univ., 1972.

CHAPTER ONE

AMERICAN WELLSPRINGS

Walt Whitman's contributions to American poetry are significant and extensive, but critics often cannot define his specific innovations. This problem arises because so many of Whitman's techniques straddled standard literary divisions. His poetry transcended the division between poetry and prose; it adopted qualities of folk, popular, and genteel literature as well as of neoclassicism, romanticism, and realism.*

In general, Whitman epitomized romantic values and poetics, but his radical romanticism anticipated much contemporary American realistic poetry. Whitman created poetry based on common language, yet marked by great textual density. He tried to speak directly and simply to the masses on moral subjects, but he consciously wrote to be remembered for his artistry. Whitman asserted, "The proof of a poet shall be sternly deferr'd till his country absorbs him as

* Since this chapter seeks brevity by moving directly into specific aspects of neoclassicism, romanticism, and realism which are directly related to Whitman's poetic experiments, it seems valuable to include general definitions of each of these three terms. As such, these definitions are intended only to give the reader the sense of the general literary movement which gives rise to specific characteristics considered in Chapter One. I have, therefore, sought generally accepted definitions of each rather than probing some of the more controversial nuances. These definitions are taken from William Flint Thrall and Addison Hibbard, A Handbook of Literature, Revised and Enlarged by C. Hugh Holman, New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1960.

affectionately as he has absorbed it. . . . I am willing to be understood by the growth of the taste of myself."¹

Whitman did not simply exhibit random contradictions, however; he consciously set out to be the American bard, the embodiment of all the country's values. In 1855 he wrote an unsigned review of his poetry for the Democratic Review. Here he called himself, "An American Bard at last!", basing his claim upon his writing about the common man, experimenting with verse forms appropriate to American experience, and trying to amalgamate and elaborate American character.² "Whitman conceived of his poetry as an instrument for reconciling . . . elite standards and democratic values . . . he did . . . so consciously, not unwittingly. This self-consciousness was prominently revealed in his poetic theory."³

In Democratic Vistas he called for radically new poetry and greater attention by readers. He asked for

not merely the pedagogue-forms, correct, regular, familiar with precedents, made for matters of outside propriety, fine words, thoughts definitely told out--but a language fann'd by the breath of Nature, which leaps overhead, cares mostly for impetus and effects, and for what it plants and invigorates to grow--tallies life and character, and seldomer tells a thing than suggests or necessitates it. In fact, a new theory of literary composition for imaginative works of the very highest class, and especially for highest poems, is the sole course open to these States. Books are to be call'd for, and supplied, on the assumption that the process of reading is not a half-sleep, but, in the highest sense, an exercise, a gymnast's struggle; that the reader is to do something for himself, must be on the alert, must himself or herself construct indeed the poem, argument, history, metaphysical essay--the text furnishing the hints, the clue, the start or framework. Not so much needs the book to be the complete thing, but the reader of the book does. That were to make a nation of supple and athletic minds, well train'd, intuitive, used to depend on themselves, and not on a few coteries of writers.⁴

What was true of Whitman was also true of the four Chicago Renaissance "liberation" poets--Carl Sandburg, Sherwood Anderson, Vachel Lindsay, and Edgar Lee Masters. They followed Walt Whitman's lead in writing poetry transcending standard types and in facing changes in poetic values. The Whitmanic tradition selectively mixed elements of elite, popular, and folk poetry along with the modes of writing current in each type.

When Whitman began writing, popular poetry was primarily neoclassical. Elite poetry favored romantic language, themes, and attitudes. Folk poetry was both stylized and realistic. This overlapping of poetic norms occurred because literary trends are accepted first in genteel circles and then slowly gain acceptance in the popular tradition. The folk tradition, however, does not change readily. It remains in direct touch with the most elemental realities of life, and it maintains age-old stylizing qualities largely unchanged. Ironically, folk poetry during Whitman's lifetime used realistic techniques not yet current in genteel or popular literature. As these more pretentious literary traditions went full circle seeking effective techniques for portraying human experience, the realistic aspects of the folk tradition became increasingly fashionable.

The popular tradition in literature refers to writings aimed at literarily-untrained mass audiences. This poetry is characterized by predictable rhythm and rhyme; simplicity and directness; infrequent, haphazard use of literary techniques; and reaffirmation of commonly

held values.⁵ In conjunction with American neoclassicism* of the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century, popular poetry exercised three functions: instructing, entertaining, and inspiring the reader.⁶ Whitman accepted all three functions. The importance of instruction explained Whitman's own didacticism.

Since nineteenth century popular poetry regularly emphasized moral lessons, it spoke directly and simply, using similes, metaphors, analogies, or even very blunt, direct statement.⁷ This poetry reinforced, rather than challenged, religious, social and patriotic values. Representative themes of nineteenth century popular poetry

* Neoclassicism. Neoclassical literature consciously modeled its literary style and attitudes toward life and art on classical and French neoclassical literature. This literature viewed man as "limited, dualistic, imperfect." It emphasized order, reason, and rules while avoiding invention and innovation. "Neoclassical literature saw [man] . . . most significantly in his generic qualities and his group activities." "The artistic ideals [were those] of order, logic, restrained emotion, accuracy, 'correctness,' 'good taste,' and decorum. A sense of symmetry, a delight in design, and a view of art as centered in man, with man as its primary . . . subject matter, and the belief that literature should be judged in terms of its service to man . . . resulted in the seeking of proportion, unity, harmony, and grace in literary expression that aimed to delight[,] . . . instruct and correct man. . . . The play of mind upon life was regarded as more important than the play of feeling."

Poetic diction and imagery tended to become conventional with details subordinated to design. "The appeal to the intellect rather than to the emotions resulted in a fondness for wit and the production of much satire. . . . The irregular or unpleasant aspects of external nature . . . were less frequently utilized than the pleasanter phases." A tendency to realism marked the presentation of life, with the generic qualities and common attributes and actions of men being stressed. Literature exalted form--polish, clarity, brilliance. It avoided the obscure and mysterious. It valued the classical critical requirements of universality and decorum. Classical literary forms, such as satire and the ode, flourished along with a disposition toward didacticism.

affirmed middle class values: the sacredness of home and family; the respectability of hard labor; the perfection of the Divine plan; the greatness of America and her patriotic heroes; brotherhood; and charity.⁸ Nineteenth century popular poetry inevitably asserted God's greatness and man's primacy in His creation. This poetry maintained that democracy would lead man to ever greater heights. It asserted that morality would always triumph and that sorrow was transitional if not actually illusory. Behind all these stood the implicit or explicit assertion of cosmic order, progress, and optimism. This poetry avoided subjects likely to make the reader uncomfortable.⁹ Disagreeable topics were avoided, or, as with death--when no escape was possible, the subject was treated euphemistically and overlarded with moralistic encouragement.

Whitman's didacticism, his moral emphasis, his patriotism, and his optimism corresponded closely to the values current in early nineteenth century popular literature. Certainly, the pre-eminence of these values must have shaped his views. However, Whitman would not glibly confirm socially accepted values. Thus he found it necessary to modify the popular literature approach.

The popular poetry during Whitman's youth was also overwhelmingly narrative. The story carried the poem. The subject was generally the progress of democracy. Whitman, however, rejected emphasis on narrative line. Instead, he encouraged empathy by presenting without comment ecstatic catalogues of American scenes, events, and people. Thus Whitman provided an objective correlative of his views. The reader experienced these themes for himself

rather than passively observing plot. Whitman supplemented the experiential quality of his poetry with motif-like repetition of key terms, through which he focused the reader's attention.

The popular poetry of Whitman's era relied heavily on appeals to the heart. Whitman's poetry also used sentiment and emotion, as do all great poems. However, he did not make sentiment an end in itself. Instead, sentiment and emotion led the reader to higher goals.

In terms of poetic technique, nineteenth century popular poetry almost invariably used regular rhyme and rhythm schemes with few literary devices. There was generally no strong relation between subject and form. Most nineteenth century popular poets simply wanted a predictable rhythm and simple rhyme that audiences could anticipate and enjoy. Popular poets often subordinated normal word choice and syntax to rhyme and meter. Unnatural constructions were common.

Whitman rejected these qualities of nineteenth century popular poetry; however, he was impressed by popular poetry's emphasis on the concrete. He, too, sought

a new found literature, not merely to copy and reflect existing surfaces, or to pander to what is called taste--not only to amuse, pass away time, celebrate the beautiful, the refined, the past, or exhibit technical, rhythmic, or grammatical dexterity . . . but a language underlying life, religious, consistent with science, handling the elements and forces with competent power, teaching and training men--and, as perhaps the most precious of its results, achieving the entire redemption of women out of those incredible holds and webs of silliness, millinery, and every kind of dyspeptic depletion.¹⁰

He also approved of popular poetry's infrequent attempts at colloquial language and simulated dialect, slang, and non-standard diction.

Whitman wanted poetry to express common situations in common language; he believed these form the basis for an effective realistic moral poetry. In place of limited, humorous treatment of homely life, Whitman wanted poetry to represent all aspects of life fully and reverently. He tried to deal with man's full nature--the sexual as well as the spiritual, the prostitute along with the president.

It is difficult for us to understand the full importance of the nineteenth century neoclassical popular literary tradition to Whitman because in our era literary norms mirror the preferences of genteel literature. That was not true in the nineteenth century. Popular wisdom and values were paramount, and the wise poet did not lightly ignore them. A review of Oliver Wendell Holmes' Urania in the North American Review in 1847 exemplified nineteenth century values. The reviewer bluntly declared

If the multitude neglect . . . [the poet], it is pretty good proof that he ought to be neglected . . . It is . . . [the poet's] business to strike chords which find a response in every bosom, to present analogies which are perceptible to every mind, to command the passions which are the universal attribute of human nature. If his verse needs explanation or comment, if one must be educated before he can understand it, or go through a particular training before he can appreciate it, the busy world will pass it by, and will lose very little by its neglect.¹¹

The second influence on Whitman's poetry was elite--or genteel--poetry, which had adopted romantic* literary values

* Romanticism. Romanticism meant different things to different people. It has been associated with "liberalism in literature," "the revival of medievalism," "the addition of strangeness to beauty," "aspiration, having its origin in wonder and mystery," and "the predominance of imagination over reason and over the sense or fact of the actual."

British romanticism often used the sonnet form and the Spenserian stanza along with blank verse and numerous experimental

shortly after 1800. Elite poetry emphasized technique. It possessed greater control of form, density of texture, and correspondence between form and content. The elite poet presented more than an interesting story with a regular metrical accompaniment. He created art through the integration of many diverse elements--organically. And the choice of these elements was so careful that each contributed significantly to the meaning and experience of the poem. Close rendering of details was necessary, therefore. The reader could not simply concentrate on the narrative, as in popular literature. He was expected to contribute actively--both intellectually and emotionally--to the working out of theme. In return, elite poetry offered themes which did more than reaffirm commonly held values.

verse forms. Lyrics were the dominant poetic type. Romantic literature de-emphasized poetic diction to some extent. Its subjects included the rural, wild, exotic, and grotesque; it also emphasized human rights, "sentimental melancholy, [and] collection and imitation of popular ballads."

American romanticism was more optimistic and moral. While it adopted the forms and techniques of British romanticism, it placed greater emphasis on moral qualities, organic form, and democratic sentiment.

Philosophically, the romantic spirit is easier to grasp. Romantics saw man at the center of the universe; therefore, literature reached its greatest value when it expressed man's unique feelings, attitudes, and experiences, no matter how fragmentary. Genre, completeness, and unity were subordinated to self-expression. Imagination was paramount, for romanticism saw "art as the formulation of intuitive imaginative perceptions that . . . [tended] to speak a nobler truth than that of fact, logic, or the here and now. [It saw] in nature a revelation of Truth . . . and often pantheistically, a sensate portion of deity itself, and certainly a more suitable subject for true art than those aspects of the world sullied by man's artifice." Romanticism used the natural, simple, and commonplace in its quest for the ideal and absolute, by transcending the actual which realism epitomized and naturalism, which probed for operating scientific laws. Thus while different from romanticism, realism and naturalism had far more in common with it than with neoclassicism.

By about 1840 romanticism was well entrenched as the dominant mode of American genteel poetry. Romanticism emphasized imagination, originality, emotion, and stressed the importance of democratic institutions. It offered a new concept of nature along with treatment of the past--especially the unique, colorful, primitive, and exotic.¹² Romantics believed truth was accessible through feeling and intuition, and that it could be transmitted only indirectly, through the use of symbol and suggestion which allowed the reader to experience the truth himself.¹³ American romanticism took the form of transcendentalism, a moralized, idealized, socially conscious form of romanticism. Transcendentalism as an expression of romanticism also emphasized intuition, imagination, and indirect expression of ideas without challenging the country's Puritan-imposed moral norms. This elite romanticism, like its popular counterpart, was didactic. Teaching was emphasized at the expense of other poetic values. The desire to teach created problems in the genteel tradition because "the romantic inclination to convey truth through symbols that were peculiar to individual poets and not comprehensible to all, produced a poetry that tended to be esoteric . . . rather than a poetry that could be understood and responded to by large numbers of people."¹⁴

Genteel romanticism was more successful in fostering the incipient drive toward American literary nationalism. It offered "a way to use the resources of the American land, the American past, and American society to produce an art that was indigenous, new, universally beautiful, morally true, expressive of American ideals, and

representative of the American spirit."¹⁵ Romantic criticism encouraged poets to write naturally from their own feelings, impressions, and experiences. Longfellow, for example, called for literature expressing "nature, characteristic scenery, climate, historic recollections, government, institutions, to advance and improve society."¹⁶

American elite romanticism accepted the concept of organic form--the idea that subject and form must be intimately and essentially linked. It also "provided a change in mood appropriate for the development of vernacular prose style. It championed the worth of the individual, the dignity of common speech, and the special value of spontaneity. If the individual were superior to the accumulated wisdom of society, then he need not follow the traditional way of doing things."¹⁷

Genteel romanticism offered Whitman much that was attractive. It allowed him to write artistically satisfying poetry as well as to teach, as he believed great poetry must.

Our fundamental want today in the United States . . . is of a class . . . of native authors, literatures, far different, far higher in grade than any yet known, sacerdotal, modern, fit to cope with our occasions, lands, permeating the whole mass of American mentality, taste, belief, breathing into it a new breath of life. . . . And as its grandest result, accomplishing (what neither the schools nor the churches have hitherto accomplished. . . .) a religious and moral character beneath the political and productive and intellectual bases of the States.¹⁸

Romantic emphasis on the individual and his feelings, intuitions, and experiences let Whitman propose a poetry using the language of common Americans in new ways. It also broadened the range of

poetic subjects; common men, the South, the West, the frontier, natural scenes, and even social outcasts became fitting subjects for a mind seasoned by romantic literary theory. On this basis, America, with its great diversity, its beauty, and its common humanity, became itself the greatest poem, and Whitman set out to develop these new themes of our literature.

Whitman did not accept all aspects of American elite romanticism though. He rejected the poetic diction characteristic of most elite and popular literature. He tried to avoid Miltonic inversions, latinate constructions, fantastically euphemistic comparisons, and ever-present rhyme; similarly, Whitman disapproved of the normal centering on the exotic, picturesque, or "poetical." He much preferred a poetry which presented normal American living.

Whitman disliked the excesses of pessimistic, detached elite romanticism. Throughout his life, he railed at what he called "the inevitable tendency of poetic culture to morbidity, abnormal beauty--the sickliness of all technical thought and refinement in itself--the abnegation of the perennial and democratic concretes at first hand, the body, the earth and sea, sex and the like--and the substitution of something for them at second or third hand."¹⁹

Whitman also seemed to recognize the biases underlying nineteenth century elite literature. He believed genteel poetry regarded uniformity, polish, and melodiousness as ends in themselves; honored "conceptions of human character which . . . [were] limited to the uses of a few or to a special class of people"; and was "frequently contracted, dainty, exclusive, and fragmentary in

character."²⁰ Thus Whitman clearly did not want his democratic poetry to imitate elite forms uncritically, although he recognized the importance of density, form, and language selection.

Whitman's complaint against elite poetry centered on its artificiality, irrelevance, fostering of limited caste values and language patterns, and its difficulty for the common reader. He believed that democratic poetry should not "copy and reflect existing surfaces, or pander to what is called taste--[or] amuse, pass away time, celebrate the beautiful, the refined, the past, or exhibit technical, rhythmic, or grammatical dexterity."²¹

Although there were great differences between popular and elite nineteenth century poetry, many similarities existed as well. Both tended toward optimism and "prettifying" euphemism. Both were more didactic than twentieth century poetics would allow, for both stressed poetry's teaching function. For this reason, simplicity was important to both; an overly difficult poem could block the reception of an important idea. All these qualities marked Whitman's oral vernacular poetry.

Whitman's poetry embodied both the didacticism of neo-classical popular poetry and the indirect symbolic quality of transcendental verse. Further, he channeled this eclectic poetry into support of democratic principles; he wanted his poetry to serve both a moral and a nationalizing purpose. Whitman desired poetry with the artistic density and integrity of elite poetry, yet without the artificial vocabulary, syntax, subject matter, reference, and techniques which discouraged wide readership. He sought an artistically dense,

sophisticated, instructive, egalitarian, national poetry--a poetry understandable to all, yet carefully linking form, language, and subject matter in the best elite fashion.

Whitman's poetry was also influenced by the partially related aspects of realism* and the folk poetic tradition. Folk poetry is anonymous, unselfconscious, extremely elemental poetry. Its form is highly stylized and regular, yet certain areas within this structure encourage individual variation. This poetry is highly repetitive and based upon oral prose, not written verse.

* Realism. Like romanticism, realism is not limited to a single set of easily definable characteristics. There are many realisms and in the course of time one realistic type often evolves into other, generally more extreme forms. Most basically, however, realism is pragmatic. Its truth is empirically verifiable and associated with discernible consequences; it focuses on the common and average. "The realist centers his attention to a remarkable degree on the immediate, the here and now, the specific action, and the verifiable consequence." He seeks photographic accuracy in his presentation of life and generally attempts to shape the behavior of his audience through the presentation.

The realist's strong interest in his audience as well as his desire for truth lead him to reject or deemphasize traditional literary patterns as falsifications of experience. Therefore, symmetry and plot give way to emphasis on character development.

Realism aspires to simple, clear prose and scientific objectivity. It focuses on issues of conduct. The realist selects "with a view to presenting these situations accurately as they affect men and women in actual situations." The realist's democratic attitudes lead him to emphasize characterization of common people. "Hence, he . . . [has] a great concern for the effect of action upon character, and a tendency to explore the psychology of his . . . [characters.]"

Realism began with treatment of "surface details, common actions, and . . . minor catastrophes of a middle-class society." Its tone was originally optimistic, and situations were not tragic. Slowly realism evolved. Howellsian verisimilitude gave way to realism of social protest, naturalism, and impressionism. Each succeeding form is more pessimistic and antisocial than the preceding one. Each assumes a smaller role for man and greater strength for the forces operating against him.

Robert Burns' poetry epitomized the Scottish oral folk tradition. Similarly, "blues" mirrors the American oral tradition. A few lines from "My Man," popularized by Helen Morgan, will suffice to show the repetitive oral quality of folk poetry.

Oh, my man don't understand me. He treats me mighty
mean.
Oh, I say my man don't understand me. He treats me
mighty mean.
Oh, he is the cruelest man that I have ever seen.
Oh, my man don't understand me. He treats me mighty
mean.

All folk poetry* includes certain hallmarks, the oral prose base, extreme regularity of rhythm and rhyme, great use of repetition as a form inducing element, and sections specifically intended for individual variation.

The applications of folk tradition elements to Whitman's poetry were numerous. Whitman, too, sought a return to American

* The American folk poetic tradition. While specific examples of the folk poetic tradition are hard to find, they appear to correspond closely with all other elements of the folk art tradition, whether in music, crafts, textiles, or other forms. In each of these areas we can see the "handed down" concepts being repeated by new generations. In each case also only the slightest individual modifications occur, and these well within the bounds set for individual "signitures." The basic lines remain virtually unchanged for centuries. Thus the "flower garden" or "double wedding ring" quilts of one century are indistinguishable from those of the preceding era. Similarly, Appalachian clog dolls have remained unchanged. Even more spectacular though is the fostering which the "blues" tradition has seen in rural and black America. Using forms perhaps derived from the rhythms of African music, the melodies of French folk songs (heard in French-settled New Orleans), and of hymns of the early religious congregations, the blues penetrated the hamlets and ghettos of our country. American vernacular prose insistently repeated and varied gives unsurpassed form to elemental statements on the human condition. These epitomize the realistic though highly stylized folk tradition.

origins and asserted proudly, "What is commonest, cheapest, nearest, easiest is Me. . . . / I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as the wise."²²

Whitman's poetry dealt with elemental aspects of life and was based on oral prose rhythms. He used heavy repetition to give form to his verse, and he chose vernacular speech, rather than more refined language, as his poetic base. Because this poetry was based on prose, the meter was far from regular. Only repetition of words or phrases and the regular recurrence of unaccented words, especially prepositions and conjunctions, created rhythm and poetic order. Some of this characteristic oral quality was captured in these lines from "Song of Myself."

I am afoot with my vision. . . .
Where the panther walks to and fro on a limb over-
head, where the buck turns furiously at the hunter,
Where the rattlesnake suns his flabby length on a
rock, where the otter is feeding on fish,
Where the alligator in his tough pimples sleeps by
the bayou,
Where the black bear is searching for roots or honey,
where the beaver pats the mud with his paddle-
shaped tail.²³

Whitman went beyond the folk tradition primarily in his sophisticated use of techniques to form and vary the rhythms he produced. Although the concrete realism of Whitman's poetry was only incipient, it pointed the way for later oral poets.

Realism epitomized the tendency toward literary treatment of common life and common people. In this respect, Whitman tended toward realism. Though he himself consciously asserted cosmic order, purpose, and benevolence, he refused to confirm uncritically nineteenth century

Christian values.²⁴ In walking the line between romantic and realistic beliefs, he asserted, "And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is."²⁵ Whitman believed literature must be insistently empirical. Furthermore, he opened new areas to poetic treatment: the West, the South, humor, and sexuality. His writing approached early realism also in its plotlessness and slanginess.

Whitman used American vernacular vocabulary and syntax as the core of his eclectic poetic system, and slang became its hallmark because he believed it embodied in "a vibrant word the deep, silent, mysterious, never to be examined, never to be told quality of life itself."²⁶ Its importance resulted from its source, "those nearest the concrete, having most to do with actual land and sea."²⁷ Whitman viewed slang as "the lawless germinal element, below all words and sentences, and behind all poetry."²⁸ Rather than archaisms, latinate syntax, or poetic diction, Whitman demanded living, evolving speech arising "out of the work, needs, ties, joys, affections, tastes of long generations of humanity, and . . . [having] its basis broad and low, close to the ground."²⁹

Ironically, Whitman's dedication to poetry's teaching function led him to adopt realistic techniques. He maintained that "Poetry . . . must assist in guiding readers toward a discovery of the latent potentialities in this world, toward an awareness of the sanctity of existence. . . . Poetry is to aid in provoking the knowledge that no conflict exists between the real and the ideal, or between the physical and the spiritual."³⁰ The poet, he believed, must work in the realm of things as they are--that is, within the

sphere of commonplace reality . . . human experience."³¹ These ideas led Whitman toward poetry of the commonplace, employing apparently unconnected images.

Ultimately, Whitman believed that simple, realistic presentation of diverse images would assert the validity of nineteenth century moral principles. This fact alone was enough to separate him emphatically from later realistic writers. His realistic technique was a tool through which Whitman expressed his romantic philosophy and his passion for democracy.

Love for the common man, his language, and his country made the folk tradition and realistic presentation important elements of Whitman's poetic form. They took their places with neoclassical popular poetry and romantic genteel verse. Together these elements produced a repetitive vernacular prose-based poetry with dense texturing and common reference, a poetry which offered moral commentary directly and through the indirect genteel literary techniques, a poetry calling into play the reader's active emotional and intellectual participation.

Despite Whitman's early advocacy of realistic techniques, American poetry did not follow his lead until after 1900.

American poets . . . preserved in general the poetic methods of the romantic era--the full melodious rhythms, the ornamentation, the vagueness, the flowing of Shelley or of the youthful Tennyson. Moreover, the poets used this technique to express the clash of ideas characteristic of the Victorian era--the protest against materialism and the machine age, and the discussion of the relative values of religion and science. And . . . the American poets struggled manfully to preserve the values of humane culture in an age increasingly naturalistic, scientific and industrial.³²

American poetry refused to change because poets of the mid- and late nineteenth century were themselves products of earlier philosophic, social, and literary values. They could not produce anything antithetical to these values. Even Whitman shared this tendency.

It was well 'nigh impossible for the . . . American Victorian [mind] . . . to be realistic, as that term is understood today. It might set down objectively what lay before its eyes, but it was too deeply colored with the romantic philosophy of the Enlightenment, too confident in its teleological possessions, to envisage its materials with cool detachment and interpret them in the light of a realistic philosophy. The sociological novelist was a reformer, seeking particular ends, rather than a critical analyst of life; and not until the appearance of a generation familiar with the teachings of the laboratory did realism in America come of age.³³

Yet realism did finally come of age, and the factors which fostered it produced a revolution in thought so profound that they undercut virtually every extant value system and substituted the supremacy of impersonal science operating in a meaningless universe for the benign guidance of an active, personal God.

Among the strongest intellectual developments favoring a movement toward realism and its most extreme type, naturalism, were the publication of several important books. Strauss' Das Leben Jesu, published in 1853, signalled the start of the "higher criticism" of the Bible. Darwin followed, publishing The Origin of Species in 1859 and the Descent of Man in 1871. In 1867 Herbert Spencer's First Principles appeared, followed by his Principles of Biology (1874-76). Walter Pater's famous "Conclusion" to The Renaissance, published in 1873, further undercut man's sense of certainty about his world and made Pater the unwilling mentor of the European "Decadence."

Thomas Henry Huxley published his Lay Sermons in 1870. Freud's prolific writings were equally important in changing man's view of himself, as were those of the deterministic historian Taine.

The intellectual history of the generation born after the Civil War is the history of transition from Emerson to Herbert Spencer to Ernst Haeckels--from Transcendentalism to biology, and from biology to physics--from the doctrine of biological perfectability through evolution and thence to the doctrine of a mechanistic cosmos that takes no account of teleological ends. From man as the first-born child of God, to man as a flea on the epidermis of earth, is a sufficiently revolutionary transition; yet once that transition had been made, the way was prepared for a mechanistic psychology that proposed to interpret the flea in terms of physiological structure and explain his activities as the consequences of glandular secretions. In presence of such philosophical materialisms the romantic optimism that suffused a genial freedom of will that professed itself capable of shaping life to what ends it would, lost their sanctions and disintegrated, to be succeeded by a stark pessimism underlaid by a mechanistic determinism. The intellectual backgrounds were laid for a realism sombre as that of the Russians, and Theodore Dreiser succeeded William Dean Howells and Hamland Garland.³⁴

The change was as traumatic as it was radical.

But it took time for these ideas to penetrate the general consciousness. Other, more obvious and immediate changes were occurring simultaneously. Among the most important elements producing the increasingly pessimistic and "realistic" mood of the 1870's and thereafter were the Civil War and radical reconstruction; the increasing dominance of industrialism and urbanism over agrarianism and rural--if not frontier--independence; and the closing of the western frontier, which had earlier served as a molifying element for social ills. Later, unregulated "robber baron" capitalism in conjunction with the continuing influx of immigrants willing to work for low wages kept conditions poor for the working man, and the dominance

of Eastern creditors over Southern and Western farmers further worsened the situation of the average American.

Thus the stage was set for a new conception of man and life in America--one which neither Whitman nor the Puritans could ever have imagined. As consciousness of intellectual trends and of pernicious social and economic conditions rose, prose writers began to experiment with the newer realistic techniques and philosophy. "Realism in America . . . rose out of the ashes of romantic faith. It sprang from social discontent, and it came to maturity when that discontent was clarified in the light of Old World thought. European science and European social philosophy, augmented by European literary technique, completed the realistic disillusionment with middle-class economics."³⁵

Ironically, these forces working to change the nature of life in America realigned folk, popular, and elite literary canons. This realignment occurred because while the implications of the disturbing new ideas reached the upper and middle classes very slowly, workers were being directly and insistently traumatized by the drastic changes invoked by the new gods--industrialism and capitalism. The sense of inequity and emergency which culminated in populism and Bryan's "Cross of Gold" free silver speech also favored the emergence of more appropriate philosophical and poetic types.

By the early 1900's the canons of the elite, popular, and folk audiences were aligned more completely than they had been in the history of this country. They rejected expansive, unrealistic romanticism. However, underneath the surface realistic techniques of

early twentieth century poetry, a strong and insistent nostalgically romantic view of man remained. Men continued to yearn for an ideal pastoral existence, "a simpler, more harmonious style of life, an existence closer to nature."³⁶ They searched for these values primarily in the past.

The greatest American authors really do try against the perpetually greater power of [alien, machine-dominated] reality, to create an environment that might allow some longer existence to the hero's momentary expansions of consciousness. . . . [Although] on the one side we have the "romantic," and on the other the "realistic" or "naturalistic" schools, none of the interesting American novelists can be placed on either side of this dichotomy. Nearly all of [their novels] . . . are written in protest against the environment of the "rest of life" which contradicts the dreams of these heroes and heroines.³⁷

As the new century arrived, the elite and popular traditions awaited the form which would more adequately deal with the new realities of American life. The basis on which the evolving popular and elite traditions were to build was the simplest, most basic one--the realism of the folk tradition.

Whitman's democratic philosophy and his realistic-folk techniques placed his poetry closer to the evolving mainstream of American literature as 1900 neared. Thus poets like Sandburg and Anderson picked up and expanded his techniques and approaches. They adopted Hamlin Garland's realism of social protest and the impressionistic realism pioneered by Steven Crane. Garland's social protest realism maintained a Jacksonian resentment against capitalism which was using government to exploit the common man.³⁸ In Garland's writings, like those of Whitman and the later Chicago poets, man was still viewed romantically. He deserved respect and dignity. Only

man's surroundings and the forces acting on man were considered realistically or naturalistically. Carl Sandburg best exemplified Garland's social protest realism applied to a Whitmanic oral base.

Instead of holding . . . that the republic is perishing in luxury and corruption and that "humanity is the mould to break away from" [Carl Sandburg] has responded wholeheartedly to Whitman's desires for this country . . . the biography of Lincoln . . . his contacts with our saltiest life. . . . In his own poetry Sandburg has followed Whitman's lead by opening up new material from the Middle West, from the smoke and steel of Chicago. . . . His descriptions are left even rougher than Whitman's raw material, now worked up, impressions hardly created. The difficulty in sharing very completely in just what is being said is owing most to the cloudiness of his mysticisms. Whitman's faith . . . sprang from his profound acceptance of natural order, but Sandburg's is not so grounded, since he sees man's life as anarchy, swept by uncontrollable forces. Yet he is not a thorough-going tragic naturalist like Dreiser, for though repelled by the city's brutality, he is at the next moment celebrating its beautiful energy. His confused state of mind is a symptomatic response to our social chaos, but it can scarcely find the source of the life in Whitman's rhythms, the deep confidence in organic wholeness.³⁹

The second type of realism practiced by the Chicago Renaissance poets was impressionistic realism, epitomized by Stephen Crane. The Chicago poets may not have studied Crane or even been aware of Pater's views on imprisoning subjectivity, but the views of Crane and Pater were mirrored in the work of later poets, especially Sherwood Anderson. Anderson's mystic Mid-American Chants, like much of his verse, exemplified Pater's contention that the individual is hopelessly imprisoned by his own subjectivity and, therefore, is unable to see things as they really are or to communicate with his fellow man.

The deeper drift of realism was toward a crisp objective impressionism that painted the forms and colors of reality; and an inquisitive expressionism that probed the mysterious inner experience of men and women--a life shut up in the skull pan

like a Chinese prisoner in his iron-bound coffin, with only narrow opportunities through which to communicate with the external world. The realist has become a psychologist, a neo-Freudian, concerned with inner drives and with the furtive subconscious life. Sherwood Anderson, in his self-obsession, is as sturdy a rebel against industrialism as Dreiser, but he has discovered the great obstacle to human happiness in the mechanism of man. Life is a trap, but the trap is planted in human instincts, and the search for the "white wonder" brings the jaws together.⁴⁰

Using the realism of social protest and impressionism, the Chicago Renaissance poets widened the range of moods and experiences which could be treated using Whitmanic vernacular techniques. They created a mass poetry with technical density unencumbered by caste-oriented "literary" techniques, references, or allusions.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Walt Whitman, "By Blue Ontario's Shore," The Works of Walt Whitman in Two Volumes as prepared by Him for the Deathbed Edition, ed. Malcolm Cowley (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1968), I, 316-317.

² Wilma Jean Clark, "The Levels of Poetry: An Exploration of the Dichotomy between Nineteenth Century Popular and Elitist Poetry," Diss. Michigan State Univ. 1972, p. 317.

³ Donald D. Kummings, "The Vernacular Perspective in American Poetry: Philip Freneau, Walt Whitman, and William Carlos Williams," Diss. Indiana Univ. 1971, p. 42.

⁴ Whitman, "Democratic Vistas," Works, II, 216.

⁵ Clark, "Levels of Poetry," p. 104.

⁶ Clark, "Levels of Poetry," abstract.

⁷ Clark, "Levels of Poetry," p. 356.

⁸ Clark, "Levels of Poetry," p. 266.

⁹ Clark, "Levels of Poetry," p. 104.

¹⁰ Clark, "Levels of Poetry," p. 39.

¹¹ Clark, "Levels of Poetry," p. 71.

¹² Russel B. Nye, The Cultural Life of the New Nation 1776-1830 (Harper and Brothers, 1960), p. 248.

¹³ Clark, "Levels of Poetry," p. 42.

¹⁴ Clark, "Levels of Poetry," p. 49.

¹⁵ Nye, Cultural Life, p. 245.

¹⁶ Clark, "Levels of Poetry," p. 19.

¹⁷ Richard Bridgman, The Colloquial Style in America (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), p. 2.

¹⁸ Kummings, "Vernacular Perspective," p. 51.

¹⁹ Kummings, "Vernacular Perspective," p. 47.

²⁰ Kummings, "Vernacular Perspective," p. 43.

- 21 Kummings, "Vernacular Perspective," p. 44.
- 22 Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 75.
- 23 Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I. 90.
- 24 Bernard Duffey, "Romantic Incoherence," Centennial Review, VIII, No. 4 (Fall 1964), 216-236.
- 25 Clark, "Levels of Poetry," p. 343.
- 26 F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1941), p. 520.
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- 29 Kummings, "Vernacular Perspective," p. 49.
- 30 Kummings, "Vernacular Perspective," pp. 52-53.
- 31 Kummings, "Vernacular Perspective," p. 35.
- 32 Walter Fuller Taylor, The Story of American Letters (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1956), p. 251.
- 33 Norman Foerster, ed., The Reinterpretation of American Literature (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1928), p. 141.
- 34 Foerster, Reinterpretation, p. 142.
- 35 Foerster, Reinterpretation, p. 140.
- 36 Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964), p. 6.
- 37 Richard Poirier, A World Elsewhere: The Place of Style in American Literature (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), p. 15.
- 38 Foerster, Reinterpretation, p. 149.
- 39 Matthiessen, Renaissance, pp. 592-593.
- 40 Foerster, Reinterpretation, p. 158.

CHAPTER TWO

THE COMMON TOUCH

"Have you studied out the land,
its idioms and men?
Walt Whitman¹

Whitman creates poetry using elements from the three literary traditions: folk, popular, and elite. More important, he establishes a poetic amalgam midway between nineteenth century poetry and colloquial prose. Whitman's democratic leanings lead him to desire a poetry which common people can understand and which honors the real, spoken language of the United States.*
lead of Twain, Cable, and Harte in experimenting with the possibilities of literature using American subject matter and vernacular speech patterns.

In his retrospective essay, "A Backward Glance o'er Travel'd Roads," Whitman maintains that literature must take into account American democratic man and his view of the world.² He justifies indigenous American literature, saying

Plenty of songs had been sung--beautiful, matchless songs--
adjusted to other lands than these--another spirit and stage

* For Whitman's interest in the American vernacular, see C. Carroll Hollis, "Whitman and the American Idiom, Quarterly Journal of Speech, XLIII, No. 3 (Oct. 1957), 408-420. See also SherryLu Goforth Southard, "Whitman and Language: His Democratic Words," (Diss. Purdue Univ., 1972).

of evolution; but I would sing, and leave out or put in, quite solely with reference to America and to-day. Modern science and democracy seem'd to be throwing out their challenge to poetry to put them in its statements in contradistinction to the songs and myths of the past. As I see it now . . . I have unwittingly taken up that challenge and made an attempt at such statements. . . .

For grounds for "Leaves of Grass" as a poem, I abandon'd the conventional themes, which do not appear in it: none of the stock ornamentation, or choice plots of love or war, or high, exceptional personages of Old-World song; nothing, as I may say, for beauty's sake--no legend, or myth, or romance, nor euphemism, nor rhyme. But the broadest average of humanity and its identities in the now ripening Nineteenth Century, and especially in each of their countless examples and practical occupations in the United States today.³

Because the basis for Whitman's new poetry is the new democratic experience in a new land, he breaks away from the sterile conventions of European-inspired poetry. In their place he forms a new poetic synthesis, using as its base the American vernacular. Thus he says, "I consider Leaves of Grass and its theory experimental as, in the deepest sense, I consider our American republic itself to be, with its theory. . . . The volume is a sortie--whether to prove triumphant, and conquer the field of aim and escape and construction, nothing less than a hundred years from now can fully answer."⁴

Whitman's retrospective look at his poetry may seem a biased apology rather than a critical appraisal of his real impulses; however, his remarkable consistency in poetic theory and practice after 1851 undercuts this possibility. Despite some continuing modification of his poems, Whitman remains committed to the principles he holds in 1855.

Only one critical study deals effectively with the colloquial mode in nineteenth century American literature, Richard Bridgman's

The Colloquial Style in America.⁵ Unfortunately, even Bridgman limits his view to prose writing. Since no study defines colloquial techniques in American poetry, I have considered Bridgman's views of colloquial American prose and sought correspondences in Whitman's poetry. Significantly, Whitman follows trends in American colloquial prose very closely. To those who object to the extrapolation on the grounds that poetry must necessarily stylize prose elements, I would argue, following Bridgman's views, that literary colloquial prose is not an exact copy of American speech, but itself a stylization.

Bridgman maintains that "since perfect accuracy of reproduction in dialect was neither possible nor artistically desirable, at a certain point of sophistication the dialect writer was obliged to change his goal: rather than verisimilitude, he sought to achieve verbal artfulness. His attention shifted from the world "out there" to the prose surface. In order to free colloquial constituents from this naturalistic bondage, the writer had to form new literary conventions."⁶

Nineteenth century prose fiction, then, develops its own equally stylized techniques by which the illusion of colloquial speech is fostered.⁷ Whitman's primary contribution to literature is his adaptation of poetry to accommodate American vernacular speech. His reasons for desiring such an adaptation are clear.

The linguistic situation of the United States [during the early years of the republic] was historically unique. Romantic, nationalistic, and practical pressures impelled American writers to evolve a new means of expression out of the casual discourse of the nation. . . . There was a spoken language in the United States with a natural way of using it (American), and there was a literary language with an accepted way of using it (English). In many ways these overlapped, and yet they were far from identical.⁸

Whitman's dedication to the American democratic experiment leads him to develop colloquial prose-based poetry which expresses these democratic roots. He carries the experiment from colloquial prose into poetry. In doing so, he adopts the three major emphases common to early colloquial prose experimentation: stress, fragmentation, and repetition. Bridgman explains these, saying,

American prose style changed significantly between 1825 and 1925. . . . On the whole the change was toward a greater concreteness of diction and simplicity in syntax. . . . Toward the end of the century, writers became increasingly conscious of colloquial writing. These [colloquial] techniques were then stylized to accentuate the following characteristics of colloquial style: (a) stress on the individual verbal unit, (b) a resulting fragmentation of syntax, and (c) the use of repetition to bind and unify.⁹

Bridgman offers a final word of caution. "The characteristics that ultimately identify colloquial style--stress, fragmentation, and repetition--are not in themselves unique to it. But in aggregate and in heavy concentrations, they do signal a major and identifiable style."¹⁰ My task then is to identify the major stylized techniques by which prose writers simulate colloquial prose and show these operating "in aggregate and in heavy concentrations" in Whitman's poetry.

Bridgman's three major characteristics--stress, fragmentation, and repetition--tend in different directions. Stress on words and phrases and fragmentation of syntax emphasize the vernacular prose base. Repetition, though also asserting a vernacular quality, is most important in lending order and poetic intensity.¹¹ This duality has led me to divide my discussion into two chapters. Here I will

define the vernacular prose base, and in the following chapter examine the techniques which Whitman develops to assert poetic form.

Whitman's poetry uses prose speech rhythms and vocabulary. His inclusion of the poem "Mirages" in Good-Bye My Fancy shows his desire to approximate vernacular prose. Prefacing the poem, Whitman inserts this note in parenthesis: "Noted verbatim after a supper-talk outdoors in Nevada with two old miners."¹² Whether or not that assertion is true, it is important that Whitman attempts to create that impression. It is also important that this poem is similar to all his other post-1851 writings.

More experiences and sights, stranger, than you'd think
 for;
 Times again, now mostly just after sunrise or before
 sunset,
 Sometimes in spring, oftener in autumn, perfectly clear
 weather, in plain sight,
 Camps far or near, the crowded streets of cities and
 the shop fronts,
 (Account for it or not--credit or not--it is all true,
 And my mate there could tell you the like--we have often
 confab'd about it,)
 People and scents, animals, trees, colors and lines,
 plain as could be,
 Farms and dooryards of home, paths border'd with box,
 lilacs in corners,
 Weddings in churches, thanksgiving dinners, returns of
 long-absent sons,
 Glum funerals, the crape-veil'd mother and the daughters,
 Trials in courts, jury and judge, the accused in the
 box,
 Contestants, battles, crowds, bridges, wharves,
 Now and then mark'd faces of sorrow or joy,
 (I could pick them out this moment if I saw them
 again,)
 Show'd to me just aloft to the right in the sky-edge,
 Or plainly there to the left on the hill-tops.¹³

Use of a vernacular narrator aids the creation of a relaxed colloquial tone.* Whitman's "Song of Myself" exemplifies his use of this technique. He opens the poem with

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to
you.
I loafe and invite my soul,
I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer
grass.

My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil,
this air,
Born here of parents, born here from parents the same,
and their parents the same,
I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health begin, . . .

Loafe with me on the grass. Loose the stop from your
throat,
Not words, not music or rhyme I want, not custom or
lecture, not even the best,
Only the lull I like, the hum of your valved voice.¹⁴

The informality of these opening lines is confirmed by the frontispiece etching on the narrator-author. He stands leisurely slouching, one hand in a pocket, the other resting carelessly on his hip. He wears a rough hat and a plain shirt open at the neck, exposing a hairy chest and the top of a woolen undershirt. The impression is similar to that which Mark Twain creates on the first page of Huckleberry Finn. The vernacular narrator relaxes the reader, encourages realistic expectations of human nature, and erases the normal lines of formality. Use of common "non-standard" diction and apostrophes simulating dialect speech is essential to these goals.

* For discussion of the poetic use of the vernacular narrator, see Donald D. Kummings, "The Vernacular Perspective in American Literature: Philip Freneau, Walt Whitman, and William Carlos Williams," (Diss. Indiana University, 1972).

Colloquial American speech generally repeats statements several times, varying phrasing only slightly. It avoids precise, evocative language that expresses ideas clearly in one attempt. Colloquial prose relies on several restatements of an idea to express it fully. There seems to be no structure; indeed, the effect of American vernacular speech is one of rambling formlessness.

Whitman's poetry strives to achieve the effect of vernacular speech through use of sophisticated techniques and structures. Thus he advises the prospective poet that "his rhythm and uniformity he will conceal in the roots of his verses, not to be seen by themselves, but to break forth as lilacs on a bush, and take shapes of melons, or chestnuts, or pears."¹⁵ Apparent formlessness and the informal narrative voice underlie Whitman's poetic style. Both bespeak relaxation and freedom, but each is carefully contrived. Together, they encourage use of stress, fragmentation, and repetition to produce a successful prose-like effect.

A third principle, balancing, is inherent in all of Whitman's poetry and is uniquely responsible for its structure. Philosophically, structurally, and rhythmically the poet asserts balance. A Hegelian view of the universe in which thesis and antithesis combine forming a higher synthesis permeates Whitman's writings. Thus in "Song of Myself" the poet declares

Urge and urge and urge
Always the procreant urge of the world.
Out of the dimness opposite equals advance.¹⁶

He sees no contradiction in pairing the "pure contralto" and the "prostitute." He celebrates them both.

Structurally and rhythmically the same balancing occurs, beginning at the lowest level of construction, the word or phrase. It extends to balancing between lines and even between sections. Whitman's poetry starts with short rhetorical and syntactical units and builds, through balancing, to longer and fuller periods. Sometimes, Whitman repeats the basic syntactical structure several times within a single line; at others, he simply increases the number of items listed.¹⁷

Bridgman believes colloquial prose stresses words and phrases at the expense of larger syntactical and narrative units.¹⁸ Whitman uses several devices to emphasize words and phrases. The simplest of these colloquial prose techniques is repetition of key terms, whether words or phrases. One example occurs in "A noiseless, Patient Spider," where the poet repeats the key word three times.

A noiseless patient spider,
I mark'd where on a little promontory it stood isolated,
Mark'd how to explore the vacant vast surrounding,
It launch'd forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself,
Ever unreeling down, ever tirelessly speeding them.¹⁹

Whitman uses a similar repetitive technique with phrases, for example the repetition of "In vain" in "Song of Myself."

In vain the speeding or shyness,
In vain the plutonic rocks send their old heat against
my approach,
In vain the mastodon retreats beneath its own powder'd
bones,
In vain objects stand leagues off and assume manifold
shapes,
In vain the ocean settling in hollows and the great
monsters lying low.²⁰

Far more common than repetition of phrases is the emphasis on nouns. This emphasis is achieved by separating them with neutral

framing words, especially and. Bridgman sees this as an important colloquial prose technique. He explains the function of neutral framing words, saying, "the conjunctions serve not only as connectors but also as buffers . . . separat[ing] the items visually as well as aurally. The conjunctions establish an exclusive territory for each noun. Each item is independent, yet joined to the whole."²¹ Neutral conjunctions and copulas enhance the brilliancy of nouns.²²

Whitman uses this technique with single words and longer repetitions. In "Song of Myself" the line "Long I was hugg'd close--long and long"²³ illustrates the first usage, as does "urge and urge and urge, / Always the procreant urge of the world"²⁴ in Section Three. Examples of the longer pattern include these lines from "There Was a Child Went Forth."

The early lilacs became part of this child,
And grass and white and red morning-glories, and white
 and red clover, and the song of the phoebe-bird,
And the Third-month lambs and the sow's pink-faint
 litter,
And the mare's foal and the cow's calf,
And the noisy brood of the barnyard or the mire of the
 pond-side,
And the fish suspending themselves so curiously below
 there, and the beautiful curious liquid,
And the water-plants with their graceful flat heads,
 all become part of him.²⁵

Long, long catalogues, or lists, are the ultimate examples of Whitman's passion for stress on individual words and phrases. In Section Seven of "Song of Myself" Whitman expresses his credo. He says, "[I] peruse manifold objects, no two alike and every one good. / The earth good and the stars good, and their adjuncts all good."²⁶

One example of Whitman's listing tendency is this short excerpt from a much longer listing passage in "Children of Adam."

O my body! I dare not desert the likes of you in
 other men and women, nor the likes of the parts
 of you, . . .
 I believe the likes of you shall stand or fall with
 my poems, and that they are my poems,
 Man's woman's, child's, youth's, wife's, husband's,
 mother's, father's, young man's, young woman's
 poems.
 Head, neck, hair, ears, drop and tympan of the ears,
 Eyes, eye-fringes, iris of the eye, eyebrows, and the
 waking or sleeping of the lids,
 Mouth, tongue, lips, teeth, roof of the mouth, jaws, and
 the jaw hinges,
 Nose, nostrils of the nose, and the partition,
 Cheeks, temples, forehead, chin, throat, back of the
 neck, neckslue,
 Strong shoulders, manly beard, scapula, hind-shoulders,
 and the ample side-round of the chest.²⁷

Bridgman considers the listing of physical objects in colloquial prose. He believes that "in lists of physical objects, and in sentences . . . where the verbs are muted, things are displayed in themselves. They do nothing; they are merely available for inspection as objects at rest. Such static displays also heighten the importance of the individual word."²⁸ Bridgman connects the listing of objects with the listing of actions. He argues that "the compound sentence characteristic of colloquial prose is basically a list--a list of actions. The vernacular speaker offers those actions in an unsubordinated series, just as he does physical objects. . . . He literally recounts the events in the order in which they occurred. This focuses attention upon the single unit of action as it is caught and isolated between commas and conjunctions."²⁹

Two quotations show Whitman's complete dedication to this type of listing as well. The first is an exact copy in verse of the

prose "run-on" sentence pattern. The second example has some characteristics of the run-on sentence, but soon drops the repetitious and's to concentrate on the ecstatic list of actions he proposes.

I will make a song for these States that no one State
 may under any circumstances be subjected to another State,
 And I will make a song that there shall be comity by
 day and by night between all the States,
 and between any two of them,
 And I will make a song for the ears of the President,
 full of weapons with menacing points,
 And behind the weapons countless dissatisfied faces;
 And a song make I of the One form'd out of all.³⁰

This second example, which omits the and's is far more common in Whitman's writing. It more completely submerges the complete sentence while it stresses the single word and phrase.

By the city's quadrangular houses--in log huts, camping with lumbermen,
 Along the ruts of the turnpike, along the dry gulch and rivulet bed,
 Weeding my onion-patch or hoeing rows of carrots and parsnips, crossing savannas, trailing in forests,
 Prospecting, gold-digging, girdling the trees of a new purchase,
 Scorch'd ankle-deep by the hot sand, hauling my boat down the shallow river,
 Where the panther walks to and fro on a limb overhead, where the buck turns furiously at the hunter,
 Where the rattlesnake suns his flabby length on a rock, where the otter is feeding on fish,
 Where the alligator in his tough pimples sleeps by the bayou,
 Where the black bear is searching for roots or honey, where the beaver pats the mud with his paddle-shaped tail.³¹

Even in this drastically shortened form, the effect is clear and strong. Actions are viewed separately and independently. Narrative

movement and larger syntactical units are subordinated to the apparently random catalogue of actions.*

Sometimes, Whitman uses full sentences in his catalogues. Here as before there is little if any visible organization; any sense of definition occurs only through juxtapositioning of apparently unrelated objects or incidents.³² A few lines of the famous catalogue of Section Fifteen of "Song of Myself" will exemplify these aspects.

The pure contralto sings in the organ loft,
 The carpenter dresses his plank, the tongue of his
 foreplane whistles its wild ascending lisp,

 The duch-shooter walks by silent and cautious stretches,
 The deacons are ordain'd with cross'd hands at the
 altar,

 The lunatic is carried at last to the asylum a confirm'd
 case,

 The quadroon girl is sold at the auction stand, the
 drunkard nods by the bar-room stove,
 The bride umrumples her white dress, the minute-hand
 of the clock moves slowly,

 The prostitute draggles her shawl, her bonnet bobs on
 her tipsy and pimpled neck.³³

Clearly, in Whitman's poetry Bridgman's principle operates: "Actions enumerated but barely related constitute the basic sentence of the colloquial [prose] style."³⁴ A Whitman critic defines this phenomena as the "catalogue method of producing an imaginative response." He continues, saying "the objects named are simple and

* For more discussion of this principle see Detlev V. Schumann, "Enumerative Style and its Significance in Whitman, Rilke, Werfel," Modern Language Quarterly, III (1942), 171-183

concrete. . . . the poet is content merely to name the object without attempting to describe it further."³⁵ Using lists like those above, colloquial prose writers and Whitman create objective correlatives for emotions they desire to foster. The technique is basic and yet sophisticated. The concreteness and simplicity of the objects and actions is likely to appeal to the average reader, while the student of literature appreciates the indirect, suggestive quality which is achieved.

Throughout Whitman's poetry, juxtapositioning also puts stress on words and phrases. The last quotation shows the strength which objects or actions gain through juxtapositioning with others, whether the relation be inferred, ironic, or direct. As a characteristic of Whitman's poetry, juxtapositioning normally occurs between units smaller than the full sentence. In one line, for example, the poet describes himself as "hankering, gross, mystical, nude. . . ." ³⁶ The effect depends on the apparent contradiction between the four adjectives. Yet the poet intends to reconcile these apparent opposites, and the merging of apparently contradictory qualities is the starting point for reconciliation.

Juxtapositioning of phrases and full sentences is equally important to Whitman's colloquial poetic technique. He substantiates this by saying,

I am the poet of the body and I am the poet of the soul,
The pleasures of heaven are with me and the pains of hell
are with me. . . .
I am not the poet of goodness only, I do not decline to
be the poet of wickedness also.
What blurt is this about virtue and about vice?
Evil propels me and reform of evil propels me, I stand
indifferent.

The colloquial prose experimenters and Whitman agree on use of "shorter, more concrete words in fragmented and rambling sentences."³⁸ They stress concreteness along with simplification of vocabulary.³⁹ One can never doubt Whitman's thorough commitment to the concrete. His lengthy catalogues of concrete objects, common individuals, and professions enshrine concretes. In "By Blue Ontario's Shore" Whitman declares,

Underneath all, individuals,
I swear nothing is good to me now that ignores individuals,
The American compact is altogether with individuals,
The only government is that which makes minute of individuals,
The whole theory of the universe is directed unerringly to one single individual--namely to You.⁴⁰

Bridgman shows that colloquial prose writers simplify diction, repeat words and phrases, use fewer synonyms and less elaboration of thought, and force short phrases or single words to assume the burden of meaning.⁴¹ Whitman's use of repetition follows this tendency closely. Much of his repetition is most important rhythmically, but it is also important to stress his normal constriction of vocabulary.

Simple syntax does not at first seem characteristically Whitmanic, but the normal Whitmanic line consists of either a very simple syntactical unit or of two or more very simple, generally parallel syntactical units, as in these lines

Houses and rooms are full of perfumes, the shelves are crowded with perfumes,
I breathe the fragrance myself and know it and like it,
The distillation would intoxicate me also, but I shall not let it.

The atmosphere is not a perfume, it has no taste of
 the distillation, it is odorless,
 It is for my mouth forever, I am in love with it,
 I will go to the bank by the wood and become undis-
 guised and naked,
 I am mad for it to be in contact with me,
 The smoke of my own breath,
 Echoes, ripples, buzz'd whispers, love-root, silk-thread,
 crotch and vine,
 My respiration and inspiration, the beating of my heart,
 the passing of blood and air through my lungs,
 The sniff of great leaves and dry leaves, and of the
 shore and dark-color'd sea-rocks, and of hay in the
 barn,
 The sound of the belch'd words of my voice loos'd to the
 eddies of the wind,
 A few light kisses, a few embraces, a reaching around
 of arms,
 The play of shine and shade on the trees as the supple
 boughs wave,
 The delight alone or in the rush of the streets, or along
 the fields and hill-sides,
 The feeling of health, the full-noon trill, the song of
 me rising from bed and meeting the sun.⁴²

They are very similar to all Whitman's writings.

The syntax starts very simply. "Houses and rooms are full
 of perfumes." Although Whitman links these with a comma, apparently
 signifying two independent clauses--each capable of standing by
 itself. The next line carries three repetitions of an extremely
 simple syntax, "I breathe the fragrance myself, and know it, and
 like it." The second stanza is composed of several syntactically
 simple clauses of generally parallel construction. Finally, the last
 verse paragraph is simply a listing of words and phrases. Indeed,
 there is no complete sentence. Each word or phrase segment is set
 off by itself, and is syntactically parallel to those surrounding it.

This same organization occurs in all Whitman's writings.
 When the lines appear very long and syntactically complex, they can

usually be divided into several very simple, parallel syntactical constructions. Or they may be a listing of objects or actions. These lists are also normally syntactically parallel and very simple in structure. Only the piling of several within a single line makes them appear complicated.

While effusive elaboration is often present, Whitman rarely subordinates. Syntactically parallel restatement advances ideas; parenthesis relates information normally handled in subordinated or embedded constructions. For example, in "Starting from Paumanok," Whitman says

Omnes! Omnes! let others ignore what they may,
 I make the poem of evil also, I commemorate that
 part also,
 I am myself just as much evil as good, and my
 nation is--and I say there is in fact no evil,
 (Or if there is I say it is just as important to you,
 to the land as to me, as to any thing else,)
 I too, following many and follow'd by many, inaug-
 urate a religion, I descend into the arena,
 It may be I am destin'd to utter the loudest cries
 there, the winner's pealing shouts,
 Who knows? they may rise from me yet, and soar above
 every thing.)

Each is not for its own sake,
 I say the whole earth and all the stars in the sky
 are for religion's sake.⁴³

Whitman's normal syntax, like that of the colloquial prose writers, is very simple. It mirrors Whitman's commitment to the individual and the common. Even when he does handle an abstract idea, he treats it in common terms and situations. For example, in "Song of Myself," Whitman confronts the mystery and meaning of the creation with these words:

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

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

Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,
 A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropt,

Or I guess the grass is itself a child, the pro-
 duced babe of the vegetation.

Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic,
 And it means, sprouting alike in broad zones and
 narrow zones,
 Growing among black folks as among white . . .
 I give them the same, I receive the same.⁴⁴

Readers often view Whitman also as a poet of wide-ranging and even outrageous vocabulary. Examples of slangy words, dialect, crudities, exotic, foreign, and self-coined words readily spring to mind. One must consider the unusual words in terms of stress and the vocabulary surrounding them. The vocabulary used in Whitman's poetry is extremely small, considering the number and diversity of exotic words he uses at isolated moments. He regularly depends on repetition, the work itself, rather than on use of synonyms. Even in the instances when synonyms do appear, they themselves become repetitive. Both colloquial tone and rhythmic repetitiveness demand this of Whitman. The use of house in the "City Dead House," is a good example. It first means the dead house, then the prostitute's body. In one line a third synonym is used, but it quickly gives way to the return of the original word--"house."

By the city dead-house by the gate,
 As idly sauntering, wending my way from the clangor,
 I curious pause, for lo, an outcast form, a poor dead
 prostitute brought,

Her corpse they deposit unclaim'd, it lies on the damp
 brick pavement,
 The divine woman, her body, I see the body, I look on
 it alone,
 That house once full of passion and beauty, all else
 I notice not,
 Nor stillness so cold, nor running water from faucet,
 nor odors morbidic impress me,
 But the house alone--that wondrous house--that delicate
 fair house--that ruin!
 That immortal house more than all the rows of dwellings
 ever-built!
 Or white-domed capitol with majestic figure surmounted,
 or all the old high-spired cathedrals,
 That little house alone more than them all--poor, des-
 perate house!
 Fair, fearful wreck--tenement of a soul--itself a soul,
 Unclaim'd, avoided house--take one breath from my trem-
 ulous lips,
 Take one tear dropt aside as I go for thought of you,
 Dead house of love--house of madness and sin, crumbled,
 crush'd,
 House of life, erewhile talking and laughing--but ah,
 poor house, dead even then,
 Months, years, an echoing, garnish'd house--but dead,
 dead, dead.⁴⁵

Certainly, the effect here is not eloquence through com-
 mand of synonyms, though some are used. Rather, the effect is built
 on controlled repetition of words and sounds, especially the con-
 stantly recurring words house and dead. As the poem ends, the
 repetition of house reaches its peak and then gives way to the final,
 multiple repetition of the words "dead, dead, dead."

It would, however, be misleading to dismiss the question
 of vocabulary so quickly. Whitman does make great use of many
 unusual, crude, and distasteful words in his writings. Unusual
 words like "Paumanok," "Ninth-month," "dooryard," and "barbaric
 yawp" are used for their greater than normal impact. However, this
 poet's style is based on mixings of basic or dialect words of normal

experience with a few very unusual words with difficult meanings. Phrases like "occult convolutions,"⁴⁶ "the plenum of proof,"⁴⁷ and "premonitory tinkles"⁴⁸ occur within a matrix of very simple and concrete words. Indeed, such phrases as these would never be noticed in Keats' or Shelley's poetry, yet here they seem excessive because Whitman has created a revolution in our expectations. Exotic words gain their effect because they are so unexpected.

Whitman's dedication to democracy and to the common man leads us to expect only the simple word--the slang expression, the use of the 'd in place of the ed in past tense verb forms, and even the occasional intentional crudeness, flatness, or harshness of lines like "I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world."⁴⁹ Within this matrix of common vocabulary, the foreign, exotic, or self-coined word is unexpected and startling; it gains more attention than would a common word. Here too, then, the word or phrase gains force at the expense of the larger syntax and the narrative movement.

Thus we can see that Whitman, like the prose experimenters, emphasizes stress on words and phrases. Repetition and variation of words; listing of objects or actions (often set off by neutral frames; juxtapositioning; simplification of syntax; and simplification and repetition of vocabulary are the major elements of stress which operate pervasively in Whitman's poetry.

The three characteristics of colloquial prose which Bridgman has isolated, stress, fragmentation, and repetition, are three facets of one stone. They cannot be completely separated; an aspect

obvious in one area generally also has strong and immediate connections in others. The second of these major aspects is fragmentation: the tendency away from the full written syntactically normal sentence as the basic unit. Bridgman shows that "deliberate fragmentation for rhythmic and emphatic purposes" is characteristic of this mode."⁵⁰ Fragmentation is not merely the negative consequence of the other two interrelated tendencies. We must recognize that discontinuity and incompleteness are among the strongest aspects of American conversational speech.

Here too, Whitman's writings concur with the prose tendency. Although his lines are often long, the syntactical units involved are almost universally short, as I have shown above. The real working units of syntax in Whitman's poetry are the single word and the short phrase. Both are regularly multiplied several times within a single line, but the operative unit is still decisively the word and phrase. The regular parallelism of the intra-line units and the very frequent absence or weakness of any larger syntactical unit underscores this fact. A passage from Section Fourteen of "Starting from Paumanok" exemplifies the poet's emphasis on fragmented constructions. Here, the tone is ecstatically expansive. The resulting structure heaps individual examples high without ever creating any larger structure into which they fit. Whitman's pervasive sense of wonder is certainly partially responsible for much of the structure.

Daughter of the lands did you wait for your poet?
 Land of coal and iron! land of gold! land of cotton,
 sugar, rice!
 Land of wheat, beef, pork! land of wool and hemp!
 land of the apple and the grape!

Land of the pastoral plains, the grass-fields of the
 world! land of these sweet-air'd interminable
 plateaus,
 Land of the herd, the garden, the healthy house of adobie!
 Lands where the north-west Columbia winds, and where
 the south-west Colorado winds!
 Land of the eastern Chesapeake! land of the Delaware!
 land of Ontario, Erie, Huron, Michigan!
 Land of the Old Thirteen! Massachussetts land! land of
 Vermont and Connecticut!
 Land of the ocean shores! land of sierras and peaks!
 Land of boatmen and sailors! fishermen's land! . . .
 Inextricable lands! . . .
 O all and each well-loved by me! my intrepid nations!
 O I at any rate include you all with perfect love!
 I cannot be discharged from you! not from one any sooner
 than another!⁵¹

This passage expresses the degree to which independent, short syntac-
 tical intra-line units carry the force of immensely large conceptions
 with very little aid from any larger organizational frame. Only

O all and each well-loved by me! my intrepid nations!
 O I at any rate include you all with perfect love!
 I cannot be discharged from you! not from one any sooner
 than another!⁵²

are full statements which ought to give meaning to the otherwise
 apparently unrelated items of the list. Instead, these two full
 sentences are so weak after the full, expansive transcontinental
 catalogue that they slip instead into an equality with the catalogue's
 short syntax units rather than offering a viewpoint into which the
 individual statements can be fitted. Even the rhetorical structur-
 ing of these last two lines diminishes their importance. Rather
 than allowing them the normal unbroken rhythm of a complete sentence,
 Whitman breaks the two statements up into units no larger than those
 they might be anticipated to link. In this type of writing rhetorical
 period is almost always synonymous with emphasis; therefore, by

breaking the two syntactically complete sentences into short, choppy segments, he consciously denies them the force which they would have otherwise exerted. The last two lines if placed first or allowed to expand to emphatic rhetorical periods might have unified the perceptions of the section. Instead, they come as anticlimatic afterthoughts. The force is all in the fragmented, early catalogue lines.

Further compounding the weakness of the larger syntactical unit is the continuation of the section far beyond the end of my quotation. The potentially significant lines are given no force or unitary position. The lines which follow undercut the strength of the apparent two line summation. They simply shift the subject slightly and return to the ecstatic catalogue again.

Those sentences in Whitman's poetry which are not fragmented, are regularly either loosely rambling or periodic, in the best colloquial prose tradition. Generalizations usually lack the force of the smaller syntactical units because they come at the end of a listing or do not appear explicitly at all.

Bridgman explains this technique. He says, "Loose sentences . . . both focus greater attention on the component details and accumulate a series of individual responses such as the periodic sentence cannot."⁵³ In both loose and periodic sentences, the absence of a controlling generalization which appears early enough to shape perception, permits the reader's attention to simply ramble, perceiving each picture by itself--not connecting or unifying them.

In "Starting from Paumanok" we find the normal Whitmanic rambling and periodic sentence.

Starting from fish-shape Paumanok where I was born,
 Well-begotten, and rais'd by a perfect mother,
 After roaming many lands, lover of populous pavements,
 Dweller in Mannahatta my city, or on southern savannas,
 Or a soldier camp'd or carrying my knapsack and gun, or
 a miner in California,
 Or rude in my home in Dakota's woods, my diet mean,
 my drink from the spring,
 Or withdrawn to muse and meditate in some deep recess,
 Far from the clank of crowds, intervals passing rapt and
 happy,
 Aware of the fresh free giver the flowing Missouri,
 aware of mighty Niagara,
 Aware of the buffalo herds grazing the plains, the hir-
 sute and strong-breasted bull,
 Of earth, rocks, Fifth-Month flowers experienced, stars,
 rain, snow, my amaze,
 Having studied the mocking-bird's tones and the flight
 of the mountain-hawk,
 And heard at dawn the unrival'd one, the hermit thrust
 from the swamp cedars,
 Solitary, singing in the West, I strike up for a New
 World.⁵⁴

The undercutting of the narrative center in colloquial prose and poetry becomes evident through the absence of subordination. Subordination is replaced by parenthesis and the run-on sentence pattern. In The Reign of Wonder, Tony Tanner describes this lack of subordination and the tendency toward polysynditon (the run-on pattern). He defines the normal structure of American colloquial prose as paratactic. By this he means that the sentence consists of several, usually parallel, unsubordinated phrases or clauses, brought together without transition except for neutral framing words like and.⁵⁵

Whitman accepts colloquial prose techniques. In every case he piles up actions. Each is joined to those surrounding it only by

and. No control is exercised over the material viewed; it is simply shown without comment. This technique produces long strings of apparently unrelated, unsubordinated actions. Together these actions or pictures form the only continuity of Whitman's vision, and even they work without imposing any interpretation.

Section Fourteen of "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" uses the paratactic structure which Tanner describes. The passage is very characteristic of Whitman because it consists of a series of actions experienced rather than actively undertaken.

Now while I sat in the day and look'd forth,
 In the close of the day with its light and the fields
 of spring, and the farmers preparing their crops,
 In the large unconscious scenery of my land with its
 lakes and forests,
 In the heavenly aerial beauty, (after the perturb'd
 winds and the storms,)
 Under the arching heavens of the afternoon swift-passing,
 and the voices of children and women,
 The many-moving sea-tides, and I saw the ships how they
 sail'd,
 And the summer approaching with richness, and the fields
 all busy with labor,
 And the infinite separate houses, how they all went on,
 each with its meals and minutia of daily usages,
 And the streets how their throbbings throb'd, and the
 cities pent--lo, then and there,
 Falling upon them all and among them all, enveloping
 me with the rest,
 Appear'd the cloud, appear'd the long, black trail,
 And I knew death, its thought, and the sacred knowledge
 of death,
 Then with the knowledge of death as walking one side of
 me,
 And the thought of death close-walking the other side
 of me,
 And I in the middle as with companions, and as holding
 the hands of companions,
 I flew forth to the hiding receiving night that talks
 not,
 Down to the shores of the water, the path by the swamp
 in the dimness,
 To the solemn shadowy cedars and ghostly pines so still.⁵⁶

Emphasis in this passage is on a string of experiences which strongly influence the passive experiencing persona. Similarly, in colloquial prose the speaker is often unable to tell how or why he is influenced. The flow of the experiences broken only by the interminable and's must carry the meaning.

It is significant also in this passage that a great number of directional prepositions are present. When intellectual understanding of life (generally mirrored through subordination) is absent, the only thing which remains is life as it is felt directly and immediately. With coherence and understanding reduced to this level, the only unifying points are the narrator's voice, the and asserting continuity of experiences, and the presence of directional prepositions which lend some limited order to the experience.

Equally important in fragmenting syntax and reducing narrative ordering are several techniques which emphasize discontinuity. These are rejection of transitions and use of non-standard punctuation. This use of punctuation expresses the independence of impressions and short syntactical units from subservience to the larger narrative or syntactical unit. Punctuation techniques include pervasive linking of independent clauses with commas rather than semi-colons; employment of dashes instead of transitions; and use of parenthesis, which allows the poet to add normally subordinated material without using subordination.

The lack of directive transitions is exemplified by a typical Whitman passage previously quoted.

Houses and rooms are full of perfumes, the shelves are
crowded with perfumes,
I breathe the fragrance myself and know it and like it,
The distillation would intoxicate me also, but I shall
not let it.

The atmosphere is not a perfume, it has no taste of the
distillation, it is odorless,
It is for my mouth forever, I am in love with it,
I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised
and naked
I am mad for it to be in contact with me.⁵⁷

Each sensory experience appears independent of those around it because overt transitions are missing. It becomes the reader's task to supply connections. The passage also uses commas to join independent clauses. Whitman is like Gertrude Stein in using erratic punctuation to foster closer attention to each component part. This punctuation emphasizes the importance of the word or immediate experience at the expense of the larger narrative and syntactical frames. "Dropping punctuation . . . produces much the same result as does excessive punctuation. Both methods isolate thoughts in a series of units, although by different means."⁵⁸

Similarly, didactic and explanatory passages use extremely individualized examples without transitions. This technique seriously weakens the generalized concepts, which the individual examples would ordinarily support. Section One of "Song of Myself" is just such an explanatory section, but even here only one transition other than the uncritical and is used. Here, also, independent clauses are run together with commas, as are words and phrases. No structural frame is given by the punctuation. Finally, the absence of unifying generalizations allows the numerous examples to go their

own ways, largely independent meaning.

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
for every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

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

My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil,
this air,
Born here of parents born here from parents the same
and their parents the same,
I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health begin,
Hoping to cease not till death.

Creeds and schools in abeyance,
Retiring back a while sufficed at what they are, but
never forgotten,
I harbor for good or bad, I permit to speak at every
hazard
Nature without check with original energy.⁵⁹

The use of dashes works very similarly. Section Fifty of "Song of Myself" shows the degree to which dash constructions can dominate even directly explanatory sections.

There is that in me--I do not know what it is--but I know
it is in me.
Wrech'd and sweaty--calm and cool then my body becomes,

I do not know it--it is without name--it is a word un-
said,
It is not in any dictionary, utterance, symbol.
Something it swings on more than the earth I swing on,
to it the creation is the friend whose embracing
awakes me.
Perhaps I might tell more. Outlines! I plead for my
brothers and sisters.

Do you see O my brothers and sisters?
It is not chaos or death--it is form, union, plan--
it is eternal life--it is happiness.⁶⁰

This same use of dash constructions occurs with equal frequency in narrative sections.

Whitman's use of parenthesis also suggests fragmentation. Parenthesis allows him to avoid excessively subordinated syntax, which is uncharacteristic of oral expression. Inserted statements appear anecdotally, separated from the rest of the sentence. Thus Whitman expresses the stream of consciousness which is mirrored in the halts and starts of colloquial speech. Exemplifying this normal use of parenthesis is a very short poem called, "When I Read the Book,"

When I read the book, the biography famous,
 And is this then (said I) what the author calls a
 man's life?
 And so will some one when I am dead and gone write my
 life?
 (As if any man really knew aught of my life,
 Why even I myself often think I know little or nothing
 of my real life,
 Only a few hints, a few diffused faint clues and indir-
 ections
 I seek for my own use to trace out here.)⁶¹

Parenthesis also appears regularly in "Song of Myself," carrying the oral prose tendency toward clarificatory restatement, vacillation, and ambivalence. Whitman says

For your life adhere to me,
 (I may have to be persuaded many times before I con-
 sent to give myself really to you, but what of
 that?
 Must not Nature be persuaded many times?)⁶²

Breaking normal written syntactical patterns and deemphasizing narrative continuity are essential to Whitman's poetry. His writing relies on short syntax units as well as on fragmented, distorted, or periodic sentences. These distract attention from the larger syntactical and narrative unity. The characteristic

vernacular technique of framing objects or actions with and's or other neutral words heightens this tendency. Radical punctuation--especially the use of dashes, commas, and parenthesis--further adds to emphasis on the individual element at the expense of the larger entity. In all these ways, Whitman's poetry derives from the spoken language of the American people and the stylized prose techniques employed to capture them.

The third of Bridgman's categories of colloquial prose techniques is repetition. Repetition and its concomitant rhythm assert the colloquial prose base as well as the derived poetry. Further, repetition, with the resulting rhythms, becomes the element which harmonizes and unifies the prose poetry. Stress and fragmentation emphasize the small individual element. Repetition and rhythm link all aspects into a single, organic literary product as they capture the rhythm of American colloquial speech.

The repetition and rhythm Whitman uses are not those of nineteenth century romantic poetry. They are stylized rhythms of the American vernacular. Bridgman asserts that simple syntax and repetition are central to vernacular address. "The experienced speaker will simplify his syntax and repeat or restate key ideas as an aid to comprehension."⁶³ We can agree with the assertion that "The natural orators to whom Whitman loved to listen were fond of the heavily accented periods, which like the cadences of prose poetry, approximate without quite reaching, metrical regularity."⁶⁴ These same prose patterns occur throughout Whitman's poetry. "Many . . . lines [in Leaves of Grass] were obviously sentences of prose,

which . . . contained no hint of poetry. . . . the tunes were chiefly those of passionate speech rather than of verse. . . . Many passages are composed in a sort of ruined blank verse, like that employed by late Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists; a measure so broken by pauses, by accent, by sheer wilfulness, as to seem of the iambic five stressed line only through echo and reminiscence."⁶⁵

An even better description of Whitman's writing style appears in Bridgman's description of the highly rhetorical Southern oral prose style. He says,

Some Southern writers have employed an oral style that is fundamentally expansive and opulent in nature. . . . Its exclamations, repetitions, uncertain backing and fillings, accumulations of synonyms, and rhetorical emphases all originate in the extemporaneousness of speech, the spontaneous jetting of language that maintains its equilibrium by constant movement forward rather than by a poised inter-relationship among stable elements.⁶⁶

Whitman's poetry gains its individuality through his recognition that "rhythm or controlled variation" are at the heart of colloquial speech and of the stylized prose and poetic expression which imitate it.⁶⁷

Word, phrase, and clause repetition or variation abound in Whitman's prose-based poetry, as I have shown in the sections on stress and fragmentation. Here I wish to emphasize the rhythmic importance of the repetition and variation.

In a prose line such as "Long I was hugg'd close--long and long," the repetition of the word long sets up the basic rhythm of the line. Many critics have referred to this basically repetition-induced rhythm as "wavelike." The same sort of repetition regularly

occurs with phrases and clauses. It is most common in a litany, or chant, format with the first word or words of several consecutive lines constant and the remaining words of each line syntactically parallel. Each line in the chant varies only slightly from those before and after it.

The potential for sheer repetition is evident in this passage from "By Blue Ontario's Shore." The chant repetition of the first word or words of each line sets up the basic prose rhythm of the section.

I will confront these shows of the day and night,
 I will know if I am to be less than they,
 I will see if I am not as majestic as they,
 I will see if I am not as subtle and real as they,
 I will see if I am to be less generous than they,
 I will see if I have no meaning, while the houses
 and ships have meaning,
 I will see if the fishes and birds are to be enough
 for themselves, and I am not to be enough for
 myself."⁶⁸

Within the chant structure the poet can also use inversion and variation of the basic rhythmic unit. Direct inversion appears in these lines from "A Voice from Death." "The Gather'd thousands to their funeral mounds, and thousands never found or gather'd."⁶⁹

Another example makes use of all these rhythmic techniques.

I ate with you and slept with you, your body has become
 not yours only nor left my body mine only,
 You give me the pleasure of your eyes, face, flesh, as
 we pass, you take of my beard, breast, hands, in
 return,
 I am not to speak to you, I am to think of you when I
 sit alone or wake at night alone,
 I am to wait, I do not doubt I am to meet you again,
 I am to see to it that I do not lose you.⁷⁰

Juxtaposition, like inversion, is another obvious source of repetition-based rhythm. It allows the poet to repeat words, phrases, and syntactical patterns with far greater frequency than would normally occur. For example,

What will be will be well, for what is is well,
To take interest is well, and not to take interest
shall be well.

· · · · ·
You are not thrown to the winds, you gather certainly
and safely around yourself,
Yourself! Yourself! Yourself, for ever and ever!

It is not to diffuse you that you were born of your
mother, it is to identify you,
It is not that you should be undecided, but that you
should be decided,
Something long preparing and formless is arrived and
form'd in you.⁷¹

Whitman's long lists (or catalogues) are essentially juxtapositionings of objects and actions, and as such are important rhythmically.

Repetition, variation, inversion, and juxtaposition are essential to Whitman's prose rhythm. Bridgman emphasizes repetition further by asserting that "repetition often turns up when the action is crucial, or when the writer-speaker is in some way thoroughly engaged."⁷² Whitman develops these prose repetitions into rhythms, and the intensity of repetition and rhythm becomes greater in important moments. Intense feeling or action automatically elicit more densely textured rhythmic passages.

The basic prose pattern of repetition and variation is only the start of Whitman's technique. Whitman goes to great lengths to set up and maintain a stylized colloquial prose rhythm. In his poetry, as in the writings of the colloquial prose writers, the use of rhetorical questions, run-on sentences, lapses of memory, and

adjustments of the rhythm of delivery are regular features for maintaining, varying, or breaking evolved prose rhythms. The run-on sentence pattern is especially important for this reason. "Coordinating conjunctions furnish the beat for long colloquial sentences. The sense may wander, the meaning may cloud over, and clarification may never come (since cloudiness is the truest vision of the moment), but underneath it all pulsates that monotonous, barely noticeable rhythm of the conjunctions, sufficiently dependable to sustain equilibrium and to provide the confidence and comfort that go with it."⁷³ Similarly, lines like

Have you reckon'd a thousand acres much? have you
 reckon'd the earth much?
 Have you practis'd so long to learn to read?
 Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems?

Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess
 the origin of all poems,
 You shall possess the good of the earth and sun, (there
 are millions of suns left,)
 You shall no longer take things at second or third
 hand, nor look through the eyes of the dead, nor
 feed on the spectres in books,
 You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take
 things from me,
 You shall listen to all sides and filter them from
 yourself.⁷⁴

show rhetorical questions and lines used to maintain the on-going prose rhythm. The lines starting with "You shall" exist largely as rhetorical expansions of the first "You shall" line. The non-rhythmic, unrepeated parenthesis, "there are millions of suns left," allows the poet to momentarily suspend and then reinstate the repetitive prose rhythm.

Whitman is equally aware of the possibilities of syntactical shifts, strong and weak words, pauses, and even of dead spots to fill in evolved prose rhythms. For example, in a short poem entitled, "The Rounded Catalogue Divine Complete," he uses the relative weakness of the word and in setting up a prose rhythm. Even within this short poem, Whitman feels the value of momentarily breaking the evolving rhythm and then restoring it. "The devilish and the dark, the dying and diseases'd / The countless (nineteen-twentieths) low and evil, crude and savage."⁷⁵ The poem continues, and the takes the place of and as the accentually weak word which helps define the rhythmic waves. Here, too, rhythm jarring parenthesis makes its appearance, momentarily breaking the evolved pattern.

The crazed, prisoners in jail, the horrible, rank,
 malignant,
 Venom and filth, serpents, the ravenous sharks, liars,
 the dissolute:
 (What is the part the wicked and the loathsome bear
 within the earth's . . . scene?)
 Newts, crawling things in slime and mud, poisons,
 The barren soil, the evil men, the slag and hideous
 rot.⁷⁶

Whitman uses weak words and regularly introduces rhythm-breaking parenthesis for important reasons. Weak words create a memorable rhythmic pattern which emphasizes important images and actions. This rhythm approximates the essentially iambic pattern of English speech. Yet Whitman never quite falls into the strict iambic pattern, no matter how close he comes. As soon as the pattern is set, he introduces a rhythm-breaking unit or a counter-rhythm to reassert the prose base. The technique is completely analogous to Gertrude Stein's later use of erratic punctuation to

suddenly jerk the evolved rhythm to a halt, forcing the reader to consider each word carefully.

Whitman makes use of the prosy parenthesis for much the same reason. The parenthesis undercuts the evolved rhythm, asserts the prose base, and regains the reader's attention. Allen recognizes the rhythmic importance of Whitman's parenthesis, for parenthesis is "often employed where the passage is not parenthetical in thought. . . . usually, the parenthesis indicates a break in the rhythm set up by the phonetic recurrences. The rhythm is momentarily suspended, broken off completely, or in some manner varied by the passage inside the parenthesis."⁷⁷

Parenthesis also can assert a counter-rhythm, as in this passage from "City of Ships."

City of ships!
 (O the black ships! O the fierce ships!
 O the beautiful sharp-bow'd steam-ships and sail ships)
 City of the world! (for all races are here,
 All the lands of the earth make contributions here:)
 City of the sea! city of hurried and glittering tides!
 City whose gleeful tides continually rush or recede,
 whirling in and out with eddies and foam,
 City of wharves and stores--city of tall facades of
 marble and iron!
 Proud and passionate city--mettlesome, mad, extravagant
 city!⁷⁸

Whitman uses counter-rhythms and extremely long, unrhythmic prosy lines in a similar manner. The tension set up between an evolved rhythm and a counter-rhythm (or a line with no rhythm at all) reasserts the common oral speech underlying the verse. In "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," the contrasting rhythms of bird and narrator intensify the experience of the poem. The long, lyrical,

reflective narrative gives way to the sharp, piercing call of the bird, bringing the message of death.

Once Paumanok,
 When the lilac-scent was in the air and Fifth-month
 grass was growing,
 Up this seashore in some briers,
 Two feather'd guests from Alabama, two together,
 And their nest, and four light-green eggs spotted
 with brown,
 And every day the he-bird to and fro near at hand,
 And every day the she-bird crouch'd on her nest,
 silent, with bright eyes,
 And every day I, a curious boy, never too close,
 never disturbing them,
 cautiously peering, absorbing, translating.

Shine! Shine! Shine!
 Pour down your warmth, great sun!
 While we bask, we two together.

Two together!
 Winds blow south, or winds blow north,
 Day come white, or night come black.⁷⁹

Four lines from "Of the Terrible Doubt of Appearances" show Whitman's use of parenthesis and of long, unrhythmic lines to vary evolved rhythms.

The skies of day and night, colors, densities, forms,
 may-be these are (as doubtless they are) only
 apparitions, and the real something has yet to
 be known,
 (How often they dart out of themselves as if to con-
 found me and mock me!
 How often I think neither I know, nor any man knows
 aught of them,)
 May-be seeming to me what they are (as doubtless they
 indeed but seem) as from my present point of view,
 and might prove (as, of course they would) nought
 of what they appear, or nought anyhow, from entirely
 changed points of view.⁸⁰

Whitman's "meter" is based primarily upon repetition of words and phrases embedded in normal prose syntax. Therefore, it is important rhythmically that vocabulary is carefully limited.

Whitman constricts his vocabulary in presenting key words and themes. This limiting of vocabulary produces heightened repetition, thus emphasizing the important elements while rhythmically augmenting the section.

The rhythmic effect of repetition is greatest when the syntactical unit to be repeated stands at the beginning of the line. Whitman usually takes advantage of this position and begins with repetition in a chant structure. The initial rhythmic position has the added advantage of making the lines or rhythmic sections look more alike, reinforcing the sense of similarity and organization. Repetition of words or phrases at the beginning of poetic lines significantly heightens the likelihood that the remaining elements in a line will be syntactically parallel to adjoining lines with the same first word or phrase, further reinforcing the rhythm established in the first line. For these reasons, most of Whitman's repetition occurs at the beginning of the line. Since the basic element of Whitman's poetry is colloquial American prose, his use of repetition and variation within such a parallel chant structure is crucial in bringing order and form to the finished product.

The initial position is not the only one in which Whitman uses repetition. The final word is rhythmically valuable because of its conspicuous position in the line. Repetition here fosters a sense of order rhythmically, visually, and through rhyme. Whitman uses final word repetition, but he does not use it very often. He never uses rhyme in that position. The absence of rhyme emphasizes his reaction against techniques commonly accepted in nineteenth

century poetry. "To Him that was Crucified" shows Whitman applying final word repetition.

Do not mind because many sounding your name do not
understand you.
I do not sound your name, but I understand you.
I specify you with joy my comrade to salute you,
and to salute those who are with you.⁸¹

Finally, Whitman also repeats key words and phrases in the middle of the poetic line. In this position, the syntax is not emphasized, as in the initial or final repetition, but the important word or phrase does gain more force. Although the rhythmic value of a repeated word or internal rhyme in mid-syntax is not great, the intellectual and visual sense of ordering and control is greatly heightened. The repetition of the words house and dead in "The City Dead House" (see page 55) shows the thought rhythms which medial repetition can stimulate.

Since Whitman usually restricts his vocabulary, he is able to use a few unusual words with great effect. Unusual words stand out and gain emphasis against the pre-established poetic pattern of linguistic and syntactical simplicity. Repetition allows this counter-technique to become effective. Once the repetition has asserted order, structure, and parallelism, many counter-techniques can be used. The poet can create an expectation of parallelism or word repetition and then break it.

Whitman also lengthens or shortens within a parallel structure for rhetorical emphasis. Regularly, he begins with a simple, relatively short syntactical structure which serves as the pattern for parallelism in the ensuing lines. Then, Whitman expands the

non-parallel elements (usually adjectives or nouns) within the parallel structure to create a sense of grandeur, power, nobility, pride, expanded consciousness, or even great sorrow or shame. For example, in Section Seven of "Salut au Monde,"

I see the places of the sagas,
 I see pine-trees and fir trees torn by northern blasts,
 I see granite boulders and cliffs, I see green meadows
 and lakes,
 I see the burial-cairns of Scandinavian warriors,
 I see them raised high with stones by the marge of
 restless oceans, that the dead men's spirits when
 they wearied of their quiet graves might rise up
 through the mounds and gaze on the tossing hollows,
 and be refresh'd by storms, immensity, liberty, action.⁸²

Generally, the subsequent shortening of the parallel syntax marks the return to normal consciousness and the previously prevailing mood.

The lengthening and later shortening syntactical structure in Section Two of "Song of Myself," exemplify the expanding consciousness and later resumption of normal mood.

Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess
 the origin of all poems,
 You shall possess the good of the earth and sun, (there
 are millions of suns left,)
 You shall no longer take things at second or third hand,
 nor look through the eyes of the dead, nor feed
 on the spectres in books,
 You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take
 things from me,
 You shall listen to all sides and filter them from
 yourself.⁸³

At times, Whitman reverses this expansion pattern by creating a norm in which the syntax is fairly long. Then, he recounts an important or impressive fact in a massively understated short final line. Whitman's poem to Ulysses S. Grant, "What Best I See in Thee," is a good example.

What best I see in thee,
 Is not that where thou mov'st down history's great
 highways,
 Ever undimm'd by time shoots warlike victory's dazzle,
 Or that thou sat'st where Washington sat, ruling the
 land in peace,
 Or thou the man whom feudal Europe feted, venerable
 Asia swarmed upon,
 Who walk'd with kings with even pace the round world's
 promenade;
 But that in foreign lands, in all thy walks with kings,
 Those prairie sovereigns of the West, Kansas, Missouri,
 Illinois,
 Ohio's, Indiana's, millions, comrades, farmers, soldiers,
 all to the front,
 Invisibly with thee walking with kings with even pace
 the round world's promenade,
 Were all so justified.⁸⁴

On occasion, Whitman varies the expansion technique in
 another way. He multiplies the basic syntax twice or three times
 rather than expanding the syntax. For example, in "Salut au Monde,"
 the line

I see granite boulders and cliffs, I see green meadows
 and lakes"⁸⁵

is actually a contraction of the syntax of the preceding line. ("I
 see pine-trees and fir trees torn by northern blasts,") The doubling
 of the "I see" line, however, extends the rhetorical period and,
 therefore, the sense of expansiveness. This multiplication of the
 basic syntax is present in virtually every "epic catalogue," or list,
 which Whitman presents.

The poem, "Who Learns My Lessons Complete," is perhaps the
 best short example of expansion within a parallel structure and
 multiplication of syntactical units.

Is it wonderful that I should be immortal? as every one
 is immortal;
 I know it is wonderful, but my eyesight is equally wonder-
 ful,

And pass'd from a babe in the creeping trance of a couple
 of summers and winters to articulate and walk--all
 this is equally wonderful.

And that my soul embraces you this hour, and we affect
 each other without ever seeing each other, and
 never perhaps to see each other, is every bit
 as wonderful,

And that I can remind you, and you think them and know
 them to be true, is just as wonderful.

And that the moon spins round the earth and on with the
 earth is equally wonderful,

And that they balance themselves with the sun and
 stars is equally wonderful.⁸⁶

Whitman consistently uses rhetorical lengthening and shortening of lines. Yet he still needs to maintain the normal rhythm of colloquial American speech. In order to allow the conjunction of rhythmic qualities, the inherent possibilities of strong and weak words, and the many techniques of lengthening or shortening, he regularly composes in units one rhythmic vernacular prose foot long. These sublinear units are the building blocks of the poet's rhythmic structure. As a consequence of this method of composition, he can place these independent units of meaning and rhythm anywhere within the poetic line. Then, when expansion is necessary to signal intensification of mood, he simply adds extra units, modifiers, or listed elements to increase the length and rhetorical period. Since many of Whitman's lines share this quality, the inserted units fit easily into an already parallel structure. For example, in Section Thirty-Nine of "Song of Myself,"

Wherever he goes men and women accept and desire him,
 They desire he should like them, touch them, speak to
 them, stay with them,
 Behavior lawless as snow-flakes, words simple as grass,
 uncomb'd head, laughter, and naivete,
 Slow-stepping feet, common features, common modes and
 emanations.⁸⁷

Here the sublinear units are simply lists of actions. "The City Dead House," however, exemplifies these short elements independent of listing.

The divine woman, her body, I see the body, I look on
it alone,
The house once full of passion and beauty, all else
I notice not,
Nor stillness so cold, nor running water from faucet,
nor odors morbidic impress me,
But the house alone--that wondrous house--that delicate
fair house--that ruin . . .
Fair, fearful wreck--tenement of a soul--itself a soul,
Unclaim'd, avoided house.⁸⁸

Other specialized rhythmic devices are present in Whitman's work. The use of alliteration, assonance, and other sound effects is the most important of these. Whitman uses alliteration in the way which more conventional poets use rhyme. In his poetry assonance and alliteration set up rhythms that order and poeticize the colloquial prose base.* These techniques also set up rhythms which interact with and even occasionally oppose the other established rhythms--of parallelism, of word and phrase repetition, of intellectual rhythm set up by the medial repetition of some syntactic unit. Whitman increases his use of sound effects in passages he wishes to emphasize. His best poems are those in which all these elements interact, creating a sense of complete control and precision while not destroying the essential autonomy of the prose lines. Many examples of this

* For fuller discussion see Autrey N. Wiley, "Reiterative Devices in Leaves of Grass," American Literature, V (1924), 161-170. See also James McNally, "Varieties of Alliteration in Whitman," Walt Whitman Review, 13 (1967), No. 1, 28-32.

fortunate conjunction exist, as in the following sections from several of Whitman's most famous poems.

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you,

I loafe and invite my soul,
I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer
grass.⁸⁹

Flood-Tide below me! I see you face to face!
Clouds of the west--sun there half an hour high--I
see you also face to face.

Crowds of men and women attired in the usual costumes,
how curious you are to me!
On the ferry-boats, the hundreds and hundreds that cross,
returning home, are more curious to me than you might
suppose.⁹⁰

Out of the cradle endlessly rocking,
Out of the mocking-bird's throat, the musical shuttle,
Out of the Ninth-month midnight,
Over the sterile sands and the fields beyond, where the
child leaving his bed wander'd alone, bareheaded,
barefoot.⁹¹

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd
And the great star early droop'd in the western sky
in the night,
I mourned and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring.⁹²

One final technique appears as an organizing principle in the most effective moments of Whitman's best writings. It is the use of slowly shifting emphasis produced by repeating key terms and moving from one repetition to another as the poem's emphasis shifts. These "dynamic repetitions" are completely analogous to the techniques used later by Gertrude Stein and Sherwood Anderson. This shifting repetition of key terms is reinforced and signalled by the

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use of association of ideas and alliteration. In "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" and "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" the technique is present at important moments. For example in Section Sixteen of "Lilacs" the poet says,

Passing the visions, passing the night,
Passing, unloosing the hold of my comrades' hands,
Passing the song of the hermit bird and the tallying
song of my soul,
Victorious song, death's outlet song, yet varying ever-
altering song,
As low and wailing, yet clear the notes, rising and
falling, flooding the night,
Sadly sinking and fainting, as warning and warning, and
yet again bursting with joy,
Covering the earth and filling the spread of the
heavens,
As that powerful psalm in the night I heard from recesses,
Passing, I leave thee lilac with heart-shaped leaves,
I leave thee lilac with heart-shaped leaves,
I leave thee there in the door-yard, blooming, returning
with spring,

I cease from my song for thee,
From my gaze on thee in the west, fronting the west, com-
muning with thee,
O comrade lustrous with silver face in the night,
Yet each to keep and all, retrievements out of the night,
The song, the wondrous chant of the gray-brown bird,
And the tallying chant, the echo arous'd in my soul,
With the lustrous and drooping star with the countenance
full of woe,
With the holders holding my hand nearing the call of the
bird,
Comrades mine and I in the midst, and their memory ever
to keep, for the dead I loved so well,
For the sweetest, wisest soul of all my days and lands--
and this for his dear sake,
Lilac and star and bird twined with the chant of my soul,
There in the fragrant pines and the cedars dusk and dim.⁹³

The alliteration which is so strong in these sections is a significant part of Whitman's poetic technique. Alliteration often marks the first rhythmic word in a chant cycle. The recurring sound

enhances rhythmic repetition.⁹⁴ The importance of sound repetition cannot be overestimated.

The one technical feature of Leaves of Grass which does show an important chronological development (that is, after 1855) is that of phonetic recurrence. Miss Wiley says, "Whitman's use of the reiterative devices shows a constant increase from 1855 to 1881. From a frequency of approximately twenty-two percent in 1860, the use of the repetitive patterns increases to thirty-two in 1867 and 1871 and thirty-eight percent in 1881. After 1881, she finds only twenty-two percent. . . .

Phonetic repetition is more important in longer poems, and after 1881 Whitman wrote hardly any poems over ten lines in length, though not, it should be repeated because of any change in prosodic theory or intentional variation or practice.⁹⁵

Whitman's static and dynamic repetition of key terms, used in close relation to alliteration and short phonetic repetitions, parallels the techniques of colloquial prose. Bridgman sees Hemingway using precisely this same "dynamic complex of words" to create a moving repetition which places emphasis on the current center of interest. It is, as Bridgman says, "supportive of the sense of the immediate moment--not memory or associations."⁹⁶ Certainly, for Whitman as for Stein and Twain, association is a strong organizing principle.

Whitman's poetry, then, fulfills Bridgman's three major characteristics of colloquial prose. Stress, fragmentation, and repetition are central aspects, each of which works organically and interrelatedly to produce a highly-controlled, organized colloquial prose-based poetry. This poetry uses sophisticated techniques in all three areas of colloquial speech to produce order in forms not destructive to the American vernacular Whitman attempted to enshrine.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Lewis Untermyer, ed., Modern American Poetry, Modern British Poetry, New and Enlarged Edition (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1958), p. 81.

² Walt Whitman, "A Backward Glance o'er Travel'd Roads," The Works of Walt Whitman in Two Volumes as Prepared by Him for the Deathbed Edition, ed Malcolm Cowley (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1968), I, 470.

³ Whitman, "A Backward Glance o'er Travel'd Roads," Works, I, 471.

⁴ Whitman, "A Backward Glance o'er Travel'd Roads," Works, I, 470.

⁵ Richard Bridgman, The Colloquial Style in America (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966).

⁶ Bridgman, Colloquial Style, pp. 10-11.

⁷ Bridgman, Colloquial Style, p. 11.

⁸ Bridgman, Colloquial Style, p. 8.

⁹ Bridgman, Colloquial Style, p. 12.

¹⁰ Bridgman, Colloquial Style, p. 21.

¹¹ Bridgman, Colloquial Style, p. 39.

¹² Whitman, "Mirages," Second Annex: Good-Bye My Fancy," Works, I, 466.

¹³ Whitman, "Mirages," Works, I, 466.

¹⁴ Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 62-65.

¹⁵ Walt Whitman, "Unsigned Review of Leaves of Grass," Quoted in Untermyer, Modern American Poetry, p. 38.

¹⁶ Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 64.

¹⁷ Untermyer, Modern American Poetry, p. 42.

¹⁸ Bridgman, Colloquial Style, p. 21.

¹⁹ Whitman, "A Noiseless, Patient Spider," Works, I, 391.

- 20 Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 88.
- 21 Bridgman, Colloquial Style, p. 30.
- 22 Bridgman, Colloquial Style, p. 77.
- 23 Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 106.
- 24 Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 64.
- 25 Whitman, "There Was a Child Went Forth," Works, I, 327.
- 26 Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 67.
- 27 Whitman, "I Sing the Body Electric," Works, I, 122-123.
- 28 Bridgman, Colloquial Style, p. 39.
- 29 Bridgman, Colloquial Style, p. 31.
- 30 Whitman, "Starting From Paumanok," Works, I, 54.
- 31 Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 90.
- 32 Bridgman, Colloquial Style, preface.
- 33 Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 73-74.
- 34 Bridgman, Colloquial Style, p. 32.
- 35 Gay Wilson Allen, "Walt Whitman," American Prosody
(Chicago: American Book Co., 1935), p. 235.
- 36 Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 78.
- 37 Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 79-81.
- 38 Bridgman, Colloquial Style, pp. 62-63.
- 39 Bridgman, Colloquial Style, p. 73.
- 40 Whitman, "By Blue Ontario's Shore," Works, I, 317-318.
- 41 Bridgman, Colloquial Style, p. 94.
- 42 Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 63.
- 43 Whitman, "Starting From Paumanok," Works, I, 55.
- 44 Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 66.

- 45 Whitman, "The City Dead House," Works, I, 329.
- 46 Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 83.
- 47 Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 85.
- 48 Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 85.
- 49 Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 113.
- 50 Bridgman, Colloquial Style, p. 75.
- 51 Whitman, "Starting From Paumanok," Works, I, 59.
- 52 Whitman, "Starting From Paumanok," Works, I, 59.
- 53 Bridgman, Colloquial Style, p. 122.
- 54 Whitman, "Starting From Paumanok," Works, I, 51.
- 55 Tony Tanner, The Reign of Wonder: Naivety and Reality in American Literature (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 12.
- 56 Whitman, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," Works, I, 302-303.
- 57 Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 63.
- 58 Bridgman, Colloquial Style, p. 168.
- 59 Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 62.
- 60 Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 112.
- 61 Whitman, "I Read the Book," Works, I, 47.
- 62 Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 60.
- 63 Bridgman, Colloquial Style, p. 16.
- 64 Bliss Perry, Walt Whitman: His Life and Work (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1906), pp. 85-86.
- 65 Perry, Whitman, pp. 81-82.
- 66 Bridgman, Colloquial Style, p. 13.
- 67 Bridgman, Colloquial Style, p. 35.
- 68 Whitman, "By Blue Ontario's Shore," Works, I, 319.

- 69 Whitman, "A Voice From Death," Works, I, 464.
- 70 Whitman, "To a Stranger," Works, I, 142.
- 71 Whitman, "To Think of Time," Works, I, 383.
- 72 Bridgman, Colloquial Style, p. 33.
- 73 Bridgman, Colloquial Style, p. 39.
- 74 Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 63.
- 75 Whitman, "The Rounded Catalogue Divine Complete," Works,
I, 465-466.
- 76 Whitman, "The Rounded Catalogue Divine Complete," Works,
I, 465-466.
- 77 Allen, American Prosody, pp. 233-234.
- 78 Whitman, "City of Ships," Works, I, 273.
- 79 Whitman, "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," Works,
I, 238.
- 80 Whitman, "Of the Terrible Doubt of Appearances," Works,
I, 137.
- 81 Whitman, "To Him That Was Crucified," Works, I, 343.
- 82 Whitman, "Salut au Monde," Works, I, 152.
- 83 Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 63.
- 84 Whitman, "What Best I See in Thee," Works, I, 417.
- 85 Whitman, "Salut au Monde," Works, I, 152.
- 86 Whitman, "Who Learns My Lessons Complete," Works, I, 350.
- 87 Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 100.
- 88 Whitman, "The City Dead House," Works, I, 329.
- 89 Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 62.
- 90 Whitman, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," Works, I, 166-167.
- 91 Whitman, "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," Works,
I, 237.

⁹² Whitman, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd,"
Works, I, 298.

⁹³ Whitman, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd,"
Works, I, 305.

⁹⁴ Untermeyer, Modern American Poetry, p. 74.

⁹⁵ Allen, American Prosody, pp. 240-242.

⁹⁶ Bridgman, Colloquial Style, pp. 214, 182.

CHAPTER THREE

THE POETIC ORDERING

"I had great trouble in leaving out the stock
'poetical' touches, but succeeded at last."

Walt Whitman
Specimen Days¹

Whitman bases his poetry on the rhythms of American colloquial prose and the stylized techniques by which prose writers approximate oral discourse. Yet the prose rhythms and techniques are not enough in themselves. Without some unifying order and regularity, the largely amorphous prose base would never become poetry. Significantly, the elements which make Whitman's expression so prose-like are the very ones he regularizes to produce the necessary poetic ordering.

This chapter will deal with the aspects Whitman uses to bring poetic ordering to the vernacular base. As such, Chapter Three forms the necessary counter-balance of Chapter Two, which treats the prose core. Neither chapter is complete by itself. Whitman creates an organic amalgam of prose and poetry. He links the rhythms, vocabulary, and syntax* of common speech with some of the most sophisticated ordering techniques of elite poetry.

* See Richard Bridgman, The Colloquial Style in America (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966). See also Andrew Schiller, "An Approach to Whitman's Metrics," Emerson Society Quarterly, No. 22 (1961), 23-25.

Whitman criticism to date has failed to recognize the close interrelationship between these two aspects of Whitman's poetry. A few critics have asserted that Whitman's writing is "prosy" or like "prose-poetry."^{*} But they have never defined the ways in which Whitman's writing is "prosy." On the other hand, most critics have called Whitman's organization "poetic" and have devised numerous analogies with older poetic types. Some analogies have been very perceptive, especially those which cite similarities between Whitman's writing and several Biblical sections.^{**} Other critical systems for organizing and dealing with Whitman's "poetic" organization have been overly sophisticated.^{***} Even if these latter systems were correct, they would be far too complicated to use for critical or creative purposes. These systems, for all their elaboration, are no more helpful than the "prose" group because neither allows the reader to

^{*} See Bliss Perry, Walt Whitman (Boston, 1906), pp. 81-86, and Fred N. Scott, "A Note on Whitman's Rhythm," J. E. G. P., (1908), VII, 134-153.

^{**} See Gay Wilson Allen, "Walt Whitman," American Prosody (New York: American Book Co., 1935), and "Biblical Analogies For Walt Whitman's Prosody," Revue-Angloamericaine, X (August, 1933), 490-507. See also Meredith Posey, "Whitman's Debt to the Bible with Special Reference to the Origins of His Rhythms," (Diss. University of Texas at Austin, 1938).

^{***} One example is Milton Hindus' "Notes Toward a Definition of a Typical Poetic Line in Whitman," Walt Whitman Review IX, No. 4 (December, 1963), 75-81. He asserts a five beat metrical system and a five unit structure as Whitman's form.

predict Whitmanic structures or to create Whitmanic poems by using the derived rules of construction.*

No critic has suggested that Whitman's appeal lies in his combination of vernacular prosiness and poetic intensification. This dissertation takes that position. Whitman does combine vernacular prose with specialized poetic ordering techniques to produce his unique poetic amalgam. Recognition of the rhetorical prose techniques allows the reader to predict as well as recognize characteristic structures. Similarly, Whitman's oral poetic ordering techniques make his transformation of common speech into intense poetry clear.

Even the most perceptive Whitmanic scholars, those who see real similarities with sections of the Bible, have not considered the double nature of Whitman's vernacular poetry or even completely explained his "poetic" side. More importantly, they have not integrated Whitmanic poetic structures with the prose aspects of his poetic style. Yet since theirs is the most accurate and well developed interpretation of Whitman's poetic qualities, their assertion of Biblical analogies deserves consideration. Many structures which they see operating are correct, whatever the source of these structures. In other cases, however, they are unable to recognize or predict equally characteristic Whitmanic usages which my hypothesis handles easily.

* A rather good discussion of the main approaches to Whitman's metrics appears in Sculley Bradley's "The Fundamental Metrical Principle in Whitman's Poetry," American Literature, X (1938), 437-459.

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These Biblical scholars, led by Gay Wilson Allen, cite impressive parallels between recurrent aspects of Whitman's writing and sections of the Bible, especially Psalms. But two problems undercut the value of their findings. First, during the period of Whitman's greatest poetic ability, the mid-1850's and 1860's, his writing shows the smallest statistical likeness to the proffered Biblical parallels. This statistical work, moreover, is not the work of a hostile critic of the Biblical thesis. It is contained in Meredith Posey's dissertation, entitled "Whitman's Debt to the Bible with Special Reference to the Origins of his Rhythms."* Posey, who follows Allen's hypothesis in attempting to assert Biblical style and organization in Whitman's poetry, has produced them himself. If there is significant Biblical influence on Whitman's writing, one would expect the statistical similarity to increase during Whitman's "great" periods. Otherwise, the conclusion is inescapable. If Whitman is influenced by the Bible, it is a negative influence--one which detracts from the greatness of his writings.

Second, I wish to counter the assertions of the Biblical exponents in a more basic way. They see poetry of the Psalms and other Biblical passages as having the qualities of high poetry. I suggest, instead, that the admitted beauty of these sections has far more in common with strong, austere prose statement in which poetic embellishment is deliberately minimized. The great beauty

* University of Texas at Austin, 1938.

of "Psalms" comes not from the tinkling of rhyme but from the strength of feeling and the apparently unconscious simplicity of expression and structure. The "Gettysburg Address," for example, is a short, simple, massively serious prose document written on an important subject. Its tone and effect are very similar to the "Book of Psalms," although the subject is less directly religious. The greater the use of artificial poetic embellishment, the less the resulting sense of sincere dialogue with divinity.

Milton faced a similar problem in his poetry. He, too, declined to have "God" speak in a characteristically poeticized manner. Instead, Milton's "God" spoke in restrained blank verse even though the rest of Milton's poetry is among the most artificial and embellished of any in the English language. The syntactical structure of these passages is far less latinized than the surrounding sections.

I conclude that the Whitmanic-Biblical scholars are taking the wrong tack in viewing the involved books of the Bible. Those books attempt to move closer to strong, sincere prose utterance, not toward poetry as an independent genre. Although the similarities cited by Biblical scholars are real, these critics fail to consider the majority of Whitman's poetic ordering techniques. Also, they never mention the importance of the colloquial prose base or of Whitman's dedication to American democracy and American vernacular

speech patterns.* The Biblical hypothesis, although the most correct previous critical position, never goes beyond emphasis on basic patterns which appear in both Whitmanic and Biblical poetry. The Biblical approach ignores many more techniques than it considers; it also fails to consider Whitman's own statements on the qualities of his writing as well as of Whitman's motivation for writing his unique style of poetry.

Whitman's poetry is certainly uncharacteristic of nineteenth century romantic poetry in form and structure. Most basically, it does not exhibit conventional meter or rhyme. Whitman is extremely conscious of his break with nineteenth century orthodoxy. He expresses his awareness of it and gives several hints about his poetic philosophy in this statement advising the wise poet. "His rhythm and uniformity he will conceal in the roots of his verses, not to be seen of themselves, but to break forth loosely as lilacs on a bush, and take shapes compact, as shapes of melons, or chestnuts, or pears."² Whitman sees poetry as something organic which enhances the beauty of natural expression.³ He believes poetry is not something which gains strength as it moves away from the natural and asserts its own independent realm of beauty. More immediately, in saying that the "rhythm and regularity" will be in

* See C. Carroll Hollis, "Whitman and the American Idiom," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XLIII (October, 1957), No. 3, 408-420. See also Donald D. Kummings, "The Vernacular Perspective in American Poetry: Philip Freneau, Walt Whitman, and William Carlos Williams," (Diss. Indiana University, 1972). Finally, Sherry Lu Goforth Southard, "Whitman and Language: His Democratic Words," (Diss. Purdue Univ., 1972) also deals constructively with this subject.

the roots of his verse, Whitman is hinting at the oral prose poetry structure which he espouses. This poet consistently reverses the usual qualities of poetry. The regularity appears at the beginning of the line and verse paragraph rather than at the end. Thus first lines of sections and first words of lines assert the regularity normally relegated to rhyming line endings and refrains. Whitman is consciously rebelling against poetic orthodoxy. He uses this method to achieve oral and visual regularity without assuming the character of accepted nineteenth century poetic structure.

Let us consider Whitman's techniques for ordering his vernacular based poetry. I will deal with the pervasive organizational techniques first and then move to the large and small scale structures and techniques. Significantly, the central elements of Whitman's radical poetic organization are precisely those so important in expressing the colloquial prose base.

The most important single organizing technique is the omnipresence of the narrator-central character, "Walt Whitman," the poet's persona.⁴ It is the all-pervading gaze of this persona which links everything, for Whitman's poetry is largely the record of ecstatic witnessing. This persona is used by both poetry and prose writers. The central figure is isolated from his fellow man and, at the same time, representative of essential humanity. Whitman's use of the intrusive wondering narrator colors and organizes all his poetry. Even in the sections where the narrator is not explicitly present, the informal colloquial tone and the memory of the narrator remain to organize the disparate sections. Together, colloquial

tone and the all-experiencing narrator relate all subjects as those seen or experienced by the central character, "Walt Whitman."

Originally this is a prose technique characteristic of loosely organized works. Yet following Walt Whitman, William Carlos Williams, and others, it becomes identified with much of the best twentieth century poetry as well.

On a somewhat smaller scale, we find the alternation of narrative (or explanatory) with chant-like listing sections. Critics using terms taken from the opera have named this pattern the alternation of "arias" and "recitatives." The aria, or elaborate melody sung by one voice, relates closely to the narrative. The recitative, a series of changing figures, is the musical parallel of the list and chant sections (introduced in Chapter Two, pages 47 through 50). These two analogies are helpful, and the allusions to opera inherent in the terms underscore the poet's recognition of many types of rhythms, some of which attempt to approximate normal speech.

One more structural analogy is also pertinent. The typical sermon form with its three or four part structure also approximates Whitman's structure. The normal pattern consists of a terse or paradoxical quotation followed by the explanation of the concept for discussion. Then the speaker reinforces the abstract idea and its explanation with multiple parables or examples. The things seen in these sections boldly illustrate and give force to the concepts introduced in the first, narrative or explanatory, section. The third, and sometimes final, section of a sermon restates the central abstract idea unifying all the examples. In effect, this

may be simply a repetition or varied restatement of section one made necessary by the length and diversity of the intervening material. The fourth section of the typical sermon is the application of the text to the life of the listener.

Whitman's poetry often follows this pattern closely. At times, explanatory restatement is omitted because each section is very short. Sections Four, Twenty, and Thirty-One of "Song of Myself" exemplify the abbreviated three step sermon pattern. Section Four, quoted below, is the shortest of these.

- 1 Trippers and askers surround me,
- 2 People I meet, the effect upon me of my early life or
 the ward and city I live in, or the nation,
- 3 The latest dates, discoveries, inventions, societies,
 authors old and new,
- 4 My dinner, dress, associates, looks, compliments, dues,
- 5 The real or fancied indifference of some man or woman
 I love,
- 6 The sickness of one of my folks or of myself, or ill-
 doing or loss or lack of money, or depressions,
 or exaltations.
- 7 Battles, the horrors of fratricidal war, the fever of
 doubtful news, the fitful events;
- 8 These come to me days and nights and go from me again,
- 9 But they are not the Me myself.
- 10 Apart from the pulling and hauling stands what I am,
- 11 Stands amused, complacent, compassionate, idle, unitary,
- 12 Looks down, is erect, or bends an arm on an impalpable
 certain rest,
- 13 Looking with side-curved head curious what will come next,
- 14 Both in and out of the game and watching and wondering
 at it,
- 15 Backward I see in my own days where I sweated through
 fog with linguists and contenders,
- 16 I have no mockings or arguments, I witness and wait.⁵

Line one establishes the main idea. Lines two through nine present parallels and examples. Lines ten through fourteen offer a detailed restatement of the central theme. The last lines,

"Backward I see in my own days where I sweated through fog with linguists and contenders, / I have no mockings or arguments, I witness and wait," state the application of the idea presented and developed in the section. In several other sections close variants of this basic sermon pattern are present. The most important variant is the deferral of the initial explanation for a few lines. The first lines are given over to a short, cryptic statement--the text for explication in that section. Sections Thirty-Three and Thirty-Seven of "Song of Myself" exemplify this type.

1 Space and Time! now I see it is true, what I guess'd at,
 2 What I guess'd when I loaf'd on the grass,
 3 What I guess'd while I lay alone in my bed,
 4 And again as I walk'd the beach under the paling stars
 of the morning.
 5 My ties and ballasts leave me, my elbows rest in sea-
 gasp,
 6 I skirt sierras, my palms cover continents,
 7 I am afoot with my vision.⁶

Only the last of these lines, "I am afoot with my vision," states clearly the central issue. Over one hundred and twenty lines of diverse parable-like examples of cosmic vision follow.

In cases where no three-step process exists within any one section, the shortness of each section generally makes restatement unnecessary. Also, the conclusion of one section is often the premise for a subsequent passage. Whitman's message builds cumulatively. In very long sections Whitman uses the full sermon pattern. Lines one through five of Section One embody the cryptic text for explication.

1 I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
 2 And what I assume, you shall assume
 3 For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

4 I loafe and invite my soul,
 5 I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of sum-
 mer grass.⁷

The remainder of Section One and the majority of Section Two continue to establish the text to be explained.

The last five lines of Section Two and Section Three offer the clarified statement of the subject for discussion. The central statements for elaboration throughout the entire poem are these:

1 Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess
 the origin of all poems,
 2 You shall possess the good of the earth and sun, (there
 are millions of suns left,)
 3 You shall no longer take things at second or third hand,
 nor look through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on
 the spectres in books,
 4 You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take
 things from me,
 5 You shall listen to all sides and filter them from your
 self.⁸

The explanation continues in Section Three. Indeed, each verse paragraph sets a topic for later full sections, for example

There was never any more inception than there is now,
 Nor any more youth or age than there is now,
 And will never be any more perfection than there is now.⁹

Urge and urge and urge,
 Always the procreant urge of the world.
 Out of the dimness opposite equals advance, always
 substance and increase, always sex,
 Always a knit of identity, always distinction, always
 a breed of life.¹⁰

Welcome is every organ and attribute of me, and of
 any man hearty and clean,
 Nor an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile, and
 none shall be less familiar than the rest.¹¹

Sections Six through Forty-Three are primarily parables and long exemplifying sections. The longest of these lists--Section Thirty-Three--is close to the center of the poem. This explanatory

catalogue extends for several pages; it is not necessary to quote these pages, but it is important to stress the emphasis upon examples characteristic of the middle section of the poem.

Section Six, the initial section of the exemplifying second part of the sermon format, centers on the parable of the child asking, "What is the grass?" Other secular parables in this section include the Alamo, the male bathers, the fight at sea, and the slave escaping toward freedom.

With Section Thirty-Eight, the poem makes the first move toward beginning clarificatory recapitulation and explanation. But the movement does not get under way fully until Section Forty-Four. Here, Whitman begins with the typical sermon-like lines, "It is time to explain myself--let us stand up."¹² In this section, Section Forty-Five, and the first lines of Section Forty-Six, Whitman clarifies his message. These sections offer the collective answer to all the sub-sections of the poem. Here Whitman says,

I launch all men and women forward with me into the
Unknown. . . .
We have thus far exhausted trillions of winters and
summers,
There are trillions ahead, and trillions ahead of them.

Births have brought us richness and variety,
And other births will bring us richness and variety,

I do not call one greater and one smaller,
That which fills its period and place is equal to any.

I am an acme of things accomplish'd, and I am an encloser
of things to be.

My feet strike an apex of the apices of the stairs,
On every step bunches of ages, and larger bunches between
the steps,
All below duly travel'd, and still I mount and mount.

All forces have been steadily employ'd to complete and
 delight me,
 Now on this spot I stand with my robust soul.

Every condition promulgates not only itself, it promul-
 ges what grows after and out of itself. . . .

I open my scuttle at night and see the far-sprinkled
 systems.

And all I see multiplied as high as I can cipher edge
 but the rim of the farther systems.

Wider and wider they spread, expanding, always expanding,
 Outward and outward and forever outward.

There is no stoppage and never can be stoppage.

My rendezvous is appointed, it is certain,
 The Lord will be there and wait till I come on perfect
 terms,
 The great Camerado, the lover true for whom I pine will
 be there,¹³

With Sections Forty-Six through the end of "Song of Myself," we find the characteristic ending of the typical sermon--the application of the sermon to the reader. In Forty-Six Whitman says, "I tramp a perpetual journey. . . . / Not I, not any one else can travel that road for you, / You must travel it for yourself / It is not far, it is within reach. . . ." ¹⁴

I am the teacher of athletes,
 He that by me spreads a wider breast than my own proves
 the width of my own,
 He most honors my style who learns under it to destroy
 the teacher. . . .
 I teach straying from me.¹⁵

The rest of the poem further applies Whitman's message to the reader; then, the poem ends with a recapitulation of the main themes and a formalized closing.

This sermon structure is important for its descriptive quality, but it is also noteworthy that the sermon, like the use of the intrusive narrator and the picaresque plot, is primarily a prose structure.

Gay Wilson Allen and his followers have isolated many of the smaller structures which appear in both Whitmanic and Biblical poetry. Significantly, these elements are precisely those central to the establishing of rhetorically expansive colloquial prose. The first technique which Allen has identified is parallelism, which he divides into four sub-types. His definition accurately states that

The first rhythmical principle of Leaves of Grass is . . . parallel structure: the line is the rhythmical unit, each line balancing its predecessor, and complementing or supplementing its meaning. This "parallelism" may also be called "a rhythm of thought". . . . It also produces a phonetic recurrence similar to the rhythm we ordinarily speak of as meter, but the first and most fundamental principle is a thought-rhythm. . . .

The fact that Whitman intended his line to be considered as the unit is . . . indicated by the punctuation: i.e., practically every line ends with a comma or period. [The existence of only twenty run-on lines in 10,500 lines emphasizes this point.]¹⁶

Synonymous parallelism is the first type. According to Allen's definition, it is parallelism in which "the second line enforces the first by repeating the thought" with or without using the same words again.¹⁷ In this and the following instances I shall include the Whitmanic passages Allen cites.

I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable,
I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.

Closely related is antithetical parallelism, in which "The second line denies or contrasts the first."¹⁸ Allen states, however, that this form is rarely used in Leaves of Grass. His example is

A woman waits for me,
 She contains all,
 Nothing is lacking,
 Yet all were lacking if sex were lacking.

Allen's third type of parallelism is synthetic or cumulative parallelism. Here, "the second line, or several consecutive lines, supplements or completes the first."¹⁹

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
 And what I assume you shall assume,
 For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

Allen's fourth class of parallelism is climactic or parallelism of ascending rhythm. Allen defines this as parallelism in which "each succeeding line adds to its predecessor, usually taking up words from it and completing it."²⁰ He quotes these lines to exemplify climactic parallelism.

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd
 And the great star early droop'd in the western sky
 in the night,
 I mourned, and yet shall mourn with ever returning
 spring,
 Ever returning spring, trinity sure to me you bring,
 Lilacs blooming perennial and drooping star in the
 west,
 And thought of him I love.

A fifth Biblical parallelistic device which Allen sees occurring extensively in Leaves of Grass is the envelope, in which "the parallelism may be either of figures or thought. . . . In the envelope of thought-parallelism, the initial line states an idea or a proposition, succeeding lines parallel thoughts regarding the first line, and the final line states a concluding thought."²¹ Allen says that here either the introduction or the conclusion may

be omitted. He cites these lines from "Song of Sunset" to show the pattern of the envelope.

Good in all,
 In the satisfaction and aplomb of animals,
 In the annual return of seasons,
 In the hilarity of youth,
 In the strength and flush of manhood,
 In the grandeur and exquisiteness of old age,
 In the superb vistas of death.

One final type of parallelism is cited as being similar in Whitmanic and Biblical poetry--internal parallelism--exemplified below.²²

a I celebrate myself,
 a and sing myself,
 b And what I assume,
 b you shall assume,
 c For every atom belonging to me
 c as good belongs to you

and the more common

a I too am not a bit tamed,
 a I too am untranslatable,
 a I too sound my barbaric yawp. . . .

Allen expresses similar ideas to those I advanced in the section on repetition and rhythm in Chapter Two. He asserts,

Rhythm is repetition; in conventional 'meters,' it is composed of repetitions in a certain order (conforming either rigidly or in a general way to a pattern) of speech accents, or the interplay of stressed and unstressed syllables. The repetition of thoughts or ideas is also a rhythm . . . and is actually felt as a rhythm once the mind has been trained to expect it.

But since thoughts are expressed by means of spoken sounds . . . , it is possible for a poem to have two rhythms, one of thought and the other of sounds. . . . In Leaves of Grass parallel thoughts have a tendency to slide into parallel manners of expression, including both grammatical constructions and similar phonetic recurrences.

. . . these reiterations [of sounds] may . . . set up a rhythm of their own, either syncopating or completely distorting the

regular metrical pattern, but there is the very important difference between reiteration in rime and meter and reiteration in Leaves of Grass: in the former the poem has a set pattern (iambic, etc.,) whereas in Whitman's verse there is no set pattern of sounds until the reiterations produce one.²³

Allen correctly asserts similarity in terms of initial, medial, and final repetition--techniques which I have handled in the rhythm section of Chapter Two. The Biblical and vernacular prose hypotheses agree in asserting initial repetition, "repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of the line," with this quotation and explanation.

Out of the cradle endlessly rocking,
Out of the mockingbird's throat, . . .
Out of the Ninth-month midnight. . . .

Even though these lines are of unequal length, the initial reiteration sets up a cadence which carries through the whole line. The same cadence, of course, is seldom present through many consecutive lines, and it would be monstrous if it were. But Whitman is especially skillful in interweaving his cadences, as in "Give me the Splendid Silent Sun." In this poem, the first cadence is distinguished by the reiteration of "give me." In the second strophe the cadence is varied by brief repetitions; the second cadence . . . is achieved mainly by the reiteration of "Keep your . . ."; and then the poet quickly shifts to the first cadence for several lines, and plays variations throughout the remainder of the poem.²⁴

Allen defines medial and final repetition as the "repetition of the word or phrase within or at the end of the poetic line."²⁵ Both types of repetition occur in this section taken from "By Blue Ontario's Shore."

I will know if I am to be less than they,
I will see if I am not as majestic as they,
I will see if I am not as subtle as they,
I will see if I am to be less generous than they.

Allen's Biblical parallelism also concurs with the colloquial prose pattern in seeing the possibility for word or phrase repetition

in many positions in the line.²⁶ In showing this technique, he cites a section from "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd."

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

This critic asserts that reiteration can be used "to produce cadence--i.e., (1) the musical rhythms of the line depend largely upon phonic reiterations, (2) to band lines together into strophes or stanzaic divisions, and (3) to achieve purely oratorical effects. . . . parallelism and reiteration are characteristically oratorical rhythms."²⁷ The last of these three usages is important because the critic admits the rhythm is essentially "oratorical," that is, characteristic of spoken prose, rather than of poetry. It is precisely this view which I have adopted and view as central to Whitman's poetry.

Finally, Allen emphasizes the importance of initial and final repetition. He says they often "mark the beginning and ending of a strophe. Yet this is less important than the fact that they are responsible for the beginning and ending of cadences. In other words, the most important use of phonetic reiterations is rhythmical and musical."²⁸

These aspects of Biblical poetry clearly parallel recurrent elements in Whitman's poetry. Yet the case presented by these

critics is not as impressive as it first seems. While Allen can cite basic rhetorical structures, Bridgman's colloquial prose hypothesis handles them equally well. Even Allen admits these are rhetorical, rather than poetic, techniques.

Far more important are the aspects of Whitman's poetry which the Biblical critics cannot explain. They do not consider the overall structure of Whitman's major poems or the majority of his multi-line and intra-line structural techniques. The Biblical exponents cannot deal with the role of the vernacular narrator or Whitman's dedication to America, democracy, and American vernacular language patterns. Whitman repeatedly stresses the importance of these aspects in his poetry and states that he intends a poetry which epitomizes them. These critics also cannot see any relation between Whitman's themes and his organizational techniques (a relation which the American vernacular prose hypothesis handles easily.) The Biblical scholars cannot account either for many qualities of Whitman's poetry, like the many page lists, the deliberately unlit-erary language, or the moments of conscious looseness in his verse. Nor can they predict the order of Whitman's structures or explain his rationale for using that order. Finally, Allen and his fol-lowers simply do not deal with the whole range of techniques, themes, and vocabulary which Whitman uses. The vernacular prose approach to Whitman's poetry is able to integrate and explain all these qualities without strain.

Among Whitman's most important characteristics is his con-sistent subordination of narrative to the building of parallels,

sound effects, and other structural devices. The plot advances haltingly. Only the rhythms and parallelisms move the poems forward consistently. Structure emphasizes these concentrations of formative techniques. As such, Whitman is entirely in step with elite poetry. Here, too, plot is subordinated to technique. And the poem is judged best which affords the greatest density of inter-related techniques and structures.

Balancing at all levels is also extremely important. It operates for both philosophic and rhythmic purposes, as I suggested in Chapter Two. Careful balancing is among the most central qualities of nineteenth century oratory; no word or phrase is left dangling. Each is neatly paralleled by its complement or set off by its antithesis. Nineteenth century music exhibits comparable emphasis upon balancing. Caesar Franck's music, for example, is bound even more rigidly than Whitman's poetry. Each metrical or musical foot demands its complement, and the resulting unit too must be balanced. This multiple balancing in Whitman's poetry, nineteenth century oratory, and music of that century continues on to the largest units.

The structure is dominant in music, oratory, and poetry because the early nineteenth century sees itself as a uniquely orderly place. Man's position in the universe appears secure, and scientific discovery appears on the brink of discovering all nature's secrets. Hegel proposes that constant turmoil between opposites leads inevitably to higher synthesis. He sees truth existing in antithetical elements and believes that the mingling of thesis and

antithesis produces a greater synthesis. Men believe in the upward movement of mankind, and balancing, productive of a higher synthesis, seems to forward thinkers to be the operating mechanism for this advancement. Even later, as the early nineteenth century views begin to come apart, many nineteenth century writers and thinkers consciously struggle to maintain the old structures of belief and perception. Whitman's use of balancing implies all these things. In Section Three of "Song of Myself," he declares,

Urge and urge and urge,
 Always the procreant urge of the world,
 Out of the dimness opposite equals advance, always
 substance and increase, always sex,
 Always a knit of identity, always distinction,
 always a breed of life.²⁹

Many other passages throughout Whitman's poetry confirm this message--balancing of opposites leads always to a higher synthesis.

Thus balancing is important in Whitman's poetry for oratorical reasons as well as on philosophical grounds. Yet it is not fair to Whitman to stop after giving only this impression. For all his characteristic nineteenth century faith in man and the incessantly productive meeting of opposites, Whitman is uncharacteristic of that century in recognizing the possibilities of many rhythms, working together at times, antithetically at times, and completely out of phase at others. Whitman's use of multiple rhythms and of multiple balancing is a decidedly twentieth century characteristic. The intertwining rhythms of his poetry are like those of Aaron Copeland's El Salon Mexico. Both are characterized by a sense of "polyrhythmic excitement."³⁰ Both artists recognize that more than one rhythm is significant in man's life and art.

Balancing is the most regularly used large scale technique. It becomes more intense and carries on to larger units when a section is especially important to the author. Whitman uses this technique to produce greater poetic density at such points and thereby to attract greater attention. Balancing works effectively within the line and the verse paragraph. Within the line it produces multiplication of a simple syntactical unit (word, phrase, or clause) either by repetition, variation, antithesis, or juxtaposition within a parallel syntactical structure. The use of lists is the simplest example of a structure employing balancing within the line.

Working vertically, within the verse paragraph, balancing produces the most characteristic Whitmanic technique--the chant, or litany, structure. Here, too, balancing works at all levels. It creates an enhanced sense of order and importance. The repetition itself adds greatly to the density of the achieved poetic structure.

Closely related to this horizontal and vertical use of balancing is the building to longer rhythms and more extensive rhetorical periods at moments when Whitman desires a sense of importance or the impression of heightened consciousness. The technique involved in creating these extended rhetorical periods is parallel structuring. The addition of adjectives and the simple multiplication of short syntax structures within a line extend the rhythm and rhetorical period equally well.

The repetition of key terms within a non-parallel structure creates regularity and establishes a thought-rhythm; it also emphasizes the term itself, either for its sound quality or its meaning.

Whitman uses this "motif-like" repetition in two ways, statically and dynamically. Static repetition is the repetition of a single word during the section in which it is important. Normally, the one term will remain important during that entire section or poem. Dynamic, or shifting, repetition is the alternative. Shifting motif repetition emphasizes the important words or phrases at the moment they are important. As slightly different emphases begin to develop, the word being repeated will shift or evolve into the next word for repetition. This dynamic motif quality lends continuity by reproducing the plot or thematic movement with short, easily recognizable key terms.

Another major organizing technique not considered by the Biblical critics is association of ideas or sounds. This technique is much like dynamic motif organization. Association of ideas, used with alliteration and assonance, is Whitman's most basic and direct principle of movement from one idea or sound pattern to another. Regularly, association of ideas and sounds concur. A change in central ideas corresponds to a change in the emphasized pattern of sounds. Association of ideas and sounds, however, tends to change more slowly and gradually than the dynamic motif structure of repeated and shifting key terms.

These organizing principles comprise a major basis of Whitman's poetic structuring. They provide a means of poeticizing his many characteristic prose structures, such as simple syntactical units; rambling, periodic, and incomplete sentences; lists, chants, and polysinditon.

Once the poet has determined that another section is necessary, he designs the section using the normal prose techniques ordered and integrated by balancing, motif organization, association of ideas and sounds, and narrative movement. The new section almost certainly begins with a short poetic line. It will have a very simple syntax. This simple syntax is normally the basis for multiplication either horizontally, within the line, or vertically, in a chant structure. If Whitman chooses to extend the pattern horizontally first (as is usual), he often repeats the simple syntax two or more times within each of several ensuing lines, building to ever-greater rhetorical periods. I will construct a hypothetical Whitmanic horizontal expansion structure in this example.

I am strong,	(subject, verb, adjective)
I am strong, I am large,	
I am strong, I am large, I enclose multitudes.	(minor variation in third repetition)

The horizontal development can also proceed in this fashion.

I am strong,	(subject, verb, adjective)
I am very strong,	(add free element to the parallel structure)
I am very, very strong,	
I am very strong and brave and wise.	

In both types of horizontal development, the basic syntactical unit does not change throughout the expansion. The poet simply repeats the structure in ensuing lines or injects more and more free elements (such as intensifiers, adjectives, nouns, or verbs) into the parallel structure.

The most characteristic Whitmanic horizontal expansion is the list. Here, a single noun or noun phrase at the end of a

simple syntax is multiplied several times within a single line. For example,

I see mountains (subject, verb, object)
 I see mountains, valleys, rivers, rocky creeks with
 trout jumping in the new day sun

Lists regularly begin when other horizontal development techniques have multiplied and expanded the original short, simple syntax to its fullest. The list normally begins with a short line like the first line of the section. Then, it gradually expands, sometimes reaching two or three typed lines before completing one full poetic "line." Throughout this movement from the first line of the rhetorical period onward, the line length and rhetorical period expand consistently, with only slight shortening as one operating structure gives way to the next.

When the horizontal listing has reached its maximum length, Whitman usually remains unsatisfied. He continues to enlarge the pattern by shifting to a vertical development structure, the chant. The chant structure (described on pages 69-71) offers the greatest possibilities for expansion of rhetorical period. By moving to vertical development, to the chant, Whitman can create any syntactical pattern, complete or incomplete, in one line and enlarge it for literally pages. The effect is strongest when the syntactical structure is incomplete, logically attaching pages of partial syntax to the first line of the chant in which the rest of the syntax appears. The mere repetition of the basic partial syntax of each line of the chant fosters the sense of order, regularity, and rhythm. And the long continuation of the chant lends everything a sense of breathless

simultaneity. Much of Whitman's reputation for being a poet of "wonder" derives from this use of ever-expanding syntactical structures culminating in long incomplete chant structures.*

Section Thirty-Three of "Song of Myself," the longest chant structure in the poem, parallels the entire structure I have outlined above. I will quote only enough of the section to establish the similarity.

- 1 Space and Time! now I see it is true, what I guess'd at,
- 2 What I guess'd at when I loaf'd on the grass,
- 3 What I guess'd while I lay alone in my bed,
- 4 And again as I walked the beach under the paling stars
 of the morning.

- 5 My ties and ballasts leave me, my elbows rest in sea-
 gaps,
- 6 I skirt sierras, my palms cover continents,
- 7 I am afoot with my vision.

- 8 By the city's quadrangular houses--in log huts, camping
 with lumbermen,
- 9 Along the ruts of the turnpike, along the dry gulch
 and rivulet bed,
- 10 Weeding my onion-patch or hoeing rows of carrots and par-
 snips, crossing savannas, trailing in forests,
- 11 Prospecting, gold-digging, girdling the trees of a new
 purchase,
- 12 Scorched ankle-deep by the hot sand, hauling my boat down
 the shallow river,
- 13 Where the panther walks to and fro on a limb overhead,
 Where the buck turns furiously at the hunter. . . .³¹

In line one, the words "What I guess'd at" set up the basic short syntax unit. This unit is developed by multiplication and by introduction of free elements into the parallel structure ("When I loaf'd on the grass," etc., lines 2, 3, 4). With lines five and six

* For more general discussion of this topic, see Tony Tanner, "Walt Whitman's Ecstatic First Step," The Reign of Wonder: Naivety and Reality in American Literature (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 64-86.

the basic syntactical pattern is extended. Whitman lengthens the rhetorical period by repeating the structure within a single line. "My ties and ballasts leave me, my elbows rest in sea gaps." In line seven, "I am afoot . . ." introduces the basic structure on which the listing lines (eight through twelve) will build: "in log huts, camping with lumbermen / Along the ruts. . . ." Finally, in line twelve, where Whitman has expanded the listing syntax to its breaking point by continually adding larger units, the chant structure begins. Line thirteen signals this shift to the chant structure, with each line offering only one experience, each couched in a partial syntax, tied to the completing syntactical units of lines seven and eight. It is not necessary to quote the chant in its entirety. It continues for over one hundred and twenty lines.

It is important to note that within the ensuing chant structure, the rhetorical period also gets longer and longer. The technique here, too, is both multiplication of the parallel syntax and inclusion of longer and longer free units within each line. After the mood and the rhetorical period reach their fullest, the process begins to reverse. The chant becomes shorter and eventually ends in a list, which in turn gives way to a simple syntax. Again, I quote only the smallest amount necessary to establish the validity of my structure.

- 1 Speeding through space, speeding through heaven and the
 stars,
- 2 Speeding amid the seven satellites and the broad ring,
 and the diameter of eighty thousand miles,

- 3 Speeding with tail'd meteors, throwing fire-balls like
 the rest,
 4 Carrying the crescent child that carries its own full
 mother in its belly,
 5 Storming, enjoying, planning, loving, cautioning,
 backing and filling, appearing and disappearing,
 6 I tread day and night such roads.³²

The chant of lines one through four leads to the listing of line five, and finally to the conclusive short, simple syntax shown in line six.

A regular Whitmanic technique used in conjunction with these structures is the use of and, either joining nouns, verbs, or clauses. The use of and's to separate nouns or verbs frames the picture or action while it also extends the rhetorical period. When the run-on sentence structure is used, the and's tend to run actions together, producing the same sense of simultaneity as the use of the chant structure.

Loose, periodic, rambling, and incomplete sentences serve in several ways to advance Whitman's poetic mode. They have less force and cohesiveness than the normal short sentence. As such, these sentence patterns act as loose frames within which smaller rhythmic units and individualized concrete images can become dominant. These sentence patterns also allow the poet to string several unrelated actions together in characteristically colloquial patterns.

Two final large scale techniques occur frequently. The use of the refrain as the first line of a verse paragraph, rather than the last, emphasizes order and regularity. The appearance of regularity is more than usually necessary in Whitman's poetry because it is based upon colloquial prose rather than the apparently more

regular conventional syllabic verse. By putting the refrain first, both the eye and the ear recognize regularity, and the refrain usually builds into other structures which enhance the rhythm and order of the passage without restricting the freedom of prose rhythms.

The last important technique is the use of multi-line lines. Whitman uses these unusual lines for two very different purposes. The first usage occurs simply as the ultimate expansion of a chant or listing structure. As such, it marks the utmost intensity of feeling or the greatest expansion of consciousness in a sense of wonder.

The second usage involves indisputably prosy lines like this one: "When I heard at the close of the day how my name had been receiv'd with plaudits in the capitol, still it was not a happy night for me that follow'd."³³ This type of line is used as the ultimate counter to the conventional artificial syllabic verse of most nineteenth century poetry. Rather than being simply very bad lines, I see them as an assertion of the worth and validity of colloquial prose as a medium for poetry. Quite often, lines like this occur after the prose-poetry has begun to fall into too regular syllabic patterns. Then, these long, extremely prosy lines shake the reader out of any unconscious syllabic rhythm. The consciousness of the prose base necessarily grows. Such lines usually do not recur; thus there is no way that a regular rhythm based upon repetition of the line can begin. Prosy lines far longer than any normal syllabic line show Whitman's consciousness of his radical experiment in

colloquial prose and buttress his claim. Later, the Chicago Renaissance poets, especially Carl Sandburg, use this same technique in similar situations.

Whitman uses many other techniques in structuring smaller units of his poetry. Within the typical Whitmanic line, several elements work consistently. Most important, we must remember that the single word or very short phrase is the basic rhythmic and syntactical unit, just as the line is the predominant unit of meaning in Whitman's verse. This short unit is repeated, varied, inverted, or juxtaposed against a counter-rhythm. Once the pattern of rhythm becomes established, the poet's work is well on its way. Whitman does not move quickly toward the adoption of multiple synonyms; oral poetry demands all possible repetition. Therefore, originality of phrasing cannot be a consistent Whitmanic quality.

As Whitman establishes the pattern, he immediately becomes aware of the possibilities of balancing at the intra-line level. Balancing supports the nascent order and rhythmic regularity. This rhythmic regularity demands that no parenthetical information or subordination of any kind be allowed. The omission of these rhythm-breaking words, phrases, and clauses, insures that the regularity and musicality induced by the techniques listed above will not be diluted beyond recognition. The prose rhythms, induced by repetition, disappear when repetition does not occur regularly and frequently. Thus the prohibition on subordination, characteristic of colloquial prose, is equally important in fostering the sense of poetic regularity and control.

These techniques are among the most important in creating controlled regularity and rhythm. By carefully husbanding these rhythms whenever possible, the poet opens the door to several equally productive counter-techniques. Breaking rhythms at critical points can be as poetically productive as asserting the rhythm in the first place. The same is true of the expectations produced by many types of balancing as well as by repetition. Even the regular appearance of the essential word and phrase unit as the syntactical and rhythmic base affords opportunities for controlled movement toward other units or breaking of the basic rhythms for emphasis.

Beyond these, several other more autonomous techniques operate. Just as establishing and breaking rhythms operates effectively on the intra-line level, so also does creating and breaking the expectation of the language level and the commonness of words used. The simple, common word is the basic sense and rhythmic unit. But the establishment of this pattern opens great possibilities to the counter-technique--the longer, rhythm breaking, unusual or foreign word.

Concrete imagery portrayed without transitions is also significant. Whitman's is the poetry of pictures of the nation and the world. These pictures express the diversity and individuality of each entity. Whitman offers multiple views consciously lacking transition, except for the use of neutral framing words like and. Concreteness is important just as the fragmented syntax is important. Each emphasizes the individual, the small unit over the whole. Each is an example of Whitman's theory of democracy. The individual is

never swallowed by the mass. It dominates and colors the nature of the larger structure. The demands of colloquial speech and plot-furtherance call for the use of and's to extend rhetorical patterns and to keep the narrative moving.

In terms of sound quality, Whitman's poetry depends heavily upon alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia, and even internal rhyme. These sound effects occur in concentrations around the most important sections and ideas in the poem. Alliteration is the most important of these because of its initial position in the sound-repeating words. It not only produces a continuing sound pattern; it also offers the reader an eye pattern and an intellectual sense of regularity even stronger than the traditional line end rhyme. Many times, Whitman uses the same word many times to introduce the pattern of alliteration and assonance. Internal rhyme is closely associated. It, too, asserts regularity. Whitman rejects end-rhyme, however. Although end-rhyme has obvious potential in asserting order, rhythm, and regularity, Whitman avoids it. The reason is simple. End rhyme is the most noticeable characteristic of normal nineteenth century American and British poetry. Since Whitman's rebellion is conscious, he regularly avoids rhyme so that the reader will not see the attributes of the old poetry and miss the new which Whitman is trying to emphasize.

Whitman normally sets up repetitions, lists, and chants by using and's, other conjunctions, present participles, and prepositions. Since these elements are the ones which normally occur at the beginning of all short syntax units, they support the contention

that the short syntactical unit--word or phrase--is indeed the basis for Whitman's rhythm. Words like these are not important in traditional poetry, but in Whitman's oral poetry their role is different. They become easily recognized signals of his repetitive oral structuring. Since conjunctions, present participles, and prepositions appear very frequently in normal speech, they are easily adaptable to any repetitive situation. The conspicuous ing ending of present participles offers apparent regularity while it remains free to attach itself to any verb stem.

Although Whitman is rebelling against syllabic poetry, he remains very conscious of the relative rhythmic strength or weakness of words. The weakness of coordinating conjunctions and prepositions makes them natural choices to begin short rhythmic and syntactical units; thus lists, chants, and intraline structures regularly show many repetitions of these words leading short phrases. They tend to set and reinforce the prose rhythm while lending poetic regularity to the passage.

Finally, association of ideas operates pervasively on the intra-line structural level. The absence of transitions, except for and's and the limited use of directional prepositions hinders plot advancement and word choice. Association of ideas works closely with sound effects, especially alliteration and assonance, to fill the gap and influence the choice of words, sounds, and topics. These techniques vary greatly in their frequency of usage. Almost every poem which the twentieth century considers great makes heavy use of alliteration and association. Whitman's worst poems, by our

standards, are those which lack the density provided by association, alliteration, assonance, as well as the tone of wondering awe.

Punctuation also influences rhythm and meaning at the intra-line level. Whitman's writing eschews subordination and transitions; therefore, dashes constitute an important means of linking statements and bridging the apparent sense of complete unrelatedness. Even more important, however, is the use of the comma, Whitman's most important punctuation tool.

The use of commas between words, phrases, and clauses not linked by conjunctions, serves to signal rhythm and meaning. Using commas to join normally incomplete syntactical units allows more exclusive focusing upon actions or pictures. At the same time, it promotes the sense of expansive vision and simultaneity so central to Whitman's message and technique.

Parenthesis, especially parenthesis enclosing very unrhythmic prose passages, serves as the means of breaking or temporarily suspending a developed rhythm. Parenthesis reasserts the prose base, and it allows some softening of Whitman's prescription against subordination. The major function, though, is certainly momentary suspension of evolved rhythms and reassertion of the elemental prose base.

These are the organizing principles, the major and intra-line techniques which guide and support Whitman's poetic revolution. They appear throughout Whitman's poetry because they function more effectively than any others in harmonizing the qualities of prose

with the needs of verse. In other words, the techniques are present because the base is prose.

Let us now take a longer view of Whitman's poetry. The dominant qualities are a sense of wonder and a centering upon the immediate movement. Whitman's poetry emphasizes simultaneity and expansiveness. The successful poems offer a unique conjunction of all the techniques and structures presented above. These produce a poetic density equal, if not superior to, that of more conventional verse.

In the instances where Whitman's poetry fails, it is normally because the informal tone and sense of wonder are missing. In addition, the apparent inability to intertwine structures and techniques effectively leads to a lack of satisfying density, rhythm, and texture. When the emphasis goes too heavily upon either poetry, as in "O Captain, My Captain," or upon prose, as in "A Hand Mirror," the effect is usually unsatisfactory. Whitman's poetic greatness depends upon the organic interrelation of prose and poetic elements.

Whitman attempts not only to balance poetry and prose, but also to find an equilibrium somewhere between the folk, popular, and elite traditions as they exist in America during the nineteenth century. He integrates folk patterning, common language, and elite infrastructuring and subordination of plot. Ultimately, elite elements dominate Whitman's poetry. The subject matter, though expressed in common words and concrete images, is extremely abstract and theoretical. Most important, Whitman's poetry lacks the easy centering of plot, so characteristic of the popular tradition, and

even to a limited extent, of the nineteenth century elite tradition. Finally, Whitman's poetry, though outwardly "licentious" in treating sections like the lonely spinster watching the twentieth-eight naked male bathers, is largely devoid of the "chastely" titillating elements so characteristic of the nineteenth century popular poetic mode.

Whitman's poetry went largely unnoticed until the early twentieth century. Then, the changing canons of literature and criticism created an atmosphere more conducive to his theory and practice. Whitman failed, in the nineteenth century's view, because he offended proprieties and created a poetry too different from normal poetry to be immediately accepted. The biggest reason that the nineteenth century democratic man did not read Whitman's poetry was that there was no galloping plot to sustain interest and carry any incidental "moral."

Whitman "failed" because the nineteenth century was not ready for him. Nineteenth century criticism fostered simplicity and order, more conspicuously regular forms. It was not until years later that people began to see order, rhythm, and structure in Whitman's poetry. And by that time his disciples, the Chicago Renaissance poets, would adopt his theory and achieve popularity by adding more plot and all the raciness of a popular scandal sheet. Carl Sandburg adopts and furthers Whitman's poetic theory and practice. His success is due both to the public's increasing readiness to accept this poetry and to his more direct centering upon the life, interests, and problems of the common man. Although Sherwood Anderson does not write much poetry, his Mid-American Chants bears the unmistakable imprint

of Whitmanic techniques and structures. He, too, further develops Whitman's poetic theory under the partial guidance of Gertrude Stein and through his own brand of mystical realism.

With the first edition of Leaves of Grass, the stage is set. Whitman's poetry changes very little in the years following 1855. Once public taste and poetic theory move toward acceptance of twentieth century elite standards, a better audience is assured. While the change in literary standards is occurring, Sandburg and Anderson are busily pushing Whitman's theory closer to the popular pole where the people Whitman loves can appreciate it more.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Walt Whitman, Specimen Days, quoted in Bliss Perry, Walt Whitman: His Life and Work (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1906), p. 69.

² Walt Whitman, "Unsigned Review of 'Leaves of Grass,'" quoted in Louis Untermeyer, ed., Modern American Poetry, Modern British Poetry, New and Enlarged Edition (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1958), p. 38.

³ Sculley Bradley, "The Fundamental Metrical Principle in Whitman's Poetry," American Literature, X (1938), 437-459.

⁴ Donald D. Kummings, "The Vernacular Perspective in American Poetry: Philip Freneau, Walt Whitman, and William Carlos Williams," (Diss. Indiana Univ., 1971).

⁵ Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," The Works of Walt Whitman in Two Volumes as Prepared by Him for the Deathbed Edition, ed., Malcolm Cowley (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1968), II, 65.

⁶ Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 90.

⁷ Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 62.

⁸ Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 63.

⁹ Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 64.

¹⁰ Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 64.

¹¹ Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 64.

¹² Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 105.

¹³ Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 105-108.

¹⁴ Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 108.

¹⁵ Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 109-110.

¹⁶ Gay Wilson Allen, "Walt Whitman," American Prosody (Chicago: American Book Co., 1935), pp. 221-222.

¹⁷ Allen, American Prosody, p. 222.

¹⁸ Allen, American Prosody, p. 222.

- 19 Allen, American Prosody, p. 222.
- 20 Allen, American Prosody, p. 222.
- 21 Allen, American Prosody, p. 223.
- 22 Allen, American Prosody, p. 223.
- 23 Allen, American Prosody, p. 229.
- 24 Allen, American Prosody, p. 231.
- 25 Allen, American Prosody, p. 225.
- 26 Allen, American Prosody, p. 231.
- 27 Allen, American Prosody, p. 231.
- 28 Allen, American Prosody, p. 232.
- 29 Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 64.
- 30 Leonard Bernstein, Rhythm, televised lecture.
- 31 Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 89-90.
- 32 Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 92-93.
- 33 Whitman, "When I Heard at the Close of the Day," Works,
I, 138.

CHAPTER FOUR

MASTERS, LINDSAY, AND THE WHITMANIC SYNTHESIS

Carl Sandburg, Sherwood Anderson, Vachel Lindsay, and Edgar Lee Masters follow Whitman in writing oral vernacular poetry. The popular acclaim these poets have enjoyed parallels the degree to which they share Whitman's underlying assumptions. Carl Sandburg is Whitman's closest poetic and philosophic heir. He has, consequently, received much the same continuing recognition as his mentor. Sherwood Anderson maintains a great Whitmanic faith in America throughout his lifetime, but he is affected by conditions which might have tried even Whitman's optimism. Consequently, the completely harmonious integration characteristic of Whitman and Sandburg is absent.

With the poetry of Edgar Lee Masters and Vachel Lindsay, the harmonious integration of Whitmanic assumptions, themes, and poetic techniques comes completely apart. At moments, Masters and Lindsay produce poetry of great quality and force, like Spoon River Anthology, "Bryan, Bryan, Bryan, Bryan," and "The Eagle that is Forgotten." At other times their cynicism, pessimism, and genteel romanticism make successful use of vernacular poetry impossible.

Edgar Lee Masters recognizes the importance of Whitmanic experiments and their relation to the America of Whitman's dream.

He refers to Whitman, saying, "Poets and creative thinkers make a nation by ideas and aesthetic leadership. . . . Whitman consciously strove to mould America to his dream of greatness and nobility."¹ Masters tribute to Whitman's poetry and its relation to his view of America is even more impressive. He says, "Whitman was a pioneer. . . . He felled to some extent the encumbering forest and let later eyes see in part what the lay of the land was, what its resources were . . . and what its fertility. This had to be done in order that later poets could build beautiful cities of song, always original and of a new age and a new land, and incapable of being known by any other designation save that they were American."²

Masters follows Whitman's lead in dealing with American folklore and experience. He treats subjects like Lincoln and Johnny Appleseed along with common rural and urban Americans. Yet despite the similarity in subjects, Masters' use of Whitmanic oral technique remains only incipient. Clearly, Masters' very different philosophy explains the inappropriateness of many Whitmanic techniques.

Masters is the most conservative of the Chicago Renaissance poets, and he remains the product of genteel romanticism. A few lines from "A Cenotaph of Sorrows" exemplify this heritage.

This is the tragic and the fateful stone . . .
 A symbol and a paradigm,
 A sphinx of elegy and battle hymn
 Whose lips unlock
 Life's secret, which is vanquishment, defeat,
 In epic dirges for the races
 That pass and leave no traces.³

1

The poem is written in traditional syllabic verse, and American rhythmic and speech patterns are completely lacking. The diction is also artificially poetic rather than a real American dialect. Words and phrases like "the fateful stone," "a sphinx of elegy," "vanquishment," "epic dirges," and even the title, "A Cenotaph of Sorrows," are abstract and artificial. Also, the last two lines of this passage seek finality in a closing rhyme. Masters regularly uses rhyme, a dominant characteristic of earlier poetry and the specific technique which Whitman rejects. Finally, the pessimistic tone of this passage is representative of Masters' work. Other Masters poems duplicate the qualities of this poem. Many even use regular stanzaic patterns and iambic pentameter lines.

Passages such as the one above make clear that many of Master's poetic and philosophic assumptions are antithetical to Whitman's. Masters lacks Whitman's optimism in America's prospects and the universal order. Also, although he often deals with Americans, Masters does not share Whitman's faith in a special destiny for this democratic nation. Instead, he sees one defeated civilization inexorably giving way to the next. Masters' writing offers little pride in America. He turns away from the masses and aligns himself exclusively with an aristocracy of spirit in a way Whitman would never do. Only those who have been through the fire of experience and have gained a true understanding of life hold Masters' respect.

Masters' literary biases, too, are largely anti-Whitmanic. While Masters recognizes much of the nature and value of the new

poetry, he is incapable of breaking the hold of the old. With these assumptions, there is little impetus to present American idiom or speech rhythms. And more important, the instances in which these do appear often suggest a snobbishly patronizing view of small town provincialism. Also, since this language is not intrinsic to Masters' own writing style or philosophy, his forays into newer poetic forms and speech are likely to be imitations of current literary successes. Masters himself once admits Sandburg's influence while speaking at a banquet given for contributors to Poetry.

Both Whitman and Sandburg are likely influences because of their extreme fashionability during the period immediately prior to Masters' writing of Spoon River Anthology. All the "new" literary magazines (Poetry, the Little Review, and Reedy's Mirror) publically venerate Whitman as the originator of the "New Note" in literature. Carl Sandburg is even more likely to be Masters' model, however, because excerpts from Chicago Poems appeared in Poetry in June 1914. Masters had seen and favorably commented on these poems prior to beginning his own Spoon River Anthology. He even names Sandburg as the inspiration for his Anthology at the early 1915 Poetry dinner. The strength of this statement is decreased, however, by his equally strong statement that William Marion Reedy is the inspiration behind this important volume.

Some of Masters' poems from the volume entitled Lichee Nuts are strikingly similar to Carl Sandburg's worker portraits. "Salvation Army Girl" and "Working Man and Picture" present Masters at his closest to Sandburg.

This morning Salvation Army girl come
 And say: Pray and get what you want,
 Ask and receive.
 This afternoon Irishman digging up water main
 Say God damn, and say Ireland pray to God
 For more'n hundred years for freedom,
 And get it in neck all time.
 Chinaman has better way
 No give a damn.⁴

Masters' "Working Man and Picture" is virtually identical
 with Sandburg's style in "Chicago."

All over New York
 Strong men at work: Big men, niggers, and whites driving
 trucks;
 Italians digging subways, laying tracks,
 Irishmen running long trains,
 Putting up sky-scrapers, hammering plates on ocean liners,
 Greeks, Lithuanians, all strong arms,
 Lifting rocks, working scoops.
 All strong men dressed in blue, with red faces,
 And dirty hands, hard at work all day
 Under gray sky, blue sky, in rain, cold--
 This I call wonderful picture for artist.
 But Englishman sending cable;
 Or Jew counting money;
 Or American standing in pulpit;
 Or making speech to judge;
 Or playing piano;
 Or writing poem,
 Not much picture
 Not man wearing spats, dancing with ladies,
 Or drinking tea
 Not much picture either.⁵

Despite these occasional poems which fully embody central
 techniques used by Whitman and Sandburg, Masters does not generally
 maintain a high density of Whitmanic oral elements. The only major
 works in which Whitmanic techniques recur are the Spoon River
Anthology and the New Spoon River Anthology.

The recurrent devices of Spoon River Anthology are Whit-
 manic; however, even they do not gain the strength of Whitman's

poetry. Masters' Whitmanic poetry is weak because theme, form, and language are not moving toward the same goal. Masters is not attempting to praise the American experience or foster pride in American speech. Therefore, although most techniques common to Whitman and Sandburg are present, their frequency is not great. More important, however, they cannot overcome the lingering influence of genteel romanticism in Masters' poetry.

Masters sometimes uses first person informal (or "I") centering as Whitman had, as these lines from the "Bert Kessler" epitaph show. "I winged / I tramped / I reached / I fell."⁶ Here, though, the dialect narrator, created by the "I" centering, is partially counteracted by the presence of the ironically romantic motif of the over-reacher. Pessimism dominates.

The tone of Fiddler Jones' epitaph starts pessimistically, but it ends very differently. The first impressions of life as a destroyer give way to a profound sense of the magnificent experience of life.

I ended up with forty acres;
I ended up with a broken fiddle
And a broken laugh, and a thousand memories
And not a single regret.⁷

In this poem the first person vernacular centering coincides with the equally Whitmanic technique--polysindeton. The same conjunction is present in "Harry Carey Goodhue."

Do you remember when I fought
The bank and the courthouse ring . . .
And when I fought the water works
.
And when I fought the business men
Then, . . .

I slipped from my cloak my last ideal
 And smote the bank and the water works,
 And the business men . . .
 And made Spoon River pay the cost.⁸

The epitaphs of Jeduthan Hawley, Oaks Tutt, and Judson Stoddard carry the Whitmanic "and" sequence to even greater lengths, attempting to present the flavor of real spoken American dialect.

Whitman's repetition and variation of a parallel construction is also present. This technique emphasizes order within the loose oral framework. Here, as in Whitman, repetition and variation take many forms. At its simplest, it is the repetition of a phrase anywhere in the line, as in "Doctor Meyers," "indicted me . . . disgraced me . . . finished me."⁹ More common is the repetition of the first word or sound of a line, as in this short sample from "Edmund Pollard."

Leave no balconies where you can climb;
 Nor milk-white bosoms where you can rest;
 Nor golden heads with pillows to share;
 Nor wine cups while the wine is sweet;
 Nor ecstasies of body or soul.¹⁰

The repetition may take the form of repetitive emphasis upon a single key word, as in "thinking, thinking, thinking, thinking"¹¹ in the Walter Simmons epitaph. It also occurs as dynamic motif repetition of key terms, as in "Jeremy Carlisle."

Passer-by, sin beyond any sin
 Is the sin of blindness of souls to other souls.
 And joy beyond any joy is the joy
 Of having the good in you seen, and seeing the good
 At the miraculous moment.¹²

The slow change of alliterating words gives rhythm to the passage and emphasis to each new key term.

A similar use of alliteration and key-term repetition occurs in the Lambert Hutchins epitaph.

I could hear the whispers, whispers, whispers
Wherever I went, and my daughters grew up
With a look as if someone were about to strike them;
And they married madly.¹³

Often too, alliteration operates independently. Masters and Whitman use alliteration as a substitute ordering element for deliberately absent rhyme. "Mrs. Meyers" epitomizes the alliterative tendency with phrases such as, "Poor soul so sunk in sin he could not see," "ancient admonition," and "If your ways would be ways of pleasantness / And all your pathways peace, / Love God and keep his commandments."¹⁴

In many sections of Spoon River Anthology, we can see signs of affinity to romantic poets, especially Keats and Shelley.¹⁵ Yet in other poems, there are definite statements undercutting the romantic vision. Hamlet Micure's comments on "divine despair" and "Tears, Idle Tears" effectively counter any romantic psychology.¹⁶ Petit, the Poet also rebels against the old stifling romantic poetics. He characterizes these as

Seeds in a dry pod, tick, tick, tick.
Tick, tick, tick, like mites in a quarrel.
Faint iambics that the full breeze wakens--
But the pine tree makes a symphony thereof.
Triolets, villanelles, rondels, rondeaus,
Ballades by the score with the same old thought
The snows and the roses of yesterday are vanished
.
Blind to all of it all my life long
Triolets, villanelles, rondels, rondeaus,
Seeds in a dry pod, tick, tick, tick,
Tick, tick, tick, what little iambics,
While Homer and Whitman roared in the pines.¹⁷ [italics mine]

This epitaph proves Masters' consciousness of the arguments favoring Whitmanic poetry. Yet we cannot tell with certainty whether he shares these views.

The uncertainty over Masters' views raises a central question: who speaks for Masters in Spoon River Anthology? Masters answers this question indirectly in several epitaphs. He shows his ability to use sophisticated contemporary theories of literature and perception. Masters uses Browning's dramatic monologue and Pater's concept that each individual is hopelessly imprisoned within an impenetrable wall of subjectivity.¹⁸

The epitaph of Griffy the Cooper, Ernest Hyde, and Many Soldiers express Pater's concept of imprisoning subjectivity. The Cooper's epitaph says,

And you
Think you know life
You think your eyes sweep about a wide horizon,
perhaps,
In truth you are only looking around the interior of
your tub.
You cannot lift yourself to its rim
And see the outer world of things,
And at the same time see yourself
You are submerged in the tub of yourself.¹⁹

"Ernest Hyde" expresses the same view.

My mind was a mirror:
It saw what it saw; it knew what it knew
In youth my mind was just a mirror
In a rapidly flying car
Which catches and loses bits of the landscape
Then in time
Great scratches were made in the mirror,
Letting the outside world come in
And letting my inner self out
For this is the birth of the soul in sorrow
The mind sees the world as a thing apart,
And the soul makes the world at one with itself.
A mirror scratched reflects no image.
And this is the silence of wisdom.²⁰

The soldiers' epitaph drives this concept home even more decisively. "A glint of glory / A dream of duty to country or to God / But these were things in ourselves, shining before us. . . ."21

Use of Pater's vision and Browning's dramatic monologue removes the central, authoritative voice from the Anthology. In its place, Masters uses multiple--often contradictory--interpretations of experience. In quickly characterizing hundreds of Spoon River citizens, he also uses language quality--syntax, dialect, and rhythm to differentiate character. Thus many "dialect" characters appear unsophisticated and unintelligent. They are not proud Whitmanic examples of American democracy. Masters uses his vernacular characters as genre pieces. Dialect is regularly inserted in quotation marks to separate it from "correct" speech.

This usage further undercuts Whitman's synthesis of language, technique, and theme. It also creates the problem of achieving a consistent verbal level and tone. Indeed, at moments Masters' characters speak in poetic diction with words like "saprophyte" and "putrescent carcass,"22 highly formal language like "thou canst," "smote," and "thou wert."23 At other moments, the language carries low or negative connotations, as with "knave of hearts," "warmed-over affairs," and "all but shot."24 Often, too, high language intermingles with slang, producing incongruous effects or destroying mood, as when "Chase Henry," the town drunkard's, slangy epitaph uses the phrase "which redounded to my benefit."25

Masters, then, is familiar with Whitman's techniques and their importance. On occasions he uses almost all of them.

Unfortunately, the density is not great enough to produce a consistent sense of American vernacular speech. Masters does not accept the values and themes which made Whitman's poetry a vital synthesis. In most of his poetry, Whitmanic elements are subordinated to older poetic norms. Non-Whitmanic poetry forms the bulk of Masters' work before and after Spoon River Anthology. He shares Whitman's reverence for great American figures, but he does not believe they can create a millennial future for America.

Unlike Masters, Vachel Lindsay writes many types of poetry, the most famous being distinctively oral. Poems like "General William Booth Enters into Heaven," "the Congo," and "Kallyope Yell" will long remain virtuoso pieces for oral interpretation. Lindsay calls this poetry, "Higher Vaudeville," because of its swift changes of mood and the incantatory tones and rhythms of vaudeville.²⁶ If Lindsay had been satisfied with continually chanting his few universally known verses, he would be remembered as a highly talented stage performer, but he wanted more.

Pursuing this goal, Lindsay tries to widen his poetic range. He attempts Whitmanic oral pieces, directly propagandistic verses, and impenetrable Yeatsian-Blakean poems using his own private symbolic system. Thus his poetic efforts mix aspects of new and old poetry. Most are mixed in technique and assumptions. This curious mixture makes most of his poetry unsatisfying, although a few excellent poems in the Whitmanic manner do exist.

Lindsay is aware of the new movement in poetry. In fact he owes his reputation to Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, which discovers

and champions his oral style. Lindsay shows his understanding of both the magazine and the modern movement in poetry when he says, "The magazine, Poetry, ever since its foundation . . . has encouraged this new spirit in the arts, coming nearer than either the novel or the drama to the actual life of our time."²⁷

In describing "General William Booth Enters into Heaven," Lindsay expresses his desire to catch distinctively American prose patterns and oral speech rhythms. He says, "I set it to the tune which is not a tune, but a speech, a refrain used most frequently in the meetings of the Army on any public square to this day."²⁸

Lindsay's division of purpose stems from his early interest in Edgar Allen Poe. He expresses his admiration for Poe with these words:

There was not even a picture of Poe in the histories of American literature taught in High School when I entered it. There was nothing to be found but the full page portraits of a famous mutual admiration society. I knew exactly Poe's opinion of these whiskered worthies. I had read his complete works, critical headlines that brought blood. I knew also George E. Woodberry's Life of Poe. In my egotism I thought that I and George E. Woodberry were the only people north of Kentucky venturesome enough to estimate Poe as a sage, and a high priest of every form of beauty, and not a jingle man.²⁹

Following Poe's lead, Lindsay clearly opts for strong use of rhythm, rhyme, and alliteration. Although much of Vachel Lindsay's verse does contain Whitmanic oral poetry elements, the very strong rhythmic beat and the incessant rhyme undercut the vernacular prose quality Whitman sought. Lindsay's poetry also follows Poe's in emphasizing narrative movement. With plot unifying his poetry, Lindsay's use of Whitmanic techniques becomes even less important.

Lindsay comes to realize the cost of his dedication to Poe. He says, "I have paid too great a penalty for having written a few rhymed orations. All I write is assumed to be loose oratory, or even jazz. . . ." ³⁰ The strong Poe centering is certainly ironic, for, had it not been for Poe's influence, Lindsay might have become a major poet in the Whitmanic tradition. He shares many of Whitman's most central beliefs and assumptions. Lindsay does, however, write some excellent Whitmanic poetry as well as several poems which mix Whitmanic elements with other poetic devices. Among Lindsay's best Whitmanic poems are "The Eagle that is Forgotten" and "Bryan."

Subject matter greatly influences Lindsay's choice of technique. American folk-heroes like Bryan, Altgeld, Johnny Appleseed, Jackson, and Lincoln tend to elicit Whitmanic treatment. In "The Eagle that is Forgotten," we get a sense of real American speech. Although the poem is rhymed, the rhyme and imposed rhythm do not completely dominate speech rhythms. Whitmanic repetition occurs consistently at the word, phrase, and line level. Alliteration and repeating first words of lines provide a sense of order to the listener. Effective use of ellipsis helps approximate normal speech, and the final lines offer a Whitmanic expansion which coincides with movement toward heightened consciousness and emotion. Finally, fragmentation and multiplication of syntax into list-like passages occur throughout the poem.

Sleep softly . . . eagle forgotten . . . under the stone.
Time has its way with you there, and the clay has its
own.

"We have buried him now," thought your foes, and in
 secret rejoiced.
 They made a brave show of their mourning, their hatred
 unvoiced.
 They had snarled at you, barked at you, foamed at you
 day after day.
 Now you were ended. They praised you . . . and laid you away.

The others that mourned you in silence and terror and
 truth,
 The widow bereft of her crust, and the boy without youth,
 The mocked and the scorned and the wounded, the lame
 and the poor
 That should have remembered forever . . . remember no more.

Where are those lovers of yours, on what name do they call,
 The lost, that in armies wept over your funeral pall?
 They call on the names of a hundred high-valiant ones,
 A hundred white eagles have risen the sons of your sons,
 The zeal in their wings is a zeal that your dreaming
 began,
 The valor that wore out your soul in the service of man.

Sleep softly . . . eagle forgotten . . . under the stone,
 Time has its way with you there and the clay has its own.
 Sleep on, O brave-hearted, O wise man, that kindled the
 flame--
 To live in mankind is far more than to live in a name.
 To live in mankind is far, far more . . . than to live in
 a name.³¹

The last two lines are the most characteristically Whitmanic. They repeat and rhetorically expand, producing the sense of heightened intensity and emotion so common to Whitman's poetry.

The tone of this poem is originally very pessimistic. The movement, however, is toward recognition that Altgeld is not forgotten and that his example has not been lost. Here, too, Lindsay is adopting the Whitmanic techniques and assumptions so critical to successful oral poetry.

"Bryan, Bryan, Bryan, Bryan" is far more optimistic through most of the poem. It uses almost every Whitmanic technique unvitiated

by genteel romantic norms. The first person narrator is present, and the language and rhythms are slangy and American. Repetition, variation, and expansion of word, phrase, and line appear throughout. No syllabic rhythms are present although there is some inconspicuous use of rhyme. First words of lines recur and alliterate, promoting the poetic ordering.

In a nation of one hundred fine, mob-hearted, lynching,
 relenting, repenting millions,
 There are plenty of sweeping, swinging, stinging,
 gorgeous things to shout about
 And knock your old blue devils out.

I brag and chant of Bryan, Bryan, Bryan.

· · · · ·
 There were truths eternal in the gab and tittle-tattle,
 There were real heads broken in the fustian and the
 rattle.

There were real lines drawn;

· · · · ·
 · · · the longhorns from Texas,
 The jayhawks from Kansas,
 The plot-eyed bungaroo and giant giassious,
 The varmint, chipmunk, bugaboo.
 The horned-toad, prairie dog and ballyhoo.³²

Similarly, polysinditon appears heavily.

The demons of the bucks, the demons in the grass,
 The demons in the bank vault peered out to see us pass.
 And the angels in the trees and the angels in the grass
 · · · · ·
 And the sidewalk was our chariot, and the flowers bloomed
 higher.
 And the street turned to silver and the grass turned to
 fire
 And then it was but grass, and the town was there again.
 A place for women and men.

III

Then we stood where we could see
 Every band
 And the speaker's stand
 And Bryan took the platform

And he was introduced
 And he lifted his hand
 And created a new spell.³³

Lindsay uses rhetorical expansion in this poem to intensify feeling just as Whitman does in his poetry. Section V of "Bryan" inflates the line, "Boy Bryan's Defeat," to

Defeat of alfalfa and the Mauposa lily.
 Defeat of the Pacific and the long Mississippi.
 Defeat of the young by the old and silly,
 Defeat of tornadoes by Tubal Cain supreme,
 Defeat of my boyhood, defeat of my dream.³⁴

Similarly, the last lines of the poem extend the rhetorical period. The syntactical units expand so much that the line, the normal Whitmanic sense unit, is not big enough to encompass them. Lindsay also uses parallel fragmented syntactical units as Whitman does in moments of great emotional intensity.

Where is Altgeld, brave as the truth,
 Whose name the few still say with tears.
 Gone to join the armies with Old John Brown,
 Whose fame sings loud for a thousand years.

Where is that boy, that Heaven-born Bryan,
 That Homer Bryan, who sang from the West?
 Gone to join the shadows with Altgeld the Eagle,
 Where the kings and the slaves and the troubadours rest.³⁵

Lindsay's "Bryan" is a successful Whitmanic poem in the fullest sense because the theme and many of the literary assumptions are compatible with Whitman's. Lindsay asserts an optimistic view of America based on a renaissance of localism. He, like Whitman, wants Americans to recognize their worth, and he wants the towns to become proud native cultural centers.³⁶ Lindsay is a romantic who opposes materialistic standards. He seeks the higher, broader culture which

Whitman fosters. Further, Lindsay tries to capture American speech rhythms and dialect. He, too, fosters the American pantheon of folk-heroes from Lincoln to Altgeld.

With these assumptions, it is surprising that more of Lindsay's poetry is not Whitmanic. Yet the early Poe influence never loses its hold. Later, new literary trends and figures like W. B. Yeats further shift his poetry, this time toward difficult, privately symbolic poetry.

Despite the small number of pure Whitmanic poems which Lindsay writes, several of his poems combine Whitmanic and traditional literary techniques with some success. Among these are "Kallyope Yell," "General William Booth Enters into Heaven," "Buffaloes," "Daniel," "Old, Old . . . Andrew Jackson," and "Virginians." In general, these poems possess the Whitmanic trademarks: alliteration; polysinditon; word repetition and alliteration. Unfortunately, they appear within the smothering regularity imposed by Poe's poetry with its own distinctive rhythm, alliteration, and rhyme. Lindsay's complete subordination of Whitmanic elements to traditional effects is best exemplified in "The Congo." A few lines show the extent of this domination by traditional meter, rhyme, and alliteration.

Fat black bucks in a wine-barrel room,
Barrel-house kings with feet unstable,
Sagged and reeled and pounded on the table,
Pounded on the table.³⁷

Lindsay's poem, "Daniel," shows his willingness to use normally Whitmanic techniques to produce pure rhythmic repetition in the manner of Poe.

And Gabriel chained the lions.
 And Gabriel chained the lions.
 And Gabriel chained the lions.
 And Daniel got out of the den.
 And Daniel got out of the den.
 And Daniel got out of the den.
 And Darius said:--"You're a Christian Child."
 Darius said:--"You're a Christian Child"
 And gave him his job again.
 And gave him his job again.
 And gave him his job again.³⁸

"The Ghosts of the Buffaloes" and "Old, Old . . . Andrew Jackson" are poetic amalgams of diverse and at times antithetical poetic theories, yet at times they succeed in approximating American vernacular. These lines from "Old, Old . . . Andrew Jackson" emphasize the importance of unembellished American speech.

I will speak of your deeds,
 Andrew Jackson.
 When I take the free road again.
 Oh, the long, dusty highway!
 Oh, the rain,
 Oh, the sunburnt men!
 I will think of you,
 Strong old Indian god,
 Old turkey cock,
 . . . Old buffalo, knee-deep in the weeds,
 Old faithful heart who could boast and strut;
 I will think of you when I harvest again,
 I will think of you in the forest again,
 I will think of you in the forest again,
 I will think of you when the woods are cut,
 Old, Old Andrew Jackson.³⁹

The greatest failing of "Old, Old . . . Andrew Jackson" and the "Ghosts of the Buffaloes" is Lindsay's use of excessively rhythmic, rhymed lines, for example, in "Andrew Jackson the lines,

This Washington
 Is too superfine
 Is full of sugar
 Cake and wine.⁴⁰

Apparently, Vachel Lindsay sees these as lending some sense of poetic finality. In reality, however, they break the mood created by the simpler, more direct, realistic American speech which precedes the rhymed endings.

Lindsay's great errors in writing oral poetry are his use of hackneyed romantic language, themes, and techniques; and his use of language unsuited to the poetic subject being treated. Lindsay's poem, "Ameranth," brings us all the least attractive trappings of hackneyed romanticism, as this short passage indicates.

Ah, in the night, all music haunts me here. . . .
Is it for naught high heaven cracks and yawns,
And the tremendous Ameranth descends
Sweet with the glory of ten thousand dawns?⁴¹

"Abraham Lincoln Walks at Midnight" exemplifies the second major group of Lindsay's errors: the treatment of American subjects in language unsuited to the character or situation involved. In treating Abraham Lincoln, Lindsay tries to show respect by using more formal, traditional iambic pentameter rhymed syllabic verse rather than Lincoln's own midwestern idiom. Lines like,

It is portentous and a thing of state
That here at midnight, in our little town
A mourning figure walks, and will not rest,
Near the old court-house pacing up and down.⁴²

are attempts to produce the mood of dignity worthy of the president and the grave situation. Yet how much greater a poem it might have been had Lindsay allowed Lincoln to speak as a midwesterner rather than a composite of early nineteenth century poetic diction! Unfortunately, Lindsay falls back upon all the trappings of poetry imposed on America by Europe.

Several other poems about great American figures share this fault. Vachel Lindsay either treats American figures in the old poetic manner or destroys the American language patterns by emphasizing artificially imposed rhythm, rhyme, and overly heavy alliteration. With poems like "Bryan," in which Lindsay allows himself freer use of vernacular patterns, the greatest poetic successes come.

One final criticism is applicable to much of Lindsay's poetry. Too often Poe-like sound effects gain control over Lindsay's poetry, and both mood and language level are violated in order to retain the incantatory rhythms necessary to platform delivery. The needs of the platform speaker and the demands of Whitmanic poetry are often at odds. Lindsay's early dedication to Poe, Poetry's fostering of his incantatory oral poetry, and the continuing popularity of poems like "General William Booth," "the Congo," and "Kallyope Yell" all keep him producing Poe-like poetry and subordinating Whitmanic oral elements when they do appear.

We must not forget, however, that Vachel Lindsay does share many philosophical and literary assumptions with his predecessor, Whitman. Some of Lindsay's poems--especially "The Eagle that is Forgotten" and "Bryan" show his ability to treat distinctively American personalities in particularly American language.

Lindsay's exposure to Poe makes his fortune and ultimately undoes him. Had he not written poems like "General William Booth" and "the Congo," Poetry might never have publicized his work. Yet were it not for his fatal attraction to Poe's musicality, Lindsay

might have written great oral poetry expressing Whitman's dream for America in truly American language and rhythms.

Critics have generally agreed that Lindsay's later symbolic poetry is not satisfying. The difficulty of these non-oral poems is not offset by any profundity or effectively original technique. Vachel Lindsay's contribution to literature is his oral poetry, traditional and Whitmanic. Lindsay shares so many of Whitman's beliefs, literary assumptions, and techniques; it is a great pity that he so rarely uses them programmatically to produce the native American poetry which Whitman had prophesized.

Both Edgar Lee Masters and Vachel Lindsay are transitional in their use of new poetic techniques. Both prove themselves capable of effectively using Whitman's oral techniques, but neither avails himself of the opportunity. Masters' philosophy and his literary heritage keep him from following Whitman's lead just as does Lindsay's overnight climb to fame as the chanting bard of the "Higher Vaudeville." These poets mark only one aspect of popular use of Whitmanic oral prose-based poetry. Other poets also appear, led by Carl Sandburg and Sherwood Anderson. Through these poets, American vernacular speech is raised to the level of enduring literature for America and the world.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ Edgar Lee Masters, Whitman (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1937), p. 59.
- ² Masters, Whitman, p. 327.
- ³ Edgar Lee Masters, Starved Rock (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1919), pp. 2-3.
- ⁴ Edgar Lee Masters, Lichee Nuts (New York: H. Liveright, 1930), p. 21.
- ⁵ Masters, Lichee Nuts, pp. 19-20.
- ⁶ Edgar Lee Masters, "Bert Kessler," Spoon River Anthology (New York: Collier-Macmillan Ltd., 1962), p. 163.
- ⁷ Masters, "Fiddler Jones," Spoon River, p. 83.
- ⁸ Masters, "Harry Carey Goodhue," Spoon River, p. 34.
- ⁹ Masters, "Doctor Meyers," Spoon River, p. 46.
- ¹⁰ Masters, "Edmund Pollard," Spoon River, p. 173.
- ¹¹ Masters, "Walter Simmons," Spoon River, p. 169.
- ¹² Masters, "Jeremy Carlisle," Spoon River, p. 270.
- ¹³ Masters, "Lambert Hutchins," Spoon River, p. 164.
- ¹⁴ Masters, "Mrs. Meyers," Spoon River, p. 47.
- ¹⁵ May Swenson, "Introduction," in Spoon River, introduction.
- ¹⁶ Masters, "Hamlet Micure," Spoon River, p. 230.
- ¹⁷ Masters, "Petit, the Poet," Spoon River, p. 109.
- ¹⁸ Walter Pater, "Conclusion," The Renaissance (New York: World Publishing Co., 1961), p. 221.
- ¹⁹ Masters, "Griffy the Cooper," Spoon River, p. 89.
- ²⁰ Masters, "Ernest Hyde," Spoon River, p. 134.
- ²¹ Masters, "Many Soldiers," Spoon River, p. 223.
- ²² Masters, "Hildrup Tubbs," Spoon River, p. 195.

- 23 Masters, "Johnnie Sayre," Spoon River, p. 60.
- 24 Masters, "Lucius Atherton," Spoon River, p. 278.
- 25 Masters, "Chase Henry," Spoon River, p. 33.
- 26 Ann Massa, Vachel Lindsay: Fieldworker for the American Dream (New York: Macmillan Co., 1963), p. 3.
- 27 Nicholas Vachel Lindsay, Collected Poems, Revised Edition (New York: Macmillan Co., 1930), xviii.
- 28 Lindsay, Collected Poems, p. 22.
- 29 Lindsay, Collected Poems, p. 12.
- 30 Lindsay, Collected Poems, pp. 5-6.
- 31 Nicholas Vachel Lindsay "The Eagle That is Forgotten," Selected Poems of Vachel Lindsay, ed., Mark Harris (New York: Macmillan Co., 1963), p. 40.
- 32 Lindsay, "Bryan," Selected Poems, pp. 40-41.
- 33 Lindsay, "Bryan," Selected Poems, p. 45.
- 34 Lindsay, "Bryan," Selected Poems, p. 51.
- 35 Lindsay, "Bryan," Selected Poems, p. 57.
- 36 Lindsay, Selected Poems, xiv.
- 37 Lindsay, "The Congo," Selected Poems, p. 182.
- 38 Lindsay, "Daniel," Selected Poems, p. 182.
- 39 Lindsay, "Old, Old . . . Andrew Jackson," Selected Poems, pp. 27-28.
- 40 Lindsay, "Old, Old . . . Andrew Jackson," Selected Poems, p. 28.
- 41 Lindsay, "Ameranth," Selected Poems, p. 70.
- 42 Lindsay, "Abraham Lincoln Walks at Midnight," Selected Poems, p. 90.

CHAPTER FIVE

SANDBURG AND THE WHITMAN TRADITION: TOWARD FORMLESSNESS AS THE EPITOME OF FORM

Carl Sandburg's poetry is clearly among the most misunderstood and underrated of the twentieth century. Current criticism dismisses his work as formless and interesting only for its usage of American idiom and slang. Indeed, one recent doctoral dissertation damns him with the backhanded compliment, "Carl Sandburg: A Major Poet for the Secondary School."

Sandburg's mastery of American idiom is consummate, but it is a mistake to dismiss his dedication to Whitmanic principles and techniques and his furthering of Whitman's experiments in poetic language and form. Critics must recognize that Sandburg's poetry is not based solely upon chance or successful improvisation. Sandburg, like Whitman, espouses a set of clear-cut poetic principles, and his work embodies these precepts.

His dedication to Whitman's principles and poetics takes many forms. Sandburg's letters disclose that as early as May or June 1904 he visited Whitman's tomb and placed a rose at the grave.¹ In a letter dated December 19, 1906, Sandburg mentions his "Whitman lecture," entitled "An American Vagabond."² By May 1908 he had developed a second Whitman lecture: "The Poet of Democracy."³

Critics have recognized the rudiments of Sandburg's indebtedness to Whitman. Crowder, in discussing Sandburg's third mature book of poetry, Smoke and Steel, notes that "More and more he made use of . . . repetition. . . . The effect is that of a chant (one of Sandburg's own categories of poetry). . . . Sandburg had a much-admired precursor in Whitman, whom he had studied carefully."⁴ [Parenthesis is Crowder's]

Paul Rosenfeld, in a Bookman article points out the similarity of the two poets' subject matter. He recognizes that Sandburg "has been doing in his Chicago of the new century what Whitman was doing in the Manhattan of Civil War times: burning the mists off the befogged land, striving to create out of the inanimate steel and the loveless dirt, the living thing, America. Sandburg has been feeling beauty in the towns of the Middle Border, where beauty never before was felt. . . . He has a sense of the unity of mankind, the oneness of the forgotten man of yesterday and the men of today."⁵ Sandburg himself acknowledges this similarity in a letter written on July 30, 1913. In asserting the importance of his job as a reporter for a Chicago newspaper, he maintains, "You might say at first shot that this is the hell of a place for a poet to get his head knocked where he needs it. In fact, it is so good a place for a healthy man who wants to watch the biggest, most intense, brutal and complicated game in the world--the game by which the world gets fed and clothed--the method of control--the economics and waste."⁶

The young poet clearly mirrors Whitman's intense interest in America's democratic experiment and optimism at its ultimate success. In an autobiographical poem, Sandburg echoes Whitman in declaring, "I am credulous about the destiny of man, / and I believe more than I can ever prove / of the future of the human race. . . ."7

Even Sandburg's appearance mirrors Whitman's, and the underlying purpose is identical. Crowder has realized that by "maintaining a studied unkemptness of dress and a carefully shaggy head of hair, Sandburg has built an image of himself as one of the common people--tall, broad, rough-hewn, deep-voiced. At the same time he has wanted to be their spokesman."8

Carl Sandburg and his most perceptive critics have proclaimed the importance of the oral element in his writing. As early as 1904, he wrote, "I have been breaking away more and more from the habit of writing. My tendency is now more toward oratory [as a guiding poetic principle.]"9 Callahan also stresses the importance of oral presentation of Sandburg's poetry. "In his sonorous voice which made even the commonplace seem dramatic, he sang out his rhythmic word pictures until his audiences were fascinated by the sounds alone. . . . Some people who asserted that they found no beauty in the reading of Sandburg's poetry became entranced by his own rich intoning of the lines."10 [italics mine] Sandburg's poetry is oral poetry, which, like Whitman's, achieves its highest potential chanted in the Whitmanic manner.

Certainly then, Sandburg does write poetry in the oral colloquial mode developed and advocated by Walt Whitman, whose

philosophy and persona Sandburg also imitates. Sandburg's early poetry begins where Whitman's left off, with the spirit and technique in tact. From here, Sandburg moves beyond, to further experimentation and development of Whitmanic techniques. Later, he begins to integrate these techniques with those of imagism. If Whitman's poetry centers on expansive wonder, Sandburg's poetry encompasses moods of anger, joy, irony, and the momentary flickering of an image. Using all these moods, Sandburg's poetry produces typically Whitmanic intensifications of feeling.

What then is the nature of Sandburg's poetry? From his earliest successful poetry, Carl Sandburg writes two types of poems. The first and most important type is the expansive Whitmanic poetry; the second consists of short, imagistic poems like "Fog." This chapter will not deal with the imagistic strain at length. It is, however, necessary to establish its existence and, later, its interaction with the Whitmanic poem.

Like Whitman's, Sandburg's poems "departed widely from the customary: not only was there no rhyme, not even slant rhyme, but there was the greatest variation imaginable in line length--from a one syllable word . . . to an entire poem written as a single paragraph-line of 139 words. . . . Such structures were beyond conventional analysis. To establish a metrical pattern was out of the question."¹¹ Many critics mistakenly believe that because structure is not conventional, the poem must be structureless. Sandburg's poetry, however, is written with an intense regard for structure and

language! This poetry results from a central, unchanging poetic theory.

Sandburg's use of language is the key to the first aspect of his poetic theory. One reviewer notes that throughout Smoke and Steel he finds "hard materialism at hand and . . . vague mysticism . . . never far around the corner."¹² Common facts do, indeed, produce mystical insights, interests, and conclusions. Sandburg declared in 1926, "I have always thought the best poetry something close to the line of silence; it almost crosses over."¹³ To achieve this end, Sandburg "used two kinds of words in trying to get at the essence of his craft. The first set was composed of . . . objective, almost scientific, non-committal words. . . . The second kind was sensuous."¹⁴ Thus, in his Good Morning, America, the poet's "Tentative (First Model) Definitions of Poetry" declare, "Poetry is the achievement of the synthesis of hyacinths and biscuits."¹⁵

The two terms, "hyacinths" and "biscuits" embody the two poles forming the loom for his art. On one hand, Sandburg leans toward the democratic Whitmanic poem celebrating aspects of common existence; on the other, he is taken by the short imagistic poem expressing a momentary mood or illustrating the unspeakable and unknowable. In Sandburg's early poetry, he treats these two as separate categories and embodies them in separate poems. Later, Whitmanic and imagistic elements coalesce into Sandburg's mature style. The poet expresses this synthesis in a 1922 letter to G. D. Eaton. He says,

Art must be understandable, have explicit meanings, be definite, tangible, explicable? No. It must communicate something--yes--and yet it may only shoot a rocket around a dim rim of the incommunicable. . . . The difference between the two of us on what you call the enigmatic pieces may run into something serious. Of course, you may find that art delivers most to you when you require it shall be explicit with no mockery or mystery. For me, it is a test of a work of art whether it has the elusive, the incommunicable, the bluejay and the gray mouse running up the canyon walls. . . . It may be sad or gay that there are muddleheads who enjoy being misunderstood because they have seen that every great work of art seems to those who get nothing from it to be a joke or a fake or a pretense. --There is no judgment possible except from the positive approach: I know what is good for me and what it does for me.¹⁶

Realism is the ground from which Sandburg's romanticism, like Whitman's, springs.

Language itself is also a very central Sandburg concern.

Here, too, comparison with Whitman is immediate.

Sandburg established himself as the most daring user of American words--rude words ranging from the icy metaphors of the soil to the slang of the street. But long before this, the possibilities of a new vocabulary were being tested. As early as 1865, Whitman was saying, "We must have new words, new potentialities of speech--an American range of self-expression. . . . The new times, the new people need a tongue according, yes, and what is more, they will not be satisfied until it is evolved."¹⁷

The presence of "Americanisms" and slang does not necessarily mean the absence of precision or of deliberate intent with respect to their use. The precise word is important to Sandburg. He seeks to honor and understand Americans through the language they use. Imprecision is tantamount to error. Throughout his career Sandburg seeks to remedy the inability of American people and poets to express American life on its own terms.¹⁸

Several Sandburg definitions of poetry express the poet's consuming interest in American idiom as the base for structured, organized poetry.

Poetry is an art practised with the terrible plastic material of human language.

Poetry is a projection across silence of cadences arranged to break that silence with definite intentions of echoes, syllables, wave lengths.¹⁹ [*italics mine*]

When slang enters a poem, it produces immediacy; sometimes . . . it is a little shocking, but it nearly always has a subtle suggestion of poignancy. . . .²⁰

Complete insight into Sandburg's language is central to any understanding of the poet's sense of poetry and America. No one expresses this meaning better than Crowder when he says,

In many . . . poems . . . Sandburg . . . freely [uses] the clichés and hackneyed apothegms out of which his people form their conversation. These are the shibboleths, the passwords, by which the common folk recognize their own kind. They are easy, undemanding means of communication among the unreflective masses. Taken by themselves, they say little to the thoughtful reader; but their effect is cumulative. He feels after pages of these sayings that folk wisdom is indeed massive. He realizes that it has grown from a patient endurance, a basic sense of the ridiculous, and an experience of life's fundamental emotions from travail to ecstasy--on an uncomplicated level, unenriched by profundities of sophistication: it has grown from a meeting of life head on.²¹

Sandburg is a master of American colloquial speech, but he does not write in this manner unconsciously, as some critics have asserted. Sandburg writes very consciously, and his word usage and structure are certainly intentional. Sandburg expends "a great deal of time and energy--often a month or more--in looking for the right words and in polishing his structures."²² In fact, he once told a reviewer for Bookman, "I cut out all words ending in ity and ness

as far as I can. That is, I cut out words describing 'state of being.' And I search for picture words, as the Indians have them, as the Chinese have them."²³ This technique produces Sandburg's characteristic "powerful detail."²⁴ Even after Carl Sandburg had attained the age of fifty, he wrote these words expressing his continuing interest in language. He said, "I am still studying verbs and the mystery of how they connect nouns. I am more suspicious of adjectives than at any other time in all my born days."²⁵

The clarity and directness of Sandburg's poetry produce a sense of simplicity akin to Hemingway's. Yet readers do not recognize or appreciate the extensive revision necessary to achieve such spare, limpid, direct writing. In one instance, for example, Sandburg was justly angered when a reviewer chastized his looseness of language in a poem which he had previously revised fourteen times!

Similarly, Carl Sandburg is extremely conscious of style--the totality of language, technique, mood, and philosophy. He recorded these views, saying

Kill my style
and you break Pavlova's legs
and you blind Ty Cobb's batting eye.²⁶

Sandburg agrees with Yeats in seeking a poetry "that is naturally simple, that might exist in the simplest prose, [and which] should have instantaneous effect, provided it finds the right audience.

. . . The whole movement of poetry is toward pictures, sensuous images, away from rhetoric, from the abstract toward humility."²⁷

He believes that the potential of the old verse forms has been

reached and that vital poetry must appear in new forms, based upon new principles. Therefore, he put[s] new stress on deriving his subjects as well as his language from everyday life and criticize[s] the generally accepted process of what he term[s] . . . subjugation of the intellect to well-matched syllables. He believe[s] . . . that the excessive use of verse forms tend[s] . . . to make the rhyme more important than the meaning and thus deceive[s] . . . the reader."²⁸ Sandburg maintains, however, that "free verse . . . [is] not an iconoclastic break with the past; it doesn't move with hate as a dynamic; it's only that here's something . . . nourishes better and all round has the attractions that connect with more of life."²⁹

These constitute Carl Sandburg's guiding principles; his poetry applies them consistently. Specific applications are best exemplified operating interrelatedly in a single poem. Since "Chicago" is the poem that brought him fame in the pages of Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, I will use it to exemplify his adoption of Whitman's colloquial prose-based techniques and poetic ordering principles. Here, Sandburg sets the poetic pattern which he maintains and further develops throughout his lifetime. In order to minimize quotation and better show the overall structure of the poem, I will quote "Chicago" in its entirety and make subsequent references by line number.

"Chicago"

1 Hog Butcher for the World,
 2 Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat
 3 Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler
 4 Stormy, husky, brawling,
 5 City of the Big Shoulders:

 6 They tell me you are wicked and I believe them, for I
 have seen your painted women under the gas lamps
 luring the farm boys.
 7 And they tell me you are crooked and I answer: Yes, it
 is true I have seen the gunman kill and go free to
 kill again.
 8 And they tell me you are brutal and my reply is: On
 the faces of women and children I have seen the
 marks of wanton hunger.
 9 And having answered so I turn once more to those who
 sneer at this my city, and I give them back the
 sneer and say to them:
 10 Come and show me another city with lifted head singing
 so proud to be alive and coarse and strong and
 cunning,
 11 Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil of piling job on
 job, here is a tall bold slugger set vivid against
 the little soft cities;
 12 Fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action, cunning
 as a savage pitted against the wilderness,
 13 Bareheaded,
 14 Shoveling,
 15 Wrecking,
 16 Planning,
 17 Building, breaking, rebuilding,

 18 Under the smoke, dust all over his mouth, laughing with
 white teeth,
 19 Under the terrible burden of destiny laughing as a young
 man laughs,
 20 Laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs who has never
 lost a battle,
 21 Bragging and laughing that under his wrist is the pulse,
 and under his ribs the heart of the people,

 22 Laughing!

 23 Laughing the stormy, husky, brawling laughter of Youth,
 half-naked, sweating, proud to be Hog Butcher, Tool
 Maker, Stacker of Wheat, Player with Railroads, and
 Freight Handler to the Nation.³⁰

CHART ONE:

STRUCTURAL AND RHETORICAL ORGANIZATION

"CHICAGO"

1	refrain	_____	(one element structure)
2	list	_____, _____	(two element structure)
3		_____ and _____	(longer two element syntactical structure)
4		_____, _____, _____	(three element structure)
5		_____:	(momentary contraction leading to the next expansion; one long syntactical element)
6		_____ and _____ for _____.	(one complete question and answer)
7		And _____ and _____: _____.	(one complete question and answer)
8		And _____ and _____: _____.	(longer complete question and answer)
9		And _____ so _____ and _____ and _____;	(complete question, incomplete answer; this line is the balance point of the poem)
10	chant	_____ and _____ city _____ and _____ and _____.	(incomplete answer carried over from last line; this is also the last period until the final line of the poem)
11		_____ (dangling modifier), _____ slugger _____;	(dangling modifier in this periodic sentence enhances the sense of incompleteness; this line modifies city in line ten; one complete and one incomplete syntax)
12		_____ dog _____, _____ savage _____,	(two incomplete elements)
13	list inside	_____	(one very incomplete element)
14	chant	_____, " " " "	
15		_____, " " " "	

dotted lines show modification

16	-list inside chant-	_____ , (one very incomplete element)
17		_____, _____, _____, (three incomplete elements; though this is a slight contraction preparing for the last expansion of rhetorical period, the listing of these elements together gives the effect of a very long list, and thus of an expansion)
18		Under _____, _____, <u>laughing</u> _____, (three very fragmented elements; possible modification of <u>slugger</u> in line eleven or of <u>savage</u> in line twelve; begin <u>laughing</u> motif)
19	11. 18-23 chant inside chant	Under _____ <u>laughing</u> _____ laughs, (one longer fragmented unit; <u>laughing</u> motif continues)
20		<u>Laughing</u> _____ laughs _____, (longer, more fragmented construction; <u>laughing</u> motif continues to build)
21		<u>Bragging and laughing</u> _____ and _____ _____ people _____, (extend <u>laughing</u> to bragging and laughing; two long fragmented constructions)
22		<u>Laughing!</u> (short contraction of rhetorical period preparing for final and fullest expansion of rhet. period; possible modification of <u>people</u> in line twenty-one)
23		<u>Laughing</u> _____ laughter

dotted lines show
modification

proud to be Hog Butcher, Tool Maker,
Stacker of Wheat, Player with Railroads
and Freight Handler to the Nation.

(final chanting expansion of rhetorical period; reintroduction of the first lines as a refrain)

Throughout the poem, the primary movement is the constant expansion of the (oral) rhetorical period and the felt-rhetorical period. The felt-rhetorical period is the mind's sense that the rhetorical period is expanding even though the just-spoken line may be no longer or more compound than the preceding line. This felt sense of rhetorical expansion is achieved here through Sandburg's use of multiple indirect modifications (marked on Chart One). Thus even in the instances where the expansion is not oral, the reader is constantly, though perhaps not consciously, aware that the structure is consistently expanding.

This poem's second important element of overall structure is the ever-increasing movement toward more fragmented constructions. This, like the use of consistent rhetorical expansions, is typically Whitmanic. While early lines (following the refrain of the first five lines) hold one or more complete statements and syntactical units, the succeeding lines become ever more fragmented, as in a Whitmanic chant.

Let us now (using the poem and the chart of rhetorical and structural organization) consider structure and rhetorical expansion in more detail. The first four lines of the poem comprise a refrain, which often appears in Whitmanic and other oral poetry. The refrain-first structure fosters a strong sense of ordering when repeated later in the poem. With the first five lines Sandburg presents the first Whitmanic expansion technique: the ever-expanding, horizontally developed list. In these first five lines of the poem, very short syntactical elements are compounded into larger and rhetorically

longer multiples which are carefully kept parallel. This list expands in length and number of components until line four. Line five, "City of the Big Shoulders:" is in itself a slight contraction of rhetorical period in preparation for the Whitmanic expansion from the horizontally oriented list to the longer, usually more fragmented, vertically-ordered chant. The colon at the end of line five is also important. It indicates that the entire poem will act to complete the line and to lengthen its rhetorical period.

With line six, the list has become a chant, and each line is joined by a neutral frame word, and. And's abound in this section, as well as in the poem as a whole. The reason is simple: in normal speech, direct subordination is rare. And's, conjunctions, and present participles link these unsubordinated units and provide rhythmic and visual repetitiveness at the same time.

Lines six through nine are obviously parallel syntactically. Indeed, great care has been taken to present a long sequence of hardly-varied sentences. Similarly, words are reused rather than giving way to synonyms. These techniques emphasize the feeling of order, regularity, and rhythmic repetitiveness experienced by the listening audience.

In lines six through nine, the syntax moves from complete multiple statements and questions to a complete statement and an incomplete answer. Again, at the end of line nine, ending with the words ". . . I give them back the sneer and say to them:" the colon appears; it signals that the remaining lines of the poem will constitute the answer to the charges made against the city. As such,

line nine is very important. It is the balance point of the poem. Here, Whitmanic antitheses meet to ultimately produce a larger synthesis: the view of the city as a proud, amoral center of energy.

Lines ten, eleven, and twelve continue the Whitmanic chant structure while developing further syntactical parallelisms. Lines eleven and twelve appear to modify the word city in line ten, but to the listening audience the impression is given of parallelism starting with the words "singing so proud to be alive and coarse and strong and cunning" in line ten. Then, the word flinging at the beginning of line twelve, because it rhymes and is syntactically parallel with singing, extends the parallel structure. Line twelve continues the chanting of attributes with more parallel elements. The two first words of line eleven and twelve, "Flinging" and "Fierce" do not rhyme, but they are alliterative. This rhetorical technique suggests regularity and rhythm to the listener.

With line twelve the chant ends. The movement toward syntactical fragmentation has advanced greatly by this point. The line has neither the beginning nor the ending of a complete syntactical structure. Instead, the fragmentation is becoming ever-greater. The single, incomplete syntax of line eleven, "Here is a tall bold slugger set vivid against the little soft cities" gives way to two parallel and equally fragmented phrases, "fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action," and "cunning as a savage pitted against the wilderness."

The lists of attributes continues in lines thirteen through seventeen. Here, the parallel attributes also parallel "Fierce," the

first word of line twelve, and indirectly modify "city." Yet they seem to refer, instead, to the "tall bold slugger" of line eleven or the "cunning . . . savage" of line twelve. Thus, the appearance is one of further syntactical fragmentation accompanied by expansion of the rhetorical period.

The listing of lines thirteen through seventeen contracts the spoken rhetorical period, but because the last line multiplies the parallel structure three times, the impression is of expansion. "Bareheaded, / Shoveling, / Wrecking, / Planning, / Building, breaking, rebuilding." The list seems to coalesce into a long single catalogue of attributes, and the last line "Building, breaking, rebuilding" induces a sense of heightening momentum. The list seems to be growing by leaps and bounds.

In line seventeen, Sandburg begins the movement toward the fullest rhetorical expansion in a Whitmanic chant. The list of lines thirteen through seventeen is lengthening each unit and multiplying the number of units per line. The appearance of the word "laughing" in line eighteen is the first in the poem. From this point until the end of the poem the word will recur more and more densely. It becomes a motif-like element whose increasing regularity serves to increase the apparent pace of rhetorical movement while simultaneously offering visual, syntactic, and oral regularity. The repetition of the word "Under" in lines eighteen and nineteen also builds this regularity. Here, too, balancing and antithesis are present. The sordid aspects of life are fostered by the words "under the smoke" and "under the terrible burden of destiny." But

the relentless fighter confronts his fate successfully with the word "smiling." By line twenty "laughing" has assumed the important first position in the line. The negative aspects of life may still be present, and life may not always be easy, but for now, at least, they are overshadowed by sheer animal joy in life and pride in strength. The motif word "laughing" now combines with the "Laughing" at the beginning of the chanted line to produce an even more heightened sense of regularity and order in this final chant.

"Bragging and Laughing," the first words of line twenty-one, multiply the parallel present participle structure. Simultaneously, the line length increases somewhat, contributing further to the sense of penultimate expansiveness.

Line twenty-two contracts the syntax to a single parallel element, "Laughing," just before the final expansion. While the word "Laughing" parallels those in the lines before, it also appears to refer to the "people" apostrophized in line twenty-one. This reference is heightened even further by the absence of final punctuation. Instead of a period, the line ends in a comma: "the heart of the people, / Laughing."

Line twenty-three is the last expansion of the poem. In typical Whitmanic fashion, the last line is the longest in the poem, and it brings together many of the elements referred to earlier in the poem. The motif-like repetition of the previous lines is present as is the refrain of the first four lines. The elements are all parallel and highly fragmented, syntactically. The length of time between pauses (signalled by commas) increases as the line progresses.

This rhetorical lengthening fosters a final sense of increasing strength and momentum which corresponds to the ultimate position in the poem.

Laughing!

Laughing the stormy, husky, brawling laughter of Youth,
half-naked, sweating, proud to be Hog Butcher, Tool
Maker, Stacker of Wheat, Player with Railroads, and
Freight Handler to the Nation.

Sandburg has, then, used the inherited Whitmanic structural techniques: rhetorical expansion; lists; chants; refrains; parallelism; alliteration; motifs; multiplication of short, fragmented syntaxes; and repetition of words, especially first words of lines. He has produced a highly Whitmanic, expansively optimistic poem.

In addition to the overall structure, sound quality and language level are also central. Certainly, these two aspects profoundly affect the experience of the poem. "Hog Butcher," the first two words of the poem, both belie and express the meaning of the poem. The words are slangy; their first impression, pejorative; their very presence shocks the reader. Yet beyond these words, the vocabulary of the poem is generally more colloquial than slangy and graphic rather than crude. Essentially then, the poet uses the first words to create an initial negative response, which the remainder of the poem overturns. Thus the poet is not picking words loosely, as critics have suggested; rather, he is employing words and phrases with great precision to graphically describe the city and to create and subsequently alter the impression received. Aspects of slang throughout the poem are chosen, not because they are the first to

come to mind, but because they convey precisely the right image, connotation, and denotation.

Almost equally important is Sandburg's use of Whitmanically juxtaposed rhythms. The short staccato phrases of the poem's first five lines and of lines thirteen through seventeen contrast sharply with the longer, more sinuous lines which follow both passages. Line twenty-three is equally remarkable in blending these two contrasting line types to produce a fitting rhetorical climax.

Sandburg's management of these contrasting line types is analogous to his handling of prose rhythms throughout the poem. The repetition of the word and in increasing density in lines six through nine builds to a crescendo, which in turn underlines the rapid shift in point of view in line nine. Other similar rhythmic elements are the shifting parallelisms which recur throughout the poem, the motif-like repetition of the word "laughing," and the triumphant return of the poem's first lines in the concluding line. The poet's technique is emphatically oral in choosing and repeating words to induce rhythm and order rather than in substituting synonyms consistently. Here the oral tradition is at odds with the practice of written poetry.

Alliteration is another technique which appears in the poem and is characteristic of spoken, rather than written, verse. Sandburg is like Whitman in using sound effects of this type at moments of greatest importance, as in the s and an sounds in line nine, "And having answered so I turn once more at those who sneer at this my city, and I give them back the sneer and say to them / Come and show

me another city with lifted head singing so proud to be alive and coarse and strong and cunning." This same alliteration appears in the l sounds of lines eighteen through twenty-three.

These sound techniques supplement the more basic elements of the oral poet's repertoire: repetition and variation of words, phrases, and clauses; parallelism; use of the same word or of alliterative words at the beginning of lines; the motif-like repetition of important words or phrases; the refrain, and the consistent breaking of flow which produces a sense of expansiveness when lines are allowed to go to full length or much longer. Significantly, also, the hallmark of written verse, rhyme, is not present in any strength.

Certainly, the presence of all these aspects of Whitmanic, or oral colloquial prose-based, poetry is not simply coincidental. They are present because the author follows Whitman's lead and because he is craftsman enough to blend the many diverse elements into a successful poetic synthesis.

Sandburg does follow in Whitman's footsteps despite Sandburg's unwillingness to subordinate narrative to technique, rhythm, or theme. Poems like "Chicago" express American colloquial verse as Whitman developed it. Sandburg is not, however, content to continue producing imitative Whitmanic poems. Instead, he carries forth the experiments in form which Whitman's work had suggested. He attempts, first, to find the extent to which colloquial American prose can be embodied in verse; second, he wants to know the degree to which superimposed poetic ordering techniques can be eliminated

to move toward a poetry of common speech; and third, he maintains a consuming interest in the nature of American speech itself.

Both Sandburg and Whitman share a continuing interest in the language of American democracy. They believe that it is beautiful for itself and as an indicator of America's character. This interest combines with the first two elements to produce poetry radically different than had been seen before. Yet in the years between Whitman's publication of the first edition of Leaves of Grass in 1855 and Sandburg's serial publication of Chicago Poems in 1914 the mood shifts in favor of admitting more common speech into poetry. Therefore, Carl Sandburg can do things in colloquial prose-based verse that Whitman's audience would never have accepted. In this way, Sandburg is able to extend Whitman's experiments to find out how much unstylized colloquial prose can be introduced into poetry and to what extent the superimposed poetic ordering techniques, necessary in Whitman's era, can be abandoned. These three extensions of Whitman's experimental verse continue throughout Sandburg's later years.

One other non-Whitmanic element also shapes Sandburg's later poetry: the intermixture of imagistic and Whitmanic elements in colloquial prose-based poetry. In Carl Sandburg's poetry through at least 1918, imagistic and Whitmanic poems appear side by side, but they never intermingle within a single poem. As the years pass, however, Sandburg begins to allow greater integration of the two poetic types. This integration offers the poet the advantages of Whitmanic expansiveness and truth to colloquial usage along with

imagism's compression and ability to deal with fleeting moments, images, or things incapable of explanation. In Sandburg's later years, the naming, listing tendency of Whitmanic verse combines with the formidable descriptive powers of imagism. The amalgam proves very successful artistically.

Let us trace Sandburg's experiments in verse and see the ways in which they modify oral colloquial poetry as received from Whitman. Sandburg's interest in prose as the base for poetry leads him to attempt to integrate as much colloquial prose into his poetry as possible.

The first result of Sandburg's attempts at more proselike verse is the increasing emphasis he puts on lines far longer than traditional poetry can encompass. The verse appears shapeless and paragraphically proselike to the eye, but when read, the lines show that the dominant Whitmanic techniques are still present. One of many examples of this movement to poems using multi-line paragraphic lines is the poem entitled "Destroyers."

Grandfather and grandfather's uncle stand looking at the harbor. "Look there," says grandfather, "and you see a torpedo boat. Next to it is a torpedo boat destroyer. And next to the torpedo boat destroyer is a destroyer of torpedo boat destroyers."

And grandfather's uncle says, "I heard my grandfather's uncle say every echo has a destroyer and for every destroyer there is a destroyer of echo destroyers."

And grandfather's uncle says, "I remember hearing my grandfather's uncle say every destroyer carries a pocket of eggs and the eggs wait and when they are ready they go blooey and the works of the destroyer blows up."

So they stand looking at the harbor, grandfather a grand old gray-whiskered monochromic sea-dog and grandfather's uncle a grand old gray-whiskered monochromic landlubber.

"Columbus," says grandfather, "Columbus was only a little dago, a ginny, a wop, and he changed the shape of the earth; before Columbus came the shape of the earth was square and flat and he made it round and round in the heads of men."

"Yes," said grandfather's uncle, "he was bugs, he was loony, he saw things in a pig's eye, he had rats in his garret, bats in his belfry, there was a screw loose somewhere in him, he had a kink and he was a crank, he was nuts and belonged in a booby hatch."

And the two grand old gray-whiskered monochromic men, one a sea-dog, the other a landlubber, laughed, laughed, laughed in each other's sea-green, land-gray eyes.³¹

The second experiment, prompted by Sandburg's desire to increase the amount of prose in his poetry, is his movement toward parallelisms of many lines in which there is one or even two non-parallel elements. Here, too, the attempt is to move one step closer to recording in poetry the real language spoken by the American masses. Sandburg's movement to long paragraphic lines and his experiments in including non-parallel elements in a parallel structure are both exemplified by a poem from Smoke and Steel entitled "In the Shadow of the Palace." In this poem the third and fourth lines break the parallelism set up by the other lines in the poem.

Let us go out of the fog, John, out of the filmy persistent
drizzle on the streets of Stockholm, let us put down the
collars of our raincoats, take off our hats and sit in the
newspaper office.

Let us sit among the telegrams--clickety-click--the kaiser's
crown goes into the gutter and the Hohenzollern throne of a
thousand years falls to pieces a one-hoss shay.

It is a fog night out and the umbrellas are up and the collars
of the raincoats--and all the steamboats up and down the Baltic
sea have their lights out and the wheelmen sober.

Here the telegrams come--one king goes and another--butter is
costly: there is no butter to buy for our bread in Stockholm--
and a little patty of butter costs more than all the crowns of
Germany.

Let us go out in the fog, John, let us roll up our raincoat
collars and go on the streets where men are sneering at the
kings.³²

The third of Sandburg's experiments in increasing the natural oral prose sound in his poetry is the use of first words of lines which are neither the same word nor parallel syntactically. Instead, Sandburg begins to include first words which are only alliterative. The alliterative sound gives a hint of regularity to both the reader and listener while moving away from the somewhat artificial, stylized usage of consistent parallelism and identical first words. It is, however, necessary to maintain the sense of oral prose rhythm, so Carl Sandburg maintains the alliterative first letter, and he embeds the less-parallel structures in a group of parallel forms. In that way the poet achieves a sense of rhythm and the natural slight deviations from the evolved prose rhythm. The poem "Runaway Colors" from Honey and Salt establishes a strong pattern and then deviates slightly in the last line.

The smoke of these landscapes has gone God knows where.
The sun touches them off with shot gold of an evening,
 with a mother's gray eyes singing to her children.
The blue smudge on a haystack a mile off is gone God
 knows where.
The yellow dust on a sheet over Emil Hawkinson's corn-
 field,
The ribbons of red picked at by the high-flying, hard-
 crying crows,
These too are in the pits of the west God knows where.³³

Other poems using this technique exhibit far greater deviation from an established pattern than this poem. In many cases only two lines are necessary to establish a pattern; then, one or more lines are added which correspond to the pattern only in their alliterative first words.

Carl Sandburg's attempts to extend the usage of unstylized or less-stylized prose lead him to experiment with the partial or complete removal of many Whitmanic poetic ordering techniques. Yet he is not moving toward formlessness as such. Sandburg recognizes that he is writing poetry and that poetry must impose form on language and subject. His experiment consists of attempts to find more subtle and less artificial ways of inducing form into the common speech of Americans. He attempts to find, at times, the least amount of poetic ordering to which Americans will respond by finding ordered poetry--not shapeless, amorphous language.

Sandburg has been accused repeatedly of amorphousness. Some of his poems may indeed be amorphous, but they are the unsuccessful experiments, the ones which push the limits of form too far. Instead of formlessness as an end in itself, Sandburg, in his later years, is attempting to assert near or apparent formlessness as the epitome of form! He wants form, but he doesn't want artificial or constricting form. Those individuals schooled in other poetic traditions are particularly apt to misjudgment in this field. Seeing that the techniques characteristic of other forms of poetry are not present, they assume that this poetry is formless. They are not attuned to the different and often more subtle techniques and structures of predominantly oral poetry.

Sandburg's experiments lead him to attempt poetry which reduces or eliminates several characteristic Whitmanic elements. But as Sandburg moves experimentally toward greater formlessness, certain basic aspects of form become more important than ever. These include

precise language, parallelism, alliteration, motif-like use of key words, and, to some extent, refrains. Parallelism asserts a sense of order and fosters repetitive rhythms. Alliteration in the first word of lines gives the impression of regularity. In other positions, it adds an element of musical enjoyment. The motif-like repetition of key words or phrases acts both rhythmically and to enhance understanding. Used in this manner, motif-like repetition appears at important moments and grows in density of appearance until the point is made and the subject changes.

Refrains, like the first few and last lines of "Chicago," are often used when most other ordering techniques are absent. In these instances, the refrain serves as a reminder that the otherwise loosely organized material is indeed poetry. The refrain becomes most important when other elements are missing and when the poetry is heard rather than read.

Finally, as more and more structural devices and rhythmic techniques disappear, only language is left. At these moments the precision of language usage must be greatest, for the poet counts on natural speech rhythm and fidelity to uniquely American speech patterns to assume the weight of ordering the poetry. Any impurity of speech or imperfection of diction will destroy the mood as well as the sense of order.

Sandburg's reason for increasing the amount of apparently amorphous prose in his writing and removing the most artificial poetic ordering techniques derives from his love for the American language as spoken by the common people. Sandburg and Whitman

share a consuming interest in the language itself and as an indicator of the national character. Whitman's interest in slang and colloquial terms is closely akin to Sandburg's collection of American language and song samples. Democratic principles lead both men to attempt to carry the language of the people over into their poetry.

For Sandburg, The People, Yes is the fullest embodiment of this desire. In trying to catch and preserve the language of the people, Sandburg adds two more experimental techniques to his list. The first of these is the movement toward more epigrammatic verse. The second is the importation of lists of American catchphrases or language pastiches into poetry. One example of Sandburg's usage of apparently unrelated aphorisms and language samples occurs in Section Forty-Nine of The People, Yes.

Wedlock is a padlock.
Take a good look at the mother before
getting tied up with the daughter.
Let a mother be ever so bad she wishes
her daughter to be good.
The man hardly ever marries the woman
he jokes about: she often marries the
man she laughs at.
Keep your eyes open before marriage,
half-shut afterward.³⁴

While the epigrammatic urge exists readily in conjunction with normal Whitmanic techniques and poetic ordering practices, the listing of unrelated catchphrases and language samples usually does not. One must recognize the existence of some central idea or motif running through the expressions and unifying them to some extent. Also, before deciding that these are a departure from Whitmanic technique, another look is in order. Whitman himself composed long

lists of things seen or experienced with only the slightest ordering statement holding them together. In The People, Yes, Carl Sandburg is doing exactly the same thing, only he is recording a list of things heard or said. The attempt is not really as radical as it seems on first impression--especially if one remembers that the epigrams and lists of catch-phrases are unified; they are all examples of a central concept--language itself and language as an indicator of the character of the speaker.

Sandburg indicates just such an intention indirectly in Section One of The People, Yes. Here, he tells the parable of the progress of man.

From the four corners of the earth,

 tall men from tall rocky sleepy valleys,
 Their women tall, their women sleepy,

 with little ones babbling, "Where to now?
 what next?"

The people of the earth, the family of man,
 wanted to put up something proud to look at,
 a tower from the flat land of earth
 on up through the ceiling into the top of the sky.

And the big job got going,

And God Almighty could have struck them dead
 or smitten them deaf and dumb.

And God was a whimsical fixer.
 God was an understanding Boss
 with another plan in mind,
 And suddenly shuffled all the languages,
 changed the tongues of men
 so they all talked different

.
 Some called it the Tower of Babel job
 And the people gave it many other names.

the wreck of it stood as a skull and a ghost,
 a memorandum hardly begun,
 swaying and sagging in tall hostile winds,
 held up by slow friendly winds.³⁵

With these lines Sandburg begins his study of man's attempts to cope with life; American character is mirrored in the aphorisms and catch-phrases of the people. Sandburg, like Whitman, is attempting to close the gap between elite poetic forms and the inherent folk wisdom and expression of America. This poetry attempts to reassert folk values and language while embodying them in more sophisticated ordering structures.

In Sandburg's first successful volume of poems, Chicago Poems, several non-Whitmanic poems appear. Clearly, these poems are the product of different poetic norms than those inspiring the Whitmanic poetry. "Fog" is an example of these poems, and imagism is the shaping philosophy underlying them. For years these two very different types of poetry exist side by side in Sandburg's verse, but they never intermingle. Poems are either long-lined, Whitmanic oral colloquial prose poems or spare imagistic pieces centering upon a single image or mood. In later Sandburg poetry, however, the types begin to merge. Sandburg becomes more selective in positioning words on the page, even in Whitmanic poems. He tends also toward shorter lines (except for his experiments in multiline poetic lines). Enjambed lines and shorter vertical sections also become more common as the poet moves from repetitive verbal opulence toward verbal sparseness.

The critics who reject the idea of highly organized Sandburg poetry will undoubtedly scoff at the idea of integrated

Whitmanic-imagistic poems, but literally hundreds of poems support the assertion. To those who say Sandburg is not sophisticated enough to consider the nuances of poetic forms, I cite Sandburg's February 11, 1904 letter to his mentor, Professor Philip Green Wright. "I have through innate interest given the subject some thought and have read Harry Thurston Peck on the subject I refer to, i. e., "The Psychology of the Printed Page." And hereafter if I'm going to judge of the merits of two writers, they must both be read in the same typographical garb."³⁶

Surely, a practising journalist, propagandist for social reform, and poet interested in studying the psychology of response to placement of words on paper and use of type styles is highly unlikely to disregard these elements in his own poetry. As early as "Prairie," the first poem in Cornhuskers, Whitmanic and imagistic poetry are clearly beginning to merge. The last three stanzas show both tendencies.

O prairie mother, I am one of your boys.
 I have loved the prairie as a man with a heart shot full
 of pain over love.
 Here I know I will hanker after nothing so much as one
 more sunrise or a sky mood of fire doubled to a
 river moon of water.

I speak of new cities and new people.
 I tell you the past is a bucket of ashes.
 I tell you yesterday is a wind gone down,
 a sun dropped in the west.
 I tell you there is nothing in the world
 only an ocean of tomorrows,
 a sky of tomorrows.

I am a brother of the cornhuskers who say
 at sundown:
 Tomorrow is a day.³⁷

In "Laughing Blue Steel" in Smoke and Steel, the integration is complete.

Two fishes swimming in the sea,
 Two birds flying in the air,
 Two chisels on an anvil--maybe.
 Beaten, hammered, laughing blue steel to each other--maybe.
 Sure I would rather be a chisel with you
 than a fish.
 Sure I would rather be a chisel with you
 than a bird.
 Take these two chisel-pals, O God.
 Take 'em and beat 'em, hammer 'em,
 hear 'em laugh.³⁸

Finally, in Harvest Poems, we see the fullest application of Whitmanic elements exemplified in a thoroughly imagistic poem, which nevertheless retains something of a Whitmanic flavor. The poem is "Kisses Forgotten."

We will weep
 yet not weep together.
 the harm is over
 the blame is on both
 the harm forgotten
 the blame kissed away
 with kisses forgotten.³⁹

Clearly, Sandburg's contribution to modern poetry is immense. He adopts and further develops Whitmanic colloquial prose-based poetry techniques without sacrificing his own greater emphasis upon narrative strength. He develops Whitmanic techniques with those of imagism. He broadens the range of poetry and immortalizes the speech of the twentieth century working masses. He works to harmonize folk, popular, and elite poetry; and his democratic and cosmic optimism has inspired many generations of Americans.

Sandburg's poetic life was always that of an experimenter. In a 1921 interview with Water Yust of The Bookman, he said he and

other experimenters were trying to achieve "a kind of freedom. We're not sure we're writing poetry. Remember Nora in Ibsen's "Doll's House"? She didn't know what it would be like, but she knew it was something fine, and that she had to go after it. I guess really we don't know where but we're on our way. We may never win this freedom; maybe we'll be interesting to future generations only because we are a step toward a higher development. I don't know."⁴⁰ These words echo Whitman's opinion of his own writing. Both men experimented, and some of their poems strained the bounds of poetry too far, but each of these poets had left a great body of poetry to which generations of Americans have responded.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ Herbert Mitgang, ed., The Letters of Carl Sandburg (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), p. 38.
- ² Mitgang, Letters, pp. 41, 66.
- ³ Mitgang, Letters, p. 66.
- ⁴ Richard Crowder, Carl Sandburg (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1964), p. 67.
- ⁵ North Callahan, Carl Sandburg: Lincoln of Our Literature (New York: N.Y.U. Press, 1970), p. 161.
- ⁶ Mitgang, Letters, p. 99.
- ⁷ Carl Sandburg, The Complete Poems of Carl Sandburg, Revised and Expanded Ed'n. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1970), xix.
- ⁸ Crowder, Sandburg, preface.
- ⁹ Mitgang, Letters, p. 27.
- ¹⁰ Callahan, Lincoln of Our Literature, p. 167.
- ¹¹ Crowder, Sandburg, p. 50.
- ¹² Crowder, Sandburg, p. 80.
- ¹³ Mitgang, Letters, p. 243.
- ¹⁴ Crowder, Sandburg, p. 106.
- ¹⁵ Sandburg, "Tentative (First Model) Definitions of Poetry," Complete Poems, 318.
- ¹⁶ Mitgang, Letters, p. 210.
- ¹⁷ Louis Untermeyer, Modern American Poetry, Modern British Poetry, New and enlarged ed'n. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1958), p. 16.
- ¹⁸ Callahan, Lincoln of Our Literature, p. 166.
- ¹⁹ Sandburg, "Tentative (First Model) Definitions of Poetry," Complete Poems, 318.
- ²⁰ Crowder, Sandburg, p. 82.

- 21 Crowder, Sandburg, p. 82.
- 22 Crowder, Sandburg, p. 86.
- 23 Crowder, Sandburg, p. 86.
- 24 Crowder, Sandburg, p. 78.
- 25 Sandburg, Complete Poems, xxxi.
- 26 Crowder, Sandburg, p. 56.
- 27 Crowser, Sandburg, p. 45.
- 28 Callahan, Lincoln of Our Literature, p. 169.
- 29 Mitgang, Letters, p. 168.
- 30 Sandburg, "Chicago," Complete Poems, pp. 3-4.
- 31 Sandburg, "Destroyers," Complete Poems, p. 413.
- 32 Sandburg, "In The Shadow of the Palace," Complete Poems,
p, 237.
- 33 Sandburg, "Runaway Colors," Complete Poems, p. 752.
- 34 Sandburg, "The People, Yes," Complete Poems, p. 503.
- 35 Sandburg, "The People, Yes," Complete Poems, pp. 439-440.
- 36 Mitgang, Letters, p. 22.
- 37 Sandburg, "Prairie," Complete Poems, p. 85.
- 38 Sandburg, "Laughing Blue Steel," Complete Poems, p. 216.
- 39 Sandburg, "Kisses Forgotten," Complete Poems, p. 679.
- 40 Crowder, Sandburg, p. 85.

CHAPTER SIX

SHERWOOD ANDERSON:

WHITMANISM ON THE RAGGED EDGE

Walt Whitman was the spokesman for America's early achievements and sense of purpose. His great poems predated common knowledge of Darwin and Freud. Whitman's America was predominantly rural and agricultural; it had not experienced industrialism and laissez faire capitalism. However, America's idyllic period of firm values and identity with the land could not last. During the period of America's transformation to a self-conscious industrial nation, another poet-prophet would appear--a man deeply influenced by the strains of America's coming of age. Ironically, the new poet at first dismisses Whitman as "windy" and "tricky."¹

Sherwood Anderson seeks to be the prophet of America's industrial future. His life and writings epitomize the tensions America is experiencing. His consciousness of the parallelism between personal and national experience shapes his interpretation of life, just as it determines the subject matter of his writings.

Anderson's experiences lead him to assume many apparently contradictory positions. He seeks radical modernity, yet his philosophy is essentially conservative; he believes in craftsmanship yet he apostrophizes "crudity." His writing, too, is difficult

to characterize. Critics have called it realistic, naturalistic, impressionistic, expressionistic, and transcendental--all with some good reason.*

If we are to understand Anderson and his relation to Whitman, we must consider his personal life and prose writings as well as his poetry. As a child he sees opportunities for success as intense and immediate as those presented in the Horatio Alger books. But he also feels his own potential for failure.² His father, one of the first technologically unemployed craftsmen, had left the family with uncertain prospects and diminishing resources. Sherwood Anderson, therefore, begins his adult life with only the determination to succeed and the midwestern oral storytelling tradition which his father practiced. Horatio Alger boosterism and childhood

* In addition to Anderson's own comments on his form as fantasy, anti-realistic, anti-naturalistic, and subjective, several other commentators have considered this question. Among those holding each of the cited positions are: (naturalism and impressionism) Walcutt, "Sherwood Anderson: Impressionism and the Buried Life," from "Literary Nationalism: A Divided Stream," contained in Ray Lewis White's The Achievement of Sherwood Anderson: Essays in Criticism (1966), pp. 156-157, 162; (realist) James Schevill, Sherwood Anderson: His Life and Work (Denver: University of Denver Press, 1951), p. 81, and Norman Foerster, The Reinterpretation of American Literature (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1960), p. 158; (impressionism and post-impressionism) Rex Burbank, Sherwood Anderson (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1964), p. 62; (expressionist) James Schevill, Sherwood Anderson: His Life and Work, pp. 91, 99; (American idealism/transcendentalism) David D. Anderson, Sherwood Anderson: An Introduction and Interpretation (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1967), p. 168; (mythic) Schevill, Sherwood Anderson: His Life and Work, p. 101; (mystical) Julius W. Friend, "The Philosophy of Sherwood Anderson," in Paul P. Appel, ed., Homage to Sherwood Anderson 1861-1941 (Mamoroneck, New York: Paul P. Appel, 1970), p. 57; (lyricism/non-realistic) Bernard Buffey, The Chicago Renaissance in American Letters (East Lansing: M. S. U. Press, 1954), p. 56.

insecurity alternately dominate his mental state. The basis for his later success is present from the first; he is to use his interpretations of midwestern experience communicated through the oral tradition. Through this medium he asserts his own sense of personal identity. Anderson himself declares, "I am by nature a story teller. No one ever taught me. . . . I'm a natural."³

Midwestern origins are a source of pride to Anderson, but they have their drawbacks as well. Except for Whitman's daring use of "common" vocabulary, language patterns, and subject matter, midwestern experience is not yet established in literature. Well-educated, genteel Easterners dominate the field. Anderson expresses this hesitancy, saying, "[Writing,] it had been pointed out to me, was a field for educated men, and I was not educated. I spelled badly. . . . I knew nothing of punctuation; to save my life could not have phrased a sentence. It was true that I had read eagerly, since childhood, but for most of my life I had associated with workingmen."⁴ Only as he recognizes the validity of midwestern experience and gains confidence in his ability to convey these experiences in midwestern speech patterns does his insecurity wane.

Yet if Anderson's subject matter and language break daringly from genteel literary standards, his subject and language are common and conservative. Distressed by the imperfect present and future, Anderson's writing turns to the values and ways of life in the past. He considers himself "fortunate to have been born an American in what may well turn out to be America's happiest period, to have been poor and in a small town, when community life was intimate and close, to

have had to work as a laborer both in factories and on farms, to have known thus from whence comes the food that has nourished [his] body and with what toil it is produced."⁵

But American life is becoming more complicated and unsatisfying. "Robber baron" capitalism has little in common with tradition-oriented nineteenth century American small town life. The nineteenth century had offered strong personal and social value systems, but Anderson cannot accept all aspects of the past either. Restrictive Puritanism, he believes, had perverted life in the past. Thus, facing an imperfect past and a malignantly terrifying present and future, Anderson retreats to an imaginative world in which man's needs and values do not conflict with material reality. He believes that "to the imaginative man in the modern world . . . life splits itself into . . . two sections, and, no matter how long one may live . . . the two ends continue to dangle. . . . There is the life of fancy. In it one sometimes moves through ordered days, or at least through ordered hours. In the life of fancy there is no such thing as good or bad. There are no Puritans. The dry sisters of Philistia do not come in at the door. They cannot breathe in the life of fancy."⁶

Anderson believes rational thought cannot lead man to fulfillment. Instead, emotion and intuition are the guides he, like Whitman and the Transcendentalists, follows. Despite the blows dealt to man's self-esteem by contemporary events and scientific discoveries, Anderson clings to an irrational faith in the primacy

of man and the shaping power of the imagination. He is "determined to show the evils inherent in a world dominated by materialism."⁷

Sherwood Anderson's mature life is largely a search for a home and identity. He wants roots in a long-established community, and he seeks emotional ties with the best aspects of the past. These are his safeguards against a hostile world. Imaginative reappraisal of himself and his past is the primary means of healing the breach with reality.

Following Anderson's mental breakdown in late 1912 and his subsequent separation from advertising, he feels most alienated from his world. Creative and financial responsibilities drive him in opposite directions. His major themes and his style have already begun to develop by this time. In the following years he will further explore the meaning of American life, but the main lines are already set. His later experimentation will concern itself with techniques by which he can more effectively approximate midwestern language and speech patterns. Two of these experiments are Mid-American Chants and A New Testament.

The major difference between Sherwood Anderson and the other Chicago poets is Anderson's inability to share Whitman's optimism. He expresses this doubt retrospectively, saying, "Well enough for Walt Whitman, Carl Sandburg and others to sing of the strength and fineness of laboring men, making heroes of them, but already the democratic dream had faded and laborers were not my heroes. . . . Was it not apparent that something had already happened to the democracy on which Whitman had counted so much?"⁸ Inability

to accept Whitman's vision leads Anderson in his early Chicago years to dislike Whitman and what Anderson believes he stood for. Violently opposed to America's capitalistic greed, Anderson tries to perpetuate antithetical values like respect for craftsmanship. He rejects Whitman's premises about the common man, believing that

in America . . . something went wrong in the beginning. We pretended to so much and were going to do such great things here. This vast land was to be a refuge for all the outlawed brave foolish folk of the world. The declaration of the rights of man was to have a new hearing in a new place. . . . We were going to be superhuman and it turned out we were sons of men. . . . You cannot blame us that we are somewhat reluctant about finding out the very human things concerning ourselves. One does so hate to come down off the perch. . . . Oh, how Americans have wanted heroes, wanted brave simple fine men! And how sincerely and deeply we Americans have been afraid to understand and love each other, fearing to find ourselves at the end no more brave, heroic and fine than the people of almost any other part of the world.⁹

During the period from 1913 through 1916 Anderson is very bitter because he sees America's potential being perverted. He considers Whitman a charlatan--not a man facing America's imperative problems. He recognizes Whitman's artistic greatness early, but he feels Whitman's superficial optimism negates his poetic ability. Anderson's reaction against Whitman seems largely a reaction against Anderson's own "immoral" advertising career, writing glib statements to sell lackluster products.

Yet even Anderson's strong statement deflating accepted optimistic assumptions about America concedes their importance and partial validity.

There was a time here when we were sincerely in earnest about all this American business, the land of the free and the home of the brave. We actually meant it and no

one will ever understand present day America or Americans who does not concede that we meant it and that while we were building all of our big ugly hurriedly thrown together towns, creating our great industrial system, growing always more huge and prosperous, we were as much in earnest about what we thought we were doing as were the French of the thirteenth century when they built the Cathedral of Chartres to the glory of God.¹⁰

Anderson wants to reassert the nineteenth century spiritual values which gave Americans a sense of identity and purpose without the restrictive Puritan morality that had limited the nation's potential. Clearly, Anderson feels that radical measures are necessary. Direct rational exposition of personal and national problems have not succeeded. Thus he uses emotion and memory as tools for presenting his views.

Mid-American Chants is Anderson's first attempt to "express the hunger within."¹¹ As such, these Chants are partially a protest against the rampant ugliness and the dehumanizing qualities in industrial life.¹² But the Chants are not an expression of utter desolation. Rather, they signify the beginning of a lifetime crusade to reassert beauty and humanity. In his forward to the poems, Anderson moves beyond rejection and makes the first tentative step toward acceptance of modernity: "I do not believe that we people of mid-western America, immersed as we are in affairs, hurried and harried through life by the terrible engine--industrialism--have come to the time of song. . . . We do not sing but mutter in the darkness. Our lips are cracked with dust and with the heat of furnaces. We but mutter and feel our way toward the promise of song."¹³ The salvation of modern society, Anderson believes, can be accomplished

only through return to older values. He believes men should live close to the land and renounce their greed. Anderson sees history as a continuing battle between polarized opponents. The rich and powerful are evil, while the good are the poor, simple people pushed into the industrial age unknowingly, against their will. He views American history as a conspiracy in which the wealthy and powerful attempt to control and subvert America's future.¹⁴

Chicago shows Anderson more than social and economic injustice, however; the city is alive with intellectual and artistic ferment.

Sherwood Anderson came to Chicago when the very air was electric; rarely has a locality provided so well the setting for the ferment of ideas and the development of personality. That was the period when Theodore Dreiser was still sold under the counter; when Harriet Munroe was scraping together a moderate endowment in order to print Lindsay, Frost, Robinson, and H. D.; when Edgar Lee Masters wrote verse under two names for Reedy's Mirror and practised law with Clarence Darrow; when Harriet Moody opened her house and her purse to poets from Ireland and Hoboken; when Maurice Browne began producing Greek plays; when Floyd Dell had inherited the Post from Francis Hackett, and Carl Sandburg was seen wearing his flowing black tie. It was small-town, Midwest, but the talk was not provincial.¹⁵

As Anderson finds support for his artistry, Chicago gives him the confidence to assert his values.

The themes, techniques, and function of Sherwood Anderson's art come clear in the years following his arrival in Chicago. His themes include the desire to find roots and identity, to regain America's lost purity and greatness, and to turn America to the pursuit of higher values. Anderson's experiences lead him toward greater agreement with Whitman. Both men want to replace materialism

with spiritual values. Ultimately, Anderson's theme centers upon "America's inability to distinguish between substance and dross and the all too frequent willingness to accept the cheaper substitute rather than search for the more valuable. . . . [He] points out that man's willingness to accept material values instead of spiritual values is responsible for the corruption of the American ideal and of American life."¹⁶

The more Anderson sees of industrial America, the more he retreats to the nostalgic security of small town nineteenth century America. He seeks roots, identity, a set of values which he can accept and be known by. In telling his story, he says, "I wanted, as all men do, to belong. To what? To an America alive, . . . to an America that had at last given up the notion that anything worthwhile could ever be got by being in a hurry, by being dollar rich, by being merely big and able to lick some smaller nation with one hand tied behind its broad national back."¹⁷

Clearly, he wants a prophetic role in shaping American culture just as Whitman, the Transcendentalists, and the English romantics had done earlier. Yet in Anderson's case the primary function of his art is purification of the artist himself. Anderson's care and precision in writing result from his desire to raise writing from the level of advertising to the status of art or craft. As the American dream appears more certainly to be dying, Anderson retreats strategically to literature, to art, where he can still act wisely, fairly, and honestly. He tries to gain a sense of pride and meaning through the craftsmanship of his productions. The

perfection which he cannot find in life, he seeks to reproduce--or at least immortalize--in his art. Anderson's art is to be both crusade and curative.

The Chicago Renaissance poets second his views and bolster his self-confidence. "The keynote of the Chicago Renaissance was liberation, and it was devoted to freeing the writer from confusion and from the concessions that idealism made to genteelness. . . . The movement['s] core was a determination to right old wrongs at the same time that it established a new and honest American literary tradition."¹⁸ Here, too, Anderson is nearing Whitman's positive approach, his advocacy of moral reform.

Despite their strong emphasis upon liberation, the other Chicago Renaissance writers share Anderson's essential conservatism and romanticism. They see that any vital writing must be regional in the best sense of the word. In 1925 he writes "In America the writer is faced with a situation that is unique. Our country is vast. In it are to be found so many different conditions of life, so many different social traditions that the writer who attempts to express in his work something national is in an almost impossible position. At best, as yet, he can only snatch at fragments."¹⁹ The America which Anderson knows is the midwest; therefore, he expresses his own experience and his own regional dialect in his writings. He is beginning to accept himself, his language, and his experience, and he has come a long way toward accepting Whitman. As he becomes surer of his personal and literary values, he begins to attack genteel literary standards along with the remnants of Puritan morality.

Along with the other Chicago poets, he wants to express "that great empire, the middle west, mid-America, the real body of America, the great fat land stretching from the Appalachian Mountains."²⁰

Anderson's mode of writing is difficult to define as I noted at the outset. His writing blends diverse aspects of many literary modes. In treating common subjects in the vernacular and in dealing with subjects previously forbidden in more genteel literature, Anderson's approach is superficially realistic. But realism is certainly not the most expressive term for what he is attempting in his poetry. "After 1914 . . . [Anderson] was concerned with portraying the actual social and individual conflicts that he knew from his own experience. Only in that sense was he a 'realist.' His style was always antinaturalistic, concerned not with the minute portrayal of facts, but with the significant selection of psychic detail."²¹

Indeed, the central dichotomy lies between the world of fancy and that of material fact. Rather than directly attacking industrial America, he seeks instead to "convey to his reader moments of feeling, of emotion and of . . . insight . . . hoping that in the process he can set free the spirit of the American people."²² The focus is on psychic reality rather than on "names, dates, and places."²³ He seeks to "record . . . and analyze . . . the impressions of generic man during the unique period that saw America transformed from an agricultural to an industrial state."²⁴

In a note to Gilbert Seldes in April, 1922, . . . he [said] "Down with realism! A bas naturalism! Up with fantasy!" His major interest was in the tragedy of the individual mind unable to adapt itself to the mechanical age. . . . He hoped that the effect on the reader would be that of greater

self-analysis. . . . He was following the modern trend towards a greater internal examination of character. No longer would the battle of man with fate be paramount, but the struggle of man with his own mind and body.²⁵

Anderson's writings, particularly the poetry, embody the romantic assumptions that man can recreate the universe through the imagination. Yet this reassertion of romantic premises contradicts all the disquieting knowledge man has gained since the heyday of the romantics. Freud, Darwin, Strauss, and economic determinism have shattered the romantics' pristine world view. And surprisingly enough, Anderson himself admits the most damaging of these truths, saying, "There is this thing called 'life.' We live it, not as we intend or wish but as we are driven on by forces outside and inside ourselves. There is something insidious, often malicious, brutal, selfish, at rare moments even tender, really considerate of others."²⁶

Thus, Anderson accepts all the naturalistic assumptions about man, and he goes even further. In a letter to his son, John, he says, "The drawn object doesn't matter so much. It's what you feel about it, what it means to you."²⁷ Knowingly or not, Anderson is repeating Pater's variation of Ruskin's dictum on art.

Impressionism is the core of Anderson's poetry; therefore, he focuses on psychological states, moments of insight with no real beginning or end. Anderson fully recognizes the difficulty of his undertaking. He says, "It is the most delicate and the most unbelievably difficult task to catch, understand, and record your own mood. The thing must be done simply and without pretense or windiness, for the moment these creep in, your record is no longer a

record, but a mere mass of words meaning nothing. The value of such a record is not in the facts caught and recorded but in the fact of you having been able truthfully to make the record."²⁸

Imagination offers Anderson alternatives unreachable by any other means. It metamorphoses the dreary, unfulfilled world gone wrong; it joins all experience, linking moments normally separated by time and space; and it offers a refuge against an unsympathetic age. Thus, Anderson's emphasis on imagination is both a literary technique and a last ditch attempt to celebrate man and allow him to dominate his experience. At his most dispirited, Anderson is romantic in seeking refuge for man alienated from his world. His romanticism desperately employs impressionistic and even surrealistic portrayal of psychic states to protect man's pre-scientific view of himself.

Myth, too, becomes a favorite Anderson technique for organizing and interpreting American experience in his poetry.²⁹ Indeed, Anderson's compulsive reinterpretations of his life recur largely in the hope that the reinterpreted theme will give all experience meaning and worth, that it will all contribute to a successful conclusion. Anderson's technique is, then, essentially impressionistic and archetypal. He seeks basic patterns in his experience and finds them not in realistic experience but in the fleeting patterns and impressions of the mind. The definition of impressionism correlates closely to this artistic approach.

[It] suggests the shaping of a narrative sequence in accordance with the flow of feelings and thoughts, or impressions of the narrator rather than chronological time. This meant that form

would develop in two ways: first, from within the narrative . . . which required that the traditional 'plot' sequence of action . . . would be abandoned for a form that moves with the mind and feelings; and, second, because both mind and feelings operate in a continuum of time, following moods, attitudes, or ideas rather than a chronological order, form would grow by means of a series of disconnected images which are thematically and symbolically related and coalescent like the paintings of the French impressionists. . . . For Anderson . . . the new principle of order or organization was psychological rather than external and linear.³⁰

Walcutt believes

impressionism attempts to render quality of experience more closely, . . . colorfully, . . . delicately. . . . To this end it presents the mind of a character receiving impressions rather than judging, classifying, or speculating; and because it attempts to catch the experience as it is received, the experience will not have a reasonable order but a chronological or associational one. The order in Anderson's work is one of its most striking qualities, for it shows people thinking of several things at once, combining incidents in the past with present experience which now makes those incidents relevant, and having at the same time emotions which they cannot understand while they entertain thoughts which do not do justice to their emotional states. As a device of presentation he tells his stories through the minds of ignorant--or certainly unstudied--narrators who have no sense of selection and arrangement and so give a story that has the tone and flavor of free association.³¹

While these elements of the definitions are true of Anderson's prose, they are far truer of his poetry. In these poems, narrative, or plot line, often disappears, and the poems delimit the welter of sensations surrounding the bewildered narrative voice. Structural restrictions do not block emphasis on mental impressions of experience.

Anderson wants his art to feed on life while remaining separate from it. This view leads him to subjective writing. Both his definition of subjective writing and his reservations about the mode are enlightening. They point out the consciousness with which

Anderson approaches his craft. "I do not know how far a man may go on the road to subjective writing. . . . There is something approaching insanity in the very idea of sinking yourself too deeply into modern American industrial life. But it is my contention that there is no other road. If a man would avoid neat slick writing, he must at least attempt to be brother to his brothers and live as the man of his time lives. He must share with them the crude expression of their lives."³² Anderson points out that "the subjective impulse is almost unknown to us. Because it is close to life it works out into crude and broken forms. It leads along a road that such masters of prose as James and Howells did not want to take but if we are to get anywhere we shall have to travel that road."³³ In accepting "crude and broken forms" he breaks formally with the genteel literary establishment and follows Whitman toward a discovery of America.

With this philosophy, Anderson clearly is not content to write formless prose or poetry. Instead, apparent formlessness is his conscious attempt to portray "lives flowing past each other"³⁴ and to express mid-American lives in terms of the language and rhythmic patterns actually used there.

Anderson's emphasis on craft and the American vernacular is equally important. He believes that the Modern Movement consists of throwing out "the tricks of realism and representation and the absorption in surface technique and . . . trying to bring feeling and form back into . . . the writing of poetry. . . . The Modern Movement . . . is in reality an attempt on the part of the workman to get back into his own hands some control over the tools and

materials of his craft. . . . The worker in words has a . . . [good] chance. . . . The real pioneering for the better workmen has been done by men like Whitman and Dreiser."³⁵ With Anderson's self-dedication to the Modern Movement, he rejects his earlier slickness, craft without honesty. He works for the "rejection of truth and honesty into the craft; . . . an appeal from the standards set up by money making magazine and book publishers in Europe and America to the older, sweeter standards of the craft itself."³⁶ He sees that "there . . . [are] two steps necessary. . . . One had first of all to face one's materials, accept the life about, quit running off in fancy to India, to England, to the South Seas. . . . There [is] something else, too. We had to begin to face the possibilities of the surfaces of our pages."³⁷

The first point in Anderson's artistic credo is the acceptance of the environment as a complete and perfect subject for literature. He, like Whitman, opts for settings and situations unfamiliar to genteel literature. This choice is the basis for his advocacy of "crudity." He sees mid-America as crude and unsubtle in its language and perception of life. He believes that any honest artist has to paint life and language as they are, rather than resorting to falsified versions of Eastern or European literature. He mirrors Whitman's views, in asking "Why should we Americans aspire to an appearance of subtlety that belongs not to us but to old lands and places? Why talk of intellectuality and of intellectual life when we have not accepted the life we have? There is death on that

road and following it has brought death into much of American writing."³⁸

Sherwood Anderson's "crudity" is not formlessness; it is authentic organic American form; it is the language and experience of real people--the experience of the dehumanizing standardized industrial city in which all man's values and needs are subordinated to the demands of machines and the avariciousness of owners. It is the reaction against the falsity of glibly optimistic slick literature. Crudity is Sherwood Anderson's first step toward creating an honest picture of the psychic experience of twentieth century midwestern industrial man, and a movement in the direction of personal purification.

Anderson writes with precision and an ear responsive to the speech rhythms and vocabulary of the common people--the very technique which Whitman had used as the base for his poetry. He emphasizes use of the vernacular, saying

I had long been telling myself, "You will have to stay where you have put yourself." There was a language of the streets of American towns and cities, the language of the factories and warehouses where I had worked, of laborer's rooming houses, the saloons, the farms.

"It is my own language, limited as it is. I will have to learn to work with it." There was a kind of painting I was seeking in my prose, word to be laid against word in just a certain way, a kind of word color, an arch of words and sentences, the color to be squeezed out of simple words, simple sentence construction. . . . Most of the men of the time did feel that writing, the telling of tales, had got too far away from life as we men of the time were living and what was so wonderful to me, in the new associations I had found, was a certain boldness of speech.³⁹

This vernacular language, he believes, is an important tool through which he can "press . . . [himself] down, not into earth but into body and spirit of men" his fellows.⁴⁰

Walt Whitman's influence on Anderson, though less direct and immediate than on Carl Sandburg, is indeed great. And throughout his career Anderson's respect and admiration for Whitman grow. Many oral prose-based poetic techniques which Whitman innovated appear largely unchanged in Anderson's first poetic experiment, Mid-American Chants. He never achieves Whitman's serene optimism, however; for this reason Anderson's poetry never uses the most central Whitmanic technique, rhetorical expansion mirroring optimism or ecstatically expanded consciousness.

In early 1914 Poetry publishes Carl Sandburg's Chicago Poems, and shortly after, Edgar Lee Masters' Spoon River Anthology appears. Sandburg's poetry is the direct inheritor of the complete Whitmanic tradition. Masters' Spoon River, although far from completely Whitmanic, also shows the hallmarks of Whitman's style. Since these two poetic works are among the best and most popular productions of the Chicago Renaissance, they attract great attention. Within a few months, Anderson begins his own experiment. It seems very likely that the lessons taught by Sandburg and Masters are not lost on Anderson when he begins writing in late 1914 and early 1915. Indeed, textual evidence suggests that Anderson's discovery of Whitman and his poetry occurs largely through Sandburg's use of Whitmanic themes and techniques. In almost every instance where Whitman and Sandburg diverge in their use of techniques, Anderson follows

Sandburg's lead. It appears that his first clear vision of Whitman comes through Sandburg's poetry and respect for Whitman.

Because of the haphazardness of Anderson's education and reading, one cannot determine whether he had read much of Whitman's poetry before starting to write his own in 1914. Certainly, he becomes familiar with the Whitmanic method of Sandburg and Masters. He can hardly escape discussions of these poets in his 57th and Stony Island bohemian apartment. Also, Poetry's dedication to Whitmanic principles, subjects, and language must occasion discussion of Whitman and his poetry.

By 1917 Anderson rates Whitman as one of America's three great seminal writers, in company with Twain and Poe. Later, he proposes Whitman as one of the five greatest Americans. Still later, in "The Modern Writer," Anderson declaims against the failure of the American establishment to proclaim Whitman as a major influence and to propagate his name and teachings. In this 1925 publication he says, "Although by the world in general Whitman is recognized as our one great American poet, I have heard of no general movement to introduce him into our public schools to take the place of the decidedly second rate and imitative New Englander, Longfellow."⁴¹

Finally, in 1931 Anderson writes the introduction to Whitman's Leaves of Grass. Here, he asserts that "Whitman is in the bones of America as Ralph Waldo Emerson is in the American mentality, but what is needed here now is a return to the bones and blood of life--to Whitman."⁴² Anderson further apostrophizes Whitman's prose-based poetry as well as his vision of America in the same introduction.

As Anderson becomes more confident in his ability to cope with America artistically, his optimism increases and he begins to see more value in Whitman's commentary on America.

Read the rocking long and short American verses. Who was it said only the negroes had brought real song into America? Wail, all hail, negro workmen, river hands, plantation hands, makers of songs, but hail also, always Whitman, white American, lustful one . . . [ellipsis in text].

Singer of the great sweet land, the broad land . . . singer of growing cities, horses plowing, men sowing seed, soft waves breaking on sea shores, forest singer, town and dusty road singer.

The great sweet land that Walt Whitman sang so lustily is still here. People now forget what America is . . . Why forget how huge, varied, strong and flowing it is? We gather too much and stay too long in holes in cities. We forget land-love, river and sky-love. To these we must return before we begin again to get brother to brother love of which Whitman sang and dreamed.

Whitman is the bones and blood of America. He is the real American singer. What is wanted among us now is a return to Whitman, to his songs, his dreams, his consciousness of the possibilities of the land that was his land and is our land.⁴³

Not only does Anderson eulogize Whitman here in the most glowing terms, he also pays the highest compliment of using Whitman's poetic style in the introductory eulogy. The line starting with "Whitman is in the bones of America" is repeated with slight variation and serves as a "refrain first" structure, characteristic of oral poetry. Anderson multiplies images in a Whitmanic list. He employs the most characteristic Whitmanic technique: expansion of rhetorical period to signal the expanding consciousness and ecstasy at the American scene.

a return to Whitman,
 to his songs, his dreams,
 his consciousness of the possibilities of the
 land that was his land and is our land.
 [taken from the quotation above and put into verse pattern]

Whitman's America is the America of Anderson's dream, and the two poets' views on life and the role of the poet are extraordinarily similar. "Sherwood Anderson had faith in American democracy. His faith was not literal but essential; . . . like Walt Whitman, he went to the heart of the matter, to the values on which democracy is built and which alone make it worth preserving. Anderson firmly held his belief in the sanctity of human personality, without which the machinery of democratic government is a ridiculous merry-go-round."⁴⁴

Both Anderson and Whitman believe that the poet should fill a priestly function, reawakening the people to their potential in a reconstituted society. In this respect, like Whitman, "Anderson is part of the mainstream of American romantic idealism."⁴⁵

Mid-American Chants, begun in late 1914 and early 1915, is Anderson's first extended attempt at writing poetry, and it is certainly the most Whitmanic of his verse experiments. The Chants are important to Anderson. The volume is a "self-conscious effort to rid his writing of its 'literaryness,' allowing it to seek its own natural rhythms."⁴⁶ Yet despite this conscious rejection of one form, it is not the "outright and unrestrained lyricism" which Duffey had charged.⁴⁷ The Chants fall neatly into the American oral prose tradition. Anderson attempts to write poetry in the style of Whitman and Sandburg; he simultaneously adopts the technique of aggressive

simplicity from Gertrude Stein. As such, the Chants testify to an increasing interest in the possibilities of common language and increased control of the writing process.

These poems are important in the Anderson canon partly because they express the author's mind freed from the constraints of prose plot development. They can more easily introduce symbolic and archetypal parallels as well as techniques which produce the nightmarish quality with which Anderson depicts twentieth century American life.

While the Chants express bafflement and dismay at the course which American life has taken, they also begin Anderson's counterattack against ugly American industrial life. With them, he first expresses awareness of beauty in some aspects of contemporary society: the health, vitality, and fertility that America possesses but has lost sight of.⁴⁸ The shift which this attitude represents is hard to over-estimate; it alters Anderson's experience of the country for the rest of his career.

There was, in the Chants, a deliberate effort to say yea, not to all Anderson had formerly denied, but to the inevitable essence of his own development and his work. His new acceptance depended on hope and imagination: new perceptions . . . of the qualities in Midwestern people and their lives which not only gave a different tone to the region than he had formerly recorded but . . . more important made it available for imaginative and sympathetic scrutiny. The early Anderson had been . . . a pessimistic rebel crying to himself the news of doom. After Mid-American Chants with their broad acceptance he could pick up the pieces of what he still regarded as a spoiled and broken life for detailed and genuinely loving treatment. . . . not acts of judgment but of commiseration and understanding.⁴⁹

Sherwood Anderson seconds this view in a 1918 letter to Van Wyck Brooks. He says, "In the chants I reached into my own personal muttering, half insane and disordered experience and tried to take out of them a little something ordered."⁵⁰

Anderson's Mid-American Chants expresses his experience of the time. They contain the idealist-victim's cry at the perversion of America; they present Whitmanic prose-based poetic techniques almost unmodified and even extend them to cover the psychological as well as the natural landscape.

Anderson's themes are very similar to Whitman's. The earlier poet wrote of America's promise; and Anderson, sixty years later, focuses on the promise America had shown before materialism and industrialism led it astray. Even so, Anderson's tone shifts noticeably about midway through the Chants. The early poems deal with frustration at tendencies in America, but the later poems assume a tone of resolute courage and optimism that America can return to its earlier promise.

These tendencies are apparent throughout the Chants. For example, the first poem of the collection, "The Cornfields," carries all the impressionist centering on psychic states as well as the difficulty of such poems. The first stanza begins

I am pregnant with song. My body aches but do not betray me. I will sing songs and hide them away. I will tear them into bits and throw them in the street. The streets of my city are full of dark holes. I will hide my songs in the holes of the streets.⁵¹

A later stanza impressionistically expresses the sense of defeat and despair.

On my knees I crawled before my people. I debased myself. The excretions of their bodies I took for my food. Into the ground I went and my body died. I emerged in the corn, in the long cornfields. My head arose and was touched by the west wind. The light of old things, of beautiful old things, awoke in me. In the cornfields the sacred vessel is set up.⁵²

Whatever resurrection the poem implies is certainly far away. Thus the Mid-American Chants begins. A similar impressionistic or surreal note is sounded in "The Beam," where pessimism and loss dominate psychically as well as physically.

Eighteen men stood by me in my fall--long men--strong men--
see the oil on their boots.

I was a guest in the house of my people. Through the years
I clung, taking hold of their hands in the darkness.
It rained and the roar of machines was incessant. Into
to the house of my people quiet would not come.

Eighteen men stood by me in my fall. Through their breasts
bars were driven. With wailing and with weeping I ran
back and forth. Then I died. Out of the door of the
house of my people I ran. But the eighteen men stood
by me in my fall.⁵³

In these sections pessimism dominates, but as the book moves forward, the seeds of optimism planted in the first despairing pages begin to sprout. In "the Song of the Soul of Chicago," Whitmanic drive and determination appear.

On the bridges, on the bridges--swooping and rising,
whirling and circling--back to the bridges, al-
ways the bridges.

I'll talk forever--I'm damned if I'll sing. Don't you
see that mine is not a singing people? We're just
a lot of muddy things caught up by the stream.
You can't fool us. Don't we know ourselves?

Here we are, out here in Chicago. You think we're not humble? You're a liar. We are like the sewerage of our town, swept up stream by a kind of mechanical triumph--that's what we are.

On the bridges, on the bridges--wagons and motors, horses and men--not flying, just tearing along and swearing.

By God we'll love each other or die trying. We'll get to understanding too. In some grim way our own song shall work through.

We'll stay down in the muddy depths of our stream--we will. There can't any poet come out here and sit on the shaky rail of our ugly bridges and sing us into paradise.

We're finding out--that's what I want to say. We'll get at our own thing out here or die for it. We're going down, numberless thousands of us, into ugly oblivion. We know that.

But say, bards, you keep off our bridges. Keep out of our dreams, dreamers. We want to give this democracy thing they talk so big about a whirl. We want to see if we are any good out here, we Americans from all over hell. That's what we want.⁵⁴

Though there are notes of subjugation sounded throughout, the dominant tone asserts confidence in America and its people. The poem indirectly rejects genteel poetry which had denied the common realities of mid-American experience. With poems like this, Anderson begins to express acceptance of America. He recognizes the ugly realities but sees these as the basis for honest effort toward the ideal.

The "Song of the Soul of Chicago," like all the Chants, is Whitmanic. Anderson uses an informal first person narrator. The language is consistently simple midwestern vernacular. Parallelism of word, phrase, syntactical unit, and line operates throughout the poems. Whitmanic lists and chants are regularly present.

Alliteration, association of ideas, and dash constructions are the major transitional techniques; they replace the use of normal literary transitions. Anderson follows Whitman also in using alliteration in place of rhyme to order and heighten the enjoyment of oral reading. Repetition of words, phrases, and lines is consistently important, and motif-like repetition of important words, phrases, and symbols appears whenever important themes recur. Refrains come regularly in Anderson's poetry, like Whitman's; and since both men write in the oral tradition, they put the refrain first in each stanza to make the regularity even more apparent to a listening audience.

The techniques used in this poem are less impressionistic than in the earlier poems of the volume, but otherwise the structure is not significantly different. The poem begins with the list-like refrain so characteristic of Whitmanic poems. "On the bridges, on the bridges--swooping and rising, whirling and circling--back to the bridges, always the bridges."⁵⁵ The structure here, in addition to setting up later repetitions, is very tight. The phrase "on the bridges" is repeated and gives way to a series of dash-separated gerunds further separated by neutral connecting and's, just like Whitman's poetry. Then, the opening phrase is modified slightly and repeated, "Back to the bridges, always the bridges." The poet is not only creating a sense of order, he is also building a basis for the later motif-like repetition of the important word bridges. Throughout this first multi-line line, the syntax is repeatedly fragmented. Indeed, there is never a complete statement throughout the first multi-line line.

In the second multi-line unit, Anderson moves to one of his fullest and freest uses of American slang. The poem is in this respect very similar to Sandburg's virtuoso piece of American slang declamation, the "Ode to a Contemporary Bunkshooter." The narrator speaks in the Whitmanic irreverent first person style. The syntax is very short and simple throughout, and the words used are simple as well. Great parallelism exists between many syntactical units of the multi-line unit. Rhetorically, too, the parallelism is heightened by the technique of starting sentences with the same first word or letter, such as I'll, Don't, and We, all of which are repeated several times. These repeated first words or alliterating first letters continue throughout the entire poem and greatly enhance the sense of form.

In the third Whitmanic line, parallelism and short syntactical units continue. They work with the repeating and alliterating first words of lines and tend to emphasize the importance of mid-American language patterns and slang.

The fourth line repeats with minor variation the refrain of the first line. Here, too, appear typical Whitmanic images, nouns listed and separated by neutral and's as before. The listing of parallel gerunds fosters the impression of movement and panoramic vision just as it does in Whitman's own poetry.

Line five moves forward the theme of determination as it continues the parallel syntax of line segments. Alliteration of important words also operates in this line, just as does the continuing subconscious rhythm fostered by repeating or alliterating

the first word of each sentence. Two important groups of words are alliterated for emphasis in this line: the we'lls of the line expressing determination, the s sounds of song and shall beginning to assert a native, rather than an imposed, literary expression.

Line six continues the parallelism between intra- and inter-line sections as well as the alliteration of important words. The latter technique becomes more dense here, pointing the way to Anderson's poetic solution. Again the w sounds of the we'll are repeated, signifying the determination of the people "staying in the muddy depths of . . . [their] stream." The equally dense repetition of s sounds in stay, stream, sit, shaky, and sing again reject the euphemistic genteel poetic reaction to the modern situation and assert the importance of staying in the basic realities and of working out their salvation from this position.

Line seven heightens the parallelism of intra-line units. Four consecutive units repeat we're, the first word of each sentence; and each of these sentences is parallel. The close repetition emphasizes order and determination, which is further emphasized by the use of other alliterative w sounds in what and want.

With the last line, the w alliteration continues, but it also gives way to the dominance of the recurring b sounds brought on by the word bridges. This strong repetition contrasts with the repeated d sounds of dreams, dreamers, and democracy. Thus the last line of the poem emphasizes three alliterative patterns, each associated with a different theme.

Bards, the singers of the old genteel tradition, are opposed to bridges, the solid practical achievements of modern industrial society, and symbolically the bridge from spiritual deprivation to the ideal of enlightened democracy.

Dreams and dreamers are opposed to democracy; dreams suggest the foolish, meaningless thoughts of those unable to turn their ideas into something real and meaningful, like democracy. I believe that at this point Anderson is first able to separate himself from the idle dreamers unable to confront the realities of the American situation. He has begun to assert the positive possibilities of modern life guided by democratic principles.

The third and last alliterative grouping is the repeated w sound. The words we, want, we want, we, what, and want, emphasize the desires of the common people at the same time that Anderson forcefully asserts overwhelming confidence in the course the common people have chosen. The last line is in the best Whitmanic tradition, for it serves as the culmination of a rhetorically and emotionally expansive period. It is by far the longest line of the poem, and the culmination of a movement from the early dejection to the final note of sure self-confidence on the part of the American people. The final syntactical unit of the last line, in addition to maintaining the poem-long rhetorical parallelism of syntax, emphasizes both Anderson's theme and the tone he is able to achieve. Working up from the most dismal realities of the twentieth century industrial situation, he is able to conclude confidently, saying, "That's what we want."

Clearly, then, although the pattern of poetic construction and organization is not that of nineteenth century written poetry, the poem is far from being formless or uncontrolled. The pattern is simply different than the average reader is accustomed to. Anderson, with the Mid-American Chants, is becoming a serious practitioner in the American oral tradition. He has replaced the standard tools and techniques of written poetry with those more congenial to the oral colloquial mode.

Other poems in the collection employ standard Whitmanic prose-based poetic elements not used in the "Song of the Soul of Chicago." Anderson's "Song to the Laugh," for example, is constructed in a more typically Whitmanic line pattern which emphasizes the importance of repetition, variation, and rhetorical expansion. The first stanza of "The Song to the Laugh" exemplifies this pattern as Anderson uses it. The first line functions as a refrain which comes first in the poem. The second, third, and fourth lines begin to expand the rhetorical period. This pattern of alternating refrain and expansion continues throughout the poem.

All night we lay in the cold and the rain in the midst
 of the laughter,
 The laughter of weaklings,
 The laughter of women,
 The laughter of those who were wrong⁵⁶

Similarly, the poem entitled "Revolt" makes greater use of long, long multi-line lines which mark Whitman's poetry and are extended even further by Carl Sandburg. Here, as in these other poets, each "line" is comprised of several generally parallel syntactical constructions. Some parallelism also exists between elements

in all of the multi-line lines. Two stanzas express Anderson's adoption of this pattern.

Tipping the water-gates of the rivers the night riders
assemble. In the cities the grey little foxes lie
low. By the howling of dogs in the silence the
decay of men is proclaimed.

Long nights we were weeping the prelude, my brothers.
The madness and washing of hands has been done.
The sweetness of apples--the fatness of cornfields--
the whoring of men for strange gods is begun.⁵⁷

Sherwood Anderson's own developments in oral prose-based poetry are equally important. Clearly, he has extended the range of the Whitmanic chant through heavy intermixture of mythic, symbolic, impressionistic, and archetypal elements. Throughout the Mid-American Chants numerous references to Christian, sexual, and generalized mythological symbols appear. These include ritual "washing of hands,"⁵⁸ "fires which do not burn,"⁵⁹ "climbing to a high place overlooking the city,"⁶⁰ "kneeling in mud and creating a god in man's image,"⁶¹ "pricking men with spears,"⁶² "a sacred vessel,"⁶³ "a king shall arise,"⁶⁴ and "through the walls and the bolted doors you come."⁶⁵

Sexual references appear with almost equal frequency. They include references to "long straight"⁶⁶ rows of corn, "cornfields . . . the mother of men . . . rich with the milk that shall suckle men,"⁶⁷ and "into the secret places of all women and all men I have gone. I have made love to them. Before me lies the naked body of a woman."⁶⁸ Other mythological references imitate classical mythology; these include "hoarse and terrible singer, half man, half bird, strong winged one . . . black against . . . black smoke laden sky."⁶⁹

The sexual and mythological references provide archetypal parallels and portents for modern life.

The allusions to Christian symbols are more important than these, however; singly, they create a mythic tone of high seriousness and offer a sense of important prophecy to come. Collectively, they provide a strong and pervasive archetypal pattern which Anderson parallels and counters with his sexual and industrial symbolism. Anderson is attempting to create a new archetype, a modern sexual-industrial myth for modern man. In this way Anderson has extended the range of the Whitmanic chant to include the Christian and classical realms and the creation of modern myths and archetypes.

More important than the symbolism is the extension of Whitman's very concrete poetry into highly allusive, impressionistic verse. Anderson changes the field of vision from American panoramas to the visions and delusions of a troubled, often uncertain industrial man. In these poems, the subjective impression is cited as if it possessed objective reality, as in this passage from "the Cornfields."

On my knees I crawled before my people. I debased myself.
The excretions of their bodies I took for my food.
Into the ground I went and my body died. I emerged
in the corn, in the long cornfields. My head arose
and was touched by the west wind. The light of old
things, of beautiful old things, awoke in me. In
the cornfields the sacred vessel is set up.⁷⁰

Another major difference between Anderson's and Whitman's poetry is Anderson's very limited use of the basic Whitmanic expansion pattern. Anderson largely ignores the pattern because expanded consciousness, the dominant mood in Whitman's poetry, is almost entirely absent in

his own poetry. For Anderson, the moment of fulfillment has not yet arrived, and it is questionable whether it will ever arrive. Therefore, Anderson's oral poetry tends to occur in stanzas that are not rhetorically expansive. Often stanzas and even whole poems contract rhetorically. Anderson's main effects are secured by compression of the rhetorical period, either in an unstated expression of despair or in a note of understated determination to surmount man's imperfect condition. A typical stanza from "Industrialism" expresses this normal contracting pattern.

Our fathers in the village streets
Had flowing beards and they believed.
I saw them run into the night--
Crushed
Old knowledge and all old beliefs
By your hand killed--
My mistress
Grim.⁷¹

Another of Anderson's shifts from strict Whitmanic patterning is the adoption of a Sandburg technique. Sandburg consistently includes non-parallel elements in a parallel structure. Anderson continues this technique as well as varying it by intermingling two different parallel constructions. Both these patterns are present in these lines from Anderson's "Chicago."

I am a little thing, a tiny little thing on the vast
prairies. I know nothing. My mouth is dirty.
I cannot tell what I want. My feet are sunk in
the black, swampy land, but I am a lover. I
love life. In the end love shall save me.⁷²

Finally, Anderson modifies Whitman's repetitive patterning by shifting word order within otherwise parallel constructions. If the pattern syntax is normal, Anderson soon shifts to an extremely

periodic syntax. Then, he returns to the original pattern. Anderson seems to be attempting to remove the sense of boredom caused by multiple repetition of words, phrases, and lines in the oral poetry. It is important that he do so because his poetry generally lacks the Whitmanic rhetorical expansion pattern which would vitiate the unrelieved, unchanging repetition. Unfortunately, his attempt is counterproductive. While the shifting of syntactical patterns does relieve boredom, it also enhances the impression of amorphousness. Instead of lending oral richness, this technique creates poetry which is simply free verse in the worst sense--words grouped together randomly without any organizing principle.

Other factors also reduce the effectiveness of Anderson's brand of Whitmanic poetry. Of these, two are the most important. First, in becoming abstract, symbolic, and impressionistic, Sherwood Anderson presents too much for the audience to understand immediately. The degree of difficulty is critical in oral poetry since the listener must be able to quickly grasp the meaning of each line before moving on to the next. Unless the listener can do this, the cumulative effect of the repetitive oral presentation is wasted and he feels lost amid the welter of unclear and apparently unrelated images.

Second, Anderson's vision is originally very different from Whitman's--his time of celebration has not yet arrived. In his consequent rejection of the Whitmanic expansion pattern, he is forced to seek relief from excessive repetition by lessening the density of syntactical repetition or motif reiteration or to suffer the monotony of the same words or phrases repeated endlessly with only slight

variation. Either alternative produces a poetry less satisfying than Whitman's or Sandburg's.

Finally, Anderson's tendency to set the poems in the past rather than the present and to shift tone and psychic state too quickly limits the reader's ability to empathize with the narrator and at times to even understand the message. At its worst, Anderson's Mid-American Chants presents too great a range of psychological, symbolic, and impressionistic moods with too little preparation or transition to aid the reader. Further, the tone never achieves the note of comfortable, relaxed enjoyment or ecstasy so important to the success of Whitman's poetry.

On the other hand, Anderson's poetry is both highly formed and worthy of notice. His best poems, largely those of the second half of Mid-American Chants, are significant and well-constructed. Finally, Anderson is confronting a situation which might well have turned Whitman away from poetry; there is at this time very little happening in proletarian industrial America which would have elicited the typical optimistic Whitmanic response. Anderson's achievements, then, must include his reshaping of Whitman's paeon to triumphant America to fit very different circumstances.

By the end of 1919 and early 1920, Anderson has begun his second experiment in oral poetry. It is to result in the publication of A New Testament in 1927.⁷³ David D. Anderson correctly expresses the relation of Anderson's New Testament to his earlier volume of poetry. He says,

A New Testament marks a stylistic as well as a personal change.

Alternated with the notes of celebration and affirmation that predominate the volume are the shadows and echoes of the fears that had plagued Anderson during most of the 1920's. . . . But essentially A New Testament is . . . a reaffirmation of what Anderson had long believed, and it heralds his full acceptance of his role as townsman. Its overall tone is one of joy and release, and although it is not a serious effort at poetry, occasional flashes of insight and frequent pleasing phrases make it often rewarding. It is Anderson indulging himself, looking on the remote past fondly and the immediate past fearfully; acknowledging the harshness of the present; and looking forward to an uncomplicated future in an uncomplicated environment.⁷⁴

Without doubt, Anderson is not repeating his experiment in Whitmanic poetry in A New Testament. Although the poetry of the second volume is oral prose-based poetry, it is not Whitmanic except in theme. This volume seems to be an attempt to use the themes and methods of Masters' Spoon River Anthology and Anderson's own Winesburg, Ohio with oral poetry techniques based on Biblical models. In other words, Anderson is trying to use the dramatic monologue, inherited from Browning and modernized by Masters and Anderson, through the presentation of far more revealing, personal, and private glimpses into the human psyche. Anderson and Masters also modify the Browning form by including a fuller epiphany, directly or indirectly.

Anderson implies two meanings for the volume's title. First, and most immediately obvious, Anderson is writing a new gospel and record of modern times to parallel the New Testament of the Christian Bible. The second, related meaning alludes to many individual impressions of the nature and meaning of life in modern society. One poem even bears the title, "Testament of an old Man." The titles of the poems and the overall content support both meanings.

Even the epigraphs focus upon both interpretations of the title. The first epigraph suggests multiple impressions of life: "They talked and their lips said audible words but the voices of their inner selves went on uninterrupted."⁷⁵ The second group of epigraphs sound much like the Christian New Testament. "While you can see me you shall not have me. While you can reach out your hand and touch my fingers you shall not know I am alive. In the time of my death and decay life shall come out of me and flow into you."⁷⁶

Anderson announces this shift in intention and method clearly in a letter written to Van Wyck Brooks on March 31, 1919. Here he speaks of

a purely insane, experimental thing I call A New Testament. It is an attempt to express, largely by indirection, the purely fanciful side of a man's life, the odds and ends of thought, the little pockets of thoughts and emotion that are so seldom touched. . . . It is infinitely more difficult than the chants. . . . anything approaching accomplishment grows wearisome [referring to the Whitmanic Mid-American Chants]

I want constantly to push out into experimental fields. "What can be done in prose that has not been done," I keep asking myself. . . . I push on knowing that none will perhaps care in the least for these experiments into which I put so much emotional force.⁷⁷

Speculation is possible on the reasons for his shift in technique in A New Testament. We know that Anderson is much impressed by Biblical language and syntax. Clearly, too, he must have been impressed by Sandburg's Chicago Poems and Masters' Spoon River Anthology, for in the Mid-American Chants Anderson chooses to use the Whitman-Sandburg mode to express his vision of America. In A New Testament, Anderson moves toward the approach made popular by Masters,

the presentation of many short life stories, expressing the experience or mis-experience of life for many people.

Yet the use of Masters' theme is not in itself enough to round out Anderson's presentation. In attempting to avoid Masters' tendency toward formlessness, he adds Biblical language, syntax, and techniques. This addition is especially necessary because Anderson is attempting to quickly present visions of many, many very different individuals. He has to emphasize narrative movement at the expense of Whitmanic repetition and other ordering techniques. An attempt to integrate the narrative and repetitive elements would have made each poem three or four times as long. Consequently, any sense of immediate comparison between individuals would have been lost. The use of Biblical language not only lends an immediate tone of high seriousness, it also creates a greater sense of form than otherwise possible. Anderson picks the Biblical narrative form, the parable, and writes the majority of his poems in that pattern. The familiarity of Biblical parables offers the reader an easy parallel to Anderson's work and makes him expect predominantly narrative ordering rather than Whitmanic repetitive continuity and regularity. The opening lines of "The Dumb Man" emphasize Anderson's use of the parable form.

There is a story. . . . The story is almost forgotten but
sometimes I remember.

The story concerns three men in a house in a street.
. . . The three men are in a room in a house. One is young
and dandified. He continually laughs.

There is a second man who has a long white beard.
He is consumed with doubt. . . .

A third man there is who has wicked eyes and who
moves nervously about the room rubbing his hands together.
The three men are waiting, waiting.⁷⁸

The emphasis is clearly upon telling a story in which the characters have no real existence in and of themselves. They are simply embodiments of the speaker's vision. The emphasis on the parable form and on the drawing of archetypal figures instead of real ones is a significant difference from Whitman's method.

The use of the parable technique puts a high premium on simplicity and clarity of presentation. Thus in A New Testament Anderson does not present incomprehensible mantic ecstasies as expressions of his inner feelings. In this volume he presents his views more clearly than in the Chants.

The emphasis on narrative and the desire to present a sense of order and regularity lead Anderson to experiment with many other techniques. First is the wholesale division of the volume into narrative and "choral" sections. The narrative sections advance the plot while the choral sections provide the lyrical efflorescences normally characteristic of Biblical and, to some extent, Whitmanic poetry. These include very strong, dense repetition and use of alliteration. Narrative is generally only reinforced in these sections. New material is usually not presented here. The first narrative and choral, or lyrical, sections of "Testament, Song Number One" show the division of these effects in Anderson's Biblical poetry. In the choral or lyrical sections we see the Biblical techniques which some scholars have confused with Whitman's.

My life has passed into a coma of waiting but I wait no more
intelligently than you. Sometimes as I walk in the streets
a look of intelligence comes into my eyes. If I had not
watched closely the eyes of my brothers I would be often
deceived by what I see in my own eyes.

It is only by going about in secret I can stumble into the pathway to truth. When truth has passed through the streets of a town or has walked on wet leaves in a forest there is a faint smell. It is blown about by the wind. . . . I smell the footsteps of truth but I do not walk in the footsteps.

I have recently thrown out of my arms the maiden placed
 there by my father--a liar,
 I sit in a stone chair in a cold place.
 I am beset by many pains.
 Pain comes running to me out of the bodies of men and
 women.
 I am bred out of the lusts of the world.
 I am become the abiding place of little lustful thoughts
 that weave in and out of the minds of my people.⁷⁹

The difference between the first two narrative sections and the third, lyrical, section should be very evident here. But Anderson goes even further in the separation of techniques. He writes seventy to eighty percent of his New Testament poems in pure narrative unembellished by repetitive oral patterning. The remaining twenty to thirty percent of the poems, notably those about Blacks, are generally pure lyrical poems without any strong narrative element. In Anderson's introduction to Whitman's Leaves of Grass, he states that Blacks are generally viewed as the only Americans responsible for "real song."⁸⁰ "In a Workman's Rooming House" exemplifies the pure narrative poem.

At two o'clock at night a steamboat whistle blows in the Chicago River. A man who lives above me gets out of bed and goes barefooted across the floor. His feet fall on the boards like the fingers of a player on a silent piano filled with broken strings.

He strikes a match. I know what he is doing. He is lighting a candle in order that God may see into his room and remember him in the time of his death.

I do not arise and light a candle for the sake of God. I lie still and think. God has multiplied himself so often in my sight that I cannot see him by the light of a candle.⁸¹

The lyrical pattern is well expressed by a few lines from "The Red Throated Black."

Give me the word.
 Let my red throat and black lips caress the words of
 your lips.
 Give me the word.
 Give me three words, a dozen, a hundred, a history.
 Give me the word.

Give me the word.
 Throw a curse at my head.
 Throw a threat at my eyes.
 Give me the word.

Give me the word.
 I will melt song into your words.
 I will color your words with song.
 I will eat your words and vomit forth song.
 Give me the word.⁸²

The lyrical sections offer greater variety of line length and mood than the narrative segments. The lyrical sections also are more tightly constructed and use more oral ordering techniques, such as repetition and variation of words and phrases. Even so, they are not directly Whitmanic, although some Whitmanic elements are present.

Within each narrative section, or testament, Anderson sets the tone by using a line with a Biblical sound and then maintaining the language level and the approximate sentence length. In these sections, poetic ordering is generally limited to repetition of the first word in sentences and to the use of the first person narrator. These sections are not tightly constructed in the Whitmanic manner.

While each narrative maintains an approximate length, tone, and level of language, these are not consistent between different individuals. It is as though Anderson is attempting to give each speaker a voice and mentality of his own. The only element which

appears to recur consistently is a sentence length longer than characterizes Whitman's poems. This attempt to individualize each voice is very effective, but it has the drawback of not being able to present a wide range of mood or emotion as Whitman's poetry does. For example, the first verse of "Man Walking Alone" expresses Anderson's habit of continuing the sentence length and to some extent the syntactical pattern throughout the poem.

The nights in the valley of the Mississippi River have the eyes of an owl. I have risen from the place where I slept under a tree but cannot shake the sleep from my eyes. The nights in the valley of the Mississippi River are staring nights. They look at men with the pupils extended. The skies are empty over the cities and the plains. The skies have not formulated a thought that I can breathe into my being. In the whole valley of the Mississippi River there is no bed of thought in which I can lie.⁸³

Two more stanzas continue the almost identical sentence length as well as mood. There is never any shift in tone or lightening of message.

A few poems, though generally successful, seem misplaced in this volume. They include "A Dying Poet: To Emanuel Carnevali," "Chicago," "Poet: To Alfred Steiglitz," and "An Emotion: To E. P." These poems offer tributes and catch character and emotion very successfully, but their tone and overall quality is far different than that of the rest of the poems. These appear to intrude on the rest of the New Testament poems. With the exception of these few poems, however, the tone and techniques are remarkably consistent throughout the volume. And the general quality of the poems is, I believe, higher than that of the Mid-American Chants. The best poems of the Chants are, however, far better than their counterparts in the Testaments.

One poem in A New Testament, "A Young Jew," seems to be a revival of the Whitmanic oral tradition. Here, Anderson offers continuously integrated narrative and lyrical elements and heavy use of ordering techniques as well. The line lengths and range of moods are similarly far wider than any other poems in the volume. A few lines should suffice to show the difference in quality between Anderson's Whitmanic approach and the Biblical method of A New Testament.

Years and a life of it,
 Sitting in a room,
 Walking with my father in a street,
 Hungering,
 Hating,
 Burning my flame out in an empty place.
 The smoke from burning bodies goes straight up.
 Fire everywhere.
 My world is choked with smoke of burning men,
 With smoldering fumes of fires,
 My mother's eyes look out at burning men.
 At men who burn out in an empty place.⁸⁴

In this poem the use of oral ordering techniques is far greater than in the rest of the volume. Consistent and heavy motif-like repetition of the word fire occurs, and moves by association to burning, flame, smoke, and smoldering fumes. The lines are generally short and composed of short syntactical units. Alliteration is also dense in the poem and serves to point out the important words and themes. The great variation of line length allows great versatility and variation of mood. The long opening lines carry a tone of quiet desperation which flames into violent reaction with the short, staccato lines, "Hungering" and "Hating." Here, Anderson does not avoid the use of incomplete statement or syntax.

The two brands of Anderson's poetry are, then, quite identifiably different. His Whitmanic chants employ all the characteristic techniques of repetitive oral vernacular poetry, and they extend Whitman's range, primarily in presenting vistas of the mind in addition to American landscapes. Anderson's second volume, A New Testament, remains very oral in quality, but the oral effects are culled from Biblical language, syntax, and organization. Both offer promise as poetic modes, but only his Mid-American Chants follows Whitman's lead. Only these poems carry the Whitman themes, language, and speech rhythms. Only these fully confront the experience of twentieth century industrial America. Anderson spends his life searching for America. He finds it best in Whitman.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Paul P. Appel, ed., Homage to Sherwood Anderson 1861-1941 (Mamoroneck, New York: Paul P. Appel, 1970), pp. 69, 75.

² Rex Burbank, Sherwood Anderson (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1964), p. 23.

³ Ray Lewis White, ed., Sherwood Anderson's Memoirs: A Critical Edition (Chapel Hill, Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1969), p. 23.

⁴ Appel, Homage, pp. 21-22.

⁵ White, Memoirs, p. 11.

⁶ Ray Lewis White, Sherwood Anderson's A Story Teller's Story: A Critical Text (Cleveland: Case Western Univ. Press, 1968), p. 59.

⁷ David D. Anderson, Sherwood Anderson: An Introduction and Interpretation, Michigan State Univ. American Authors and Critics Series (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1967), p. 168.

⁸ Appel, Homage, p. 50.

⁹ White, Story Teller's Story, pp. 217-218.

¹⁰ White, Story Teller's Story, pp. 217-218.

¹¹ Sherwood Anderson, Mid-American Chants (New York: John Lane Co., 1918), forward.

¹² Sherwood Anderson, "An Apology for Crudity," Sherwood Anderson's Notebook (Mamoroneck, New York: Paul P. Appel, 1970), p. 198.

¹³ Anderson, Mid-American Chants, forward.

¹⁴ Burbank, Anderson, p. 37.

¹⁵ Appel, Homage, p. 49.

¹⁶ Anderson, Sherwood Anderson: Introduction and Interpretation, p. 134.

¹⁷ White, Story Teller's Story, pp. 306-307.

¹⁸ Anderson, Sherwood Anderson: Introduction and Interpretation, pp. 168-169.

- 19 Appel, Homage, pp. 173-174.
- 20 White, Memoirs, p. 241.
- 21 James Schevill, Sherwood Anderson: His Life and Work (Denver: Univ. of Denver Press, 1951), p. 81.
- 22 Anderson, Sherwood Anderson: Introduction and Interpretation, p. 30.
- 23 Anderson, Sherwood Anderson: Introduction and Interpretation, p. 2.
- 24 Anderson, Sherwood Anderson: Introduction and Interpretation, p. 2.
- 25 Schevill, Sherwood Anderson: Life and Work, p. 160.
- 26 White, Memoirs, p. 3.
- 27 Schevill, Sherwood Anderson: Life and Work, p. 243.
- 28 Sherwood Anderson, "More About the New Note," The Little Review, April 1914, pp. 16-17.
- 29 Schevill, Sherwood Anderson: Life and Work, p. 101.
- 30 Burbank, Anderson, p. 62.
- 31 Ray Lewis White, The Achievement of Sherwood Anderson: Essays in Criticism (1966), p. 165.
- 32 Anderson, "An Apology for Crudity," Notebook, p. 200.
- 33 Anderson, "An Apology for Crudity," Notebook, p. 198.
- 34 Schevill, Sherwood Anderson: Life and Work, p. 97.
- 35 Appel, Homage, pp. 182, 183, 185.
- 36 Sherwood Anderson, "The New Note," The Little Review, I (1914), 23.
- 37 White, Story Teller's Story, p. 287.
- 38 Anderson, "An Apology for Crudity," Notebook, p. 197.
- 39 White, Memoirs, p. 338.
- 40 White, Memoirs, p. 6.

- 41 Appel, Homage, p. 176.
- 42 Sherwood Anderson, "Introduction to Leaves of Grass,"
quoted in Viva Elizabeth Haught, "The Influence of Walt Whitman on
Sherwood Anderson and Carl Sandburg" (M.A. Thesis Duke Univ., 1936),
p. 39.
- 43 Anderson, "Introduction to 'Leaves of Grass,'" p. 40.
- 44 Appel, Homage, p. 61.
- 45 Anderson, Sherwood Anderson: Introduction and Interpreta-
tion, vii.
- 46 Anderson, Sherwood Anderson: Introduction and Interpreta-
tion, p. 30.
- 47 White, Achievement, p. 56.
- 48 Anderson, Sherwood Anderson: Introduction and Interpreta-
tion, p. 32.
- 49 Bernard Duffey, The Chicago Renaissance in American
Letters, quoted in White, Achievement, p. 55.
- 50 Appel, Homage, p. 69.
- 51 Anderson, Mid-American Chants, p. 11.
- 52 Anderson, Mid-American Chants, p. 11.
- 53 Anderson, Mid-American Chants, p. 46.
- 54 Anderson, Mid-American Chants, pp. 62-63.
- 55 Anderson, Mid-American Chants, p. 62.
- 56 Anderson, Mid-American Chants, p. 65.
- 57 Anderson, Mid-American Chants, p. 23.
- 58 Anderson, Mid-American Chants, p. 23.
- 59 Anderson, Mid-American Chants, p. 25.
- 60 Anderson, Mid-American Chants, p. 29.
- 61 Anderson, Mid-American Chants, p. 44.
- 62 Anderson, Mid-American Chants, p. 67.

- 63 Anderson, Mid-American Chants, p. 12.
- 64 Anderson, Mid-American Chants, p. 11.
- 65 Anderson, Mid-American Chants, p. 26.
- 66 Anderson, Mid-American Chants, p. 15.
- 67 Anderson, Mid-American Chants, p. 67.
- 68 Anderson, Mid-American Chants, p. 26.
- 69 Anderson, Mid-American Chants, p. 47.
- 70 Anderson, Mid-American Chants, p. 11.
- 71 Anderson, Mid-American Chants, p. 31.
- 72 Anderson, Mid-American Chants, p. 13.
- 73 Schevill, Sherwood Anderson: Life and Work, p. 121.
- 74 Anderson, Sherwood Anderson: Introduction and Interpretation, p. 103.
- 75 Sherwood Anderson, A New Testament (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1927), p. 9.
- 76 Anderson, New Testament, p. 9.
- 77 Anderson, New Testament, p. 80.
- 78 Anderson, New Testament, pp. 56-57.
- 79 Anderson, New Testament, pp. 12-13.
- 80 Anderson, "Introduction to 'Leaves of Grass,'" p. 41
- 81 Anderson, New Testament, p. 40.
- 82 Anderson, New Testament, p. 42.
- 83 Anderson, New Testament, p. 31.
- 84 Anderson, New Testament, pp. 61-62.

CONCLUSION

Born in reaction against nineteenth century poetic excesses, Whitmanic poetry quickly asserts its own qualities. Its combination of romantic, realistic, and neoclassical poetic norms as well as those of the folk, popular, and genteel literary traditions makes it very different from other nineteenth century poetic forms.

The adoption of both the most elemental and sophisticated qualities of many poetic types produces three major results. First, Whitmanic poetry adapts the essentially romantic view of man and concept of organic form. His poetry maintains man's central position in the universe long after the assumptions resulting in romantic coherence have been disproved. Thus in Whitman's poetry optimism is dominant. Despite the problems, degradations, and inhumanities of life, Whitman sees man as ultimately triumphant. He affirms the universal order and celebrates the human spirit. Man can transcend his situation and achieve ecstatic harmony with the creation.

The romantic concept of organicism also finds new emphasis in the American vernacular poetic tradition. Whitman bases his poetic form on the vocabulary, speech patterns, and occupations of American people as well as the beauty and diversity of American landforms. Literary techniques and forms imposed by tradition have no place here.

Whitman's poetic intensifying techniques are taken from American folk art and applied with the conscious precision of an elite artist.

The second major component of Whitman's synthesis is his use of techniques uncharacteristic of nineteenth century poetry and influential to developing twentieth century norms. His contributions in this field include use of realistic language, subjects, and characters; emphasis on concrete yet apparently unconnected images; use of sophisticated speech rhythms; and fostering the illusion of simplicity. We must recognize also that Whitman's Leaves of Grass, like Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads, broadens the range of subjects, language, character, and rhythms open to serious literary treatment.

The third quality of Whitman's poetry results from the integration of folk, popular, and elite poetry. While each tradition has its own characteristic techniques, the poetic response in each tradition is even more singular. While the response to elite poetry is largely intellectual, popular verse elicits a primarily emotional response, and folk art operates at the instinctive and kinesthetic levels. Thus Whitman's integration of poetic elements from all three traditions produces a poetry with unprecedented breadth of appeal. Whitman's oral poetry almost always produces a strong intellectual response. Later oral vernacular poets have balanced all three types of response or have stressed the instinctive and emotional more heavily.

Whitman's combination of elemental and sophisticated techniques produces a poetry which seems extremely simple and unsophisticated. In reality, however, Whitman's aggressive simplicity is

as consciously controlled and sophisticated as Hemingway's clipped prose style. Whitman's boast that "What is commonest, cheapest, nearest, easiest, is Me"¹ refers to the effect he seeks, not to the skill and effort he expends in achieving his goal. Whitman desires an artistically defensible poetry which is immediately apprehensible, even by those untrained in literature. Thus he must emphasize immediate sensory experience and techniques which appeal to the emotions or the unconscious rather than the intellect.

Whitman's thoroughgoing organicism and his emphasis on non-intellectual response result in Ezra Pound's early derision. They also produce the continuing differences between Whitmanic poetry and imagism or the poetry of the French symbolist movement. Although Whitman's poetry influences some imagistic and symbolist techniques, his goals are completely different. T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, for example, write poetry which achieves its highest response intellectually. The trained reader sees their forms as commentaries on older traditional forms; their allusions and references point out real or ironic parallels to literature and the past; the jarring transitions between sections emphasize intellectually the discontinuity and inharmoniousness of contemporary experience. Similarly, although Amy Lowell and William Carlos Williams use and vary rhythms masterfully, they consistently subordinate rhythmic development to intellectual, "literary" response.

The hiatus between Whitmanic and imagistic or symbolist poetry is unalterable. The early twentieth century publications by Ezra Pound, F. S. Flint, Amy Lowell, Ford Madox Ford, and others are

attempts to create new rules for poetry. In a sense they assert a new, international "Academy" to proclaim the lines twentieth century literary "tradition" is to take. They want to assure the continuing intellectual response which occurs as readers see the relation between the individual work of art and the "tradition." Pound's "Some Don'ts for Imagistes" makes this point clear.²

Whitman, on the other hand, says

I am the teacher of athletes,
He that by me spreads a wider breast than my own proves
the width of my own,
He most honors my style who learns under it to destroy
the teacher.³

He also writes to produce a response which is far more visceral and kinesthetic. Whitman's poetry demands no literary training of his audiences. And although he often states his theme rationally and intellectually, the dominant response is usually subconscious or instinctive reaction to rhythm.

Whitman's poetics influence Carl Sandburg and Sherwood Anderson decisively. They wholeheartedly adopt and further his experiments in elemental oral vernacular poetry. In this century, however, Edgar Lee Masters and Vachel Lindsay are more characteristic examples of Whitmanic influence. Both men combine limited aspects of Whitmanic poetry with other modes of poetic expression--thus creating new poetic amalgams or heightening the intensity of essentially non-Whitmanic poetry.

Masters and Lindsay are much like the "little magazines," which have isolated specific Whitmanic techniques and fostered their adoption outside the context of oral vernacular poetry. Emphasis on

slang, dialect, or colloquial language; use of sophisticated rhythms; development of extremely organic forms; presentation of apparently unrelated images; focus on immediate experience; and rejection of poetic diction and rhyme are among the Whitmanic characteristics often emulated in this manner.

Despite the great diversity of twentieth century poetry, current literary norms do not favor oral poetry. Examples of pure Whitmanic poetry are rare unless one cites the work of Sandburg or Anderson. However, Whitman and his followers have proved the effectiveness of oral vernacular techniques. As styles change, greater emphasis on these forms is likely.

When pure Whitmanic oral vernacular poetry does again appear, it will almost certainly look less like Whitman's poetry than do the poems of Carl Sandburg and Sherwood Anderson. The reason for this necessary evolution is inherent in the oral form. While repetition establishes form and coherence, it quickly produces boredom. Only repetition with sufficient variation maintains interest. Thus the imitator will duplicate Whitman's forms while the creative oral poet will constantly derive new vernacular rhythmic structures.

Carl Sandburg's work exemplifies this evolution. While his early volumes mirror Whitman's techniques precisely, later poems experiment with ever longer multi-line lines as well as with less obvious repetition. The situation is analogous to styles in clothes or automobiles. Each new style must bear some resemblance to the earlier model, but it must be slightly longer or shorter and develop new areas of interest to compensate for waning attention to older

emphases. In precisely this manner, Sandburg's retention of the vernacular as a base for continuing experimentation keeps the reader asking, "Is this form or formlessness?" How else could Sandburg, the poet whom many consider formless, maintain,

Kill my style
and you break Pawlova's legs
and you blind Ty Cobb's batting eye.⁴

Oral poetry which attempts to maintain intellectual as well as emotional and instinctive response must continue the evolution of the Whitmanic poetic tradition.

Finally, Whitman and his followers have captured American scenes, character, and language more lovingly and comprehensively than any other poets. They have put their poetry in touch with the most elemental aspects of life. In the process they have found transcendence. If Whitman's oral vernacular poetry is "coarse and broad,"⁵ it is also unique, expressive, and magnificent.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," The Works of Walt Whitman in Two Volumes as Prepared by Him for the Deathbed Edition, ed., Malcolm Cowley (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1968), I, 73.

² Ezra Pound, "Some Don'ts for Imagistes," Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, II, no. 6 (1913), 200-206.

³ Whitman, "Song of Myself," Works, I, 109.

⁴ Carl Sandburg, quoted in Richard Crowder, Carl Sandburg (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1964), p. 56.

⁵ Walt Whitman, "Appendix to Second Edition of Leaves of Grass--Letter to Ralph Waldo Emerson," quoted in Edmund Wilson, ed., The Shock of Recognition: The Development of Literature in the United States recorded by the Men who made it (New York: The Modern Library, 1955), p. 256.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

"NEW" POETRY IN THE "LITTLE MAGAZINES"

The early twentieth century "little magazines" have long been considered crucial to the development of contemporary poetry. Three of these magazines--Reedy's Mirror, Poetry, A Magazine of Verse, and the Little Review maintained particularly close ties with the Chicago Renaissance poets. Nevertheless, these magazines were less directly influential in fostering Whitmanic oral prose-based vernacular poetry than critics have imagined. A short look at these magazines will make clear the nature of their contributions.

Reedy's Mirror, the earliest of the three magazines, is not strictly a literary magazine. Its approximately eight folio page, three column issues include regular features dealing with social events, the arts, personalities, business trends, finance, and the stock market. Large blocks of advertising space are also present. Literature generally fills approximately one page per issue. Poetry is lucky to receive a single one column article. Often it does not appear at all.

The poetry articles which do appear in Reedy's show real sensitivity and awareness of literary trends world wide. By 1898 William Marion Reedy is corresponding regularly with William Butler Yeats. As early as 1908 the magazine is regularly publishing attacks

against the still dominant genteel romanticism. It complements these attacks with advocacy of twentieth century experiments in poetry.

The Mirror consistently praises Whitman's poetry, innovativeness and willingness to express the American language and experience. Articles like "A Poet of the People (June 29, 1911), "The Cult of Walt" (June 26, 1914), "Home Rule in Poetry" (November 24, 1916), "American Poetry" (September 7, 1917), and "Whitmanic" (May 24, 1918) show the early and continuing admiration for Walt Whitman and his poetry. However, these are certainly not the only articles which enthusiastically recommend Whitman as a model for American poets. Even articles as apparently unrelated as "Culture in the Encyclopedia Britannica" emphasize the world's debt to this poet.

Walter Pater also receives a surprising amount of recognition in the Mirror. Between 1911 and 1917 four major articles stress his importance to later literature. These articles--or the discussion they foster--may well have led Sherwood Anderson and Edgar Lee Masters to write poems using Pater's theory of imprisoning human subjectivity.

The only other writer receiving special notice from Reedy's Mirror is Edgar Lee Masters. From mid-1914 almost every issue carries a few poems from Masters' Spoon River Anthology. Other Masters poems appear as early as April 17, 1914. They continue to appear regularly for several years. By 1916 articles praising Masters begin to appear.

"Home Rule in Poetry,"¹ "Poets and Poets,"² and "Masters, American Master"³ are among these.

William Marion Reedy's "discovery" of Masters' work lends credence to Masters' assertion that Reedy himself inspired his writing of poems mirroring the simplicity and directness of Greek epitaphs. This suggestion is consistent with Reedy's literary philosophy. It may also explain the continuingly close association of Masters and Reedy's Mirror. If this is true, however, it remains unclear why Masters publicly acknowledged his debt to Carl Sandburg's Chicago Poems. Perhaps both Reedy's suggestions and Sandburg's poems directed Masters to produce the Spoon River Anthology.

The Mirror emphasizes the work of other poets, but not to the same extent as Whitman, Pater, and Masters. Amy Lowell receives support as do Sara Teasdale, Theodore Dreiser, and Witter Bynner. Vachel Lindsay, Sherwood Anderson, and Carl Sandburg receive much less attention. Except for Masters, then, imagists get far more notice in the Mirror than do the four Chicago Renaissance poets.

Reedy's Mirror supports poetic doctrines and techniques as well as poets. Several critics contribute articles, and opinions vary widely. However, the magazine remains overwhelmingly in favor of the new experiments in literature. Many "new" poetic techniques are discussed at length. Yet even more important are the comments regularly interspersed in book reviews or treatments of authors. The collective impact of these articles and short statements is far greater than one would expect from the Mirror's table of contents.

Many important techniques and types of poetry receive support in William Marion Reedy's magazine. They include vers libre, imagism, the French symbolist experiments, realistic poetry, poetry as craft, spoken or chanted poetry, popular and oral poetry, and American indigenous ("local village") poetry. In almost every case, they are touted at the expense of hackneyed genteel romanticism with its ethereal subject matter, poetic diction, syllabic verse, and abstract treatment.

A study of Reedy's Mirror must also consider the personality, intellect, and orientation of William Marion Reedy, the founder and guiding spirit behind the Mirror. His personal influence must have been considerable despite--or perhaps because of--the philosophical positions he was able to bridge.

Until he was forty Reedy was an avowed conservative in politics and in literary taste. From that time on events forced him into an even more radical position. He became a supporter of Theodore Roosevelt, . . . and a partisan of Masters, Theodore Dreiser, and other spokesmen of literary dissent. Yet in essential ways he remained a conservative all his life, even though it was the rebels who always claimed him for their own. Carl Sandburg said he never missed an issue of the Mirror because he had to know what Reedy was thinking. Dreiser called him a "Balzar manque," and read his magazine for twenty-five years. . . . Ezra Pound would retort angrily when Reedy ridiculed his novel poetic theories and the obscurity of his poems, yet Pound praised him for having the courage to print Spoon River Anthology. Masters, who could not have written that pivotal work without Reedy's early tart rejections and subsequent applause, boasted of Reedy as both his friend and the "Literary Boss of the Middle West."⁴

Reedy's personal stamp is evident throughout the magazine he edited. But nowhere is his perspective more clear than in his periodic articles entitled, "What I've Been Reading." Here, Reedy

sets forth very convincing arguments favoring the new experiments in literature.

Reedy's Mirror, then, is important in emphasizing the importance of Whitman's poetry, fostering new experiments in literature, and advocating the central principles of twentieth century poetry. However, despite the Mirror's early advocacy of new poetic norms, two factors minimize its importance to the Chicago Renaissance poets. First, Reedy's Mirror does not print enough articles on poetry to emphasize more than the central core of this evolving form. Second, despite Reedy's emphasis on Whitman, nothing ever appears in the Mirror which details specifically Whitmanic techniques of oral prose-based poetry. Instead, the Mirror advocates the techniques of imagism and symbolism. Only insofar as Whitmanic and imagistic poetry share assumptions and technique do the Chicago Renaissance poets learn from the man behind the Mirror.

Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, starts publication in 1912. Its editor, Harriet Munroe, has far more ambitious plans. She wants Poetry to be a journal dedicated solely to poetry. The first words printed in this magazine are by Walt Whitman. "To have great poets there must be great audiences too."⁵ The same issue carries this clarifying statement of editorial purpose.

Poetry alone, of all the fine arts, has been left to shift for herself in a world unaware of its immediate and desperate need of her, a world whose great deeds, whose triumphs over matter, over the wilderness, over racial enmities and distances, require her everliving voice to give them glory and glamour.

Poetry has been left to herself and blamed for inefficiency, a process as unreasonable as blaming a desert for barrenness. This art, like every other, is not a miracle of

direct creation, but a reciprocal relation between the artist and his public. The people must do their part if the poet is to tell their story to the future. . . .

We believe that there is a public for poetry, that it will grow, and that as it becomes more numerous and appreciative, the work produced in this art will grow in power, in beauty, in significance.

We hope to publish in Poetry some of the best work now being done in English verse. . . . The test . . . is to be quality alone; all forms, whether narrative, dramatic, or lyric, will be acceptable.⁶

Her goal is the revitalization of poetry, of poetry worthy to express the experiences of the new century.

While Poetry magazine does offer some space to competing schools of verse, the words "The best work now being done in English verse" and "the test is quality alone" are important. While some conservative criticism appears, very few genteel romantic poems are able to survive Miss Munroe's critical gauntlet. The basis for this judgment in favor of new, experimental poetry appears in these words.

Many people do not like poetry . . . as a living art to be enjoyed, but as an exact science to be approved. To them, poetry may concern herself only with a limited number of subjects to be presented in a predetermined and conventional manner and form. To such readers the word "form" means usually only a repeated literary effect; and they do not understand that every "form" was in its first and best use an originality, employed not for the purpose of following any rule, but because it said truly what the artist wished to express. I suppose that much of the monotony of subject and treatment observable in modern verse is due to this belief that poetry is merely a fixed way of repeating certain meritorious though highly familiar concepts of existence--and not in the least the infinite music of words meant to speak the little and the great tongues of the earth.⁷

From the first, Whitman is the symbol of the new poetry. As early as 1912 long articles eulogizing Whitman appear consistently. They cite him as an ignored American genius, an iconoclast who broke the shackles of earlier poetry, an innovator of new chanting rhythms,

and the spiritual father of vers libre. These articles cite Whitman's acceptance of his universe, his country, and his fellow man as well as his willingness to write directly from nature. Whitman is more than a convenient symbol of revolt, however. His poetry introduces most of the techniques essential to vers libre and oral vernacular American verse.

Poetry advocates many "new" techniques and modes of writing. Unremitting editorial comments, book reviews, retrospective articles on major poets, and educational articles tend to coalesce into a consistent editorial position on what constitutes good verse. Poetry is to be realistic in handling the probabilities of life, imagistic, and concrete. The magazine also calls for local, current American democratic subjects presented in simple American speech patterns and vocabulary. There is to be no external ornament, especially rhyme. Poets are to use original, organic forms and quantitative verse. Finally, poetry is to be "craft," using language and images precisely and creating its own organic form. Modern verse, according to Poetry, is to avoid the excesses of earlier poetry while it links the best aspects of popular and elite poetry. The new amalgam is to have the simplicity and immediate emotional impact of popular verse and the density, craftsmanship, and longterm appeal of elite poetry.

While Whitman would certainly have agreed with these guidelines, they are really only the assumptions held in common by almost all twentieth century verse. His specific techniques (discussed in Chapters Two and Three) for creating an oral prose-based vernacular poetry never appear in these articles. Although Poetry consistently

defends Whitman and advocates that poets study his form, the magazine never really defines Whitman's form. Thus Poetry's emphasis on Whitman encourages experimentation and careful reading of Whitman, though it seldom if ever deals with his writing techniques. To Poetry, Whitman is a source of inspiration, not the originator of a specific form to be imitated.

Poetry goes beyond advocacy of literary norms, however. It teaches young poets of the early 1900's what they need to know. The "new" poets are largely unschooled, middle or working class midwesterners. Some, like Carl Sandburg, are the children of immigrants. All are strangers to the East coast literary salons. Therefore, the magazine fills a real need when it publishes long, informative articles examining the major writers and literary movements of the twentieth century as well as detailed studies on form and technique.

These timely, informative articles include famous pieces like Ezra Pound's "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste"⁸ and F. S. Flint's "Imagisme,"⁹ along with several others which deserve recognition. These include Harriet Munroe's two part series on "Rhythms of English Verse,"¹⁰ Amy Lowell's "Vers Libre and Metrical Prose"¹¹ and Nationalism in Art,¹² Ford Madox Ford's "Impressionism--Some Speculations,"¹³ and Ezra Pound's "The Renaissance,"¹⁴ a discussion of the most appropriate artists for young poets to emulate.

Contemporary doctrine and necessary explanations are available to young poets in the pages of Poetry. And even if the Chicago Renaissance poets had already learned their poetic lessons, they must certainly have been encouraged at seeing their radical poetics

supported in print. Even more important than the magazine's instruction for poets are the education it gives readers and the support it offers young poets.

Support comes in the form of extensive, flattering book reviews and favorable editorial comment. Sandburg, Masters, Anderson, and Lindsay receive unfailingly strong reviews. The great length of these reviews is in itself important. It suggests the favor in which Poetry magazine holds these poets.

Whenever other, more conservative literary journals are harsh, Poetry can always be counted on for support. The most notable such incident occurs when the Dial rebukes Edgar Lee Masters' Spoon River Anthology. The Dial reviewer objects to what he calls Masters' "deliberate unloveliness," to the "extraordinary study in mortuary statistics," and to the "cruel and unusual" events which occur.¹⁵ Alice Corbin Henderson responds for Poetry. She repudiates the charges, castigates the "wordy artifice" of older poetry, sets forth the tenets of modern poetry, and ends by denouncing the Dial and the literary standards it supports. "Is Mr. Alden's criticism of a type to guide or instruct in any way the professional craft of poets? I do not think so. Its tendency is simply to discourage the public. . . . The Dial is one of the few journals in America devoted exclusively to the interests of literature. It is a sad commentary on the present state of criticism that it should be recorded of the Dial . . . that it recognizes merit only after the fact. For the initial recognition, genius must look to other tribunals."¹⁶

Though Poetry supports all the Chicago Renaissance poets, Carl Sandburg clearly gets the most attention. Vachel Lindsay, too, as the other of Poetry's discoveries, receives great respect. Ironically though, despite Poetry's special attention to Sandburg and Lindsay, these two are the most completely developed of the four poets and, as such, the least subject to any possible attempt to alter their poetic method. Carl Sandburg's 1910 poetry is essentially the same as his "mature style" reputed to begin with Chicago Poems in 1914. Since Sandburg appears to be the intermediate step through which Anderson and Masters receive Walt Whitman's poetic techniques, it is questionable that they could be swayed toward conformity with Poetry's views.

Similarly, Vachel Lindsay's highly oral, repetitive poetic methods are the basis of his fame. These were formed before Poetry received his first manuscript. Although Lindsay does change his technique several times, only his early, repetitive style receives approval in Poetry magazine. It is also the only poetry he writes using Whitman as one of his models.

It is unfair, however, to suggest that Poetry attempts to dictate the vision or technique of its poets. The "Editorial Comment" dated April 1913 makes this clear. It maintains that

It is not a question of subject, nor yet of form, this new beauty which must inspire every artist worthy of the age he lives in. The poet is not a follower, but a leader; he is a poet not because he can measure words or express patly current ideas, but because the new beauty is a vision in his eyes and a beauty in his heart, and because he must strain every sinew of his spirit to reveal it to the world. He cannot resign his ancient poetic office; and the techniques of its fulfillment--the style which he achieves with joyous

ease or more or less painful effort according to his temperament--necessarily cannot satisfy him until it matches the beauty of his vision.¹⁷

The motivating force for both Poetry magazine and the Chicago poets is the same. They are all responding to the stifling influence of nineteenth century genteel romanticism. Thus, agreement is instinctive; it requires no attempt to gain compliance.

Poetry magazine does a great deal for the Chicago poets. Carl Sandburg, Sherwood Anderson, Vachel Lindsay, and Edgar Lee Masters gain greatly from it. They are lionized in its pages. Their poetry is consistently praised. Their audiences are tutored in the nuances of the "new" poetry. But the debts are all personal, not intellectual. These men would have written the same verse without Poetry magazine or its influence on their behalf. The magazine simply hastens the public and critical acceptance while bolstering the egos of its fledgling poets.

The Little Review begins publication in March 1914, a year and a half after Poetry's first issue and several years after Reedy's Mirror first appears. Margaret C. Anderson, the Little Review's editor, is committed to the new movement in literature. Unfortunately, some of this commitment is to poetry as an advocate of social change rather than as an art in itself. The "Announcements" section of the first issue cites the Review's field of interest as "criticism of books, music, art, drama, and life." The many interests expressed here restrict the amount of attention paid to any one subject. Similarly, the dual interest in art and life or "art and revolution" discourages extensive attention to technical aspects of poetry.

Instead, the magazine appears to court poets at least partially on the basis of their social commentary or their "truth of life." Most articles are abstract and general.

The Little Review modifies Poetry's ideal of "New Beauty" with a call for "Life for Art's sake [as] the only way to get more Life--a finer quality, a higher vibration. The bigger concept . . . [inferring more than] merely more Beauty. It means more intensity. In short, it means the New Hellenism. And that is a step beyond the old Greek ideal of proportion and moderation. It pushes forward to the superabundance that dares abandonment."¹⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche is consistently cited in support of this irrational quest for intensity through "Art and Revolution."¹⁹

Later editorials emphasize this double emphasis on art and social change. Statements like "Revolution is Art," and "Paroxysm is the poetic expression of . . . modern spirit. . . ." ²⁰ occur frequently. Even Ezra Pound couches his 1917 acceptance of the position as the Little Review's foreign editor in these terms. He says, "Poetry has never been 'the instrument' of my 'radicalism.'" ²¹ Finally, in August 1917 some shift in policy becomes evident as Margaret Anderson ruminates editorially on her prior dedication to the anarchist cause.

For three years at irregular intervals, . . . [the Little Review] reflected my concern about various . . . matters. When I got incensed over the sufferings of . . . the proletariat, I preached profound platitudes about justice and freedom. . . . When I decided that the only way to prevent the exceptional from being sacrificed to the average was for everybody to become anarchists, I preached the simple and beautiful but quite uninteresting tenets of anarchism. I have long given them up. I still grow violent with rage about the things that are "wrong", and

probably always shall. But I know that anarchism won't help them.²²

Neither the anarchist bent, nor the sympathy for the work of the radical magazines, like Broom, Blast, and the Masses, would be important were it not that they colored the artistic choices made by the Little Review. Thus, for example, Carl Sandburg is viewed as the poet who exposes the rape of the proletariat.

Carl Sandburg has understood the failures and the lies and exposed the cause. He has shown the lie of your government and the farce and folly of monuments to those who kill to keep it alive. He exposes your little deaths and their perfumed sorrow and the bunk of words and antics of your Billy Sunday and fellow citizens. He has heard the "fellows saying here's good stuff for a novel or it might be worked up into a good play," when speaking of an Italian widow living in city slums. He has the courage and the knack of giving them the challenge--calling their bluff; and he declares with strong conviction that he's able to back up his defiance. Who of the scatter-brains living could put her or her daughter-in-law or the working girls or the entire mob, for that matter, into a play? But he has put them, their spirit, into lines, gaunt and vivid as their lives. And I declare he is the only modern that has got it across.²³

Similarly, Masters gains favor, at least partially through his exposes of robber baron capitalism and American village life. Sherwood Anderson and Vachel Lindsay, too, are poets whose proletarian sympathies must enhance their reception in the Little Review. This magazine emphasizes the poet's "vision," and technique becomes subordinate to philosophy. Even Whitman's poetics are linked to his social views. They assert, "Go with Whitman into the heart of humanity--struggle with them--not far above them--to lift from off their backs the crushing weight of wealth and masters and idle snobs and false gods so that they may get room to spread their wings--for

they have wings and then you will know them as they are, and yourself but as one of them."²⁴

Ironically, then, the Little Review popularizes the "new" poetry as one exponent of social change. Spokesmen for women's rights, labor problems, and anarchy share the pages with advocates of imagism, impressionism, vers libre, and the overthrow of genteel romanticism.

Under the circumstances, the Little Review is unexpectedly successful in getting major poets and critics to submit articles and poetry. Ezra Pound, Sherwood Anderson, T. S. Eliot, Amy Lowell, Alice Corbin Henderson, Richard Aldington, Eunice Tietjens, Maxwell Bodenheim, Wyndham Lewis, and Carl Sandburg are among the many influential contributors.

One base of the Little Review's critical position is support of Whitman as the father of modern poetry. Article after article names him, and one even uses his poem to judge Edgar Lee Masters' poetry.

What is it you bring my America?
 Is it uniform with my country?
 Is it not something that has been better told or done before?
 Have you not imported this, or the spirit of it, in some ship?
 Is it not a mere tale? a rhyme? a prettiness?--is the good
 old cause in it?
 Has it not dangled long at the heels of the poets, polit-
 icians, literats of enemies' lands?
 Does it not assume that what is notoriously gone is still
 here?
 Does it answer universal needs? Will it improve manners?
 Can your performance face the open fields and the seaside?
 Will it absorb into me as I absorb food, air, to appear
 again in my strength, gait, face?
 Have real employments contributed to it? original makers,
 not mere amanuenses?²⁵

There is never any article though which details Whitman's oral prose-based poetic technique. In this respect the Little Review is like Poetry and Reedy's Mirror. Whitman and his poetic principles are consistently honored, but his technique is ignored in favor of imagism's greater compression, precision, and representational ability.

The Little Review's articles dealing with modern poetry are very disappointing. Over twenty articles which purport to treat realistic, imagistic, oral vernacular poetry, or vers libre appear from 1914 to 1917. But of these, eighteen articles offer a few platitudes concerning the goals or techniques of these forms and then slip into page after page of uselessly general philosophical or impressionistic criticism. Eunice Tietjen's "Poetry and the Panama-Pacific," for example, begins by asking if art has any meaning for the American people. Then she shifts to impressionistic comments. The majority of the article centers on the philosophical implications of not finding a listing for poetry on the official program for the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco. The extent to which the Little Review encourages substitution of emotional response for concrete analysis is well shown in this short excerpt from Miss Tietjen's article. "All the other arts are here. Architecture, music, sculpture, mural and easel painting, drawing, prints and etching, landscape gardening together with the so-called "Liberal Arts" are adequately represented. But not Poetry. A perusal of the official list in an attempt to discover it is significant. 'Poultry' is there with a large exhibit, so is 'Plumbago,' 'Plumbers' Implements,' 'Pomology,' and 'Ponies.' Excellent exhibits all, but hardly

lyrical."²⁶ Though this is the most extreme example, other "critical" articles are distressingly similar.

One critic and three other critical articles do not follow this trend. The critic is Ezra Pound, whose work is far above the level normally achieved in the Little Review. Yet if his philosophy and criticism are superior, they certainly do nothing to advance the cause of the Chicago Renaissance poets. Pound rejects all the views which support the poetry of Sandburg, Masters, Anderson, and Lindsay. He grudgingly admits Whitman's importance, but he asserts Greek parallels for Whitman's poetry. He rejects Whitman's premise that America itself is a great source of poetry, and he scorns the movement toward realistic local village poetry. Finally, Ezra Pound asserts that art is for the elite, not the masses. While all these positions have some basis in fact, they all undercut the confidence and importance of the Chicago Renaissance poets.

The three other substantial articles on poetry published from 1914 to 1917 include Alice Corbin Henderson's "Don'ts for Critics,"²⁷ Edward J. O'Brien's "A Note on Paroxysm in Poetry,"²⁸ and Margaret C. Anderson's "The Great Emotional Mind."²⁹ Unfortunately, even these articles are not quite what they first seem. They are actually patterned after Ezra Pound's "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste," published in Poetry a few months to a year earlier. The Little Review articles copy Pound's format and parrot his ideas. The Review article entitled "Don'ts for Critics" even asserts this relation indirectly by using this statement as a parenthesized subtitle: "(Apropos of recent criticisms of Imagism, vers libre, and modern

poetry generally."³⁰ The value of even these critical essays is, therefore, not very great.

The Little Review's greatest contribution to modern poetry occurs in its many short reviews on volumes of current verse. About half of these reviews concern imagistic poets--especially F. S. Flint, Amy Lowell, Richard Aldington, and H. D. Most of the other reviews comment on the works of Sandburg, Masters, and Lindsay. One of them, entitled "Notes for a Review of the Spoon River Anthology,"³¹ is even written by Carl Sandburg. These articles have more real critical merit than all the general "critical" articles published by the Little Review during its first four years. The reviewers grasp important elements of each poet's work. The reviews are interesting, capably written, and generally correct in their arguments. Also, the reviewers are not afraid to criticize negative aspects of each man's poetry. Unfortunately, the reviews are usually too short to add measurably to critical understanding of the modern poets being considered.

The Little Review is important in fostering the drive for social justice, a drive which Carl Sandburg, Sherwood Anderson, Vachel Lindsay, and Edgar Lee Masters fully support. The Little Review keeps their names, along with Whitman's, before the public. Further, this publication shares the common assumptions of twentieth century poetry with the Chicago poets. This sharing of beliefs leads, for example, to the Review's acceptance of Sherwood Anderson's articles entitled "The New Note"³² and "More About the New Note."³³ Although these deal most directly with prose writing, they touch the

central concerns of both prose and poetry. Anderson deals with craft, truth, and simplicity in writing. The Little Review fails, however, in never really probing the nature and importance of Whitman's writing. The wide field of attention which the magazine assumes and its general emotional or impressionistic criticism also detract seriously from its potential importance. Perhaps most important though is the fact that the Little Review arrives on the scene too late. It cannot possibly have the importance of Poetry or Reedy's Mirror.

We must reconsider the importance of the little magazines, and not solely in relation to the careers and poetic forms used by the Chicago Renaissance poets. Reedy's Mirror, Poetry, and the Little Review are important and each for different reasons. We can say, however, that they all offer encouragement, critical support, and literary markets to the struggling Chicago poets. They hasten the transition from genteel romanticism to modern poetics. Finally, they keep the Chicago poets aware of Whitman. Despite these successes, there are serious failures, too. All the little magazines fail to seriously investigate Whitman's poetic heritage as they scramble to catch the newer movements in literature. This failure is important to our understanding of the Chicago Renaissance poets. It means that Masters, Anderson, and Lindsay either receive their Whitmanic inheritance directly or through Carl Sandburg!

Going beyond the limited importance of clarifying the passage of Whitman's oral techniques to the Chicago Renaissance poets, there is a far greater failure involved. It is the failure by these

influential magazines to recognize the importance of Whitman's contribution to all twentieth century poetry--the integration of the American vernacular into the poetry of the highest caliber. This Whitmanic quality has since then taken its place with the centering on the image to produce the best and most characteristic twentieth century American poetry.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Vachel Lindsay, "Home Rule in Poetry," Reedy's Mirror, November 24, 1916, p. 740.

² Orrick Johns, "Poets and Poets," Reedy's Mirror, July 26, 1918, p. 356.

³ John L. Hervey, "Masters, American Master," Reedy's Mirror, May 17, 1918, pp. 292-293.

⁴ Max Putzel, The Man in the Mirror: William Marion Reedy and His Magazine (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1963), p. 6.

⁵ Walt Whitman, "Epigraph," Poetry, I, No. 1 (Oct. 1912), 1.

⁶ Harriet Munroe, "The Motive of the Magazine," Poetry, I, No. 1 (Oct. 1912), 24.

⁷ E. W., "On the Reading of Poetry," Poetry, I, No. 1 (Oct. 1912), 24.

⁸ Ezra Pound, "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste," Poetry, II, No. 6 (March 1913), 202-206.

⁹ F. S. Flint, "Imagisme," Poetry, I, No. 6 (March 1913), 198-200.

¹⁰ Harriet Munroe, "Rhythms of English Verse, Parts I and II," Poetry, III, No. 1, 61-68, and III, No. 3, 100-111.

¹¹ Amy Lowell, "Vers Libre and Metrical Prose," Poetry, III, No. 6 (March 1912), 213-220.

¹² Amy Lowell, "Nationalism in Art," Poetry, (Oct. 1914), 32-38.

¹³ Ford Madox Ford, "Impressionism--Some Speculations," Poetry, II, No. 6, 182-185, and II, No. 6 222-225.

¹⁴ Ezra Pound, "The Renaissance," Poetry, V, No. 5, 227-233, and V, No. 6, 280-287.

¹⁵ "Dial Review of Masters' 'Spoon River Anthology,'" quoted in Alice Corbin Henderson, "Our Friend and Enemy," Poetry, VI, No. 5, 259.

¹⁶ Alice Corbin Henderson, "Our Friend and Enemy," Poetry, VI, No. 5, 261.

- 17 "Editorial Comment," Poetry, II, No. 1 (April 1913), 22.
- 18 Margaret C. Anderson, "The Artist in Life," The Little Review, June-July 1915, p. 20.
- 19 "Editorial," The Little Review, March 1916, p. 23.
- 20 Edward J. O'Brien, "A Note on Paroxysm in Poetry," The Little Review, Jan. 1915, p. 15.
- 21 Ezra Pound, "Editorial," The Little Review, May 1917, p. 1.
- 22 Margaret Anderson, "What the Public Doesn't Want," The Little Review, August 1917, p. 20.
- 23 Caesar Zwaska, "Modernity Exposed," The Little Review, August 1915, p. 9.
- 24 "The Reader Critic," The Little Review, August 1915, p. 48.
- 25 "The Case of Masters," The Little Review, August 1916, pp. 11-12.
- 26 Eurice Tietjens, "Poetry and the Panama-Pacific," The Little Review, May 1915, p. 45.
- 27 Alice Corbin Henderson, "Don'ts for Critics," The Little Review, June-July 1916, pp. 12-14.
- 28 O'Brien, "Paroxysm," p. 15.
- 29 Margaret C. Anderson, "The Great Emotional Mind," The Little Review, Jan. 1917, pp. 1-3.
- 30 Alice Corbin Henderson, "Don'ts for Critics," The Little Review, June-July 1916, p. 12.
- 31 Carl Sandburg, "Notes for a Review of the Spoon River Anthology," The Little Review, May 1915, pp. 42-43.
- 32 Sherwood Anderson, "The New Note," The Little Review, March 1914, 42-43.
- 33 Sherwood Anderson, "More About the New Note," The Little Review, April 1914, pp. 16-17.

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