

The Love of Comrades
Walt Whitman and the British Socialists

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Walter Crane
'The Vampire'
Supplement to *Justice* (22 August 1885)

Abstract

In this thesis I examine how *fin de siècle* British socialists engaged with Walt Whitman and his work. These were generally considered to be one and the same: the speaker in *Leaves of Grass* was understood to be Whitman, and *Leaves of Grass* was read as an extension of his personality. This underscores the appropriation of Whitman for the labour cause: his admirers not only used his words, but claimed the poet himself, often as a prophet as well as a poet. I argue that just as *Leaves of Grass* influenced the development of radical mystical and socio-political thinking, so were its reading and reception shaped by these ideological frameworks. I explore this relationship through articles, poems, books and speeches, many of which have received little or no critical attention, demonstrating how personal responses to *Leaves of Grass* had an effect on the wider socialist community.

Each chapter is concerned with a different socialist, or group of socialists, who read and responded to Whitman: first, Bolton's 'Eagle Street College', a reading group devoted to the poet; second, Edward Carpenter and his Whitmanesque poems in *Towards Democracy*; third, a selection of journalists who wrote in socialist publications; fourth, William Clarke and his book-length critique of Whitman. I finish with a comparative study of the use of 'Pioneers! O Pioneers!' by different figures within the socialist movement. My critical approach focuses specifically on the literary and political impact of the relationships between Whitman and his nineteenth-century 'disciples', complementing recent biographical scholarship in this

field. The significance of Whitman to British socialism has long been recognised; however, though aspects of it have been critically discussed, this is the first extended study of the ways in which Whitman was responded to, interpreted, and used by British socialists.

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Introduction

On 25 April 1888 Walt Whitman had a visit from a young Russian political revolutionary seeking Whitman's seal of approval. Characteristically, Whitman refused to align himself with any organised form of political activism, giving instead only a general assurance: 'My heart is with all you rebels – all of you, today, always, wherever.' Later, Whitman explained to his companion Horace Traubel:

We had no quarrel—I only made it plain to him that I was not to be impressed into that sort of service. Everybody comes here demanding endorsements: endorse this, endorse that: each man thinks I am radical his way: I suppose I am radical his way, but I am not radical his way alone. Socialists, single tax men, communists, rebels of every sort and all sorts, come here. I don't say they shouldn't come—that it's unreasonable for them to come: the Leaves is responsible for them and for more than them.¹

As this passage indicates, Whitman had a profound impact on many groups of progressive thinkers in the late nineteenth century and was claimed for a variety of radical causes, despite his professed reluctance. Whitman claims that *Leaves of Grass* was responsible for producing such 'rebels', but in truth the relationship between text and reader worked in both directions: *Leaves of Grass* undoubtedly influenced radical thought, but radical thought also shaped the way that Whitman's work was read and interpreted. This affected how the poems and Whitman himself were 'impressed into service'.

¹ Horace Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, 9 vols, vols 1-3 (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1906-1914; repr. 1961), I, p.65.

This thesis explores the ways in which Whitman was read, responded to, and appropriated by *fin de siècle* British socialists. He was a significant figure in the emerging labour movement: socialist periodicals printed articles about him and extracts from his poems; socialist orators spoke of him and quoted from *Leaves of Grass*; his poems were set to music, published in labour movement songbooks, and sung at Labour Church meetings; *Leaves of Grass* was advertised and recommended to socialist readers alongside economic and political publications. He even featured in a calendar of socialist saints. These can be seen as acts of ‘translation’: Whitman’s democratic vision was removed from its American context and reconstructed so that it was applicable to Britain and the socialist cause. For Whitman, ‘America’ and ‘democracy’ were ‘convertible terms’, interchangeable conceptually and linguistically.² Clearly, British commentators did not interpret ‘democracy’ in this way, and as M. Wynn Thomas observes, it was a ‘very heatedly contested term’.³ Socialists were one group who incorporated it into their vocabulary, and in the discourses of this movement ‘democracy’ tended to be used either synonymously with ‘socialism’, or to denote an overarching category which included not only socialism but other movements which worked towards creating a more equal society. In this way, Whitman, who was frequently dubbed the ‘poet of democracy’ by contemporary critics, was seen to have a special ‘message’ for the labour movement, and could be claimed as a poet of socialism.

As the title of my thesis suggests, Whitman’s theme of ‘comradeship’ was central to this appropriation. The phrase ‘the love of comrades’ is taken from the refrain in Whitman’s ‘For You, O Democracy’, first published in 1860, which envisions a perfect (specifically American) society founded upon ‘companionship’. In the poem, democracy and comradeship are bound into each other, an idea which accorded with the central tenets of socialism and so had a particular appeal for Whitman’s socialist readers. One admirer from Bolton explained the effect that reading ‘Song of the Open Road’ first had upon him:

It was a revelation – the idea of Comradeship. I had learned something of what brotherhood was in studying the French Revolution, but here was an

² Walt Whitman, *Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Justin Kaplan (New York: Library of America, 1996), p.954. Further references to Whitman’s work are from this edition and are given after quotations in the text.

³ M. Wynn Thomas, *Transatlantic Connections: Whitman U.S., Whitman U.K.* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005), p.197.

explanation of it. It was not brotherhood only. It was going along as comrades. It was nobler and vaster, that idea of Comradeship.⁴

The term was understood and used in a Whitmanian context by high profile socialists; for example, Caroline Martyn, a well-known orator on the lecturing circuit, wrote that ‘Walt Whitman is rejoicing with us in our constantly increasing numbers and the constantly intensifying Comradeship which binds us together’, and Katharine St John Conway, a prominent member of the Independent Labour Party, qualified her use of the greeting ‘dear Comrades’ in a letter to the Bolton Whitmanites with the explanation, ‘That is his word, Walt Whitman’s, and I use it fearlessly.’⁵ Of course, the word ‘comrade’ came to play a special role in socialist movements, and by the end of the nineteenth century it had become a stock left-wing form of address. In the English language, the first recorded use of it in this sense was in 1884 in William Morris’s magazine *Justice*.⁶ Though Whitman’s use of the term long pre-dates this instance, by the time that many of his British readers came to his poetry, the theme of comradeship had acquired specific socialist connotations. For those already familiar with the poems, new readings opened up, as did opportunities to use them as socialist material.

In this thesis I address specific aspects of the process of ‘translation’, and focus each chapter on how a different person or group responded to Whitman and his poetry: the ‘Eagle Street College’, a reading group in Bolton devoted to Whitman; Edward Carpenter, lecturer, mystic and poet, who was involved in a diverse range of radical causes; the journalists from four different socialist periodicals; and William Clarke, a founder of the Fellowship of the New Life, and later a prominent Fabian. I say ‘Whitman and his poetry’, but most of Whitman’s nineteenth-century readers considered the persona of the poet-speaker in *Leaves of Grass* to be synonymous with Whitman himself, and the text was thought to reveal Whitman’s personality. As a result, when British socialists engaged with Whitman, it was with both man and text. In this sense, my thesis has a biographical element. My focus, however, is

⁴ William Ferguson, ‘Typescript of the College Farewell to Dr. R. M. Bucke and J. W. Wallace’ (24 August 1891), JRUL, Sixsmith Collections, MS 1170/2/4/1/1.

⁵ Caroline Martyn to James William Wallace (6 July 1894), JRUL, Sixsmith Collections, MS 1170/2/4/2; Katharine St John Conway to the Eagle Street College (May 1893), Bolton, Whitman Collection, MS ZWN 9/278. Katharine St John Conway married John Bruce Glasier in 1893 and became known as Katharine St John Bruce Glasier or Katharine Glasier. In this thesis I generally use Katharine Glasier, unless the context is specifically before her marriage, in which case I use her maiden name.

⁶ Anon., ‘Ronbaix Conference’, *Justice* (April 1884), p.6.

textual rather than biographical, and I explore the relationships between Whitman and these socialists through articles, poems, books and speeches – the means by which Whitman was mediated to the wider socialist community. Rather than telling the history of these personal relationships, I demonstrate how individual responses to Whitman and to *Leaves of Grass* were used for political purposes.

As this suggests, the boundaries between the personal and the political are not clear cut. This is especially marked in the field of sexual politics, where personal relationships and private acts take on a profound political significance. This theme is central to *Leaves of Grass*, as Whitman's political vision is founded on the bonds of comradeship between individuals, in particular those of 'manly attachment' ('In Paths Untrodden', p.268). The *Calamus* cluster is often seen to give this idea its fullest expression; it contains some of Whitman's most intensely personal poems, many of which are concerned with same-sex attachment, yet he considered them to be political:

Important as they are in my purpose as emotional expressions for humanity, the special meaning of the "Calamus" cluster of "Leaves of Grass," (and more or less running through the book, and cropping out in "Drum-Taps,") mainly resides in its political significance.⁷

Much has been written on this important subject, and many critics have approached the topic of Whitman's reception in England through the lens of sexuality. So far as my subject matter is concerned, Edward Carpenter in particular has often been analysed in this way. My concern is not, however, with this aspect of Whitman's political vision, or how British socialists responded to it. In socialist circles 'comradeship' was not interpreted primarily in terms of same-sex attachment, even by those who had a profound and personal interest in the subject and its relation to Whitman, and so I focus instead on the broader democratic concerns that characterise the relationship between *Leaves of Grass* and the texts produced by Whitman's socialist readers in Britain.

⁷ Whitman, Preface to the 1876 *Two Rivulets* (Camden, NJ: Author's Edition, 1876); reprinted in *The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman*, ed. by Floyd Stovall, 2 vols (New York: New York University Press, 1963), II, *Prose Works 1892: Collect and Other Prose*, p.471.

Historical Context: a Brief Survey of British Socialism

In order to understand the relationship between British socialists and Walt Whitman, it is necessary to have some knowledge of the ‘socialist revival’ of the 1880s and the labour movements that developed out of it.⁸ A useful place to begin is Tony Wright’s starting-point in *Socialisms: Old and New*: the word ‘socialism’ and what it means. Wright argues that ‘the history of socialism is the history of socialisms’, and quotes R. H. Tawney: ‘Socialism, however, is obviously a word with more than one meaning’.⁹ This plurality is important: I refer to ‘British socialists’ and ‘British socialism’, but these terms encompass a range of political traditions, even when ‘socialism’ is considered apart from its European and global backgrounds. Historically, the ‘meaning’ of socialism has evolved: Wright traces its British origins back to the Owenites in the 1820s, before summarising the changes in its usage through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Yet, at any one time, there are a number of distinct, though interrelated, ‘socialisms’. Wright suggests that socialist arguments find ‘common ground’ in ‘the assault on individualism’ and ‘the ideology of “free” capitalism’.¹⁰ This is not exactly right, for as M. Wynn Thomas observes:

[Wright] proceeds to emphasize that socialism’s alternative program of “human sociality” stood in an ambivalent relationship to the Enlightenment individualism to which it was opposed: as well as seeking to replace it, socialism also sought to extend it into a new kind of universality.¹¹

This dialectic runs through the texts I analyse, and the freedom of the individual was very important to many nineteenth-century socialists, as it certainly was to Walt Whitman. The socialists studied in this thesis seemed to find ‘common ground’ in the desire to bring about a new social order in which every person would be treated fairly and equally. This, alongside the very fact that they defined themselves as ‘socialist’, is more important than a precise definition of each of their ‘socialisms’.¹²

⁸ I am not a political historian, and so acknowledge my debt to the scholars cited in the following outline. For detailed and nuanced accounts of the development of British socialism their work should be consulted. In addition, there are a number of texts written by people who were involved in the socialist movement; see, for example, Max Beer, *A History of British Socialism* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1920), and Joseph Clayton, *The Rise and Decline of Socialism in Great Britain, 1884-1924* (London: Faber and Gwyer, 1926).

⁹ Tony Wright, *Socialisms: Old and New* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.1; p.18.

¹⁰ Wright, *Socialisms*, p.22.

¹¹ Thomas, *Transatlantic Connections*, p.162.

¹² To clarify, not every member of the Eagle Street College was a socialist; however, its leader and core members were, and so socialism had a profound influence on the group. This will be discussed

The 1880s saw the beginnings of what has become known as the 'socialist revival', following a period of relative quietude after the collapse of Chartism. Though Martin Crick notes that 'from the mid-sixties onwards there were currents of thought and action which contributed to the Socialist revival', socialism only gained significant support in the final decades of the nineteenth century.¹³ Gregory Claeys suggests that the revival was 'a response to agricultural and industrial depression as well as the growing popularity of Marxian socialism on the continent'.¹⁴ Clearly, Marx was an influential figure, but different forms of socialism emerged in Britain that were not Marxist, and so were 'quite distinct from the perspective of European socialism as a whole', as Wright puts it.¹⁵ Stanley Pierson discusses the role played by Marxian ideology in *Marx and the Origins of British Socialism* and *British Socialists: The Journey from Fantasy to Politics*, and suggests that socialism was embraced by the British 'only after its initial Marxist form underwent a series of reinterpretations and mediations'. He summarises the different strands of British socialism that emerged:

Through the adaptation of Marxism to indigenous modes of thought and experience, three more or less distinct versions of the Socialist ideology emerged—Social Democracy, Fabianism, and a less coherent form I have called Ethical Socialism. These different versions of socialism gave rise to different organizations, styles of propaganda, and political strategies. But they constituted a common movement.¹⁶

Certainly, discussions about British socialism focus on this tripartite division, and the different roles that each tradition played within the socialist revival.¹⁷

Social Democracy was the branch of socialism represented by the Democratic Federation (which became the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) in 1884). Established in 1880, and led by H. M. Hyndman, this was the first socialist organisation of national importance. Graham Johnson asserts that the adoption of a

further in the first chapter. As far as I am aware, William Clarke is the only person studied in this thesis who later renounced socialism.

¹³ Martin Crick, *The History of the Social-Democratic Federation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), p.13. See also Mark Bevir, 'Republicanism, Socialism, and Democracy in Britain: The Origins of the Radical Left', *Journal of Social History*, 34:2 (Winter 2000), 351-368.

¹⁴ Gregory Claeys, 'Political Thought', in *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. by Chris Williams (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp.189-202 (p.197).

¹⁵ Wright, *Socialisms*, p.9.

¹⁶ Stanley Pierson, *British Socialists: The Journey from Fantasy to Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), p.2; Pierson, *Marxism and the Origins of British Socialism: The Struggle for a New Consciousness* (London, Cornell, 1973).

¹⁷ See, for example, Donald F. Busky, 'Democratic Socialism in Great Britain', in *Democratic Socialism: A Global Survey* (Westport: Praeger, 2000), pp.75-142.

socialist programme by the Democratic Federation in 1883 ‘marked a paradigm shift in British politics’:

For the first time, a specifically British organisation committed itself to advanced continental social democratic politics. From this point on the language of socialism, in its modern sense of a socialism derived from Marx, was available in Britain.¹⁸

This was the most Marxist of the three main British socialist traditions, though Marx’s annoyance with Hyndman for plagiarising him in *England for All* is well known.¹⁹ The class war was a matter of utmost importance to the SDF; Johnson suggests that it was a ‘shibboleth of revolutionary purity’, and Martin Crick remarks that the SDF’s insistence on ‘maintaining the full rigours of the class-war doctrine’ came at the expense of forming broader alliances.²⁰ Another important aspect of SDF socialism was its engagement in parliamentary politics; as Mark Bevir states, the ‘guiding thread of Hyndman’s political activity was his belief that socialists should use parliamentary action to introduce the reforms necessary to ensure a peaceful transition to socialism’.²¹ This insistence, and criticism over Hyndman’s leadership, created a division in the SDF which resulted in a break-away group forming the Socialist League in 1885. Under these auspices, William Morris, Walter Crane, Eleanor Marx and others pursued a more idealistic version of socialism which Wright describes as seeking ‘to integrate Marxist ideas with a Ruskinian tradition of aesthetic protest against the “civilization” of commercial capitalism’.²²

Conversely, the Fabian Society was born out of a shift away from utopian interpretations of socialism. In 1883 a discussion group, which called itself the Fellowship of the New Life, gathered around philosopher Thomas Davidson.²³ The group discussed ideas of moral and social regeneration. Davidson became uncomfortable with the emphasis some of the group put on social and economic

¹⁸ Graham Johnson, *Social Democratic Politics in Britain 1881-1911* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2002), p.3.

¹⁹ H. M. Hyndman, *England for All* (London: E. W. Allen, 1881). For more information about Hyndman see Chushichi Tsuzuki, *H. M. Hyndman and British Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), and Mark Bevir’s article ‘H. M. Hyndman: A Rereading and a Reassessment’, *History of Political Thought*, 12:1 (1991), 125-146.

²⁰ Johnson, *Social Democratic Politics*, p.143; Crick, *History*, p.245.

²¹ Bevir, ‘Hyndman’, p.132.

²² Wright, *Socialisms*, p.9. For a contemporary account of this see John Bruce Glasier, *William Morris and the Early Days of the Socialist Movement* (London: Longmans, 1921).

²³ For an early history, see William Knight, *Memorials of Thomas Davidson, The Wandering Scholar* (Boston and London: Ginn, 1907). Also a short pamphlet by Percival Chubb, *The Fellowship of the New Life*, published in 1885.

reform, which led to a split in the group, and in January 1884 Hubert Bland, Edward Pease and Frank Podmore established the Fabian Society.²⁴ Kevin Manton argues that the division between the two groups was not as sharp as has often been supposed, and points out that for many years a significant number of people were members of both groups.²⁵ However, the pragmatic Fabian approach to socialism was markedly different from the ethical philosophising of the Fellowship. Fabianism, which did not engage with the class war, was also very different from the socialism of the SDF. Wright asserts:

[Fabian socialism] was not merely non-Marxist but anti-Marxist, in the sense that it challenged the basis of Marx's economic analysis and claimed to have developed a superior account of the nature of capitalist exploitation, and in the further sense that it rejected Marxism's strategy of revolutionary class action as wholly inappropriate to English conditions. Fabianism offered a strategy of 'resolute constitutionalism' (Shaw's phrase) that would increasingly capture the state, both centrally and locally, for collectivist purposes.²⁶

Early Fabianism is usually associated with its most prominent members such as George Bernard Shaw, and Sidney and Beatrice Webb, and Stanley Pierson contends that this form of state socialism was mainly due to Sidney's Webb's influence: 'Convinced that prevailing institutions provided the means of achieving socialism, Webb dismissed the moralistic appeal, the call for a new spirit of altruism, still stressed by some of his Fabian colleagues.'²⁷ Peter Beilharz agrees that 'public administration, for Webb, then replaced "utopianism"', and suggests that the Fabian 'project' was 'not to initiate a small, local or partial community which adopted the whole faith, so much as to pursue the partial adoption of the new faith by the whole community'.²⁸

²⁴ Many leading Fabian figures wrote histories of the society: see George Bernard Shaw, *The Fabian Society: Its Early History* (London: Fabian Society, 1892), and Edward Pease, *A History of the Fabian Society* (London: Fifield, 1916).

²⁵ Kevin Manton, 'The Fellowship of the New Life: English Ethical Socialism Reconsidered', *History of Political Thought*, 24:2 (Summer 2003), 282-304 (p.282).

²⁶ Wright, *Socialisms*, p.10. The definition of 'Fabians' in *A New Dictionary of Sociology* is more scathing: 'The socialism of the Fabians has always been gradualist, not revolutionary; bureaucratic rather than democratic; technical and research based rather than ethical or emotional; elitist rather than popular; Machiavellian more than liberal.' Geoffrey Duncan Mitchell, *A New Dictionary of Sociology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), p.78.

²⁷ Pierson, *Fantasy to Politics*, p.31.

²⁸ Peter Beilharz, *Labour's Utopias: Bolshevism, Fabianism and Social Democracy*, (London: Routledge, 1992), p.56. See also Mark Bevir, 'Fabianism, Permeation and Independent Labour', *Historical Journal*, 39:1 (1996), 179-196, and Bevir, 'Sidney Webb: Utilitarianism, Positivism, and Social Democracy', *Journal of Modern History*, 74: 2 (June 2002), 217-252.

Most of the people who responded to Whitman, however, had utopian socialist views, and were associated with what has become known as ethical socialism, a tradition far less cohesive than Social Democracy or Fabianism. As Matt Carter notes, ‘Just as it is possible to have more than one tradition called socialism, it is possible to have more than one tradition of ethical socialism’.²⁹

Pierson offers a broad definition:

This version of socialism was not the creation of a specific person or group; it arose more or less spontaneously out of the interaction between various Socialist propagandists—Social Democrats, Fabians, and the followers of Morris—and the lower classes in the industrial centers of the north. But this new form of socialism gave scope to the ethical, aesthetic, and religious aspirations which the Marxists and the Fabians had, with varying degrees of success, excluded.³⁰

As has become the norm in academic writing about this period of socialist history, I use ‘ethical socialism’ in this general sense, though I have misgivings about the term itself: other socialist groups clearly also had ethical concerns and, as Carter points out, it is not immediately obvious what makes the work of socialists such as Blatchford, Morris, Ruskin and Glasier ‘ethical’ as opposed to the work produced out of other socialist traditions.³¹

Ethical socialism is a broad category that included a range of people, groups and opinions, and it was not attached to an organisational body in the same way that the Social Democrats or the Fabians were. There were, however, strong links with the Independent Labour Party (ILP), established in 1893, which became Britain’s largest socialist organisation. The ILP garnered a lot of support from the working class, especially in the industrial north, and labour concerns were central to its philosophy. Many of its leading members espoused or associated themselves with a version of socialism that included parliamentary politics, but also looked towards a more visionary social ideal. Mark Bevir suggests that ‘what distinguished the socialism of the ILP from most forms of continental Marxism was above all else the presence of an ethical tone deriving from a vision of socialism as a new religion

²⁹ Matt Carter, *T. H. Green and the Development of Ethical Socialism* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2003), p.7.

³⁰ Pierson, *Fantasy to Politics*, p.34.

³¹ Carter, *T. H. Green*, p.7.

requiring a new personal life'.³² Spirituality was often central to the ideologies that fed into ethical socialism, and literature was considered by many to be a 'vital force'.³³ Pierson emphasises the influence of Morris, and suggests that his socialism was 'translated into popular terms'.³⁴ It was not simply translation, however, but merging, reshaping and expanding, and other sources were equally inspirational: socialist and anarchist philosophies, American transcendentalism, poetry, theosophy, eastern religions, and Christianity.³⁵

In his article 'The New Life: The Religion of Socialism, 1883-1896', Steven Yeo traces some of the ways that socialism assumed a religious character during this period, and revises standard interpretations of the phenomenon. Rather than dismissing it as 'an anachronistic, "substitute" religion, filling a gap left by declining "orthodox" religion', or 'the moralising dress worn by socialists because of the historical peculiarities of British popular and middle-class culture', Yeo argues that it had a 'maximum presence' and contributed significantly to a 'distinctive phase', characterised by creativity, force and vitality, in the history of socialism.³⁶ Yeo does not propose the 'religion of socialism' as 'a single, *systematic* body of theory/thought/theology/doctrine', but as a more general idea; in Robert Blatchford's words:

Socialism is a step—a long step indeed, but still only a step—to the realisation of a new social ideal. The Labour movement is but one sign of a new spirit at work in many directions throughout human affairs. A new conception of life is taking shape, to which it is affectation, if not folly, to refuse the name of religion.³⁷

Yeo outlines some of the forms this 'religion' took:

³² Bevir, 'British Socialism and American Romanticism', *English Historical Review*, 110:438 (September 1995), 878-901 (p.878). For more on ethical socialism see Bevir, 'Welfarism, Socialism and Religion: On T. H. Green and Others', *Review of Politics*, 55:4 (1993), 639-661.

³³ This phrase was used in an article by Percival Chubb that is discussed in the third chapter, 'The Two Alternatives', *To-day* (September 1887), p.76.

³⁴ Pierson, *Fantasy to Politics*, p.34.

³⁵ See Bevir, 'American Romanticism'; also Bevir, 'The Labour Church Movement, 1891-1902', *Journal of British Studies*, 38: 2 (April 1999), 217-245.

³⁶ Steven Yeo, 'A New Life: The Religion of Socialism', *History Workshop Journal*, 4:1 (Fall 1977), 5-56 (pp.6-7).

³⁷ Yeo, letter to the editors, *History Workshop Journal*, 7:1 (Spring 1979), 215-219 (p.217). The Blatchford quotation is given by Yeo in 'A New Life: The Religion of Socialism', pp.5-6, and taken from 'Studies in the Religion of Socialism', *Labour Prophet* (April 1897), p.52. Blatchford's weekly paper, *The Clarion* (established in 1891), was very influential in Lancashire and Yorkshire, and his book *Merrie England* won many converts for socialism. Alongside Edward Carpenter, Pierson names him as one of the most important people who engaged in the work of 'translating' socialist philosophy into popular terms. Pierson, *Fantasy to Politics*, p.34.

Positions varied from systematic, metaphysical and counter-christian stances (Bax), to mystical, nature-based, eclectic appropriations of christian and other religions (Carpenter), to Marxism (Morris), to F. D. Maurician and anglo-catholic socialism (Hancock and the Guild of St. Matthew), to Christ-the-working-man back-to-the-simple-origins christianity (Conway), to a baptism of socialist demands with the name of religion (Glasier and Brocklehurst), to a rooting of socialism in 'brotherhood of man, Fatherhood of God' language (Hardie), to attempts to articulate and then to organise a 'new religion' arising out of, but not simply 'reflecting' labour movement development (Trevor), to a religion based upon evolutionary determinism (Blatchford) . . . and so on.³⁸

The construction of socialism in these religious terms also allows the literature that inspired it to be regarded as sacred, their texts inspired, and their authors prophets. Yeo gives examples of Tolstoyans in Purleigh and Ruskinians in Liverpool, as well as the Bolton Whitmanites, as groups who 'gathered to follow prophets'.³⁹ Whitman was often invoked in this way; an important aspect of the 'religion of socialism' was an emphasis on fellowship – this was evident, for example, in the popularity of the Labour Church movement and the Clarion groups – and it is easy to see how Whitman's ideas about comradeship and democratic unity could be seen to support the vision of a socialist fellowship.

The belief that socialism would inevitably be brought about was a recurring idea in British socialist thought. Yeo suggests that there were four versions of this assumption:

Either because of a Marx-derived view of the imminent collapse of the economy under the weight of its contradictions: or because of a softer set of assumptions about this being the 'age of the people' [. . .]: or because of an evolutionary view with these years as a qualitative leap: or because of a widely-shared sense of crisis in the political and party machines, socialism was going to happen.⁴⁰

The 'evolutionary view' is particularly relevant to my thesis, and is present in many of the texts I analyse. This often took the form, as in the passage from Robert Blatchford quoted earlier, of a conviction that socialism was one stage in the progression towards a new order of humanity, which was certain to come about. Sometimes this was connected to a belief in the evolution of human consciousness; the assumption was that if humankind had evolved from 'lower' forms of being it was certain to evolve into 'higher' forms. Darwin obviously had an enormous impact on nineteenth-century beliefs, culture and discourse, but socialist rhetoric did

³⁸ Yeo, 'Religion of Socialism', p.18. Lower-case 'c's in 'christian', etc. are as in Yeo's article.

³⁹ Yeo, 'Religion of Socialism', p. 27.

⁴⁰ Yeo, 'Religion of Socialism', p.21.

not only adapt Darwinian concepts of evolution; it also drew on notions of progress and development that pre-dated *Origin of Species*. These included a general understanding of evolution as ‘the unfolding or progression of a series of events in orderly succession’ (*OED*), and theories that modified or added to this concept, such as Lamarckian inheritance. When evolution is invoked it is not always clear in which sense, and it is sometimes difficult to separate the influence of evolutionary theories from a general belief in progression. For example, biological metaphors were sometimes used to illustrate the development of society and humanity, a rhetorical device that seems deliberately to recall theories of evolution, yet it had been used by earlier writers in the service of progressive ideas. In addition, socialists sometimes worked consciously against the discourse of social Darwinism, which applied evolutionary principles to society in a way that promoted competition rather than comradeship. In this thesis, like many of the British socialists I discuss, I use the term ‘evolution’ in a general sense, and only attach it to a specific scientific theory if explicitly stated.

In 1944 E. M. Forster discussed how Edward Carpenter’s mysticism had caused him to be forgotten by twentieth-century socialists:

Love to him was the final earthly reality. He was a mystic. Once he was asked, “How do you combine socialism and mysticism”? He answered, in his gay quaint way, “I like to hang out my red flag from the ground floor and then go up above to see how it looks”. An excellent answer but not sound Trade Unionism. Except by the more elderly people, Edward Carpenter is forgotten now in the Labour Movements he helped to found.⁴¹

This passage highlights the increasing division between religious or ethical socialism and municipal or state socialism. Many historians date the end of the socialist revival as late as 1914, when the First World War, in Tony Wright’s words, ‘not only ended an era in the history of socialism but inaugurated a new era in which all socialist traditions were to be profoundly transformed’.⁴² However, though the war certainly marked a new phase in socialism, both in Britain and on the continent, it had already begun to change. As socialism developed in Britain in the early twentieth century it became increasingly concerned with legislative and parliamentary politics rather than a wider sense of spirituality or utopianism, and

⁴¹ E. M. Forster, ‘Book Talk: The Life and Works of Edward Carpenter’ (1944), Sheffield Archives, Edward Carpenter Collection, MS 387/5.

⁴² Wright, *Socialisms*, p. 11.

literary ‘prophets’ such as Whitman and Carpenter ceased to play such an important role.

Whitman in Britain

The most detailed account of the dissemination and reception of Whitman in Britain remains Harold Blodgett’s *Walt Whitman in England*, published in 1934. Blodgett explains Whitman’s appeal to the British in terms of his visionary democracy: ‘Seen from the still feudal shores of England, Whitman’s Americanism took on a romantic glow, and democracy appeared to sanguine minds not merely as an experiment in suffrage but as an ideal for an inspired brotherhood.’⁴³ Blodgett returns to this distinction between democracy as a political system and Whitman’s vision of comradeship at the end of the book: ‘In its social aspect *Leaves of Grass* appealed to English radicals – and others who might deny the title – not so much as a panegyric of political democracy as a powerfully suggestive plea for “brotherhood.”’⁴⁴ As has been discussed, many of the ‘radicals’ involved in the socialist movement saw no such division, but Blodgett mainly focuses on the British intelligentsia rather than readers who were directly involved in political agitation; he briefly discusses Rhys, and his final chapter is about Carpenter, Havelock Ellis and the Bolton group, but most of the book is concerned with how Whitman was received by writers, scholars and journalists in literary circles.

In the mid-twentieth century, Gay Wilson Allen’s Whitman handbooks had sections about Whitman’s reception in Britain, but these were based on *Walt Whitman in England*.⁴⁵ Similarly, though Douglas Grant’s 1962 lecture ‘Walt Whitman and his English Admirers’ focused on the democratic force of Whitman’s message, it also relied primarily on Blodgett’s work (though it did also discuss the socialist Henry Salt, and how he associated Whitman with Shelley in a democratic poetic tradition).⁴⁶ In *Walt Whitman Abroad*, Allen’s collection of responses to

⁴³ Harold Blodgett: *Walt Whitman in England* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1934), p.9.

⁴⁴ Blodgett, *Whitman in England*, p.219.

⁴⁵ Gay Wilson Allen, *The Walt Whitman Handbook* (New York: Hendrick House, 1946), pp.472-486; *The New Walt Whitman Handbook* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), pp.270-282.

⁴⁶ Douglas Grant, *Walt Whitman and His English Admirers* (Cambridge: Leeds University Press, 1962).

Whitman in countries outside America, there was no section on Britain because it was felt that Blodgett had adequately covered the subject.⁴⁷ However, by 1995, when Allen and Ed Folsom produced *Walt Whitman and the World*, with the stated aim of bringing together ‘the most illuminating responses to Whitman from every culture in which we could identify significant work on Whitman’, it was recognised that Blodgett’s work needed supplementing and updating.⁴⁸ This was undertaken by M. Wynn Thomas who wrote the introduction to the British section, ‘Whitman in the British Isles’, and has returned to the subject in the entry on the British Isles in *Walt Whitman: An Encyclopaedia*, and in his monograph *Transatlantic Connections: Whitman U.S., Whitman U.K.*; in addition, Thomas has written articles that discuss Whitman’s relationship with the Welsh, ‘From Walt to Waldo: Whitman’s Welsh Admirers’ and ‘Walt Whitman’s Welsh Connection: Ernest Rhys’.⁴⁹ In *Walt Whitman and the World*, Thomas locates Whitman’s reception within ‘what became a broad movement for social, political, and cultural reform in Victorian Britain’, and discusses the political context surrounding responses to him; he includes Whitman’s scholarly and literary admirers, but stresses that ‘it wasn’t only members of the intelligentsia who were intensely attracted to Whitman’s writings’ and also discusses radicals outside of those circles.⁵⁰ The chapter on Edward Carpenter in *Transatlantic Connections* considers Whitman in relation to the socialist movement, which this thesis explores further, building on Thomas’s line of enquiry, and extending it in different directions.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Allen, *Walt Whitman Abroad* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1955).

⁴⁸ *Walt Whitman and the World*, ed. by Gay Wilson Allen and Ed Folsom (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1995), p.2.

⁴⁹ Thomas, ‘Whitman in the British Isles’, in *Whitman and the World*, pp.11-70; ‘Whitman in the British Isles’, in *Walt Whitman: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by J. R. LeMaster and Donald D. Kummings (New York: Garland, 1998), pp.72-75; *Transatlantic Connections*; ‘From Walt to Waldo: Whitman’s Welsh Admirers’, *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review*, 10:2 (Fall 1992), 61-73; ‘Walt Whitman’s Welsh Connection: Ernest Rhys’, *Anglo-Welsh Review*, 82 (1986), 77-85.

⁵⁰ Thomas, *Whitman and the World*, p.12.

⁵¹ In addition, other scholars have focused on particular aspects of Whitman’s reception in Britain. Eve Kofosky Sedgwick discusses how Carpenter, John Addington Symonds and Oscar Wilde responded to Whitman in terms of sexuality in the chapter ‘Toward the Twentieth Century: English Readers of Whitman’ in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp.201-218. Gregory Woods also traces the history of British homosexual responses to Whitman in the chapter ‘“Still on My Lips”: Walt Whitman in Britain’, in *The Continuing Presence of Walt Whitman*, ed. by Robert K. Martin (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), pp.129-140. Michael Robertson, Stephen J. Marsden and Carmine Sarracino include British admirers in their work on Whitman’s disciples, which will be discussed later in the introduction.

A point requiring clarification is how the terms 'Britain' and 'England' are used, both in the texts I cite and in my own thesis. In the nineteenth century 'England' was often used synonymously with Britain; looking no further than the authors I discuss, examples can be found in Edward Carpenter's book *England's Ideal* and William Clarke's essay 'The Influence of Socialism on English Politics'.⁵² Blodgett also substitutes 'England' for 'Britain': *Walt Whitman in England* includes Scottish, Irish and (half) Welsh responses. This Anglocentric bias extends into the content of scholarship on this topic; Thomas, for example, remarks that 'regrettably, but not surprisingly, studies of Whitman's influence on the cultures of the countries of the British Isles have tended to concentrate very heavily on England'.⁵³ Though Thomas works against this tendency in his own research, particularly with regard to Wales, the balance has yet to be redressed. I am very aware of the weighting towards England in my thesis: Rhys was half Welsh, John Johnston of the Bolton group was Scottish, and so were Keir Hardie and John Bruce Glasier, who are mentioned briefly, but otherwise all the people that I discuss were English. The texts that I analyse, if they were published, were published in England. However, though research into how Whitman was received amongst socialists from Scotland, Wales, Ireland and England could be fruitful, it is not the purpose of this thesis, so nationality was not one of the criteria I used to select the people and texts that I discuss.⁵⁴ I am concerned with the overarching context of British *fin de siècle* socialist movements, and so despite this weighting towards the English I use the term 'Britain', unless discussing a text that refers specifically to 'England' (whether or not it is meant to include the other countries of the British Isles). In these cases, I follow the author in order to avoid making anachronistic assumptions.⁵⁵

Two selections of Whitman's poetry were printed in Britain during his lifetime: William Michael Rossetti's *Poems by Walt Whitman* in 1868, and Ernest Rhys's *The Poems of Walt Whitman* in 1886.⁵⁶ One other selection was published

⁵² Edward Carpenter, *England's Ideal* (Manchester: John Heywood, 1885); William Clarke, 'The Influence of Socialism on English Politics', *Political Science Quarterly*, 3:4 (December 1888), 549-571.

⁵³ Thomas, 'Walt to Waldo', p.61.

⁵⁴ These criteria will be discussed fully later in the introduction.

⁵⁵ For the same reason, I use the masculine pronoun when discussing a text that also does so.

⁵⁶ Whitman, *Poems by Walt Whitman*, ed. by William Michael Rossetti (London: John Camden Hotten, 1868); Whitman, *The Poems of Walt Whitman*, ed. by Ernest Rhys (London: Walter Scott, 1886).

during the nineteenth century, edited by W. T. Stead for the Penny Poets series in 1894.⁵⁷ Rossetti's selection played such an important role in disseminating Whitman in Britain that his discovery of *Leaves of Grass* is often told as the story of how Whitman's poetry was brought to Britain. In 1856 James Grindrod, who sold books through 'hand-selling' (a type of auction where the price is gradually lowered until there is a buyer) sold the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* to Thomas Dixon, a cork-cutter from Sunderland. Dixon sent it to William Bell Scott, an artist and poet, who bought more copies and sent one to Rossetti. If it had not been for this sequence of events, claimed Bell Scott, '*Leaves of Grass* may never have reached this country at all'.⁵⁸ Of course, as Blodgett observes, this is hardly correct; there were other copies of the 1855, 1856, and 1860 editions in Britain, as is evident by the fact that there were reviews of them in the national press. Edward Whitley has produced a useful overview of the distribution of American editions of *Leaves of Grass* in Britain for the online Walt Whitman Archive: in 1855 a small number of the first edition were distributed by William Horsell; in 1860 Trübner distributed a limited quantity of the 1860 edition, and in 1877 about twenty copies of the 1876 edition; they also distributed some copies of the 1881 edition, but Whitman was dropped when Trübner's son took over the firm; in 1883 Scottish publishers Wilson and McCormick distributed 300 copies of the 1881 edition. The only complete edition to be published in Britain during Whitman's lifetime was a forgery of the 1872 edition by John Camden Hotten in 1873.⁵⁹ So *Leaves of Grass* did circulate in Britain, but it was often expensive and difficult to obtain; Rossetti's selection made Whitman's poetry more easily available, and so increased his readership.

Though Whitman had previously refused to make cuts to *Leaves of Grass*, he gave Rossetti permission to publish a selected edition of his poems, and afterwards also allowed Rhys and two American editors to do the same. Ed Folsom discusses

⁵⁷ Whitman, *Poems by Walt Whitman*, ed. by W. T. Stead (London: Review of Reviews Office, 1894). It was subsequently printed together with selections from Coleridge and Arnold as a 6d volume.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Blodgett, *Whitman in England*, p.17. In a letter to Rhys, Bell Scott asks him to 'give Walt affectionate remembrances from me—I dare say he knows my name in connection with the introduction of his *Leaves of Grass* into this country'. Ernest Rhys, *Letters from Limbo* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1936), p.8.

⁵⁹ Edward Whitley, 'British Editions of *Leaves of Grass*', *The Walt Whitman Archive*, <<http://whitmanarchive.org/published/foreign/british/index.html>> [accessed 20 May 2010] (para 12 of 12).

Whitman's participation in the selection process in 'Leaves of Grass, Junior: Whitman's Compromise with Discriminating Tastes', and concludes:

[They] engaged in a similar sanitizing process by issuing entire books of safe Whitman, making him palatable for a public that he had set out to challenge and remake, while convincing him that their selections would be prudent investments, paving the way for a full-fledged readership. Whitman, while tortured by the paradoxes, finally acted out of the belief that inclusion and provisional acceptance—even in a safely gemmiferous form—were preferable to exclusion and rejection.⁶⁰

Whitman was certainly conflicted about the selections: he wavered between supporting the process (at times actively contributing towards it), and distancing himself from it, either by expressing passive ambivalence or outright antipathy; on one occasion, Horace Traubel records Whitman vehemently complaining that 'expurgation is apology—yes, surrender—yes, an admission that something or other was wrong [. . .] Expurgate, expurgate—apologize, apologize; get down on your knees.'⁶¹ Folsom could, however, be a little kinder to Whitman's editors. Rossetti and Rhys 'convinced' Whitman that their selections would lead to an increased readership because they genuinely believed it would; neither wanted to prevent the poet from 'challenging' or 'remaking' the public, but conversely sought to increase the opportunity he had to do so. They both, for example, urged the reading of the complete *Leaves of Grass*: in his preface Rossetti advises that 'Whitman is a poet who bears and needs to be read as a whole', and Rhys asserts 'for those who wish to thoroughly apprehend the *Leaves of Grass* it will be necessary, let it be said at once, to study them in their complete form'.⁶²

Neil Fraistat argues that poets "publicize" themselves in their books, attempting to shape a public identity through the process of selection and arrangement', and that in Whitman's case this construction of a sense of personality is bound into that of creating an ideology. He argues that 'autobiographical narratives so constructed by poets, however, may be deformed or, even, entirely reformed by editors who alter the selection and arrangement of a volume', and that reading poems in the order that the poet intended is therefore 'a means of rehistoricizing texts':

⁶⁰ Ed Folsom, 'Leaves of Grass, Junior: Whitman's Compromise with Discriminating Tastes', *American Literature*, 63:4 (1991), 641-63 (p.663). 'Gemmiferous' refers to the title of Elizabeth Porter Gould's selection *Gems from Walt Whitman* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1889).

⁶¹ Traubel, *Whitman in Camden*, 1, pp.150-151; quoted by Folsom, 'Leaves of Grass, Junior', p.659.

⁶² Rossetti, *Poems*, p.4; Rhys, *Poems*, p.xxxv.

Books as wholes might then be viewed in terms of several converging contexts: as indices of poets' conceptions about their audience and representations of how they would like to present themselves to that audience; as entries into ongoing cultural, literary, or social debates—that is, as ideological statements; and as products of contemporary conventions regarding the ordering, publishing, and reading of poetic volumes.⁶³

Whitman was undoubtedly concerned with the arrangement of his poems, as is evident in the continual revision and addition and re-shuffling of *Leaves of Grass*. However, this also means that Whitman 're-formed' his own narrative with each edition, and though Fraistat does acknowledge that poets 'who alter the organization of their books, change the meaning of the contexture', he does not explore the consequences of this reshaping, or how this is different from the process of editing.⁶⁴ After all, the above passage applies as equally to selections and editors as to 'books as wholes' and poets. Rossetti's and Rhys's selections can usefully be considered in terms of these 'converging contexts', as indices of their perceptions of their intended audience, how they wanted Whitman to be presented to that audience, and how they felt Whitman's work engaged, or could engage, with 'cultural, literary, or social debates'. This was achieved not only through the selection and ordering of Whitman's poems, but was addressed overtly in the prefaces. Rossetti and Rhys were not only conscious of the fact that their selections mediated Whitman to the British public, but they justified it on the grounds that the texts were produced in order to meet specific social and cultural needs.

Morton D. Paley discusses how Rossetti came to publish *Poems by Walt Whitman* in 'John Camden Hotten and the First British Editions of Walt Whitman: "A Nice Milky Cocoa-Nut"'.⁶⁵ He draws attention to the 1857 Obscene Publications Act, and suggests that Rossetti was very aware that no publisher would be prepared to risk printing *Leaves of Grass* in its entirety, and therefore knew he had to make changes: he could substitute individual words, cut lines and sections from poems, or entirely omit those which could be perceived as offensive.⁶⁶ Aside from removing a few lines from the 1855 preface, Rossetti decided to remove whole poems - it was an

⁶³ *Poems in Their Place: The Intertextuality and Order of Poetic Collection*, ed. by Neil Fraistat (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), p.11; p. 4.

⁶⁴ Fraistat, *Poems in their Place*, p.10.

⁶⁵ Morton D. Paley, 'John Camden Hotten and the First British Editions of Walt Whitman - "A Nice Milky Cocoa-Nut"', *Publishing History*, 6:1 (1979), 5-35.

⁶⁶ Whitman initially gave permission (though it was later retracted) for Rossetti to make substitutions for words like 'onanism' and 'father-stuff'. See Traubel, *Whitman in Camden*, III, p.299.

important point of principle to him that he did not expurgate; he later protested to Whitman: 'If any blockhead chooses to call my Selection "an expurgated edition," that lie shall be on his own head, not mine.'⁶⁷ Rossetti's selection criteria, of which he informed both Whitman (in a letter) and his readers (in the preface), were two-fold:

First, to omit entirely every poem which could with any tolerable fairness be deemed offensive to the feelings of morals or propriety in this peculiarly nervous age; and, second, to include every remaining poem which appeared to me of conspicuous beauty or interest.⁶⁸

This resulted in the omission of about half of the poems from the 1867 American edition of *Leaves of Grass* that Rossetti was working from, including 'Walt Whitman' (later to become 'Song of Myself'), provoking Blodgett to assert that 'many Englishmen met Whitman only after he had been gone over by Rossetti, his shirt buttoned and his hat set at a decent angle'.⁶⁹

In his preface, Rossetti defends these decisions; he justifies the omissions whilst arguing – somewhat ironically, as Ed Folsom has observed – that they would lead to an acceptance of the complete *Leaves*:

I sacrifice them grudgingly; and yet willingly, because I believe this to be the only thing to do with due regard to the one reasonable object which a selection can subserve—that of paving the way towards the issue and unprejudiced reception of a complete edition of the poems in England.⁷⁰

Though Rossetti does speak of Whitman's 'indecencies or improprieties—or, still better, deforming crudities', he says they were excluded 'from motives of policy' and not because of morality.⁷¹ This policy, he explains, is to ensure that 'a fair verdict in Whitman should now be pronounced in England on poetic grounds alone'; the aesthetics of Whitman's poetry should be separated from the sensation surrounding it.⁷² Rossetti states that English readers were acquainted with Whitman's poetry 'only through the medium of newspaper extracts and criticisms, mostly short-sighted, sneering, and depreciatory, and rather intercepting than

⁶⁷ Traubel, *Whitman in Camden*, III, p.305.

⁶⁸ Rossetti, *Poems*, p.20. The letter to Whitman was worded differently: 'I was guided by two rules—1, to omit *entirely* every poem which contains passage or words which modern squeamishness can raise an objection to—& 2, to include, from among the remaining poems, those which I most entirely and intensely admire'. Quoted by Paley in 'John Camden Hotten and the First British Editions of Walt Whitman', p.13.

⁶⁹ Blodgett, *Whitman in England*, p.9.

⁷⁰ Rossetti, *Poems*, p.23.

⁷¹ Rossetti, *Poems*, p.20; p.22.

⁷² Rossetti, *Poems*, p.22.

forwarding the candid construction which people might be willing to put upon the poems' and claims that *Poems by Walt Whitman* was 'the first tolerably fair chance [Whitman] has had of making his way with English readers on his own showing'.⁷³ However, this argument does not quite hold up, as Rossetti also says that many of the 'tabooed passages are extremely raw and ugly on the ground of poetic or literary art'; negative judgements could also, then, be made on 'poetic grounds alone'.⁷⁴

Though Whitman came to regret authorising Rossetti's selection, it did indeed 'pave the way' towards the acceptance of *Leaves of Grass* in Britain. M. Wynn Thomas suggests that 'Whitman's poetry, once Rossetti had through his 1868 edition of *Leaves of Grass* acted as literary midwife and nurse to its reputation, came to be especially appreciated by many late 19th-century intellectuals'.⁷⁵ Carpenter was one such intellectual who first came to Whitman's poetry in the Rossetti edition. He recalls reading Whitman in Rossetti's 'little blue book' while he was a student at Cambridge: 'In a short time I bought a copy for myself, then I got *Democratic Vistas*, and later on (after three or four years) *Leaves of Grass* complete'.⁷⁶ Anne Gilchrist can also be seen as an example of the ideal reader that Rossetti had in mind, approaching Whitman through Rossetti's selection, and then progressing to the complete *Leaves*.⁷⁷ She wrote to Rossetti: 'I am glad that your Selections were put into my hands first, so that I was lifted up by them to stand firm on higher ground than I had ever stood on before, and furnished with a golden key before approaching the rest of the poems.'⁷⁸ And after reading *Leaves of Grass*:

I think it was very manly and kind of you to have put the whole of Walt Whitman's poems into my hands [. . .] Not, of course, that all the pieces are equal in power and beauty, but that all are vital.⁷⁹

⁷³ Rossetti, *Poems*, pp.1-2.

⁷⁴ Rossetti, *Poems*, p.22.

⁷⁵ Thomas, "'A New World of Thought": Whitman's Early Reception in England', *Walt Whitman Review*, 27:2 (June 1981), 74-78 (p.74). See Blodgett for a more detailed discussion, pp. 5-11.

⁷⁶ Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1916), p.64.

⁷⁷ Anne Gilchrist was the widow of Blake biographer Alexander Gilchrist. Rossetti saw the value in her letters and persuaded her to rewrite them into an article, which she published as 'An English Woman's Estimate of Walt Whitman' in 1870. Anne Gilchrist became so infatuated with Whitman that she moved her family to Philadelphia to be with the poet, and though he rejected her romantic advances, they formed a long-lasting friendship.

⁷⁸ Reprinted in Graham Clarke, ed., *Walt Whitman: Critical Assessments, Vol.2, The Response to the Writing* (Mountfield: Helm Information, 1994), p.95.

⁷⁹ Anne Gilchrist, 'An Englishwoman's Estimate of Walt Whitman', in Herbert H. Gilchrist, *Anne Gilchrist—Her Life and Writings* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1887), pp.287-288.

In radical intellectual circles therefore, Rossetti's editorial policy was profoundly successful, and Whitman began to be championed in the public sphere by lecturers and poets such as Edward Dowden, Robert Buchanan and Algernon Charles Swinburne.⁸⁰ The belief that Whitman was received more favourably in England than in America was a source of pride for many of these admirers. Robert Buchanan appealed to it, for example, to obtain support for a Whitman subscription fund in 1876:

Is Walt Whitman to die because America is too blind to understand him? or rather shall not we in England, who love and revere the Prophet of Democracy pay our mite of interest on the debt which we accept, and which America is backward to disown?⁸¹

The fiscal vocabulary plays on the concept of 'value', promoting a link between Whitman's perceived literary 'worth' and financial remuneration. Britain's support for Whitman was used to counter the criticism of Old World backwardness; the idea that there was a national appreciation of the controversial poet reversed the conceit that America was at the forefront of global progress by associating Britain with radical thinking and America with conservatism.

Ernest Rhys distanced his selection from the 'refined minds and hands' sought by Rossetti.⁸² Thomas describes him as a 'militant democrat and protosocialist' who 'set out to save Whitman not only from his enemies but also from his cultivated middle-class friends, in order to make his revolutionary gospel of thoroughgoing egalitarianism known to the masses newly made literate by the education acts of 1870s'.⁸³ Certainly, to return to Fraistat's term, the 'converging contexts' that the selection was produced out of had changed since 1868. Politically, the socialist 'revival' had begun and there was a growing sense of democratic optimism. Whitman had become well known, and his poetry was easier to find, though many people from the working classes could not afford Rossetti's selection, far less a complete American edition. In *Transatlantic Connections* Thomas discusses the production of *Poems of Walt Whitman* against the background of Rhys's work 'for radical social change' within mining communities, such as establishing a lending library and running a series of lectures in the pit village where

⁸⁰ For examples, see the selections in 'Whitman in the British Isles' in *Walt Whitman and the World*.

⁸¹ Robert Buchanan, 'The Position of Walt Whitman', *Daily News* (13 March 1876), p.2.

⁸² Rossetti, *Poems*, pp. 22.

⁸³ Thomas, 'Whitman in the British Isles', *Whitman and the World*, p. 12.

he had lived and worked – work which Thomas suggests was an ‘initiative to bridge the class divide between himself and the miners’.⁸⁴

A similar kind of ‘bridging’ is at work in his correspondence with Whitman; Rhys set himself apart from the intellectuals who embraced the American poet, and aligned himself with the uneducated classes. He appealed to Whitman on these grounds:

This is my chief claim to be your interpreter at all in England then—that I stand with the band of young men who have the future in their hands, young men of the people, not academicians; not mere university students, but a healthy, determined, hearty band of comrades, seeking amid all their errors and foolishnesses to help the average, everyday man about them.⁸⁵

Rhys draws on the ideas (and the vocabulary) of *Leaves of Grass*, introducing concepts forwarded by Whitman, such as comradeship, health and the ‘average’ man. The word ‘mere’ introduces a hierarchical relationship that inverts the social norm, whilst playing to Whitman’s sense of the ‘people’. Rhys uses ‘interpreter’ rather than ‘editor’, showing that he is acutely aware of his mediating role, and frames his request in terms of a democratic mission:

What I—and many young men like me, ardent believers in your poetic initiative—chiefly feel about this is, however, that an edition at a price which will put it in the reach of the poorest member of the great social democracy is a thing of imperative requirement. You know what a fervid stir and impulse forward of Humanity there is today in certain quarters! and I am sure you will be tremendously glad to help us *here*, in the very camp of the enemy, the stronghold of caste and aristocracy and all selfishness between rich and poor!⁸⁶

Rhys’s language is intended to persuade: in the final sentence he uses exclamatory rather than interrogative punctuation, reinforcing the statement that the cheap edition is an ‘imperative requirement’; Whitman is informed that he will be ‘glad to help’, not asked if he would be willing to do so. Rhys flatters Whitman’s democratic sensibilities by placing him in an avant-garde position in the advance towards democracy. This is introduced in the phrase ‘poetic initiative’ and extended into the military metaphor of the ‘camp of the enemy’, which also has biblical overtones. The italicised ‘*here*’ draws attention to the British context of Rhys’s project, appealing to Whitman’s belief that there was a fundamental difference between the

⁸⁴ Thomas, *Transatlantic Connections*, p.232. Thomas’s chapter ‘What a Welshman You Would Have Been’ considers the relationship between Whitman and Rhys in greater detail, particularly with regard to their communication about Wales.

⁸⁵ Traubel, *Whitman in Camden*, III, pp.163-164.

⁸⁶ Traubel, *Walt Whitman in Camden*, I, p.452.

two nations. The phrase ‘stronghold of caste and aristocracy’ supports Whitman’s own conception of British and other European ‘civilisations’ as outdated and undemocratic; for Whitman, this made the turn to American democracy vital, but for Rhys this was the very reason why Whitman’s help was so needed in Britain. By telling Whitman that the poet already had ‘many’ young men who believed in his ‘initiative’, Rhys implies that the only factor preventing Whitman’s acceptance by the masses was the unavailability of his poems. Whitman, who had long hoped for a mass readership of workers, was of course attracted by such an argument; he wrote to Rhys: ‘I much hope to reach the working men, & guilds of the British Islands—especially the young fellows—& trust the W[alter] S[cott] vol will forward that object’.⁸⁷ Eight thousand copies of *Poems of Walt Whitman* were sold in the first two months of its publication, indicating that Rhys did go some way towards achieving this ‘object’.⁸⁸

Rhys continues the democratic line of argument in his preface; he presents Whitman as the poet-prophet of a forthcoming social revolution, and asserts that *Leaves of Grass* was at the cusp of ‘the new Democracy, inevitably now at hand’, a theme which runs throughout the preface, and is considered in more detail in my case study of ‘Pioneers! O Pioneers!’.⁸⁹ However, the preface also betrays an ambivalent attitude towards the working class reader. Though Rhys privately complained to Whitman that ‘some people want to class you as the property of a certain literary clique,—a *rara avis*, to be carefully kept out of sight of the uneducated mob as not able to understand and appreciate the peculiar qualities of your work’, he publicly suggests this very thing, that an ‘average popular’ audience would not be able to comprehend a complete *Leaves of Grass*:⁹⁰

Many of Whitman’s most characteristic poems have necessarily been omitted from a volume like the present, intended for an average popular English audience—an audience which, be it confessed, from the actual experiment of

⁸⁷ Whitman, *The Correspondence of Walt Whitman*, 6 vols, ed. by Edwin Haviland Miller (New York: New York University Press, 1961-1977), IV (1969), p.22. Walter Scott was the publisher of Rhys’s selection.

⁸⁸ Whitley, ‘British Editions’, *The Walt Whitman Archive* [accessed 20 May 2010]. Rhys was not the first to suggest such a project to Whitman: in 1880 Edward Carpenter asked Whitman about ‘the possibility of publishing a cheaper edition of yr [sic] *Leaves of Grass* in England’ because ‘there are so many now who cannot afford the long price of present editions’. Carpenter to Whitman (Easter Sunday 1880), JRUL, Sixsmith Collections, MS 1170/1/1/6/1.

⁸⁹ Rhys, *Poems*, p.xxxix.

⁹⁰ Traubel, *Whitman in Camden*, I, p.452.

the present editor, is apt to find much of *Leaves of Grass* as unintelligible as *Sordello*.

As this surprising passage continues, Rhys not only asserts that he made the cuts due to the limited literary capabilities of his readers, but that therefore they were to blame for the text's deficiencies:

The method of selection adopted in preparing the volume has certainly not been scientific or very profoundly critical. The limitations of the average run of readers have been, as far as they could be surmised, the limitations of the book, and upon the head of that unaccountable class, who have in the past been guilty of not a few poets' and prophets' maltreatment, rest any odium the thorough-paced disciple of Walt Whitman may attach to the present venture.⁹¹

In this context, Rhys's use of the word 'average' is distinctly un-Whitmanian. In *Leaves of Grass* the word is repeatedly employed to reveal the divine potential of the common man or woman: just a few examples include, 'O divine average!' ('Starting from Paumanok', p.182), 'Never was average man, his soul, more energetic, more like a God' ('Years of the Modern', p.598), 'You average spiritual manhood' ('Song of the Redwood-Tree', p.353), and 'average, limitless, free' ('Song of the Exposition', p.340). In stark contrast, Rhys repeats the word 'limitations', using it to emphasise the constraints that the 'average' has placed on his text. Rhys does not seem to be 'bridging' the class divide so much as restoring it.

By 1895 Whitman's poetry was well known and widely available, so W. T. Stead's selection performed less of a pioneering function than Rossetti's or Rhys's. Its strength, however, was its cheapness: at 1d, the same price as a weekly socialist newspaper such as *The Labour Leader*, it was easily affordable to the labouring reader. It was reviewed very favourably by John Trevor in *The Labour Prophet*:

It is not Whitman's poetry that you have to get at, but rather Whitman himself through his poetry, if you would have him for a strong and inspiring companion. In this matter Mr. Stead's PENNY WHITMAN will be a great assistance to those who need it.⁹²

This is an example of how Whitman's poetry was understood to be an extension of his personality; the word 'companion' suggests that the reader can have a personal relationship with the poet, in much the same way that in the Christian faith a believer has a personal relationship with Jesus. Trevor recognises that the process of selecting and organising the poems 'in itself is already an interpretation of Whitman', but he does not see this as disrupting the 'autobiographical narrative' written into the

⁹¹ Rhys, *Poems*, p.xxxv.

⁹² John Trevor, 'Review', *Labour Prophet* (March 1896), pp. 40-41.

text by Whitman; rather, he praises it for 'bringing [Whitman] at once so much nearer to the reader'.

Trevor reiterates the notion that selections should only be a stop-gap until complete editions of *Leaves of Grass* can be obtained:

I wish every member of the Labour Church would make this Penny Whitman his constant companion, until he can no longer resist the temptation to buy a complete edition. To dwellers in towns, shut out from intercourse with Nature, Whitman should be one of the necessities of life; for Whitman is just a piece of Nature humanised – a great Nature force which impresses us as we are impressed by the Sun or the Sky, or the Mountains or the murmuring Sea.

Though the second sentence initially seems to overlook Whitman's celebration of the urban and recast him as a pastoral poet in the vein of Wordsworth, after the semi-colon it becomes clear that Trevor's point has far greater scope: he does not assert that Whitman is the poet of nature, but that Whitman is nature itself. Though Trevor uses similes to liken the effect that Whitman had to that of various powerful parts of nature, it seems as if the statement 'Whitman is just a piece of Nature humanised' was not intended to be read metaphorically, but in a similar way to how Jesus is understood in Christianity to be God incarnate. Whitman was a man, but also a supreme force. The word 'just' is not used reductively, but to communicate how fundamental a part of life Whitman was. This is reinforced by the fact that Trevor promotes his poetry to a socialist readership not as a luxury, but as a necessity.

Whitman was acutely aware of his appropriation for the socialist cause, not least because of Horace Traubel's own socialist beliefs. He received letters and visits from socialists, British and American, many of whom tried to get confirmation from the poet that he supported them; he was reluctant to discuss the issue, but when pressed by Traubel he conceded that he agreed with the goals of socialism, though he was unsure about the process. Traubel records a conversation with Whitman about Rhys, William Morris, and the 'noble group of English socialists' (Whitman's phrase):

[Traubel asks] "Do you have any sympathy for the socialism of these men?" "Lots of it—lots—lots. In the large sense, whatever the political process, the social end is bound to be achieved: too much is made of property, here, now, in our noisy, bragging civilization—too little of men. As I understand these men they are for putting the crown on man—taking it off things. Ain't we all socialists, after all?" "But about their political program—how about that?" "Of that I'm not so sure—I rather rebel. I am with them in the result—that's about all I can say."

Similar discussions appear throughout *With Walt Whitman in Camden*. Any endorsement Whitman gives to socialism is immediately qualified or countered, often without explanation; for example: ‘Sometimes, I think, I almost feel sure, Socialism is the next thing coming: I shrink from it in some ways: yet it looks like our only hope.’ For Whitman this seemed to be a point of principle, and is in keeping with the democratic vision expressed in *Leaves of Grass*, which was characterised by inclusivity and synthesis; to commit to any specific group or cause would be to elevate one part of the whole above the others. He told Traubel: ‘I am not Anarchist, not Methodist, not anything you can name. Yet I see why all the ists and isms and haters and dogmatists exist—can see why they must exist and why I must include all.’⁹³

Though Whitman resisted aligning himself with the socialist cause, he did show some curiosity about the way in which he was co-opted for its purposes; for example, Traubel relates Whitman’s response to reading an article in the British periodical *To-day* by Reginald A. Beckett, ‘Whitman as a Socialist Poet’:

[Whitman] says: “Yes, I read every word of it—not, however, because of its literary quality (though that is respectable enough) but just to see how I look to one who sees all things from the standpoint of the socialist. Of course I find I’m a good deal more of a socialist than I thought I was: maybe not technically, politically, so, but intrinsically, in my meanings.”⁹⁴

Whitman sets aside his own judgement of his poems and, in much the same way that I do in this thesis, investigates how his words are understood when a different set of cultural and political assumptions are brought to the text. Though this was not undertaken completely in earnest – there is an air of irony about the phrase ‘I find I’m a good deal more of a socialist than I thought I was’, for example – Whitman recognises that there was something in *Leaves of Grass* that socialists were right to identify with, not in its specific political ideology, but in the deeper current of democratic sympathy that ran through it.

⁹³ Traubel, *Whitman in Camden*, I, pp. 221-222; III, p.422; II, p. 71.

⁹⁴ Traubel, *Whitman in Camden*, II, p. 4; Reginald A. Beckett, ‘Whitman as a Socialist Poet’, *To-day* (July 1888), pp.8-18.

Theoretical Considerations

Certain theoretical assumptions underpin response-oriented research, most obviously the conviction that the role of the reader is not only interesting, but important. My analysis relies on the premise that a literary text is not 'self-sufficient', nor is 'meaning' created solely by the writer. This critical paradigm, explored and developed in the latter half of the twentieth century by reader-response and reception theorists, was suggested as early as 1871 by Whitman in *Democratic Vistas*:

Books are to be call'd for, and supplied, on the assumption that the process of reading is not a half sleep, but, in 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 the book needs so much to be the complete thing, but the reader of the book does. (pp.1016-1017)

Whitman suggests that meaning is constructed through a two-way relationship between the text and the reader; the text itself is less important than what happens when it is read. These ideas are at the heart of reader-response and reception theories, which oppose the central tenets of formalism and New Criticism, and specifically rebut Wimsatt and Beardsley's concept of the 'affective fallacy': that the critic should avoid 'a confusion between the poem and its *results* (what it *is* and what it *does*)'.⁹⁵ Elizabeth Freund outlines the theoretical shift:

In one mode or another, the swerve to the reader assumes that our relationship to reality is not a positive knowledge but a hermeneutic construct, that all perception is already an act of interpretation, that the notion of a 'text-in-itself' is empty, that a poem cannot be understood in isolation from its results, and that subject and object are indivisibly bound.⁹⁶

Using this approach, 'meaning' is destabilised and interpretive subjectivity is no longer problematic. Not only does what the text 'do' become important, but also what is 'done' to it. Stanley Fish summarises:

If meaning is embedded in the text, the reader's responsibilities are limited to the job of getting it out; but if meaning develops, and if it develops in a dynamic relationship with the reader's expectations, projections, conclusions, judgments, and assumptions, these activities (the things the reader *does*) are not merely instrumental, or mechanical, but essential, and the act of description must both begin and end with them.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ W. K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington, 1967), p.21.

⁹⁶ Elizabeth Freund, *Return of the Reader* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 5.

⁹⁷ Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp.2-3.

If the reader plays an active role in the production of meaning, what he or she does with the text must be a fundamental part of its literary analysis.

This thesis, in which I examine what Whitman's poetry does and what is done to it by a specific network of readers, is built on such theoretical positions. There are many examples in Whitman scholarship of research of this kind. Though the debt to reader-response and reception theory is not always explicitly acknowledged, the premise that there are variations in how Whitman is read and appropriated by different individuals, groups or nationalities, and that this is illuminating, underlies work such as Betsy Erkkilä's *Walt Whitman Among The French: Poet and Myth*, Roger Asselineau's *Walt Whitman in Europe Today*, Walter Grünzweig's *Constructing the German Walt Whitman*, Oreste F. Pucciani's *The Literary Reputation of Walt Whitman in France*, Michael Robertson's *Worshipping Walt: The Whitman Disciples*, Ed Folsom's *Whitman East and West: New Contexts for Reading Walt Whitman*, Ezra Greenspan's *Walt Whitman and the American Reader*, and Gay Wilson Allen and Ed Folsom's *Walt Whitman and the World*.⁹⁸

In 1893, Edmund Gosse observed that Whitman was appropriated by a variety of people or groups for different and sometimes opposing purposes: 'Italian dilettanti and Scandinavian gymnasts, anarchists and parsons and champions of women's rights, the most opposite and incongruous types'.⁹⁹ Gosse's list is humorous, but it makes an important point about the instability of 'meaning' in *Leaves of Grass*, which he suggests the reader was responsible for creating:

There is no real Walt Whitman, that is to say, that he cannot be taken as any other figure in literature is taken, as an entity of positive value and defined characteristics [. . .] Whitman is a mere *bathybuis*; he is literature, in the condition of protoplasm—an intellectual organism so simple that it takes the instant impression of whatever mood approaches it. Hence the critic who touches Whitman is immediately confronted with his own image stamped upon that viscid and tenacious surface. He finds, not what Whitman has to give, but what he himself has brought. And when, in quite another mood, he comes

⁹⁸ Betsy Erkkilä, *Walt Whitman Among The French: Poet and Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); Roger Asselineau, *Walt Whitman in Europe Today* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1972); Walter Grünzweig, *Constructing the German Walt Whitman* (Iowa City: Iowa University Press, 1994); Oreste F. Pucciani, *The Literary Reputation of Walt Whitman in France* (New York: Garland, 1987); Michael Robertson, *Worshipping Walt: The Whitman Disciples* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Ed Folsom, ed., *Whitman East and West: New Contexts for Reading Walt Whitman* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002); Ezra Greenspan, *Walt Whitman and the American Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Allen and Folsom, eds., *Whitman and the World*.

⁹⁹ Edmund Gosse, 'Walt Whitman', *New Review* (April 1894); reprinted in Gosse, *Critical Kit-Kats* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1896), pp.95-111 (p.98).

again to Whitman, he finds that other self of his own stamped upon the provoking protoplasm.¹⁰⁰

These metaphors imply a mirroring rather than an interaction: *Leaves of Grass* was thought to show the reader back their 'own image'. For Gosse, this was a problematic feature of Whitman criticism, and despite phrases such as 'an intellectual organism so simple' he makes it clear that the target of his critique is not Whitman but his critics:

After reading what a great many people of authority and of assumption have written about Whitman—reading it, too, in a humble spirit—though I have been stimulated and entertained, I have not been at all instructed. Pleasant light, of course, has been thrown on the critics themselves and on their various peculiarities. But upon Whitman, upon the place he holds in literature and life, upon the questions, what he was and why he was, surely very little.¹⁰¹

Unlike Whitman, or reader-response and reception theorists, Gosse's comments do not apply to the reading process in general, but specifically to Whitman; his work was seen to act in a distinctive way which prompted the critic to insert his own affective state into the text, obscuring 'what' and 'why' Whitman was.

I have been talking about reader-response and reception theories in very general terms, deliberately so, for the two broad categories bracket a diverse range of literary and linguistic arguments, not all of which are relevant or useful for my purposes. The general principles that unite these heterogeneous theories are those that inform my research, such as the belief that the reading process is dynamic, and that the relationship between reader and text is fundamentally important.¹⁰² Many of the theories proposed are too narrow in their scope, focusing on the linguistic aspects of a text and the process by which a 'model reader' (Umberto Eco), 'informed reader' (Stanley Fish) or 'super-reader' (Michael Riffaterre) passes through them. Real, social, subjective and changeable readers seem to be lost as the critic determines how an abstract reader should behave, in accordance with the critic's own experience of the text. These theories cannot be fully applied to the responses examined in this thesis, which were generally not so much concerned with the linguistic nuances of

¹⁰⁰ Gosse, *Critical Kit-Kats*, pp.97-98.

¹⁰¹ Gosse, *Critical Kit-Kats*, p.96.

¹⁰² Reader-response and reception theories often overlap, but I follow Robert C. Holub in drawing a distinction between them: reception theory refers specifically to the critical movement associated with the University of Konstanz which was a 'cohesive, conscious, and collective undertaking', whereas reader-response is a much looser term, incorporating a diverse range of writers. Holub goes so far as to suggest: 'If reader-response criticism has become a critical force, as some would maintain, it is by virtue of the ingenuity of labeling rather than any commonality of effort'. Robert C. Holub, *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1989), p.xiii.

Whitman's poetry as they were with its 'message', overarching style, and the emotional and practical response demanded by it. Evidence has rarely been left of the minutiae of 'close reading'.

Some models are, however, more fruitful than others. Wolfgang Iser's theory of aesthetic response, set out in *The Implied Reader* and *The Act of Reading*, usefully introduces the idea that the 'meaning' of a text is created by the interaction between author and reader.¹⁰³ He distinguishes between the artistic pole, 'the text created by the author', and the aesthetic pole, 'the realization accomplished by the reader', and suggests:

From this polarity it follows that the literary work cannot be completely identical with the text, or with the realization of the text, but in fact must lie halfway between the two. The work is more than the text, for the text only takes on life when it is realized, and furthermore the realization is by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader—though this is in turn acted upon by the different patterns of the text.¹⁰⁴

This serves as a useful point of departure: the author's text opens up, or prompts, certain interpretive possibilities which are adapted and extended by the reader; in this case, Whitman's radical democratic 'message' is understood and interpreted in the context of socialist philosophy. Iser posits that 'the message is transmitted in two ways, in that the reader "receives" it by composing it', which introduces an idea of 're-writing' that functions doubly in my thesis: Whitman's 'message' is 'composed' through the process of reading and interpretation, but is also literally re-written in articles, books, and poems. Though Iser focuses on novels, his claim that the reader fills the 'gaps' in the text appears particularly pertinent to the genre of poetry, which often relies on suggestion; Whitman himself writes in *November Boughs* that 'the best poetic utterance, after all, can merely hint, or remind, often very indirectly, or at different removes' (p.1176). Iser's model allows not only for people interpreting the text differently, but for an individual interpreting the text in different ways at different times, as expectations from earlier readings are continually developed and revised in the process of re-reading. This concept of the constant re-creation of meaning is essential if pat conclusions about 'what the British socialists thought of Whitman' are to be avoided. Whitman's readers came to *Leaves of Grass* again and

¹⁰³ Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader* (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1974); *The Act of Reading* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978).

¹⁰⁴ Iser, *Implied Reader*, p. 274.

again throughout their lives, and it is important to recognise that their interpretations changed over time.

Iser does not, however, adequately address the communal or social elements of the interpretive process. These are particularly obvious in the Eagle Street College where the reading of Whitman was very consciously a group undertaking, but are also evident in a more general way. As I will discuss, the readers that I analyse should be considered as part of a network; they influenced each other's readings, and collectively established a body of interpretive norms, such as the notion that Whitman had a 'message' or that he was a prophet. Stanley Fish goes some way to explaining this in his concept of 'interpretive communities' who 'share interpretive strategies' and produce meaning collectively. His claim that 'all aesthetics' are 'local and conventional rather than universal, reflecting a collective decision as to what will count as literature' is particularly germane to the 'democratic aesthetic' discussed in the third chapter, which I suggest is formulated and promoted by socialist journalists. However, Fish's argument is weakened by its reductiveness:

Members of the same community will necessarily agree because they will see (and by seeing, make) everything in relation to that community's assumed purposes and goals; and conversely, members of different communities will disagree because from each of their respective positions the other "simply" cannot see what is obviously and inescapably there.¹⁰⁵

Variations in reader-response are not taken into account, either between members of the same community, or over a number of readings by one individual. There may be patterns of aesthetic norms within social groups, but these can also be resisted or only part-accepted by its members. The complexity of group identity is overlooked: at any one time people are members of a number of interlocking communities, and within any community there are smaller sub-communities. The 'community' of late nineteenth-century British socialism, for example, was an amalgam of the smaller 'communities' of the Fabian Society, the Social Democratic Federation, the Independent Labour Party, the Labour Church, and the Christian Socialists, amongst many others. Members of these 'communities' were also members of other social groupings: for example, a Christian Socialist would probably also be part of a church

¹⁰⁵ Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class?*, p. 107; p. 15.

'community'; other socialists were part of 'communities' built around ideas such as Theosophy, vegetarianism, same-sex relationships, and women's rights. The 'assumed purposes and goals' of these communities do not stand in the kind of binary relationship described by Fish, and the similarities and differences between their cultural and aesthetic values were more subtle and nuanced than Fish's model allows.

The social construction of texts is also Jerome McGann's theme in *The Textual Condition*, though he challenges the primacy that reader-response and reception scholarship has given to the role of the reader at the expense of the text. McGann criticises this theoretical position, which he calls 'romantic hermeneutics', for failing to see the texts as social acts:

Every text enters the world under determinate sociohistorical conditions, and while these conditions may and should be variously defined and imagined, they establish the horizon within which the life histories of different texts can play themselves out.

The crux of McGann's argument is that these 'different texts' emerge not only through variations between readers (age, gender, social background, and so forth), but through undetermined possibilities 'in the texts themselves'; he suggests that within each text there are 'variants of itself screaming to get out'.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, he asserts that these possibilities are not only created through the formal and linguistic features of the text, but through material factors such as paper, ink and typeface. These physical properties are often not determined by the author, but by the publishing house, which will consider factors such as time, cost, and what it considers to be the book's purpose (for example, whether it is aimed at a popular or specialist market). In this way, social and cultural conditions will have an effect on the reader's response or interpretation, whether or not he or she is aware of it, a factor which makes it difficult to apply McGann's persuasive argument practically to the study of Whitman's reception. If readers were not aware of how the material properties of the texts affected their interpretations, they could not comment on such a process. Additionally, it is often difficult to ascertain which specific text was being worked from at any one time because Whitman's socialist admirers often owned more than one edition or selection of *Leaves of Grass*, and collected the newspapers and periodicals in which his poems were printed.

¹⁰⁶ Jerome McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp.9-10.

Other factors limit the applicability of these theories to my research. In their focus on the creation of meaning through the process of reading, these models assume that the relationship between reader and writer is only conducted through the text, yet some of the people that I discuss had personal relationships with Whitman. This changes the reading process: responses to *Leaves of Grass* were not produced solely by the text, but out of friendship and knowledge of Whitman's character. The subjects of my first two chapters, Edward Carpenter and the men from the Eagle Street College, communicated regularly with Whitman and made pilgrimages to his home (in Carpenter's case it is possible that sexual relations were also involved), giving them the opportunity to discuss his poetry and its topics and themes. Whitman considered these admirers good friends, and he communicated with them as such rather than as a celebrity to his 'fans' (though that is not to suggest that Whitman was always completely candid with his friends). Even after Whitman's death in 1892, the Eagle Street College continued to discuss what he had thought or said in correspondence with Horace Traubel. However, the idea that Whitman had an importance beyond the texts he wrote was not restricted to those with whom he had personal contact: his character was frequently commented on and analysed alongside, or even instead of, his work, which would in turn have an impact on how his poetry and prose was read and interpreted.

A related factor is that of spirituality and faith: Whitman was often treated not as a poet, but as a prophet or even a messianic figure. This meant that *Leaves of Grass* was frequently read as a sacred text and not judged as a work of art, but as something of divine origin. This has an effect on the reading process, which reader-response and reception theories, so far, do not adequately account for. Speaking about criticism in more general terms, Carmine Sarracino remarks that scholars who focus on the literary have been 'repulsed by the quasi-religious response of the Whitmanites'.¹⁰⁷ 'Repulsed' may be a little strong, but there has been a faint air of embarrassment surrounding the Whitmanites, Whitmaniacs, or 'hot little prophets' as Bliss Perry famously called them in 1906.¹⁰⁸ Michael Warner explains this by suggesting that no other literary figure has received such 'explicitly religious

¹⁰⁷ Carmine Sarracino, 'Redrawing Whitman's Circle', *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review*, 14:23 (Fall 1996-Winter 1997), 113-126 (p.113).

¹⁰⁸ For a more detailed discussion see Ed Folsom's editorial 'Whitman's Disciples' in the *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review*, 14:23, 53-55.

veneration', whilst alive or dead, and observes that 'professional critics define themselves against this kind of reading, and it should not be a surprise that Whitmaniacs fare rather badly in the critical literature on Whitman'.¹⁰⁹ There are exceptions. In 1996-97 the *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* published a 'Discipleship Issue', in which Sarracino proposed a re-evaluation of 'Whitman's loosely connected circle of disciples by closely examining, rather than dismissing out of hand, their transliterary ideals and their visionary sense of Walt Whitman's significance and importance'; Paul Salveson expanded on his pamphlet about the Eagle Street College; and Joann Krieg assessed the correspondence between Horace Traubel and James William Wallace from the Eagle Street College.¹¹⁰ More recently, Michael Robertson's *Worshipping Walt: The Whitman Disciples* tells the stories of nine prominent disciples from Britain and north America who either met or corresponded with Whitman; Robertson stresses that it is possible to be a 'both/and' reader: 'to value the rich aesthetic and historical and political interpretations of Whitman that have flourished since the 1950s while still learning from the disciples' religious appreciation.'¹¹¹

For these reasons, I structure my argument around cultural history rather than critical theory. I turn to theorists when relevant, but focus mainly on close readings of the texts as socio-historic and literary productions. Many of these texts can only be found in archives and so have not received much, if any, critical attention. I look not only at what a reader *does* to a text as it is read (for that is largely guess work), but how it is responded to in writing (or, in some cases, in speeches) afterwards. This creates a kind of chain effect, for the reader has become the writer, creating a new text which is then interpreted by other readers.

¹⁰⁹ Michael Warner, ed., *The Portable Walt Whitman* (New York: Penguin, 2004), p. xxi.

¹¹⁰ Sarracino, 'Redrawing Whitman's Circle', p.113; Paul Salveson, 'Loving Comrades: Lancashire's Link to Walt Whitman', 57-82; Joann Krieg, 'Without Walt Whitman in Camden', 85-110.

¹¹¹ Robertson, *Worshipping Walt*, p.13.

Methodology and Chapter Summary

The subjects of the following chapters were chosen according to three key criteria. First and most obviously, the person or group had to have something to say about Walt Whitman. I selected people and texts that fully engaged with him and his work, not to give a skewed notion of his importance, but because this thesis is specifically concerned with Whitman's reception in socialist circles, not the relationship between socialism and literature, or the roles that different writers played within the socialist movement (though such issues are of course touched on). Second, this engagement had to have a public element. I did not want to discuss isolated readers, but those who fed their interpretation of Whitman back into the socialist community. The final consideration was variety, as I felt that it would be fruitful to cover a range of people who produced different types of texts. As a result I chose to focus on a group (the Eagle Street College), a poet (Edward Carpenter), writers within a publication medium (socialist journalism), and a critic (William Clarke).¹¹² I included the comparative study of 'Pioneers! O Pioneers!' so that I could compare the different ways in which socialists appropriated the same text.

The people that I discuss should not be considered as isolated subjects, but as part of a socialist network of Whitman readers. They interacted with each other, and with the other socialists who are mentioned in the thesis. Whitman was read and responded to within a socialist cultural environment where ideas about politics, spirituality, philosophy, and literature were exchanged back and forth. A few examples: Edward Carpenter regularly visited the Eagle Street College, and some of its members came to stay with him; they read his books and reviews of them, and in turn sent him their poems and articles; James William Wallace of the College wrote to Keir Hardie, and John Bruce and Katharine Glasier, who were not only key socialist activists and orators for the Independent Labour Party, but also edited, at different times, *The Labour Leader*, one of the newspapers that I discuss in the third chapter, and to which Wallace and Carpenter both contributed. Wallace also

¹¹² As with the weighting towards England, I am aware of the masculine bias in this selection. Though Whitman and *Leaves of Grass* had a profound effect on leading female socialists such as Katharine Glasier and Caroline Martyn, there is not enough material to dedicate a chapter to their responses. However, as I discuss in the conclusion, this could be explored further in a different research project.

corresponded with Robert Blatchford, who wrote *Merrie England*, in which *Leaves of Grass* was recommended as one of the books socialists should read, and edited another socialist paper called the *The Clarion*; Blatchford wrote to Carpenter, criticising Hardie's editorship of *The Labour Leader*, but praising Carpenter's essays; in one of these letters Blatchford mentions also writing to John Trevor, founder of the Labour Church and editor of *The Labour Prophet*, also discussed in the third chapter. Wentworth Dixon, of the Eagle Street College, gave a talk about the Labour Church, and Carpenter was the subject of a Labour Church talk by Charles Sixsmith, also a member of the Eagle Street College; Ernest Rhys attended one of Carpenter's lectures at the Fabian Society in London. William Clarke wrote to the College's John Johnston asking for permission to quote from *Notes on a Visit to Walt Whitman*, which was sent to him by Rhys, and the Bolton group kept reviews of Clarke's *Walt Whitman*. Alfred Orage corresponded with Carpenter, and wrote articles about him for *The Labour Leader*, before becoming owner and editor of *The New Age*. This (by no means exhaustive) list shows how the socialists that I consider were connected through their admiration not only for Walt Whitman, but for Edward Carpenter, who many believed had followed Whitman in becoming a prophet of democracy.

Archival research is central to this thesis. Alongside the published texts by Wallace and Johnston of the Bolton Fellowship, Carpenter and Clarke, and the socialist periodicals examined in chapter three, I made extensive use of the 'Papers Relating to J. W. Wallace and the Bolton Whitman Fellowship' and the C. F. Sixsmith Collections at the John Rylands University Library at the University of Manchester, the Whitman Collection at Bolton Archive and Local Studies Service, and the Carpenter Collection at Sheffield Archives. The Eagle Street College papers are divided between Bolton Archives and the John Rylands Library. The larger 'Walt Whitman Collection' at Bolton was gifted by Minnie Whiteside, the adopted daughter of James William Wallace, and includes both Wallace's original papers, and Whiteside's correspondence with admirers of Whitman and the Eagle Street College. The collection at Manchester includes the smaller Whiteside donation, 'Papers Relating to J. W. Wallace and the Bolton Whitman Fellowship', but mainly consists of papers bequeathed by Charles Sixsmith. The group documented its relationship with Whitman very carefully, and the vast archives contain a diverse

range of Whitman-related materials: drafts and copies of letters, postcards, photographs, journals, manuscripts, notepads, articles, newspaper clippings, songs and poems composed by members of the group, transcripts of meetings and speeches, and miscellaneous items including boat tickets, travel insurance documents, Whitman's stuffed canary, a loving cup given by him, and a sprig of juniper taken from his grave. The John Rylands Library has produced a guide to the collection, catalogued and described by Francis Baker, with a very useful introduction to the group and its relationship to Whitman by Carolyn Masel.¹¹³ She remarks that the College's discussion of Whitman 'constitutes some of the earliest Whitman criticism, even though much of it has never been published, and most of it is still not recorded in the standard scholarly bibliographical works.'¹¹⁴ Ed Folsom calls the Bolton archive 'the major Whitman Collection outside the United States'.¹¹⁵ The Sixsmith Collections also have a subsection of material relating to Edward Carpenter, but the largest archival source about Carpenter is the collection at Sheffield. This was donated by Carpenter's executors in the early 1930s and has two parts: Carpenter's library of books and pamphlets, and Carpenter's own work, including many editions, translations, manuscripts, sermons and notebooks. In addition there are photographs and miscellaneous items, such as sandal templates; a voluminous collection of his correspondence was later added, though after the guide to the collection, *A Bibliography of Edward Carpenter*, was published by the City Libraries in 1949.¹¹⁶ These archival collections not only contain material on Carpenter or the Eagle Street College, but are useful resources for more general information concerning the emerging socialist movements and the figures involved in them.

The Eagle Street College material is of particular interest because it is a rare record of how people from the lower middle classes, who had received little formal education, responded to Whitman. Its members engaged in a communal process of reading and response; the idea of comradeship was bound into their experience of reading Whitman as well as their understanding of socialism. As I discuss in the

¹¹³ Carolyn Masel, *The Walt Whitman Collection: Guide to the Microfilm Collection* (Wakefield: Microform Academic Publishers, 2002).

¹¹⁴ Masel, 'Poet of Comrades: Walt Whitman and the Bolton Whitman Fellowship', in *Special Relationships: Anglo-American Affinities and Antagonisms, 1854-1936*, ed. by Janet Beer and Bridget Bennett (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 110-138 (p.118).

¹¹⁵ Folsom, 'Whitman's Disciples', *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review*, 14:23, p.54.

¹¹⁶ Sheffield City Libraries, *A Bibliography of Edward Carpenter* (Sheffield: Sheffield City Libraries, 1949).

first chapter, the Bolton Whitmanites were very well connected, both with Whitman and his American coterie, and with key figures in the ILP, with whom they discussed Whitman and his poetry. Though scholars have become increasingly interested in the group in recent years, scholarship has predominantly been dedicated to its history. The texts produced by the group remain fertile ground for research, and when considered chronologically they reveal a sense of change and progression within the group that has not been fully explored. The group's interest in Whitman spanned the period before and after his death, over the time that socialism became increasingly influential. Responses to Whitman became increasingly politicised, and were voiced more publicly; their earlier texts were intended for circulation amongst friends, but became more public in the years following Whitman's death: speeches were made to socialist audiences (for example, at the regional ILP conference, and at Labour Church meetings), articles were written in socialist periodicals, and pamphlets and books were published.

In this first chapter, I examine the relationship between the group and Walt Whitman, arguing that Whitman's profound influence on the group shaped the way it came to interpret socialism, and that the group's changing view of its role in relation to Whitman affected what it perceived to be its democratic mission. I discuss the College's communal response to Whitman, but consider how it was guided by the group's unofficial leader, James William Wallace, who wrote most of the speeches and articles kept in the archives. I first consider the group's initial involvement with Whitman within the context of the cultural value placed on self-improvement, and examine how an appreciation of Whitman was used to identify with lower middle-class values, but suggest that the group also used class as a means of presenting themselves to Whitman as his ideal labouring readership. I explore how Wallace negotiated the relationship between the 'literary' and daily life, framing it in the context of his search for a 'democratic literature' that could have mass appeal. Next I discuss how *Leaves of Grass* came to be interpreted as a sacred text, and analyse how the Whitmanian concepts of comradeship and democracy were interpreted as political principles. Finally, I discuss Wallace's changing sense of the group's divine mission in the years following Whitman's death, and relate it directly to the

socialist cause: ‘For we’, claimed Wallace, ‘are the heaven-appointed preachers to the Democracy of England’.¹¹⁷

The inclusion of Edward Carpenter, well-known as both an admirer of Whitman and as a socialist writer and orator, is perhaps the most obvious. Though Carpenter’s feelings towards Whitman himself changed over the years, his high opinion of *Leaves of Grass* did not, and the ideas in it remained central to his interpretation of socialism. In the years since I began my research, there has been a renewal of popular interest in Carpenter, largely due to the publication of Sheila Rowbotham’s biography, *A Life of Liberty and Love*.¹¹⁸ This has been especially noticeable in the Sheffield region where he spent most of his adult life: there have recently been a number of talks, and walks around the areas where he lived and worked. However, his writing has not been subject to a large amount of scholarly criticism, and this is particularly true of his collection of poetry *Towards Democracy*, which (with a few notable exceptions) is usually only mentioned, if at all, as a footnote to *Leaves of Grass*.¹¹⁹ Carpenter’s poetry merits critical attention in its own right, but it also deserves to be reconsidered due to the force it carried in socialist circles. Fenner Brockway, for example, who was heavily involved in the ILP in the early twentieth century, stated that “‘Towards Democracy’ was our Bible”.¹²⁰ In the same way that Whitman influenced Carpenter and one generation of socialists, Carpenter influenced the next.

The chapter on Edward Carpenter, who was often described as the ‘English Whitman’, focuses on the relationship between *Towards Democracy* and *Leaves of Grass*. I discuss how Carpenter’s ‘Englishness’ was seen to work against the Whitmanesque formal properties of *Towards Democracy*, and how issues of nationality affected its reception. Next, I examine Carpenter’s democratic poetics in relation to his belief in Lamarckian evolution, or ‘exfoliation’, to use the term he borrowed from Whitman; I discuss the concept of ‘unfolding’ as it had an impact on the reading and writing of the democratic ‘sign’, contrasting the two poets’

¹¹⁷ James William Wallace to the College (6 January 1893), Bolton, Whitman Collection, MS ZWN 2/24.

¹¹⁸ Sheila Rowbotham, *A Life of Liberty and Love* (London: Verso, 2008).

¹¹⁹ The two key exceptions are the chapter on Carpenter in Thomas’s *Transatlantic Connections*, and Andrew Elfenbein’s article ‘Whitman, Democracy, and the English Clerisy’, *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 56:1 (June 2001), 76-104.

¹²⁰ Fenner Brockway, ‘A Memory of Edward Carpenter’, *New Leader* (5 July 1929), p.6.

conceptions of the way in which the word 'democracy' acquires its meaning and fulfils its potential. The relationship between the speaking 'I' and the reading 'you' in 'Towards Democracy' and 'Song of Myself' are then examined, and I argue that Carpenter appropriates the speaking voice created in 'Song of Myself', but uses it to forward a different (though related) overarching spiritual and political vision. I suggest that Whitman's concern with incorporating the 'many in one', of celebrating the individual yet establishing national unity, is reconstructed in Carpenter's poetry as a determination to show his readers what he believed to be the 'true' nature of their entwined and interlinked selves. Finally, I turn from Carpenter's universalising principles to their specific application, and examine the treatment of England in *Towards Democracy*, arguing that Carpenter's 'exfoliation' overwrites the notion of manifest destiny, and allows England a place in the movement towards 'true democracy' that Whitman denied it on the basis of its feudal and aristocratic past.

Journalism, the subject of my third chapter, played an important role in the development of socialism: it aided the formation and propagation of socialist ideals, and was a medium through which events, meetings and demonstrations could be organised and discussed. It is therefore significant that Whitman was incorporated into these publications; through them his democratic poetry was brought to socialists who were not necessarily 'Whitmanian'. Unlike Carpenter, or the men of the Eagle Street College, the journalists that I discuss did not have friendships with Whitman, which allows me to consider how he was treated in socialist writing when personal relationships were not involved. I discuss how Whitman's treatment in the *fin de siècle* British socialist press should be considered as part of the conscious crafting of a democratic aesthetic; he was rarely championed in concrete terms as a 'socialist poet', but was instead seen to perform some kind of preparatory work that would make the reader more receptive to the political principles of socialism. I examine some of the ways in which this appropriation was undertaken, focusing on four publications that were associated with different versions of socialism: *Seed-Time* – the organ of the Fellowship of the New Life; *The Labour Prophet* – the Labour Church's mouthpiece, owned, edited and chiefly written by its founder, John Trevor; *The Labour Leader* – closely affiliated with the ILP; and *The New Age* – an independent review which moved between radical liberalism and socialism. This

allows an examination of how Whitman was presented by a range of writers to different socialist readerships.

I argue that *Seed-Time* interpreted Whitman and, more generally, American transcendentalism in terms of the individual regeneration advocated by the Fellowship, and that Whitman's poetry was advanced as a means of guiding the reader towards personal, and therefore social, liberty. In *The Labour Prophet*, John Trevor identifies Whitman as a messianic figure, and *Leaves of Grass* as scripture. For Trevor, Whitman's value lay in the fact that he offered a direct and unmediated source of spiritual guidance, which would in turn enable each individual to have their own direct and unmediated relationship with the divine. I suggest, however, that not only does Whitman himself act as a mediating figure, but that Trevor mediates Whitman for the reader, paradoxically using Christian discourses to offer Whitman as an alternative to Christianity. I consider a number of writers from *The Labour Leader*: first, I look at Alfred Orage's column 'A Bookish Causerie' and discuss how Orage's political ideology was underpinned by a belief in an evolutionary mysticism which he also saw as being the foundation of Whitman's writings; I then examine how Whitman was used for didactic purposes through satire, stories and articles, arguing that in *The Labour Leader*, *Leaves of Grass* was not so much invoked as a sacred text as it was incorporated into a democratic literary reference system. Finally, I suggest that during the nineteenth century *The New Age* worked for a progressive cause which had socialist and liberal elements, and discuss how these were negotiated in its treatment of Whitman, before exploring how he was incorporated into the paper after 1907 when Orage became owner and editor, and the journal announced itself specifically as a socialist publication.

William Clarke's study of the poet, *Walt Whitman*, offers an alternative to the apostolic approach adopted by many of Whitman's admirers and contrasts with some of the more Utopian readings of Whitman discussed in this thesis.¹²¹ First a member of the Fellowship of the New Life, then a Fabian (he contributed one of the eight essays in the influential *Fabian Essays in Socialism*, edited by George Bernard Shaw), Clarke was spiritually minded, yet his understanding of socialism was firmly grounded in practicalities of economic and political reform.¹²² *Walt Whitman* is the

¹²¹ William Clarke, *Walt Whitman* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1892).

¹²² *Fabian Essays in Socialism*, ed. by George Bernard Shaw (London: Fabian Society, 1889).

only book-length critique of the poet from a nineteenth-century British socialist perspective, and it is notable for its even-handed treatment of the poet, which was often commented on in contemporary reviews.¹²³ It has been overlooked in discussions of Whitman's reception in England, and this thesis provides the first detailed analysis of it. I show how Clarke uses his 'exposition' not only to assess Whitman's work, but to criticise the way that America had developed. The increasing strength of American industrialism and capitalism challenged Clarke's belief in the inevitability of democratic progress, and though Whitman offered a democratic 'message' Clarke did not believe that he went far enough. I argue that Clarke used Whitman's poetry as a means of launching his own social commentary, which built on many of Whitman's ideas, but in a form that was explicitly socialist. My analysis is structured around the chapters of Clarke's book, and I consider the way that each negotiates the core themes of the text: the notion of evolutionary 'progress', the process of synthesis, art and the aesthetics of reform, spiritual freedom, and the need for a collective social structure.

Finally, I offer a case study of 'Pioneers! O Pioneers!' and consider some of the ways in which the poem was co-opted for the socialist cause, despite its inherent American nationalism: extracts were printed in socialist newspapers, it was incorporated into articles, lines from it were often used as epigraphs, and the poem was referred to in speeches. First I discuss how Ernest Rhys drew on the poem in his preface, and interpreted the divide in the poem between the old and the young as being generational rather than national. I look then at two speeches given by James William Wallace, and discuss how he presented both the American Civil War and the British socialist movement symbolically as synecdochal manifestations of the universal battle for 'true democracy'. Next, I analyse how John Trevor edited the poem so as to remove its American context and emphasise the metaphor of the war march. Finally, I look at a *Labour Leader* article by Sam Hobson about a demonstration in Leicestershire, and explore the connections between the protest march and the symbolism of the march in Whitman's poem.

¹²³ Though Carpenter's *Days With Walt Whitman* (London: George Allen, 1906) contains critical essays, it focuses on his visits to the poet. The Eagle Street College's John Johnston and James William Wallace's *Visits to Walt Whitman in 1890-1891* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1918) recounts the experience of meeting Whitman rather than critiquing his poems.

This thesis, then, builds on the work of scholars such as M. Wynn Thomas and Mark Bevir, who have discussed the connection between Whitman and British socialism, and using texts that have rarely been critically considered, it offers a comprehensive analysis of the different ways in which Whitman was read, understood, and appropriated by British socialists in the late nineteenth century.

Chapter One. Love, Democracy and Religion: James William Wallace and the Eagle Street College

The Eagle Street College developed out of a reading group established in Bolton in the 1870s, under the unofficial leadership of James William Wallace. The original members were from working class families, and after leaving school around the age of fourteen they began to meet in their late adolescence to read together before an evening walk. Fred Wild, a lifelong member of the group, recalled that the group began with Burns, Milton and Shakespeare, and then 'more important readings were gradually introduced and we were soon steeped in the subtle reading of T. Carlyle, Tennyson, Emerson, Ruskin, and finally W. Whitman was introduced.'¹²⁴ This was not until 1885, when Wallace read *Leaves of Grass* during the time of his mother's illness and death, and experienced a profound spiritual awakening, which he attributed to Whitman's poetry. Richard Maurice Bucke, an American Whitmanite, used the account Wallace gave of this experience in his book *Cosmic Consciousness* as evidence for his theories concerning the evolution of human consciousness.¹²⁵ After the death of Wallace's mother, the group began to have regular weekly meetings, setting aside the time to discuss subjects of, in Wallace's words,

¹²⁴ Fred Wild, 'Sketch of Life of J. W. Wallace of Bolton' (October 1932), Bolton, Whitman Collection, MS ZWN 6/3/6, p.3.

¹²⁵ Richard Maurice Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness* (Philadelphia: Innes, 1901; repr. New York: Arkana, 1991), pp.332-342.

‘permanent interest and value’, which became increasingly centred on Whitman’s work.¹²⁶

In 1886 Wallace invited John Johnston, a doctor who had moved to Bolton from Scotland, to join the meetings. He soon became a core member of the group and, alongside Wallace and Wild, one of its most enthusiastic ‘Whitmanites’, a word which Wild himself used to describe the three friends.¹²⁷ It was Johnston who was responsible for coining the playful sobriquet ‘Eagle Street College’ in 1889, after the street where Wallace lived and the group met. In 1887 Wallace and Johnston wrote their first tentative letter to Whitman and included a gift of £10. To their surprise, Whitman responded, and the group wrote to him every birthday for the next three years. They only received one further reply, but in 1890 Johnston was advised to travel for his health; he took the opportunity to make a pilgrimage to Whitman and visit the places and people associated with him. From this point the relationship between Whitman and the group warmed into firm friendship, and Wallace reported that the College received over a hundred and twenty letters and postcards from Whitman during his lifetime.¹²⁸ Wallace went to Camden to meet the poet in 1891, and spent three weeks with Whitman and his American coterie, including Bucke, Horace Traubel, and Thomas Harned, who were later to become Whitman’s literary executors. Wallace and Johnston established close relationships with these American admirers, many of whom came to visit the Bolton group when in Britain, and there are frequent references to the group in Traubel’s *With Walt Whitman in Camden*. Traubel and Wallace entered into a voluminous correspondence, and during some periods would write to each other almost daily.¹²⁹ These friendships continued for decades after Whitman’s death; even after Traubel and Wallace had died, Traubel’s wife, Anne, and Wallace’s housekeeper and adopted daughter, Minnie Whiteside, continued to write to each other until Anne’s death in 1954. Gradually, attendance at the weekly meetings dwindled, and the group’s focus

¹²⁶ Johnston and Wallace, *Visits*, p.17. See the first chapter, written by Wallace, ‘Walt Whitman’s Friends in Lancashire’, pp.2-27, for a more detailed account of the group’s development. This is also covered by Masel in *The Walt Whitman Collection: Guide to the Microfilm Collection* and ‘Whitman and the Bolton Fellowship’; and by Michael Robertson in the chapter about the group in *Worshipping Walt*, pp.198-231.

¹²⁷ Wild, ‘Sketch of Life’, p.6.

¹²⁸ Johnston and Wallace, *Visits*, p.9.

¹²⁹ For a detailed discussion of this relationship, see Joann Krieg, ‘Without Walt Whitman in Camden’.

became the annual Whitman day celebrations, held in honour of the poet's birthday, which were continued by Whiteside and other second-generation Bolton Whitmanites until the 1950s.¹³⁰

The Eagle Street College was brought back to the attention of Whitman scholars by Paul Salveson in 1984, with the publication of his pamphlet *Loving Comrades: Lancashire's Links to Walt Whitman*, but little was written on the group until the mid-1990s. In 1996 Salveson extended *Loving Comrades* for an article of the same name in the 'discipleship' issue of the *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review*, which also contained an article by Joann Krieg about the Traubel-Wallace correspondence.¹³¹ Salveson's work serves as an important introduction to the College, and valuably emphasises the socialist cultural context surrounding its association with Whitman. It was not written for academic purposes, but to bring a part of Bolton's history to light, and Salveson himself states that through his work 'Bolton's Whitman links have been well and truly re-established and the work of Ed Folsom, Joann Krieg and Mike Robertson has taken studies of the Bolton-Whitman link to a much higher level'.¹³² A comprehensive scholarly introduction by Carolyn Masel accompanies the microfilm collection of the Eagle Street material in the John Rylands library, a shorter version of which is published in *Special Relationships: Anglo-American Affinities and Antagonisms, 1854-1936*. As befits her purpose, Masel is concerned with providing a historical overview of the Bolton connection with Whitman rather than exploring the literary implications of it. Harry Cocks, a social and cultural historian, not only gives biographical information about the group's development, but analyses it with regard to sexuality.¹³³ He argues that a repressive cultural climate, paradoxically, allowed men who were attracted by the possibilities of same sex desire to 'develop their own particular understandings of passionate friendship which licensed what would otherwise have been an impossible

¹³⁰ Paul Salveson revived these 'Whitman Day' celebrations in 1984, and they still continue. On the Saturday nearest Whitman's birthday Jacqueline Dagnall and others lead a walk around the Bolton area, with the participants decorating themselves with lilac in memory of the poet. Poems are read and a replica of the loving cup that Whitman sent to the College is passed round.

¹³¹ This article was reprinted with a few changes as *With Walt Whitman in Bolton: Spirituality, Sex and Socialism in a Northern Mill Town* (Huddersfield: Little Northern Books, 2008).

¹³² Salveson, *With Walt Whitman in Bolton*, p.1.

¹³³ Harry Cocks, 'Calamus in Bolton: Spirituality and Homosexual Desire in Late Victorian England', *Gender and History*, 13:2 (August 2001), 191-223. This was later incorporated into a monograph, *Nameless Offences: Homosexual Desire in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Tauris, 2003).

and 'morbid' intimacy'.¹³⁴ He analyses the Eagle Street College as an example, focusing on the association between the homoerotic and the spiritual, relating this to Whitman's influence and his notion of 'comradely love'. Cocks's nuanced reading is substantiated with archival evidence which seems to show deferred same sex desire, yet he overemphasises this aspect of the group's relationship with Whitman, and the role that homoeroticism played in its conception of comradeship. Wallace and Johnston did not respond to the sexual element of *Leaves of Grass* in the same way that Edward Carpenter or John Addington Symonds did, but were instead concerned, as Cocks himself states, with 'exonerating Whitman from the taint of unnatural lust'.¹³⁵

Michael Robertson offers an alternative view on comradely love in 'Worshipping Walt: Lancashire's Whitman Disciples', which appeared in *History Today* in 2004, and the Bolton chapter in *Worshipping Walt: The Whitman Disciples*, published in 2008. He argues that 'Whitman offered the Eagle Street College a model of male affection', which was not so much about same-sex attraction as providing a 'subcultural haven where the same value was placed on intense male friendships as was placed in wider society on heterosexual courtship and marriage'.¹³⁶ This is a more persuasive assessment, elastic enough to incorporate same-sex desire, repressed or otherwise, without making it the dominant feature of the group's reception of Whitman. Robertson suggests that Whitman was the focus for the men's allegiance to each other and 'provided the language and rituals that enabled them to draw together with a closeness unusual among men of the era'.¹³⁷ This statement does not indicate how important and illuminative the actual content of *Leaves of Grass* was to many of the College members, but it gestures towards the sense of discipleship that characterised the College's relationship with Whitman, which, as the title *Worshipping Walt* suggests, is Robertson's central premise.

The second half of the nineteenth century was a time of religious change, and Robertson locates the Eagle Street College's relationship with Whitman within this shifting spiritual culture. The challenge that Darwinian evolutionary theories made

¹³⁴ Cocks, 'Calamus in Bolton', p.192.

¹³⁵ Cocks, 'Calamus in Bolton', p.202.

¹³⁶ Michael Robertson, 'Worshipping Walt: Lancashire's Whitman Disciples', *History Today* (April 2004), 46-52 (p.48).

¹³⁷ Robertson, *Worshipping Walt*, p.212.

to traditional Christianity had a profound social impact: Wallace himself, for example, relates how he lost his Christian faith after reading Darwin.¹³⁸ Yet for many, including Wallace, this did not lead to secularism, but opened up alternative spiritual possibilities. Mark Bevir persuasively argues that many Victorians tried to ‘reconcile faith with evolutionary theory and historical criticism by turning from the atonement theology so characteristic of the early Victorian period to an immanentist view of God’:

They argued that God dwells in the world, revealing himself through an evolutionary process, rather than acting as a transcendent figure, intervening in our world spontaneously and miraculously as exemplified by the creation of species and the Bible.¹³⁹

The period saw the emergence of many religious movements, such as Spiritualism and New Thought, and Eastern forms of mysticism became increasingly popular. Even within Christianity, sects such as the Salvation Army and Christian Science were established and non-traditional forms of faith such as Unitarianism flourished. Alex Owen suggests that this was particularly true of the industrialised north, which earlier nineteenth-century movements such as Swedenborgism and Primitive Methodism had primed to be a ‘receptive ground for dissenting religion’.¹⁴⁰ Speaking at a Whitman birthday celebration, Wallace noted the rapid growth of the Salvation Army, Christian Science and Theosophy. Robertson remarks that these religious movements frequently drew on Christian religious forms but rejected ‘creedal orthodoxy’, and so ‘appealed to young adults adrift in a rapidly changing culture’.¹⁴¹ He suggests that the College’s relationship with Whitman, and its interpretation of *Leaves of Grass*, should be understood in this context, and places the Bolton Whitmanites in the apostolic tradition with Whitman as their spiritual leader. This is foregrounded in the epigraph to his chapter on the Bolton group, taken from a postcard Whitman sent to Wallace: ‘God bless the Church & branch of the Church (with candelabras blazing more fervidly than any) that is planted &

¹³⁸ Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness*, p.334.

¹³⁹ Bevir, ‘The Labour Church Movement’, p.221.

¹⁴⁰ Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990; repr. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p.22.

¹⁴¹ Robertson, *Worshipping Walt*, p.203.

grown in Bolton'.¹⁴² Whitman perhaps meant a 'Church' of democracy rather than a church dedicated to himself, but the Bolton group often resembled both.

The premise that the group considered itself to be in discipleship to Whitman is crucial to my reading: the most influential members of the group came to believe that *Leaves of Grass* carried a divine message, and that Whitman was a prophet, or even a quasi-messianic redeemer, able to forward the democratic cause by what they believed to be a power to prompt change from within on an individual, national and global scale. Writing in Traubel's *Conservator*, Wallace states this outright:

All the talk about Whitman as to whether he was or was not a great poet or artist is relatively unimportant. We claim for him that he was more than that – that he was in the line of succession with the greatest religious founders that there have been in the past—that he scaled the loftiest heights—that he gave new and broader expression to truths which the wise have known in all ages—and that for the modern world, for America, and for the race, he exemplified in himself and expressed in his book ideals which will become more and more the sustenance of humanity through centuries to come.¹⁴³

The sense of apostleship, however, developed over time, out of an initial willingness to serve the poet in more prosaic ways. Before Johnston left for America, for example, Wallace charged him to find out if it was possible for the Bolton group to do Whitman 'any service': 'I don't know whether it is possible, by the transmission of any books or papers to please him, but if so I shall be delighted to know.'¹⁴⁴ Wallace's apostolic sense of duty became more pronounced in the years following Whitman's death, at the same time as the group's democratic leanings became increasingly socialist. Though not every member of the group shared his convictions, either about Whitman or in socialism, Wallace had a profound influence on how the group's democratic sympathies evolved, and how it collectively interpreted and responded to Whitman's poetry.

Not every College member was involved in the socialist movement but many, including Wallace, Johnston and Wild, took on active roles: Wallace became a member of the Bolton branch of the ILP, and sometimes lectured at its meetings and conferences; Johnston was involved in the Bolton Labour Church, and campaigned about social issues such as child labour; Wild's obituary records that he was a

¹⁴² Robertson, *Worshipping Walt*, p.198; Wallace, *Visits*, p.262.

¹⁴³ Wallace, 'Leaves of Grass and Optimos', *Conservator* (September 1911), pp.103-105 (p.104).

¹⁴⁴ Wallace to Johnston (1 July 1890), Bolton, Whitman Collection, MS ZWN/6/1/55.

founding member of the Bolton Labour Church.¹⁴⁵ William Broadhurst, who joined the group later, recalled meeting Wild and fellow College member Wentworth Dixon at a Labour Church meeting, and being introduced to Whitman through them.¹⁴⁶ There are records of other members, such as Sam Hodgkinson and Richard Greenhalgh attending ILP meetings. Salveson notes that these socialist meetings were part of a thriving 'culture' of socialism:

The early days of the socialist movement saw an immensely rich flowering of ideas and activities. The socialist clubs and socialist Sunday schools, Clarion cycling and rambling clubs, vocal unions and debating societies suggest a socialist culture in the 1880s and '90s of great depth.¹⁴⁷

This can be seen as an extension of the Victorian notion of self-improvement, translated into a political context so as to concern the betterment of society as well as the individual.¹⁴⁸ Salveson remarks that in Bolton 'every aspect of this culture was reflected', and describes how the Eagle Street College both contributed to it and was influenced by it.

This socialist activity became particularly pronounced in the early 1890s; the first Labour Church was formed in Bolton in 1892, and an ILP branch was established in 1893. The movements were particularly popular in northern industrial towns such as Bolton, and as a result, religious interpretations of socialism flourished. This was also the period after Whitman's death in 1892, and the College's increasingly apostolic understanding of its relationship to the poet should be understood in conjunction with the gathering force of ethical socialism. For the College, Whitman and socialism were grafted together and incorporated into a democratic spirituality, which its members, particularly Wallace, promoted within the socialist community. Their sphere of influence extended beyond the local ILP and Labour Church groups to some of the most prominent reformers associated with ethical socialism; through their work for the ILP, members of the College developed

¹⁴⁵ Anon., *Bolton Evening News* (23 July 1935), cited by Salveson, *With Walt Whitman in Bolton*, p.16.

¹⁴⁶ William Broadhurst, 'Notes of an Address delivered before the Whitman Fellowship at the Swan Hotel, Bolton' (6 December 1930), JRUL, Sixsmith Collections, MS 1330/5/3.

¹⁴⁷ Salveson, *With Walt Whitman in Bolton*, p.10.

¹⁴⁸ Chris Waters explores how socialism engaged with popular culture in *British Socialism and the Politics of Popular Culture, 1884-1914* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1990), and argues that socialists' reliance on the discourse of rational recreation hindered their attempts to co-opt the working class for the cause.

friendships with many of its influential figures, whom they visited, hosted, and corresponded with.

Wallace advanced Whitman and *Leaves of Grass* in all of these relationships: his correspondence shows that, amongst others, he discussed Whitman with Keir Hardie, Robert Blatchford, Caroline Martyn and the Glasiers. He sent copies of Whitman's poetry to Blatchford and Hardie, hoping to persuade them of its importance to the democratic movement. Hardie, who was unconvinced after having previously read Whitman in the Rhys selection, asked Wallace to send a complete edition of *Leaves of Grass*, positing that his 'first prejudice' may have been due to the 'dilettante expurgated and generally emasculated form in which Whitman was first presented' to him, which he likened to polished granite: 'an outrage on nature'.¹⁴⁹ This is a complaint that would seem more likely to be applied to Rossetti's selection than Rhys's; for Hardie, however, the democratic impulses that informed Rhys's selection were not enough to preserve the force of Whitman's message once the poetry had been subject to the process of selection, even though they were explicitly expressed in the preface. Blatchford was more enthusiastic, though he warned Wallace that such teaching could only have a limited effect:

Whitman was a great man: too big for the world to see in one look. He will grow in the sight of men as only the giants do. He taught me a great deal and I have tried to repay the debt by teaching others. But people won't read Whitman yet. Their sight is too dim, their hearts are too faint.¹⁵⁰

Unlike other admirers of Whitman, Blatchford does not suggest that people should read *Leaves of Grass* to make their sight sharp and their hearts strong, but implies that some form of social change must occur before his message could have a mass appeal.

Caroline Martyn and the Glasiers responded to Whitman in more overtly spiritual terms, believing, like Wallace, Johnston, and other members of the College, that Whitman was the prophet of a new era. This conviction brought about a lifelong commitment to the poet which was central to their friendships with each other; they were bound together in Whitman, and they discussed and shared his 'message' throughout their lives. Wallace and Katharine Glasier were particularly close (before her marriage he even proposed that they should enter into some kind of spiritual

¹⁴⁹ Keir Hardie to Wallace (29 December 1892), Bolton, Whitman Collection, MS ZWN 9/298.

¹⁵⁰ Robert Blatchford to Wallace (15th Feb 1894), JRUL, Papers relating to Wallace, MS 1186/1/4.

union together) and their letters are saturated with references to Whitman. Glasier used Christian discourses to explain her understanding of him; for example, in 1893 she wrote to the College telling how Whitman had made her 'see all things new', and in a deliberate echo of John 10.10 that 'alike as Revealer and Reconciler it is true of him that he has come that we might have life and have it more abundantly'.¹⁵¹ This places Whitman in a Christ-like position, a construction which she reiterated many times over her long correspondence with the College. As late as 1925, she wrote to thank Wallace for a gift of Rossetti's Whitman selection:

But as for my wildly, luxuriantly beautiful Whitman – in the Rossetti edition! – dears, I can only vow once again to try to be a faithful student and disciple, – gathering his seed ever and scattering it as a good sower should.¹⁵²

Glasier again uses a biblical register to reinforce the notion of being in an apostolic relationship with the poet, yet, in keeping with *Leaves of Grass* itself, the seed metaphor and her seductive description of the 'wildly, luxuriantly beautiful Whitman' also brings an edge of sexuality to the text. Whitman is not simply a substitute Christ, but is seen to extend and add to the teachings of Jesus, bringing an even more liberating message for modern society as it evolved.

Edward Carpenter told the group that 'all over England' were other 'Societies of the Socialistic order', founded on the idea of 'abiding and deep brotherhood', and that Whitman was 'read and admired largely' amongst most of them.¹⁵³ If this was the case, what distinguished the College from the others was the intimacy of its relationships with Whitman and his American disciples. These friendships put the Bolton Whitmanites in a more influential position than was usual for a group of lower class readers from a small industrial town. The men of the College often acted as 'gatekeepers' to Whitman; writers or admirers who did not have their privileged access to the poet, or to his literary executors after his death, approached the group for information or advice. For example, William Clarke wrote to John Johnston shortly before Whitman's death requesting permission to use material from Johnston's *Diary Notes of a Visit to Walt Whitman*:

My dear Sir,

I hope you will pardon the temerity of one who does not enjoy the pleasure of your personal acquaintance in thus writing to you. But we have a common

¹⁵¹ Katharine Conway to the College (May 1893), Bolton, Whitman Collection, MS ZWN 9/278.

¹⁵² Katharine Glasier to Wallace (30 December 1925), JRUL, Papers relating to Wallace, MS 1186/1/32/3.

¹⁵³ Ferguson, 'Typescript of the College Farewell to Dr. R. M. Bucke and J. W. Wallace'.

acquaintance with Mr. Ernest Rhys who mentioned you to me a common acquaintance in Walt Whitman. I am writing a little book on Whitman for Sonnenschein's Dilettante series. I wish to know whether if I want to do so you will permit me to quote from your notes of Visit to Whitman. Rhys has sent me a copy of these notes. I have also another favour to ask. Rhys has also sent me Whitman's last autograph letter to be distributed among his friends in this country. May I reproduce this in the Daily Chronicle, a journal for which I am leader-writer, note-writer and reviewer.

This letter is what journalists call "good copy," and if we get it into our journal it will prove a very interesting item.

I envy your extended opportunities [sic] of seeing Whitman. I only saw him once when I was in Boston in the autumn of 1881 and then only for a few minutes. He was engaged in bringing out the edition of "Leaves of Grass" and got all the compositors in to supper with him at a small hotel in Bullfinch St.

Yours very truly
William Clarke¹⁵⁴

The repetition of 'common acquaintance' reinforces the idea of a network of Whitman readers. Johnston's *Notes*, printed for private circulation amongst friends, were read by and passed between more established writers, showing that Whitman's more literary British admirers with socialist interests knew about the group and its relationship to Whitman. Clarke uses the word 'envy'; though he was well-connected in the London journalism scene, he was not able to access the poet in the same way that a Bolton doctor was. Moreover, though he could have used information from Rhys, who had also corresponded with and visited the poet, a certain value was placed on Johnston's account. The 'autograph letter' referred to was the final goodbye from Whitman to all his British friends; Whitman sent the letter to the College and asked them to circulate it, which is in itself both an indication of the esteem in which the poet held the group, and a demonstration of the intermediary role that it played.¹⁵⁵ Johnston forwarded Clarke's letter to Traubel, and informed him that he had allowed Clarke to use *Notes*, but suggested that Whitman's letter was 'intended to be kept among friends only and not for the public press'. Traubel agreed and Clarke was refused permission. This kind of interaction continued after Whitman's death, and Traubel corresponded with Wallace and Johnston about the particulars of furthering Whitman's reputation, seeking their

¹⁵⁴ Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, vol 9, ed. by Jeanne Chapman and Robert MacIsaac (Oregon House, CA: W.L. Bentley, 1996), p.569.

¹⁵⁵ It was sent on 7 February 1892 and read: 'Same con'n cont'd—More & more it comes to the fore that the only theory worthy our modern times for g't literature politics and sociology must combine all the bulk-people of all lands, the women not forgetting. But the mustard plaster on my side is stinging & I must stop—Good-bye to all.' Johnston and Wallace, *Visits*, p.274.

opinions, for example, about his plans for a Whitman Society and Whitman-related publications.

Virginia Woolf, reviewing *Visits to Walt Whitman in 1890-1891* (Johnston's *Notes* republished with Wallace's account of his own trip) expressed some surprise at finding this kind of literary engagement outside of the universities of Cambridge and Oxford:

The great fires of intellectual life which burn at Oxford and Cambridge are so well tended and established that it is difficult to feel the wonder of this concentration upon immaterial things as we should. When, however, one stumbles by chance upon an isolated fire burning brightly without associations or encouragement to guard it, the flame of the spirit becomes a visible hearth where one may warm one's hands and utter one's thanksgiving.¹⁵⁶

Woolf's metaphor of the fire spiritualises intellectual activity; the study of 'immaterial things' is configured as a life-giving force, albeit one that can be taken for granted. Her assumption that the Bolton group was an 'isolated fire' emphasises how unusual it was for such a group to come to the attention of the intelligentsia, though it overlooks the enthusiasm for educational meetings, groups and lectures outside of academic circles, and does not make allowance for the 'associations' and 'encouragements' given by other Whitmanites and socialists. The review continues:

If asked to sketch the condition of Bolton about the year 1885 one's thoughts would certainly revolve round the cotton market, as if the true heart of Bolton's prosperity must lie there. No mention would be made of the group of young men—clergymen, manufacturers, artisans, and bank clerks by profession—who met on Monday evenings, made a point of talking about something serious, could broach the most intimate and controversial matters frankly and without fear of giving offence, and held in particular the view that Walt Whitman was "the greatest epochal figure in all literature." Yet who shall set a limit to the effect of such talking? In this instance, besides the invaluable spiritual service, it also had some surprisingly tangible results. As a consequence of those meetings two of the talkers crossed the Atlantic; a steady flow of presents and messages set in between Bolton and Camden; and Whitman as he lay dying had the thought of "those good Lancashire chaps" in his mind.

Woolf stresses the fact that the spiritual and intellectual activity of the group had 'tangible results'; concentration on 'immaterial things' did not need to be divorced from daily life. She does not explore the implications of the results that she

¹⁵⁶ Virginia Woolf, 'Visits to Walt Whitman', *Times Literary Supplement* (3 Jan 1918), p.7. This was originally written anonymously, but was later published in Virginia Woolf, *Granite and Rainbow* (London: Hogarth, 1958), pp.239-231; and Virginia Woolf, *Collected Essays*, ed. by Leonard Woolf, vol 4 (Harcourt: Brace and World, 1967), pp.51-53.

identifies, but each example she chooses is an indicator of the deep and unexpected intimacy between Whitman and the Bolton men.

Despite the strength of this connection with Whitman, a sense of obscurity surrounds the Eagle Street College; Woolf, for example, presumes that her literary audience would not have heard of the group. Carolyn Masel points to a speech made by William Broadhurst at a College meeting in 1930, complaining that the group had been left out of John Bailey's English Men of Letters series, and she suggests that 'by the 1950s, the Bolton Whitman Fellowship had been elided completely from official literary history'.¹⁵⁷ As it was mentioned in both of Gay Wilson Allen's Whitman handbooks this is not strictly accurate, but it is fair to say that in the early twentieth century the College was not remembered well in literary or academic circles. Or indeed, in the local area: in 1919 Charles Lazenby, a well-known American Theosophist and sexologist gave a speech to the Bolton Theosophical Society which was reported in a local newspaper. Lazenby remarked on the connection between Bolton and Whitman, and asserted that the town was 'one of the few bright spots in the universe' because of this; the reporter commented:

This is so, Bolton being, we understand, the headquarters of Whitmanism in the United Kingdom. According to Mr. Lazenby Whitman will not come into his own as a great teacher of the masses for some hundreds of years, perhaps a thousand years hence.¹⁵⁸

The sub-clause 'we understand' suggests that the group was not well-known in Bolton, and so undermines Lazenby's hyperbolic description of the town.

However, Lazenby's speech, seventeen years after the poet's death, shows that within 'Whitmanian' circles, the College was held in high regard. Similarly, when Wallace died, *The Manchester Guardian* published a short notice:

Whitmanites, of whom there are many in London, are distressed to hear of the death of Mr. J. W. Wallace, architect, of Bolton, who has been for many years the chief disciple of Walt Whitman in England. Mr. Wallace more than thirty years ago started a movement for the study of Whitman's writings which became known as "The College". He did more than anyone here or in the United States to further the appreciation of Whitman and to keep alive the spirit of his message.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Masel, 'Whitman and the Bolton Fellowship', p.118.

¹⁵⁸ In the Bolton archives, there is a large volume containing news cuttings related to the group. This item has been copied rather than cut out, and is marked as being from the *Bolton Evening News* (2 December 1919). However, though Lazenby's speech was reported on in the *Bolton Evening News*, this passage was not included, and I have been unable to identify its source. Bolton, Whitman Collection, MS 2/55.

¹⁵⁹ Anon., 'A Disciple of Whitman', *Manchester Guardian* (20 January 1926), p.8.

The articles use the words ‘Whitmanism’ and ‘Whitmanites’, which foreground the development from loving Whitman to a cult following of the poet. The intimate relationships forged by individual members of the Eagle Street College with Whitman and his Camden admirers led to a broader association between the town of Bolton and Whitmanism as an international movement.

In this chapter I follow this trajectory, focusing first on the College’s early relationship with Whitman and its proto-socialist democratic concerns, and then examining its increasingly evangelical promotion of Whitman as a prophet and teacher to the socialist community. Lazenby’s view that Whitman would not ‘come into his own as a great teacher of the masses’ for many hundreds of years is markedly different from the convictions that Wallace, and disciples such as Traubel and Bucke, held in the years up to and immediately after Whitman’s death when they zealously proclaimed that Whitman’s acceptance by the masses was imminent, and that it would have a far-reaching transformative effect. For example, at an Eagle Street meeting in 1891, Bucke claimed that Whitman had already given the faculty of ‘cosmic consciousness’ to two people ‘to a certain extent’, and that he could ‘bestow’ it on ‘tens of thousands’ more:

If he is able to bestow that faculty and if he is going to bestow it on the race – if he is avatar of this faculty – although it may have been seen before, but if he is the man who has got the whole grasp of this thing & if, by means of this book he is going to plant that faculty in the race – then we have got hold of a big thing – quite the largest thing of these centuries.¹⁶⁰

Bucke’s lexicon is hierarchical; in the acts of ‘bestowing’ and ‘planting’, the giver is active and the receptor is passive. The transformative potential of *Leaves of Grass* was not seen to lie in a dynamic interaction between reader and text, but was unidirectional: the text was a conduit through which Whitman could lead the reading masses to spiritual and social revolution. However, as time passed there was little visible evidence of any kind of mass reception of ‘cosmic consciousness’, a reality which had to be accounted for and incorporated into the belief structure of the Bolton ‘disciples’. When Wallace spoke of the Theosophist, Christian Science and the Salvation Army movements during the 1913 Whitman birthday celebrations, it was to contrast their ‘rapid spread’ with Whitman’s ‘comparatively slight’ world-wide influence. Like Lazenby, in the early twentieth century Wallace came to project his

¹⁶⁰ Ferguson, ‘Transcript of the College Farewell to Dr. R. M. Bucke and J. W. Wallace’.

hopes about the influential power of Whitman's 'teaching' into the distant future, a shift which corresponded with a more general loss in confidence about the immediacy of social reform, and the decreasing popularity of religious interpretations of socialism.

Democratic Poetics: Negotiating the Literary

The members of the group were about the same age, and as Wallace states in his introduction to the group in *Visits to Walt Whitman*, 'belonged to nearly the same social stratum': 'Our number included a doctor, a clergyman, two lawyer's clerks, two bank clerks, a cotton-waste dealer, a hosiery manufacturer, another assistant architect, a newspaper editor, an accountant, and one or two artisans.'¹⁶¹ As this list shows, the group did not belong to the labouring class, but to what Carolyn Masel suggests could be 'better described as educated working class or lower middle class'. She observes that Wallace and other members of the group were better educated than their parents, and draws attention to the 'social mobility that characterised Bolton's and other Victorian mill towns' working classes'.¹⁶² Andrew Elfenbein associates the appeal of Whitman's poetics to lower middle class readers with this sense of social movement. He refers to a culture of 'populist elitism' brought about by the 1867 and 1884 Reform Acts ('more and more men could know that, however poor they might be, at least they were above the lowest of the low, because they could vote'), and suggests that 'Whitman's poetry anchored this peculiar moment of popular elitism':

Whitman's admirers simultaneously rebelled against bourgeois conventions of respectability, admitted solidarity with progress towards democracy, and distinguished themselves from the perceived vulgarity and illiteracy of the lowest ranks of society.¹⁶³

Michael Robertson, who agrees that 'a taste for Whitman allowed one both to declare sympathy for democracy and to distinguish oneself from those lower on the social scale', applies Elfenbein's argument specifically to the Eagle Street College, and suggests that 'Whitman's verse form was perfectly suited for the clerks and

¹⁶¹ Johnston and Wallace, *Visits*, p.18.

¹⁶² Masel, 'Whitman and the Bolton Whitman Fellowship', p.113.

¹⁶³ Elfenbein, 'Whitman, Democracy, and the English Clerisy', pp.79-80.

minor professionals of the Eagle Street College' because 'the style appealed to lower-middle-class readers who were intellectually ambitious yet lacked the intense grounding in the classics common to Rossetti, Tennyson, and their middle- and upper-class audience'.¹⁶⁴

Elfenbein and Robertson argue, then, that reading and admiring Whitman was a way of identifying with the values of an upwardly mobile lower middle class. Certainly, as is indicated by the fact that Wallace discussed the group's 'social stratum' and occupations, class was important to the College's construction of its group identity. The association between Whitman and democracy was a common feature in literary and political discourse, and Elfenbein's claim that the expression of admiration for Whitman was a means of voicing democratic and progressive sympathies was certainly true of the Bolton Whitmanites. The College also fits Elfenbein's model by using its allegiance to Whitman to 'rebel' against the 'bourgeois conventions' of moral and literary respectability. For example, despite reading and enjoying authors other than Whitman, members of the group often made a point of contrasting themselves with readers of what they perceived to be more refined or intellectual literature. Browning, for example, is the target of Johnston's poem 'A College Song', which refers to the 'doses' of *Leaves of Grass* given in College meetings, and celebrates the group being 'sealed o' the tribe o' Walt':

O' the Browning Club on Chorley Road the Boys are members now
In the "College Corner" there they sit and look as wise as they ken how
Brave Boys!
But my profound conviction is they'd rather be at College
Than sitting there among the swells, wi' a' their Browning knowledge
Brave Boys.¹⁶⁵

Johnston cultivates the impression that the group was out of place in more conventional literary societies; this is emphasised spatially with the Whitman 'boys' sitting apart from the Browning 'swells' in their own corner.

This is, of course, complicated by the fact that the 'boys' had become members of the Browning club, and the relationship between their class identification and Whitman is more complicated than Elfenbein's notion of 'popular elitism' allows. The group did not always adopt an oppositional position to

¹⁶⁴ Robertson, *Worshipping Walt*, p.208-210.

¹⁶⁵ Johnston, 'A College Song' (10 April 1891), Bolton, Whitman Collection, MS ZWN 2/42. 'Sealed o' the tribe o' Walt' alludes to Revelations 7 in which the hundred and forty-four thousand who are 'sealed' of the twelve tribes of Israel are saved.

'bourgeois' literary conventions (a list of the books Wallace owned includes works by Shakespeare, Browning, Carlyle and Arnold), and there is no evidence to suggest that its members consciously distinguished themselves from a labouring class that they believed to be 'vulgar'.¹⁶⁶ More fruitfully, especially when considering the early stages of the group's involvement with Whitman, Elfenbein's argument should be considered in conjunction with Victorian conceptions of self-improvement. Though the group's meetings were to become highly spiritually charged, they developed out of a culture of intellectual self-cultivation that particularly informed the character of the educated working and middle classes.

This was emphasised in 'The Song of the Eagle Street College', another poem by Johnston, written to be read on Whitman's birthday in 1889:

The lissons thim bhoys have to larn are sevar,
An' manny's the toime they fale timpted to shwear,
But sorra a ha'p'orth the mather ud care
For the thrits ov the bhoys at the Collidge.
He tills thim if iver they wish to be *min*,
They must *practhice* thim lissons agin an' agin,
Till the wurruld can see for itsilf that they've bin
Takin' lissons at Aigle Shtrate Collidge.¹⁶⁷

Johnston exaggerates the severity of the College's informal program of self-education for comic effect, using playful rhymes and Irish dialect to poke gentle fun at the group's literary endeavours, and to emphasise the distinction between the Bolton 'Collidge' and the established academic institutions associated with the wealthier classes. Though Johnston, who studied medicine in Edinburgh, was the only university-educated member of the College, he is critical of the type of knowledge acquired in academic institutions:

The shkolars for ignorance nothin' can bate,
Though ov coorse *they* consider their larin' is great;
What they're short ov in larin's made up in consate.
Wid the bhoys ov the Aigle Shtrate Collidge.

Bourgeois 'conventions' are rejected, and Johnston consciously distances the group (and therefore himself) from the upper classes. However, to return to Elfenbein's premise, he does not try to distinguish the College from the less-educated labouring

¹⁶⁶ The same can be said in general of the socialists that I have researched. As will be discussed more fully in the third chapter, many socialist admirers of Whitman promoted the poet to the labouring classes, and tried to persuade them to read *Leaves of Grass*.

¹⁶⁷ Johnston, 'The Song of the Eagle Street College' (April 1889), JRUL, Papers relating to Wallace, MS 1186/8/1/1.

class; though the poem is structured around the white-collar occupations of its members, Johnston deliberately underplays their intellectual ability, stressing instead a sense of rough masculinity through, for example, the repeated use of the word 'bhoy' which appears at least twice in every stanza, and carries connotations of youth, health and vigour.¹⁶⁸

These are, of course, qualities which Whitman celebrated in *Leaves of Grass*, and the image of the group that is portrayed in this poem was one they specifically wanted Whitman to see: the poem was printed in leaflet form for private circulation, and a copy was sent to the poet. If the College used its admiration of Whitman as a means of identifying with particular class values, it also, conversely, used class as a means of identifying itself to Whitman as a particular type of (working) readership. In the accompanying letter, Wallace apologises for the quality of the verse, but suggests to Whitman that it would 'help to give a little personal colouring'.¹⁶⁹ This was before either Wallace or Johnston had made the pilgrimage to Camden, and demonstrates how they sought to flesh out the picture that Whitman had formed of the group through their letters. Johnston and Wallace were very conscious of what Whitman thought of the group: they did not, for example, write to Whitman spontaneously; in the late 1880s and early 1890s before Wallace and Johnston had forged close friendships with Whitman and his Camden disciples, their letters were drafted and re-drafted, read aloud in Eagle Street meetings, and sent to each other to read and revise before sending, so that each letter was carefully crafted to create a particular impression.¹⁷⁰ The group's concern with how it presented itself to

¹⁶⁸ Raymond Hickey, a specialist in Anglo-Irish dialect, kindly looked at this poem for me. He identified many features which made it undoubtedly Irish. However, he commented that it was not clear what Johnston intended with the 'bh' in 'boys', though it does appear elsewhere, for example in the glossaries for Forth and Bargy (S-E Wexford, early 19c). It is possible that Johnston knew it was also an American colloquialism, referring to a 'gay or spirited fellow', typically of the working class; New York reviews, which Johnston could have read, referred to Whitman as the 'bhoy poet' or 'the 'Bowery bhoy' in literature' and observed that Whitman's persona reflected 'bhoy culture'. See David Reynolds, afterword to *Leaves of Grass: 150th Anniversary Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.91. For more on the 'bhoy figure' see Andrew Lawson, *Walt Whitman and the Class Struggle* (Iowa: Iowa UP, 2006) and Thomas, *Transatlantic Connections*.

¹⁶⁹ Wallace to Whitman (May 1889), JRUL, Papers relating to Wallace, MS 1186/2/2/4.

¹⁷⁰ This preoccupation is evident in a letter from Wallace to fellow College-member Wentworth Dixon, advising him how to write to the poet: 'When you write to him do not be too cold and formal! Your central fires are usually veiled and hidden by an external coldness that belies them. You cannot go to the other extreme and gush, but let your letter be blood warm.' Wallace to Wentworth Dixon (8 June 1891), Bolton, Whitman Collection, MS ZWN 3/13.

Whitman, and to those closest to him, is evident in a letter from Wallace to Johnston, written shortly before Bucke came to visit the Bolton Whitmanites:

I shouldn't be afraid of meeting B if I were only myself. I'm as good a man as he and worse! If B thinks we're tip top literary swells, we'll soon undeceive him! It's the beauty of our own position that we're not. But we'll give him a good old fashioned College meeting and if he can match that anywhere also, I'd like to know! We'll sing the College Song, and get Will Law to sing 2 or 3 of his best, and Fred Wild and Hodgkinson to barge each other, Dr Johnston and WD to sing original songs and RKG to smile—and Dr Bucke will feel nowhere. We'll beat their "birthday sprees" to pot! Hunt up every man! Sound the trumpet! Beat the drums! If Dr Bucke doesn't like our style, we'll [?] him! If he wants to talk "Shakspeare [sic] and poetry" much we'll choke him with tobacco smoke! It's our [?] and not his!

No! My friend, we're not going to pose as literary men or swell critics of Whitman. We're going to show Bucke a band of comrades, old friends, faithful and true, that existed independently of Walt, and of wh. [sic] he is only the poet!

If the cockles of Bucke's heart don't warm to that, out on him! Walt's would! "Poeckry [sic] be blowed!" he'd say.¹⁷¹

Wallace is forceful: the exclamatory punctuation, repetition of the 'we'll' contraction, and rising pitch of the letter create a defiant tone. Martial imagery is used to invoke the metaphor of the battle, in which Wallace is the commander: 'Hunt up every man! Sound the trumpet! Beat the drums!'. The 'call to arms', perhaps gesturing back to Whitman's *Drum-Taps* poems, is intended to raise Johnston's morale, and imbue him with Wallace's confidence.

The battle metaphor, however, also foregrounds the strategic impetus behind Bucke's 'undeceiving'. In this letter, the meeting which he will attend becomes a performance, choreographed in advance. Though Wallace is defiant, he is also defensive, and the over-confident nature of his diatribe betrays an anxiety about the impression of the group that Bucke would formulate, and by implication, take back to Whitman. Wallace may have been vehement that the College men were not to 'pose as literary men', but they were to adopt some sort of posture: they were to present themselves as working readers who did not care much for the literary, but rather sang songs and smoked tobacco; in short, the working readership that Whitman so longed for. This is not to suggest that it was a false pose; rather, this side of the group's character was played up, whilst its literariness was played down. Though it was true that the group of 'old friends' had been meeting before they discovered Whitman, Wallace's glossing of Whitman's role in the College is intentionally reductive: he did not want the group to appear as idolisers of the poet,

¹⁷¹ Wallace to Johnston (11 July 1891), Bolton, Whitman Collection, MS ZWN 6/1/63.

but to be an embodiment of the Whitmanic principle of democratic comradeship. Whitman's 'many in one', for example, is reflected stylistically in the sentence beginning 'We'll sing the College Song': the different roles of members are individually identified but 'and' is used as an equalising conjunctive to join them together as a 'whole' over the one sentence.

The underlined 'nowhere' emphasises the sense of ordinariness that Wallace sought to create. This focus on the ordinary can be seen as a response to Whitman's celebration of the 'divine average', a phrase which appears in 'Starting from Paumanok' (p.182). Unlike Matthew Arnold, for Whitman the ordinary self was the best self, a notion which perhaps seems to be at odds with the College's emphasis on 'learning' and self-improvement; indeed, in *Democratic Vistas*, Whitman criticises the nineteenth-century preoccupation with 'cultivation':

As now taught, accepted and carried out, are not the processes of culture rapidly creating a class of supercilious infidels, who believe in nothing? Shall a man lose himself in countless masses of adjustments, and be so shaped with reference to this, that, and the other, that the simply good and healthy and brave parts of him are reduced and clipp'd away?

However, in *Democratic Vistas* Whitman also advocates an alternative 'programme of culture'; he asserts that it should be drawn out 'not for a single class alone, or for the parlors or lecture-rooms, but with an eye to practical life':

I should demand of this programme or theory a scope generous enough to include the widest human area. It must have for its spinal meaning the formation of a typical personality of character, eligible to the uses of the high average of men—and *not* restricted by conditions ineligible to the masses. (p.986)

Wallace's emphasis on the College's ordinariness can be seen as a way of aligning the reading group with this interpretation of cultural improvement, and shifting it away from an Arnoldian quest for self-perfection.

Wallace discusses these ideas in some 'Occasional Notes on Walt Whitman', written in 1890:

Here is one distinction and glory of Wh. He is one of ourselves, – not a saint (as usually understood) nor one of the cultured classes – but a man in the first place, with all the strong, brawny, and full blooded instincts and passions of a man – a common man, (what he calls an average man) who has identified himself through life with the powerful, illiterate working classes with their common experiences. His experiences have been such as ours and he has deliberately lived the common life of poverty and toil that he might shew us

that our lives too are of divine significance in every detail, more wonderful, mystic, and miraculous.¹⁷²

For Wallace, Whitman both taught and embodied the 'divine average'; though the phrase is not used, both 'average' and 'divine' appear in this passage, in which Wallace explains what Whitman's 'message' means to him: that the divine is in all, including what seems meagre, average or 'common', a word which is repeated three times for emphasis. 'Common' and 'divine' are not used as antithetical terms, but are placed in an associative relationship with each other. Wallace uses the words 'ourselves' and 'ours' to identify with Whitman's experience of the 'common', and therefore aligns the group not only with Whitman, but with the 'common man'. By doing so, like Whitman, he identifies with the 'powerful, illiterate working classes'.¹⁷³ Thus, Elfenbein's suggestion that Whitman's admirers 'distinguished themselves from the perceived vulgarity and illiteracy of the lowest ranks of society' cannot be applied to Wallace or the Eagle Street College. Wallace, like Whitman, sought a 'culture' that was available to all; he alludes to the passage quoted above in

Democratic Vistas:

The culture enfeebles and emasculates – especially the culture which only makes us 'supercilious infidels' – Whitman despises and condemns. But the manly culture open to all – to the poor and working classes as well as the rich and "leisured" classes – which lies in present every day receptivity to all the endless glories and wonders of life Whitman preaches both by word and example.¹⁷⁴

Whitman himself does not use 'class' in quite this way; he refers to a 'select class' (p.1078), a 'literary class' (p.946), a 'class of gentry and aristocracy' (p.912), and the 'class of supercilious infidels' that has been referred to. Wallace rephrases Whitman's 'teaching' so as to make it more applicable to the specific social conditions in which he was reading it.

Literature was fundamental to Whitman's radical reconstruction of culture; it was considered to be the 'soul' of the American nation, and was intrinsic to its democratic development (p.1005). 'A great original literature' was to be the 'justification and reliance' of American democracy (pp.956-957). Consequently, its

¹⁷² Wallace, 'Occasional Notes on Walt Whitman' (29 September-2 October 1890), Bolton, Whitman Collection, MS ZWN 6/2/20, p.4.

¹⁷³ All emphases in quotations are the author's.

¹⁷⁴ Wallace, 'Occasional Notes', p.14.

character and form would have to change so as to incorporate and reflect democratic tendencies:

Literature, strictly consider'd, has never recognized the People, and, whatever may be said, does not to-day. Speaking generally, the tendencies of literature, as hitherto pursued, have been to make mostly critical and querulous men. It seems as if, so far, there were some natural repugnance between a literary and professional life, and the rude rank spirit of the democracies. (p.968)

This passage follows a discussion of the famous phrase spoken by Lincoln in the Gettysburg address, 'the government of the people, by the people, for the people', which Whitman draws attention to by reproducing it in upper case letters. His use of the word in relation to literature, therefore, consciously echoes Lincoln's: it not only includes all, but unifies all. This democratic concern with uniting the 'many in one', so prevalent in Whitman's poetry, is enacted in the word 'people' itself: a plural concept is signified by a singular noun. Whitman seeks a literature which does not exacerbate or create divisions between individuals, but eliminates them.

Before Wallace or other members of the College developed specifically socialist convictions, the group was concerned with more general matters of democracy, and in the 1880s and early 1890s Wallace followed Whitman in exploring the relationship between literature and democracy. His correspondence with Whitman and with other college members reveals an ambiguous relationship with the 'literary', which he summarised in 1888 in a letter to his cousin:

I grow more and more to recognize the inadequacy of Literature, and to realize that it is at best an imperfect interpretation of the streaming life and experience around us. The illiterate man who daily tries to fulfil the duties of life and to realize in the week the ideal which he hears preached on the Sunday has a culture immensely more important and valuable to him than the "literary man" pure and simple. I do not despise culture—I have been a lover of books from my childhood—but it seems to me that Literature will yet recognize this more fully—that it even now begins to do so. Hitherto it has too much differentiated its votaries from the mass of men—as "Scholars"—bookish and supercilious. The Scholar of the future will realize more fully that life is the main thing—not the reflection of life from books.¹⁷⁵

Wallace establishes oppositional relationships between literature (as it was, not how it could be) and daily life, and like Whitman, he criticises the distance it creates between literary 'scholars' and the 'mass of men'. As an interpretation or reflection of life, literature is deemed inadequate: it is not able to function properly as a signifier. 'Literature' and 'Scholar' are capitalised, which in this context invests the

¹⁷⁵ Wallace to his cousin, extracts copied by John Johnston, 'Diary and Commonplace Book' (29 January 1888), Bolton, Whitman Collection, MS ZJO 1/1.

words with a sense of hierarchical authority and carries institutional connotation; these are contrasted with the 'streaming life and experience' of the masses. The 'illiterate' is elevated and literature is personified as a student who has still to learn his lesson: 'Literature will yet recognize this more fully'. However, this is made problematic by the fact that Wallace elevates the 'illiterate' because he realises in his work 'the ideal which he hears preached on the Sunday'. Not only does this seem to support institutionalised religion, but the Christian 'ideal' is taken from the Bible, the 'Word'. Wallace's overt promotion of life over literature is covertly challenged by his implicit affirmation of the value of the written word.

This can also be seen in a speech that Wallace wrote to be read in his absence at a meeting of the College, urging his friends towards a new mode of thought:

All I want members of the College to do—is, as Wordsworth advised—as Whitman advises—to come once again fresh and childlike, without prepossessions and without books, leaving the meddling intellect behind, passive and receptive before [Nature]. Trust your heart, trust your intuition and perception and you will perceive an ineffable tenderness, a brooding love, and a beauty that is organic and sacred and health giving.¹⁷⁶

Wallace's proposal incorporates both external stimuli and internal response: the literary is to be replaced by the natural, and intuition is to take precedence over the intellect; it is to be both a return ('fresh and childlike') and a progression ('leaving the meddling intellect behind'). Wallace's argument is obviously contradictory; he invokes the authority of Wordsworth and Whitman in order to persuade the College to turn away from books to nature, and relies on their poetic language to do so: 'meddling intellect' is from Wordsworth's 'The Tables Turned'.¹⁷⁷ Moreover, the paradoxical exhortation to renounce literature and turn to nature was a familiar literary conceit, used, as Wallace observes, by both Wordsworth and Whitman. However, these comments should be understood in terms of his search, similar to Whitman's, for a new type of democratic literature. Wallace readily admitted to being an avid reader – as he told his cousin 'I do not despise culture—I have been a lover of books from my childhood' – but held, like Whitman, that 'culture' should be assimilative and expansive. Wallace sought a literature that did not distinguish between the scholars and the 'mass of men', and would fully admit to being

¹⁷⁶ Wallace, 'A Rejoinder' (11 October 1890), Bolton, Whitman Collection, MS ZWN 2/22.

¹⁷⁷ William Wordsworth, 'The Tables Turned', *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. by R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones (London: Routledge, 1991), pp.105-106, ll.25-28: 'Sweet is the lore which Nature brings; / Our meddling intellect / Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:— / We murder to dissect.'

secondary to life itself: a type of literature that could break down the oppositional relationships such as the ones he had established.

For Wallace and Johnston, it was Whitman, more than any other writer, who had produced this democratic literature, and they were keen to present the College as an example of his success. In their first letter to the poet, they informed him:

Your books are [Johnston's] constant companions, his spiritual nourishment, his continual study and delight. And not least of his debts to you is "the glory" you have shewn him "in his daily walk and trade" which you have ennobled and made beautiful for him.¹⁷⁸

The first sentence is concerned with the internal, the scholarly, and the literary; the second with the external and labouring. The second vindicates the first, and the 'study' of Whitman's poetry is justified by the direct impact it had on the men's everyday lives. Scholarship, therefore, as well as literature, could be 'democratic'. Wallace and Johnston describe to Whitman the transformative effect that his poetry had upon them using not only the ideas, but also the words, of *Leaves of Grass*; the phrases in quotation marks refer to Whitman's 'Song of the Exposition':

I raise a voice for far superber themes for poets and for art,
To exalt the present and the real,
To teach the average man the glory of his daily walk and trade, (p.347)

The College believed that the speaker in *Leaves of Grass* was Whitman, so as well as showing that they were familiar with his poetry, this letter affirmed that he had achieved what he set out to accomplish, at least in the lives of Wallace and Johnston.

Similarly, in their letters to Whitman, Wallace and Johnston encourage Whitman by emphasising how he was admired by the 'non-literary' members of the group; for example, in 1890 Wallace writes:

It has been very pleasant to me to note how one or two of my friends (one especially) who are not "literary" in their tastes, and who care little for any authors except Shakspeare [sic] and Burns but who love manly and heroic qualities, outdoor life, boating, sailing, engineering, etc., and who have a deep inarticulate sense (deeper than usually goes with culture and aestheticism) of what is good thus are attracted by you—It is very clear to me that your ultimate absorption by this class (the class you have loved best of all) is only a matter of time and will be deep and affectionate.¹⁷⁹

The 'literary' is singled out through the use of inverted commas, and is juxtaposed with qualities celebrated in *Leaves of Grass*, which are described using the word 'manly', an adjective favoured by Whitman. Wallace had assimilated the principles

¹⁷⁸ Wallace and Johnston to Whitman (May 1887), JRUL, Papers relating to Wallace, MS 1186/2/2/1.

¹⁷⁹ Wallace to Whitman (16 August 1890), JRUL, Papers relating to Wallace, MS 1186/2/2/11.

of *Leaves of Grass* into his world-view and so appealed to Whitman in his own terms. Though the 'literary' is eschewed, literature is not condemned wholesale: Shakespeare and Burns are also mentioned, authors who are discussed one after another by Whitman in *November Boughs*. Whitman stated that Shakespeare's work was 'superb and inimitable', but that poetry 'is an evolution' and that Shakespeare stood for the past rather than the present (pp.1175-1176). Burns, however, was praised on the grounds that 'without the race of which he is a distinct specimen, (and perhaps his poems) America and her powerful Democracy could not exist to-day' (p.1177). Wallace signals to Whitman that the Bolton group was aware of the poet's discussions about literature, and that, like him, they were interested in it as it evolved democratically. The phrase 'ultimate absorption by this class' recalls Whitman's claim in the 1855 Preface that 'the proof of a poet is that his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it' (p.26), but Wallace substitutes the word 'class' for 'country'. Whitman's quest to find an appropriate poetic style through which America could be articulated is de-nationalised and translated into a class context.

In a letter written the following year, Wallace uses similarly Whitmanesque language to describe Fred Wild: he is 'not "literary" at all' and is 'frank outspoken and free – in speech and manners.' The letter continues:

I rejoice to think that natures like his respond to you so spontaneously and so warmly. You can afford to let the literary classes stand in antagonism to you (though it can be for a short time only) while the masses (the great majority) who deal with life and nature and experience at first hand, and who despise second hand presentation in books and art, see in you a master vital and fresh as life itself, and offering them love and faith and vistas before unknown.¹⁸⁰

Wallace uses a Whitmanian register to present Fred Wild as a specimen case and projects Wild's views onto the 'masses' as a whole. Not only is this clearly an inaccurate generalisation, but the implications about the 'sample', Wild, are also misleading: he may not have belonged to the 'literary classes', but he had been a member of the Eagle Street reading group for over a decade, and so evidently did not 'despise second-hand presentation in books and art'. These embellishments serve two functions: first, as has been suggested before, Wallace portrays the men of the College to Whitman as his ideal working readers, and second, they reassure Whitman that he himself had brought about the democratic literature that he so desired. The word 'master' problematises this democratic sentiment by elevating the

¹⁸⁰ Wallace to Whitman (16 January 1891), JRUL, Papers relating to Wallace, MS 1186/2/2/29.

poet above the 'masses'; however, though it can belong to the idiom of an aristocratic class system, it also refers to 'a teacher or practitioner (of religion, philosophy, art, etc)' (*OED*), and therefore carries spiritual connotations that were in keeping with the way in which the College had come to interpret Whitman's poetry, as self-cultivation gave way to religious reverence.

Interpreting Whitman's Teachings

Charles Sixsmith, who belonged to the Bolton group, remarked in an article written about the College in 1938 that 'Walt Whitman's death drew us closer together, and our meetings assumed a more religious character, though not of the traditional kind'.¹⁸¹ Though Whitman's death acted as a catalyst, and changed how the College saw itself and its relationship to Whitman, cementing an apostolic sense of duty, the group's spiritual interpretations of Whitman's poetry had developed over the preceding years. In 1890, for example, a letter from Wallace to Whitman describes spending 'blessed hours of sacred vital communion with the wordless divine Spirit' whilst rambling in the countryside and reading *Leaves of Grass*. He states:

Very sure am I that your now despised poems will yet rank with the Hebrew Scriptures (to which I can alone compare them) as sacred and priceless, springing from divine depths – the latest modern revelation of the same Spirit.¹⁸²

Wallace's expectation is that his reading of *Leaves of Grass* as sacred would become widely accepted, and that Whitman's poetry would become as influential as the Bible. Wallace 'compares' rather than contrasts Whitman's poems with the Hebrew Scriptures: *Leaves of Grass* was not seen to work against other sacred texts, but to expand on the messages contained within them.

This is because, like Carpenter, Wallace believed in a universal 'higher self' in which everyone is interconnected, an expansive interpretation of the divine that was able to incorporate 'truths' from a variety of religions. At around the same time as the above letter, Wallace explored these ideas in his 'Occasional Notes on Walt Whitman':

This higher self we all share in common – the idiot, the commonest drudge, the rapt saint and the lofty poet. This is the real, the permanent self – the soul, the

¹⁸¹ Charles Sixsmith, 'Local Friends of Walt Whitman', *Chorley Guardian* (9 April 1938).

¹⁸² Wallace to Whitman (19 September 1890), JRUL, Papers relating to Wallace, MS 1186/2/2/17.

essential self – quite infinitely of more importance than all else. It is this which is the basis of the true equality, “of equal brotherhood, of democracy”. To him who sees deeply enough a sacred mystery, worthy of deepest awe lies in the personality of each. To him who accepts the belief in a Divine Plan in all things, and who accepts the endless life and hope and ascension which lie before each, all minor distinctions are as nothing / – God in us, and we in God – that idea will color [sic] his thoughts in all his dealings. And as the meaning of the deep saying “God is love” grows in our mind and hearts, so will universal love grow too.

How easy to assent to this in thought! How difficult to carry it into practice! Say how impossible it seems! But this is the essence not only of Christ's teaching, but of His life and practice. The Democracy Whitman promulgates is only an example and development of it. And Whitman too has exemplified it both in His works and life. It is for us therefore to carefully and strenuously strive to do likewise. All good influences are with us and will help us.¹⁸³

Using the Whitmanian technique of giving a sample list, Wallace unites the lunatic, the worker, the saint, and the bard; the ‘higher self’ acts as a transcendental leveller. In this exposition the teachings of Whitman and Christ are interlocked; Wallace shifts from Whitman to Christ, then from Christ back to Whitman, quoting from both *Democratic Vistas* and the New Testament.¹⁸⁴ They are discussed as equivalent figures: the same amount of space is dedicated to each, and the capitalised ‘His’ is used to refer to both Whitman and Christ. As it is conventional to refer to the Christian God in this way, this indicates that both are divine; yet they are discussed not as gods but as men who understand the ‘higher self’, suggesting that all people are equally able to come to this level of spiritual realisation.

In Wallace’s understanding of religion, Whitmanian democracy is one manifestation of the idea that Christianity describes as ‘God is love’. This model of a triangular relationship between religion, democracy and love is given by Whitman in ‘Starting from Paumanok’. If we return to Fraistat’s argument that autobiographical or ideological narratives are constructed through the order in which the poet intended his or her poems to be read, Whitman perhaps attached a particular value to this poem, which first appeared as the opening poem of the 1860 *Leaves of Grass* (as ‘Proto-Leaf’), and thereafter was printed directly after any short ‘inscription poems’. Even if it was unintended, the poem’s position gave it a special significance: if readers began at the start of *Leaves* and progressed through the book in order, it would be their first experience of a long Whitman poem and so would colour or inform their reading of subsequent poems. It kept its place in the British

¹⁸³ Wallace, ‘Occasional Notes’, p.9.

¹⁸⁴ 1 John 4.8: ‘God is love’.

publications of Whitman's poetry: it was the first poem in Rossetti's selection, and followed a few pages of inscription poems in Rhys's.

Wallace was not much of an annotator, but he marked certain sections and phrases in his copy of the 1892 *Leaves of Grass* with brackets or a line down the margin, and 'Starting from Paumanok' is one of the poems with the most markings; four different kinds of ink are used, suggesting that Wallace came back to this poem again and again. The tenth section begins:

Know you, solely to drop in the earth the germs of a greater religion,
The following chants each for its kind I sing.

My comrade!

For you to share with me two greatneses, and a third one rising inclusive and
more resplendent,

The greatness of Love and Democracy, and the greatness of Religion. (p.181)

Wallace drew triangular brackets around this final line, indicating that it was of particular importance to him. The words 'Love', 'Democracy' and 'Religion' are foregrounded through the use of capitalisation; they form a triad of 'greatnesses' which qualify the speaker's unequivocal advocacy, in section seven, of religion as the mainstay of an ideal society: 'I say that the real and permanent grandeur of these States must be their religion, / Otherwise there is no real and permanent grandeur' (p.180). This apparently conservative position is modified by the statement that it will be a 'greater religion' (that is, not one that already exists in institutional form) and by the introduction of the interrelated concepts of 'love' and 'democracy'. Still, religion is distinguished from love and democracy by the statement that there is 'a third one rising inclusive and more resplendent', a sentiment which is enacted structurally in the final two lines of the section quoted above: the caesura breaks separate the first two 'greatnesses' from the third; in the first clause love and democracy are paired together through the zeugmatic use of the word 'greatness', but it is repeated in the second clause to emphasise the 'greatness of Religion'. Religion, in its true form, would be defined by the qualities of loving and egalitarian comradeship.

Speaking to the Progressive League on the subject of 'Whitman and Religion' in 1915, Wallace asserted that the linguistic construction of spiritual understanding often prevented its acceptance:

No doubt each one of us knows someone in whom the flame of vital religious fire is clear and unmistakeable. Yet it may express itself in the terms of a

theology which is revoltingly crude, and which we cannot but reject. Some of us know how painful this is in relation to those whom we deeply honour and love.

It is often the same with books. We turn to some famous book written by an illumined seer in the past, and we find that he uses a terminology which we have to translate into our own terms before we can assimilate his message.¹⁸⁵

As with daily life and literature, Wallace identified a disjunction between divine understanding and the language it was often expressed in. However, readers are able to reject terminology they cannot 'assimilate' without rejecting its message if they perform an act of transposition and rewrite the message in a way that is acceptable to them. To explain this using Wolfgang Iser's reader-response model, the message is transmitted in two ways, in that the reader 'receives' the message by 'composing' it. There is, however, a difference between 'translating' and 'composing'; though both involve interpretation, in Iser's theory 'meaning' is created out of the interaction between text and reader, whereas Wallace presumes that there is what Derrida calls a 'transcendental signified', an ultimate truth which exists outside of the language or theory used to describe it.

This belief is sanctioned in *Leaves of Grass*, for example, in the inscription poem 'Eidólons':

The prophet and the bard,
Shall yet maintain themselves, in higher stages yet,
Shall mediate to the Modern, to Democracy, interpret yet to them,
God and eidólons. (p.170)

Anaphora accentuates the word 'shall', which simultaneously acts as an imperative and expresses 'the speaker's determination to bring about some action, event, or state of things in the future' (*OED*); though the speaker is unequivocal there is an edge of uncertainty as the interpretative acts he speaks of have 'yet' to be performed, a word which is emphasised through repetition. This can be related to the tension in *Leaves of Grass* between Whitman's conviction that a democratic form of literature had yet to be developed, and his own development and usage of such a style. Similarly, the tension between confidence and uncertainty is evident in the relationship between the formal and the thematic in 'Eidólons': the word 'eidólón' is repeated in every fourth line and the poem has a fixed four-line stanzaic structure with indented short first and fourth lines; the formal certainty this gives is destabilised by the fact that an

¹⁸⁵ Wallace, 'Whitman and Religion: An Address Delivered to the Progressive League, Bolton' (28 March 1915), Bolton, Whitman Collection, MS ZWN 6/2/28.

'eidólon', what this structure contains, is an unsubstantial image, or spectre. The speaking bard is acutely aware that he only sees the divine he is to 'interpret' and 'mediate' in glimpses and hints.

There are no such hints of uncertainty in Wallace's appraisal of Whitman's communication of divine 'truths'. For Wallace, the need to 'translate' an interpretation of the divine betrayed a linguistic inadequacy, a tendency which he believed *Leaves of Grass* worked against. When the speaker of 'Song of Myself' claims that he is 'untranslatable' (p.87), Wallace takes him (whom he understands to be Whitman) at his word. This is related again to the difference between literature that appeals to the intellect, and literature that has an impact on life itself: Wallace asserts that religion cannot 'be communicated by any intellectual statement, whether in books or by speech', and quotes from 'Song of the Open Road': 'I and mine do not convince by arguments, similes, rhymes, / We convince by our presence' (p.303). (The fact that Wallace uses a speech to present this argument is not necessarily paradoxical; he too hoped to convince through his personality and presence.) Wallace felt that Whitman did not need to be translated because his work had an emotive effect 'which addresses and arouses the deep sub-conscious regions within us which lie below the place of intellectual consciousness.'

Wallace's use of the word 'consciousness' recalls Bucke's theories of spiritual evolution rather than Freudian psychology; in *Cosmic Consciousness*, Bucke argues that there are three types of consciousness which humankind will progress through: 'simple consciousness', 'self consciousness', and 'cosmic consciousness'. Wallace, therefore, suggests that Whitman's work is able to affect its reader beyond the ordinary level of self consciousness, pushing him or her to a greater understanding of the universal, or the 'higher self'. By the time he gave this speech, Wallace was convinced that Whitman was the greatest in a line of 'prophets' and that *Leaves of Grass* should be read as scripture:

I have read and studied some of the great scriptures of the world, and I do not see how anything can be better than each is in its place. But I believe that the revelation of God to humanity is a progressive one, to which each succeeding age adds new features. And in Whitman I believe I see a deeper and wider incarnation of the divine spirit than in any of his predecessors.

'Progressive' is the keynote: in Wallace's evolutionary world-view, it is not simply that different teachers bring different messages for different times, but that each builds on the last, and is therefore able to move humankind closer towards the stage

of 'cosmic consciousness'. As individuals evolved on a spiritual level, so the social order would develop accordingly; to return to 'Starting from Paumanok', if love, democracy and religion were not central to each individual, and so to society as a whole, there could be no lasting change achieved through legislation or parliamentary politics; there could be no 'real and permanent grandeur'.

Though Wallace believed that the terminology of Whitman's 'teaching' did not have to be translated in order for his 'message' to be assimilated, the very act of locating Whitman in the vatic tradition is one of transposition. Iser's reader-response theory cannot adequately explain the effect that such a belief has on the process of reading and re-reading, but it does help to explain how *Leaves of Grass* came to be understood as a sacred text. As discussed in the introduction, Iser argues that a literary work becomes 'more than the text' when it is 'realized', and that this 'realization' is affected both by 'the individual disposition of the reader' and the 'different patterns of the text'. The 'individual dispositions' of Johnston and Wallace to search for a deeper spiritual understanding created a tendency to read the text as scripture, which was confirmed by the 'patterns of the text', such as the omniscient speaking 'I', the dithyrambic prophetic tone, and the text's own insistence that it communicates a divine message. Of course, though Wallace and Johnston's 'realization' of the text guided how the group read *Leaves of Grass*, the College's interpretation of *Leaves of Grass* was reliant not only on 'individual dispositions' but communal or collective dispositions. The social and cultural milieu to which the group belonged had an impact on the way it 'translated' Whitmanian concepts (and put them into practice); Whitman's 'terms', such as 'democracy' and 'comradeship', were retained but recast within ideological and political frameworks which made the 'message' of *Leaves of Grass* more readily assimilated.

The two core notions of democracy and comradeship formed the basis of the Eagle Street College's engagement with Whitman, though the precise way in which they were interpreted or 'translated' changed over the years. At the beginning of his 'Occasional Notes on Walt Whitman', Wallace identifies what he considered to be the 'elementary themes' of *Leaves of Grass*: 'American Democracy – the Literature it demands. Comradeship – Acceptance in Faith of the whole of life – The holy mystery and sacredness of all experience and of the bodily functions and activities –

Personal immortality'.¹⁸⁶ The use of hyphens indicates that the list was written, as Wallace says, 'off hand', but it also has the effect of stringing together the themes in such a way that it is unclear where one ends and the next begins. Wallace's ideas progress associatively: 'American Democracy' and 'Comradeship' begin strands of this thematic chain, but the separate themes become merged together. Wallace specifies that Whitman's topic is not just 'democracy', but 'American' democracy, a distinction which seems to distance the British reader; however, as the piece continues, Wallace's consistent use of the words 'we', 'our' and 'us' (for example, 'It is one of Whitman's services that he puts us en rapport with Nature, as no one else does, so that we may perceive this for ourselves') is determinedly inclusive, indicating that he believed Whitman's 'message' about American democracy to have broader ramifications.

Again, this is authorised by Whitman in *Leaves of Grass*; for example, in 'To Foreign Lands', another short inscription poem, the speaker states:

I heard that you ask'd for something to prove this puzzle the New World,
And to define America, her athletic Democracy,
Therefore I send you my poems that you behold in them what you wanted.
(p.167)

Though the poems were written about and for the 'New World', the speaker envisions them being sent to the Old World; America, or Whitman's vision of it, is used as a democratic model for 'foreign lands'. Harold Blodgett asserts that by the time Wallace had come to Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* was no longer able to function effectively in this way in England:

By 1870 democracy as a public issue was felt to be settled. Furthermore, Whitman's gospel of democracy lost some of its force in England from the suspicion that the poet was too naïvely confident in presenting America as a model for other nations to follow.¹⁸⁷

It was not only Whitman who presented America as a democratic model; Douglas Grant, for example, observes that in nineteenth-century Britain 'to be a democrat was to be a friend of America, at least of America in the abstract'.¹⁸⁸ This notwithstanding, Blodgett is right to draw attention to the fact that as the nineteenth century drew to a close America ceased to be popularly considered as a paragon of democracy; anti-capitalist and anti-materialist radicals on both sides of the Atlantic

¹⁸⁶ Wallace, 'Occasional Notes', p.1.

¹⁸⁷ Blodgett, *Whitman in England*, p.219.

¹⁸⁸ Grant, *Whitman and His English Admirers*, p.12.

became as critical of America as they were of Britain. The statement that democracy was felt to be settled by 1870, however, is inaccurate: considered purely in terms of enfranchisement, the 1867 reform act only extended the vote to working class males who lived in towns and cities, and though the 1884 act gave the same voting privileges to those that lived in the countryside, forty percent of adult males, and all women, still could not vote. Understood in its broader sense as the rule or authority (*kratos*) of the people (*demos*), democracy remained a pressing issue in a country whose economic and social structures kept wealth and power in the hands of an elite. Though America had not developed in the way Whitman had anticipated, his 'teachings' were still able to point the way towards a 'true democracy', as Wallace called it; readers with democratic leanings, such as the Bolton group, were indeed able to behold in the poems what they wanted.¹⁸⁹

Comradeship was an essential component of the loving, democratic religion Whitman envisioned in *Leaves of Grass*. Looking no further than 'Starting from Paumanok', the stanza which discusses the three 'greatnesses' begins with the apostrophe 'my comrade', thereby establishing a relationship between speaker and reader that was to be a model for all social relationships. Comradeship was to be both a manifestation of this spiritual world-view, and at the same time, a means of bringing it about, and it was the bard's role to articulate and forward the concept through his poetry; the speaker of 'Starting from Paumanok' asserts:

I will write the evangel-poem of comrades and of love,
For who but I should understand love with all its sorrow and joy?
And who but I should be the poet of comrades? (p.179)

'Who but Whitman should be the poet of comrades?' echoes Wallace in his 'Occasional Notes'. For Wallace and the Eagle Street men, comradeship was one of the most important elements of Whitman's teaching, both on the grand scale of the transformation of society, and in relation to their own small community. It was easily assimilated into the socialist ideology that many of them came to adopt, and held a strong appeal for the members of the College who did not believe in Whitman as fervently as Wallace and Johnston but valued the communal environment offered by the group. When called to speak at the meeting attended by Bucke, for example,

¹⁸⁹ Wallace, 'The Walt Whitman Centennial: the Man and his Message', *Labour Leader* (29 May 1919), p.3.

Frederick Hutton, William Ferguson, and Sam Hodgkinson all commented on how Whitman's idea of comradeship or brotherhood had particularly touched them.

Comradeship became the idea through which the group defined itself, and archival material relating to the Eagle Street College is scattered with references to it: it was written into songs, poems, speeches and letters. Wallace wrote to Whitman informing him of a fresh sense of obligation to carry on Whitman's work, 'in particular, to establish wherever possible "the institution of the dear love of comrades"'. Whitman was also told that the College gave Fred Wild a copy of *Leaves of Grass* inscribed with lines from 'For You O Democracy': 'With the love of comrades, / With the life-long love of comrades' (p.272).¹⁹⁰ 'The Song of the Eagle Street College' pamphlets have an epigram from 'These I Singing in Spring': 'And this, O this shall henceforth be the token of comrades'. Wallace drew attention to this quotation in the letter to Whitman that accompanied the poem, adding that 'you may be sure that the comradeship and affection it expresses are largely due to your influence.'¹⁹¹ In Whitman's poem the 'token' is the calamus-root, or sweet flag:

(O here I last saw him that tenderly loves me, and returns again never to
separate from me,
And this, O this shall henceforth be the token of comrades, and this calamus-
root shall,
Interchange it youths with each other! let none render it back!) (p.273)

Johnston takes up the idea of the 'interchange' of objects as a sign of attachment and places his verse in the position of Whitman's calamus plant; his poem was intended to be passed around the group, and those that had connections to them. In Whitman scholarship the calamus-root is often interpreted as a phallic symbol of same-sex male attraction, but Johnston's use of the phrase does not allude to these erotic connotations so much as it enacts the speaker's emphasis on the importance of male friendships. As discussed in the introduction, in *Leaves of Grass* 'comradeship' relates both to personal attachments and the far-reaching social effect they could have. This is exemplified in the repetition and modification of lines from 'Starting from Paumanok' in 'These I Singing in Spring': the lines quoted above from the first poem 'For who but I should understand love with all its sorrow and joy? / And who but I should be the poet of comrades?' become '(For who but I should understand lovers and all their sorrow and joy? / And who but I should be the poet of

¹⁹⁰ Wallace to Whitman (9 January 1891), JRUL, Papers relating to Wallace, MS 1186/2/2/27.

¹⁹¹ Wallace to Whitman (May 1889), JRUL, Papers relating to Wallace, MS 1186/2/2/4.

comrades?)' in 'These I Singing in Spring'. In 'Starting from Paumanok' an omniscient bard speaks of 'love', an abstract overarching principle, whilst in 'These I Singing' a very human voice speaks about the intimacy of lovers. This duality was not an afterthought: both of these poems were first published in the 1860 edition, and in the 1860 'Proto-Leaf' the lines are also enclosed in parentheses.

It was a duality which invested the activities of the College with a profound sense of importance, and allowed its members to see the group as a model of Whitmanian comradeship. In *Visits to Walt Whitman*, Wallace recalls:

We were conscious of a composite character and of a certain emotional atmosphere belonging to our group as a whole [...] It resulted in part from our very diversity and from the curious way in which our several personalities seemed to fit in with each other, the limitations and idiosyncrasies of each being offset and harmonized by the complementary qualities of the rest.¹⁹²

Once again, the 'many in one' runs through this passage. Whitman uses catalogues in *Leaves of Grass* to identify and celebrate individuals, whilst simultaneously unifying them in a composite whole through poetic devices such as anaphora and parallelism. Here, Wallace stresses the 'diversity' of the individuals comprising the College, but also the harmony and completeness of the group as a 'whole'; the 'composite character' recalls Wallace's faith in a 'higher self' common to all, and the Bolton group are presented as a microcosm of Whitmanian democracy. This is also evident in Johnston's 'The Song of the Eagle Street College': the individual members of the group are identified by occupation rather than name ('Limb ov the Law', 'Clargyman', 'M.D') and unified in the poetic whole, though in Johnston's poem this is achieved through a regular stanzaic structure and a predominantly anapaestic rhythm.

The theme of the college's comradeship was also more overtly politicised. For example, Wentworth Dixon, who also wrote light-hearted verse as a hobby, composed a poem to welcome an American friend of Whitman's, John H. Johnston, to a college meeting. The second stanza begins:

To forward the cause which Walt Whitman enshrined
We are ready, quite "ready, aye ready".
The cause democratic-comraderie combined
Is ready, quite "ready, aye ready".

And the poem ends:

Institutions of dear love of comrades to found,

¹⁹² Johnston and Wallace, *Visits*, p.18.

We are ready, quite “ready, aye ready”,
With bands of affection to bind the world round,
We are ready, quite “ready, aye ready”.
To stamp out class feeling, war, bitterness, strife,
To establish full freedom,—abundance of life,
To make brotherhoods of friends universally rife
Be ready, quite “ready, aye ready”.¹⁹³

Democracy and comradeship are hyphenated in a single cause, ‘enshrined’, or contained, in Whitman. This specification is important as Whitman was certainly not the only radical to promote ideas about brotherhood and comradeship, and when the terms were used in socialist circles they did not always relate back to his vision. Dixon, however, makes it clear that the College’s interpretations of comradeship and democracy were specifically Whitmanian; this is stated directly, and reinforced by phrases adapted from *Leaves of Grass* such as ‘institutions of dear love of comrades’ (*I Hear It Was Charged Against Me*, p.281).

The repetition of ‘ready, aye ready’, the traditional motto of the Scottish Johnston clan, is humorous and self-consciously edges the poem towards the burlesque, but it also communicates a serious willingness to play an active role in forwarding what the College men interpreted Whitman’s social and spiritual vision to be. The predominantly anapaestic rhythm creates a bold, emphatic tone: the speaker is confident that Whitman’s ‘cause’ is able to eradicate British social ills, such as ‘class feeling’. Carolyn Masel draws attention to the collective nature of the group’s reading: ‘They do seem to have been the first group of working people to receive Whitman’s poetry collectively, the first community of non-university readers’.¹⁹⁴ It is certainly true that though Wallace, and to a lesser extent Johnston, guided the way in which Whitman was read, it was still thought of as a group undertaking. Dixon, for example, stresses the collective nature of the enterprise by only using the pronoun ‘we’. He suggests that having read Whitman together, the College men then had to act together on what they had learned. Once the Whitmanian principle of comradeship had been applied on a local level in their own community, it needed to be extended globally (‘bind the world round’, ‘universally rife’).

¹⁹³ Wentworth Dixon, ‘The College to John H. Johnston on his visit to Bolton’ (23 June 1894), Bolton, Whitman Collection, MS ZWN 2/43.

¹⁹⁴ Masel, ‘Whitman and the Bolton Whitman Fellowship’, p.112.

Harry Cocks suggests that the College ‘took on a more millennial feel’ after Wallace’s visit to Whitman in 1891; though this is a valid assessment, it became more pronounced after Whitman’s death.¹⁹⁵ Shortly after this, for example, Wallace wrote to Horace Traubel entreating: ‘Let us keep up the comradeship bequeathed us by our chief until it grows and expands into an order which shall cover the whole earth in times to come and regenerate society, politics, art, life.’¹⁹⁶ The Eagle Street men recognised the potential that comradeship had for effecting wider social change, and shared these ideas with other Whitman admirers who also believed in the transformative power of Whitman’s teachings. In the years after Whitman’s death, Wallace and the College played a key role in the international network of Whitman disciples who were intent on forwarding their prophet’s ‘message’.

Spreading the Gospel of Whitman

The year after Whitman’s death, Katharine Conway sent a letter to the Eagle Street College about the poet; it begins:

As I understand it, like the disciples of old you are meeting together after the “Death” of him you know as your leader, that you may strengthen each other’s faith in his gospel, gain a fuller understanding of its vast issues and learn together how best to send it forth to the nations. I write to send you greeting.¹⁹⁷

Conway’s rhetoric recalls that of the New Testament letters to the churches: ‘I write to send you greeting’, for example, echoes the concluding salutations in the epistles. It also performs a similar function; throughout the letter Whitman is exalted, his teaching is explained, and the believers are encouraged. The biblical register is used to introduce parallels between the disciples of Christ and the Eagle Street College, and positions Whitman more as a messianic figure than a prophet. This is made explicit as the letter continues:

¹⁹⁵ Cocks, ‘Calamus in Bolton’, p.196.

¹⁹⁶ Wallace to Traubel (5 May 1892), Library of Congress, Horace and Anne Montgomerie Traubel Collection. Quotation given by Robertson in a work-in-progress version of the chapter in *Worshipping Walt*, ‘The Gospel According to Horace: Horace Traubel and the Walt Whitman Fellowship’, *Mickle Street Review*, 16 (2004) <<http://micklestreet.rutgers.edu/archives/Issue%2016/essays/robertson.htm#f18>> [accessed 20 August 2010] (para.13 of 86).

¹⁹⁷ Katharine Conway to the College (May 1893), Bolton, Whitman Collection, MS ZWN 9/278.

Walt Whitman has led men out of the Paradise of Inexperience and willing Ignorance, out again of the Desert of Doubt and painful work and terror of goodness, into an eternal Heaven of perfect knowledge and perfect love. Henceforth there is no more death.

Using allegorical language alluding to John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Conway invokes the idea of a spiritual journey that culminates in everlasting life. The phrase 'henceforth there is no more death' recalls the proclamation in Revelation 21.4 that 'there shall be no more death', but moves it to the present. Implicitly, Whitman has succeeded where Christ had failed.

These parallels encourage the Eagle Street College to believe that Whitman's message would have as great a transformative effect as Christ's, and that its members had a fundamental role to play in its propagation; in the same way that Christ's teachings had spread across the globe through the missionary work of a small band of men, so would the 'gospel' of Whitman. Conway's reference to the 'disciples of old' compares this stage in the Bolton group's development to the period after Christ's ascension but before Pentecost. Though this was a time of uncertainty it had positive outcomes: strengthened faith, a deeper understanding of the teachings, and an ability to communicate it to others. The comparison with the disciples of Christ was therefore intended to encourage the College. The phrase 'send it forth to the nations' recalls the charge that Jesus gave his followers in Matthew 28.19 ('Go ye therefore, and teach all nations'), and so suggests that the beliefs held by the small Bolton group were able to have a global impact. Significantly, this was not written by a member of the group, but by one of the most prominent figures in British socialism.¹⁹⁸ Despite her commitment to the socialist cause, Conway forwards Whitman rather than socialism as the means of salvation; socialism was therefore a way of bringing about the democratic ideal envisioned by Whitman, rather than being in itself the ultimate aim.

In the years following Whitman's death, the popularity of ethical interpretations of socialism and the success of organisations such as the ILP and the Labour Church seemed to prove that society was indeed evolving towards the spiritual democracy outlined in *Leaves of Grass* and Wallace's 'realization' of *Leaves of Grass* became increasingly focused on the responsibility that the College

¹⁹⁸ Conway drew in large crowds at socialist lectures, first for the Fabian Society and then the ILP, and by January 1893 she was the only woman to serve in an elected role on the administrative council of the ILP.

had to implement a national, then global, acceptance of Whitman's democratic principles. If this feeling was already simmering, Whitman's death brought it to the boil. On the day of Whitman's funeral, Wallace addressed the College:

It seems to me that we ought to feel tonight a new sense – a new call to duty. We have not the friend any longer, the dear human friend whom we have corresponded with, and whom Johnston and I have seen, but he is himself part of the unseen with us always. In this poem (So long!) he gives a definite promise to return, to continue his love to us, a promise, but also a summons, a summons which if we really realised not one of us could ever again forget – a summons to come to him on equal terms – a summons which is also an injunction like that which comes to the prostitute in his poem "My girl I appoint with you an appointment and I charge you that you make preparation to be worthy to meet me, and I charge you that you be patient and perfect till I come."¹⁹⁹

Once again, there are clear biblical echoes in this speech: like the apostles of Jesus, the Bolton Whitmanites are promised that their loving leader will return and are charged with a 'calling'.

However, 'So Long!', the first poem that Wallace refers to, subverts some of the central tenets of Christianity. First appearing in 1860, long before Whitman's own death was a near possibility, the poem has as a theme the speaker's death and 'what comes after' (p.609). The final stanza offers an alternative to the story of the Ascension; the speaker prepares to depart from the earth:

I receive now again of my many translations, from my avatars ascending,
while others doubtless await me,
An unknown sphere more real than I dream'd, more direct, darts awakening
rays about me, *So long!*
Remember my words, I may again return,
I love you, I depart from materials,
I am as one disembodied, triumphant, dead. (p.612)

Unlike the Christian God, who is present in three forms, and only one of them earthly, the speaker has 'many translations', and so can appear many times in different forms. The word 'ascending' is paired alliteratively with 'avatars', referring to the incarnations of Hindu gods, a doctrine first appearing in the Bhagavad Gita. Christianity, therefore, is fused with a belief system in which the divine is perpetually reborn, not restricted to one body. As a result, a second coming in the speaker's body is less assured and less important: the speaker 'may' return, but it is not promised. The colloquial '*So long!*' humanises the divine, emphasising the

¹⁹⁹ Wallace, 'Walt Whitman's Funeral: Words Spoken to the College' (30 March 1892), Bolton, Whitman Collection, MS ZWN 2/5.

fact that in Whitman's vision, it is to be found in fleshly, eating, drinking, copulating, working man. Shortly before this section, the speaker claims that he is embodied in the text: 'Camerado, this is no book, / Who touches this touches a man' (p.611), a paradigm which recalls the Christian idea that 'the Word was with God, and the Word was God' (John 1.1), but puts 'man' in the place of 'God'.

The poem is concerned with 'consummations' and 'fruition', as the speaker looks forward to the time 'when America does what was promis'd' (p.609). With the speaker's death, the time for prophecy has passed, and the time for action begins. This is also Wallace's theme and his speech continues:

He [Whitman] had referred to our College as a Church partly in jest, but also very considerably in earnest – a Band of friends meeting with the utmost freedom, speaking with a liberty and freedom impossible to any more formal organization—to do the work of a church really – advance each other in the way that churches set themselves out to do with far better opportunities and with equal aims. I only wish each member of the College could say with me that he will do his best as I will do my best to make the College what Walt has conceived it and what with his bettering it may yet be.

Wallace does not clarify exactly what the aims of this 'church' are, except 'to advance each other'. The democratic goals hinted at in the word 'equal' are, however, clarified in a letter written by Wallace to the College the following year, in January 1893, which begins in a similar tone:

I should have liked to be present, and to make as strong an appeal as I could for a new and better effort to make the College worthy at once of its past history and of the useful future to which it is surely called.²⁰⁰

In many of Wallace's College addresses the idea of a 'calling' is linked to the metaphor of spiritual warfare; for example, a few months later he tells the College that the group is 'engaged in a battle in which we have duties to perform', and in 1910 that Whitman's call to them 'is the call of battle'.²⁰¹ This 'battle' looks outside the bounds of the College; the call to 'advance each other' is the call of 'true democracy': to 'advance' every person.

For Wallace, socialism offered a practical means of doing so, though he recognised that not every member felt the same way; the letter continues:

I am very well aware that our discussions of "Socialism" lately have been distasteful to some of our members, who are now rather hanging back in doubt as to where we are going to, and what they are likely to be committed to – And

²⁰⁰ Wallace to the College (6 January 1893), Bolton, Whitman Collection, MS ZWN 2/24.

²⁰¹ Wallace, 'Speech for Whitman's Birthday' (31 May 1893), Bolton, Whitman Collection, MS ZWN 2/6; Wallace, 'Whitman Day Speech' (1910), Bolton, Whitman Collection, MS ZWN 2/15.

it is also felt that a series of debates on economic questions – questions too, which necessarily raise discussion and controversy are not as helpful to individual members as some of our past meetings have been, in so far as they resulted in increased faith in the unseen and in contented acceptance and cheer.

But is not this the true and proper cause of development? First, that we (as a College and as individuals) come to see and feel that there is an unseen order in events, that a divine purpose of love enclose all things, and that we may yield ourselves in perfect trust to them for life and death. And then to seek out the means and ways by which we may ourselves co-operative [sic] with the divine energies and in helping them onwards find our true blessedness and means of growth.

Wallace's concern is again with the development from spiritual understanding to action, from private belief to public impact. The underlined 'is' emphasises his certainty in an 'unseen order of events' which was progressive rather than degenerative; later in the letter he states more explicitly: 'Anyone with eyes in his head may see that Democracy is making rapid strides to power and place in England. Whether we like it or not, it is inevitable as gravitation.' Socialism itself was secondary to this general democratic movement.

The day before Wallace wrote this letter, a short speech by Whitman's literary executor Thomas Harned was read to the group which applauded 'the tendency of the actively aggressive Democracy of England towards a realization of Walt Whitman's place as its inspiring prophet'.²⁰² This frames Whitman's reception in Britain in the context of a social rather than literary movement. Harned's use of the word 'democracy' is ambiguous; it is unclear if he is personifying an abstract noun to emphasise the forcefulness of English democracy, or if he is referring to the 'common people' of England. This gives the word a dual strength, which is also utilised in Wallace's letter:

For we are the heaven-appointed preachers to the Democracy of England.

We stand in the closest relation to Walt Whitman – the divinely inspired prophet of World-Democracy.

To us the leaders of the English Democracy will look more and more for spiritual food and sustenance.

Like Harned, Wallace uses a capital letter to foreground the importance of the word 'Democracy'. 'World-Democracy' refers to a philosophy or religion, but the meaning is ambiguous in the first and third lines, suggesting that both the people and the idea need spiritual sustenance. Wallace attributes a key role to the College in this democratic movement, for which its members were qualified not through their own

²⁰² Thomas Harned to the College (5 January 1893), JRUL, Papers relating to Wallace, MS 1186/8/2/2.

abilities, but through the intimacy of their relationships with Whitman ('We stand in closest relationship to Walt Whitman'). The pronouns 'we' and 'us' are underlined for emphasis, while a cumulative picture is developed through their repetition: the Bolton Whitmanites are made the focal subject of all three sentences by the position of 'we' and 'us' near the beginning of each, and over them Wallace develops what he understands to be the group's task. He does not suggest to his friends that they 'could be' the 'preachers' demanded by democracy; rather, the present tense 'we are' asserts that they have already been given this role.

The spiritual foundation of democracy was so important to Wallace that he directed much of his 'preaching' towards socialists, despite the fact that they were already actively engaged in bringing democracy about. For example, in 1894 he made a speech to the Bolton ILP, taking the maxim 'produce great Persons, the rest follows' from Whitman's 'By Blue Ontario's Shore' (p.470) as his text.²⁰³ He argued that though 'propagandist work, lectures – education in economics – organization and political machinery are all needed and indispensable' they would be unsuccessful unless carried out by 'great' personalities who understand the 'Democratic Ideal', an ideal which Wallace says he learned from his 'master' Walt Whitman. This involves love for others and pride in one's self, which is really a pride 'in the deeper self' which is 'essentially the same in all':

To develop [sic] and unfold this inner self should be the main business of life and is the purpose for which we exist. To enrich and deepen it at every point – to equip it with every available weapon – and to spend its very resource in continual service. For along with this pride in one's self – this lofty and superb individualism – must go for its perfection an equal and universal sympathy and love. It is this universal sympathy which is the essence of our Socialism just as Socialism is necessary for the full perfection of the individualism and pride in ones-self [sic] which must accompany it, if it is to be perfect.

The idea contained in the first sentence of this paragraph initially seems incongruous with the socialist ideals of Wallace's audience; after all, the ILP was concerned with raising social awareness and persuading people to look outwards to the wider community rather than focusing only on themselves and their families. Yet 'unfold' is a verb that moves outwards rather than inwards, and Wallace's premise is that socialism and individualism do not need to be antithetical. As George Kateb points

²⁰³ Wallace, 'Paper read before ILP Conference at Bolton' (26 May 1894), Bolton, Whitman Collection, MS ZWN 6/2/23. This speech is also discussed in the case study of 'Pioneers! O Pioneers!'.

out in a discussion about Whitman's 'democratic individualism', 'to be individual originally meant to be indivisible'.²⁰⁴ Wallace argues that individualism in its 'best' sense is neither selfish nor laissez-faire; rather, 'perfect individualism' and 'universal sympathy' are two sides of the same coin. This is demonstrated in the final sentence of the passage above, in which Wallace uses a chiasmic structure to explain how Whitman's 'message' relates to socialism, yet exchanges 'individualism and pride' for 'universal sympathy' as interrelated parts of the same overarching message.

A fundamental part of this message was developing a sense of pride in and about the 'common people'. Wallace asserts that historically 'human interest is focussed in the select class', both in politics, and in cultural representations of society, such as theatre and literature. However, he argues that a change has occurred:

But the divine process which underlies all history has revolutionized these conceptions along with the whole structure of society. Political power is now entirely in the hands of the common people themselves if only they were wise enough to grasp and use it. Democracy – latest and best birth of time – has appeared and is advancing to possession of every throne and to universal reign. And the heroic figure of future literature will be the common average working man or working woman, who must yet absorb and manifest in themselves the highest and proudest virtues of feudal lord, or aspiring prelate, or lady of romance – merged in a broader and sweeter humanity which recognizes no class distinctions whatever.

Wallace makes the point once again that change will be both progressive and inevitable, as is indicated by the words 'process' and 'advancing'. He even uses the past tense to make the assertion that these historical assumptions, as well as society itself, have already been 'revolutionized', a wishful claim at best. Strikingly, for a speech delivered to a socialist audience, socialist rhetoric and political philosophy are entirely absent from this passage: Wallace speaks of feudalism, for example, but not the industrialism or capitalism which succeeded it; he talks about the 'common average working man', but makes no mention of the class war; he focuses on the literature which will reflect social transformation, rather than the practical means of bringing such a change about. Some of the ideas in this passage again seem incongruous with the central principles of socialism, most obviously the statement that the average working man must 'absorb' rather than reject the qualities of the feudal lord. However, as was glossed in the introduction, many *fin de siècle*

²⁰⁴ George Kateb, 'Walt Whitman and the Culture of Democracy', *Political Theory* 18:4 (November 1990), 545-571 (p.552).

socialists did not believe that class war was essential to, or necessarily even helpful for, the democratic cause, and for socialists such as Wallace and Edward Carpenter who believed in universal interconnection in a 'higher' or 'deeper' self, it was unacceptable. This passage recalls both the rhetoric and the philosophy of the opening paragraphs of *Democratic Vistas*, where Whitman states: 'America, filling the present with greatest deeds and problems, cheerfully accepting the past, including feudalism, (as, indeed, the present is but the legitimate birth of the past, including feudalism)' (p.953). The 'democratic ideal' which Wallace learned from Whitman must be able to include and synthesise its past in order to supersede it.

As the twentieth century progressed it became clear that social change was not going to be as immediate as late nineteenth-century socialists such as Wallace had believed, if indeed it was to occur at all. The events of the early twentieth century, especially the devastation of World War One, presented a challenge that utopian interpretations of socialism had to address. Like many others, Wallace and Johnston did not lose their faith in the ultimate transformation of society, but adapted their conviction in Whitmanian democracy in order to incorporate this reality. One way of accounting for the fact that Whitman's message had not yet had a far-reaching social impact was to attribute the stasis to the shortcomings of the readers of *Leaves of Grass*. At a Whitman birthday celebration in 1913 Wallace suggests:

I believe that a really true and vital apprehension of "Leaves of Grass" requires a far more advanced and complex stage of evolution on the part of the reader than is required by the other things we have mentioned, and that it must necessarily come much more slowly, and, for a time, to a smaller number.²⁰⁵

By questioning the ability of the reader to receive the message, faith in Whitman as prophet, messiah or teacher could remain intact. This concept of an elite readership seems to work against Whitman's determination, voiced in *Democratic Vistas*, to produce democratic literature that was 'not restricted by conditions ineligible to the masses' (p.986), yet his comment in the same essay about the role of the reader, discussed in the introduction, seems to support Wallace's assessment: 'Not the book needs so much to be the complete thing, but the reader of the book does' (p.1017). Admittance into Wallace's 'smaller number' of readers was not 'restricted by conditions ineligible to the masses' but was secured through the evolution of consciousness, and this would one day be experienced by all of humanity.

²⁰⁵ Wallace, 'Whitman Day 1913', Bolton, Whitman Collection, MS ZWN 2/17.

Another method of maintaining faith in the transformative power of Whitman's teaching was to extend the time period over which this process was to occur. For example, in an article published in *The Labour Leader* for the Whitman centennial in 1919, Wallace no longer preached that the advent of Whitmanian democracy was imminent, but projected both the mass acceptance of Whitman and the transformation of the social order (which he considered to be inherently linked) into the far future:

Though a century has elapsed since [his birth], his fame and influence are as yet little more than at the beginning of their growth, and it will take a much longer period in the future to fully realise the significance of his advent and the importance of his influence in relation to the new era yet to dawn upon the world.²⁰⁶

In this article, and in a pamphlet published the following year by the National Labour Press, *Walt Whitman and the World Crisis*, Wallace uses evolutionary ideas to encourage his socialist audience that the radical social change envisioned in the 1880s and 1890s would still come about. Degenerative evolution is associated with the 'old' order of civilisation, believed to be in decline, and progressive evolution with the 'new era' which would replace it:

The form of civilisation which has been gradually developing in Western Europe for several centuries, extending itself to America, and in various degrees affecting every country, is now obviously passing into its final stages of disintegration and dissolution.

As Wallace shared Whitman's preoccupation with the unified and synthesised 'whole', 'disintegration' was a particularly potent indicator that civilisation was not as it should be. Disintegration was both a result of decline and a cause of it, as Wallace makes clear in *Walt Whitman and the World Crisis*: 'Such a civilisation is doomed to destruction by its own nature. It lacks cohesion, and tends to increasing disintegration and disruption'.²⁰⁷

The certainty that current civilisation is 'doomed' is also present in the article in *The Labour Leader*:

A civilisation of this character is doomed from the beginning, and now we see its fruits in the devastation caused by a world-wide war, in the famine and misery of vast populations, in the increasing disorganisation and unrest of nations, in statesmanship utterly devoid of insight or honesty and only eager to maintain the old systems of spoliation and injustice, and in vain cries of Peace! Peace! where there is no peace.

²⁰⁶ Wallace, 'The Walt Whitman Centennial: The Man and his Message'.

²⁰⁷ Wallace, *Walt Whitman and the World Crisis* (Manchester: National Labour Press, 1920), p.2.

The 'old order' was going through a process of degeneration, whilst at the same time the 'new era' was evolving progressively:

The old order must go, and the sooner the better. Within it another order has long been preparing, towards the growth of which diverse elements have contributed, and which will yet cast off the strangling sheaths which now envelop it, and unfold into freedom and beauty of flower and fruit.

The biological metaphor illustrates the idea of 'unfolding' which permeates Wallace's writing, and is used to explain a range of beliefs, philosophies, and events; including his interpretation of Whitman: 'Everywhere and throughout all time Whitman sees a Divine Purpose forever unfolding, which justifies every stage and every detail of the process, which nothing can hinder or mar.'²⁰⁸ In this article alone it is used to describe the future transformation of the social order, Whitman's own evolution into spiritual maturity, the idea that all of humanity can do likewise, and to explain why not all readers of *Leaves of Grass* have grasped its importance yet ('his deepest meanings are reserved for those only who are ready to receive them, and are well folded and enveloped').

This principle is the foundation for Wallace's absolute certainty, which is evident not only in the ideas he advances, but in the unequivocal language that he uses: civilisation 'is' doomed, the old order 'must' go, and the new order 'will' cast off the sheaths that strangle it. Any change or development, whether it is perceived to be good or bad, is located in a process which will only have a positive eventual outcome. Though this allows hope for the future, it is also problematic, not least because the idea of a predetermined process does not allow for free will. Responsibility is removed from people, and placed onto the abstract order of civilisation; war, famine, misery and corruption are the 'fruits' of civilisation itself, rather than the actions of the people that comprise it. If everything is part of an inevitable process, people cannot be held to account for the 'old order', and it does not matter whether or not they actively try to make changes so as to bring about a new one. In *Walt Whitman and the World Crisis*, Wallace makes a qualification that seems to show that he was uneasy with these implications: 'The war—whether itself

²⁰⁸ Wallace, 'Whitman and Religion'. Though this interpretation can be supported by a line appearing in Whitman's last poem, 'A Thought of Columbus' ('A breath of Deity, as thence the bulging universe un-folding!'), the word 'unfolding' only occurs twice in the 1890-91 *Leaves of Grass* (in 'Song of Myself' and the lesser-known 'Orange Buds by Mail from Florida'). The poem 'Unfolded Out of the Folds' can be related to this concept, but is specifically concerned with the theme of great men being born from great women. 'Unfolding' only appears once in Whitman's prose, in *Specimen Days*, but not in the same context.

inevitable or not—was the beginning of a process which was certainly inevitable in some form'.²⁰⁹ Wallace goes no further than this, but the hyphenated clause indicates that some events, such as the World War, were too disturbing to be comfortably explained as being part of a predetermined plan.

In both the article and the pamphlet, Wallace follows this discussion of the current and future social orders with the claim that Whitman embodied the results of the preceding centuries of evolution, and that he played a fundamental role in the progression towards the new order. In the *Labour Leader* article Wallace writes: 'Of this new order—the era of true Democracy—Whitman is so far the greatest pioneer and exemplar'; in *Whitman and the World Crisis*: 'He is the supreme prophet and exemplar of the world-Democracy which is now beginning to appear, and which will find an ever-widening range and depth below depth of meaning in his message for centuries to come.'²¹⁰ The principle of 'unfolding' is applied to Whitman's work; it would reveal more to its interpreters as human consciousness evolved, but would also cause this evolution to occur. Though Wallace had to account for the fact that social change had not occurred by the time he had expected, the core beliefs about Whitman expressed in these later pieces remain unchanged: namely, that Whitman's message was 'at once religious and social', that democracy itself was both religious and social, and that Whitman's message therefore was fundamental to the development towards true democracy.²¹¹ *Whitman and the World Crisis* and the article in *The Labour Leader* demonstrate Wallace's conviction that the best work he could do to advance socialism was to spread Whitman's message. As I discuss in the third chapter, articles such as this that centre on literature or religion became less frequently published as the nineteenth century came to a close, and as the twentieth century progressed, religious interpretations of socialism were taken less seriously. By 1919, the views that Wallace expresses seem somewhat anachronistic. In October of the same year, he complained to the Canadian physician William Osler about the lack of devotion to Whitman by the leaders of British socialism: 'I found them fairly responsive to the social implications of his message, but with only a

²⁰⁹ Wallace, *Whitman and the World Crisis*, p.2.

²¹⁰ Wallace, *Whitman and the World Crisis*, p.6.

²¹¹ Wallace, 'The Walt Whitman Centennial: The Man and his Message'.

limited grasp of his real significance, and of the orbic range of his vision'.²¹² For Wallace, until socialists understood Whitman's message they could not bring about a truly democratic society.

²¹² Wallace to William Osler (6 October 1919), housed at the Osler Library, McGill University, Montreal. Quoted in Philip W. Leon, *Sir William Osler: Medical Humanist* (Westminster, MD: Heritage, 2007), p.13.

Chapter Two. Edward Carpenter: Translating the American Bard

Though Edward Carpenter was a well-known *fin de siècle* socialist, it is difficult to categorise his exact political allegiances. He had links with the SDF, the Socialist League, the Fellowship of the New Life, the Fabian Society and the ILP, but though he donated money to some of these organisations and spoke at their meetings, he remained a 'semi-detached sympathiser', to borrow Sheila Rowbotham's term.²¹³ As M. Wynn Thomas demonstrates, his contacts and influences came from a broad range of socialist and anarchist movements, which were blended with Christian theology and Eastern yogic mysticism to form a 'distinctively eclectic, resolutely unsystematic, and unyieldingly antiscientific brand of religio-ethical socialism'.²¹⁴ Underneath these far-reaching interpretations of socialist principles lay the democratic influence of Walt Whitman, which Carpenter discovered long before he began to develop such political beliefs. He recalls reading and re-reading the complete *Leaves of Grass* and *Democratic Vistas* from 1868 or 1869 onwards, without knowing that they were 're-shaping' his 'moral and artistic ideals'.²¹⁵

Like the Eagle Street College, Carpenter was particularly struck by the theme of comradeship, and in his autobiography *My Days and Dreams* he states that what made him 'cling to the little blue book from the beginning was largely the poems

²¹³ Rowbotham, *A Life of Liberty and Love*, p.172.

²¹⁴ Thomas, *Transatlantic Connections*, p.164.

²¹⁵ Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, p.66.

which celebrate comradeship'.²¹⁶ Carpenter's interpretation of comradeship was more obviously related to sexuality than that of the College: though he does not explicitly refer to same-sex attachment he distinguishes between the poems about comradeship and 'other pieces' (such as 'Crossing Brooklyn Ferry', 'Out of the Rocked Cradle', and 'President Lincoln's Funeral Hymn'), and comments that 'that thought, so near and personal to me, I had never before seen or heard fairly expressed; even in Plato and the Greek authors there had been something wanting'.²¹⁷ Accordingly, as Thomas observes, much of the research done into the relationship between Carpenter and Whitman focuses on 'the homosexual, the homosocial, and the homoerotic'.²¹⁸ Andrew Elfenbein makes a similar point, and remarks that 'critics usually see Whitman's homoeroticism as being at the root of [his] English success'.²¹⁹ Gregory Woods, for example, charts gay responses to Whitman from Edward Carpenter through to the present day and suggests that towards the end of Whitman's lifetime his most enthusiastic readers were English men to whom the homoeroticism in *Leaves of Grass* appealed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick maps Carpenter's response to Whitman, alongside that of John Addington Symonds, Oscar Wilde and D. H. Lawrence, onto an increasing desire amongst British middle-class homosexual men to escape the aristocratic and effeminate associations of their sexuality. William Pannapacker expands on Sedgwick's theme and argues that Carpenter's reading of *Leaves of Grass* and visit to the poet in 1877 provided a model which allowed Carpenter to construct a masculine homosexual identity in the style of Whitman which caused him to be regarded as the 'English Whitman'.²²⁰

This kind of critical work valuably contextualises the evolving relationship between Whitman and Carpenter within nineteenth-century discourses about the body, sexuality and gender. However, as in *Leaves of Grass*, 'comradeship' functions in *Towards Democracy* on both a personal and social level; for example,

²¹⁶ Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, p.65.

²¹⁷ Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, p.65. The titles of the poems are those used by Carpenter. 'President Lincoln's Funeral Hymn' was the title that Rossetti gave to 'When Lilacs Last in the Door-Yard Bloom'd'; 'Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking' (previously 'A Word Out of the Sea') was never called 'Out of the Rocked Cradle', though this was its first line in both the 1860 *Leaves of Grass* and Rossetti's selection.

²¹⁸ Thomas, *Transatlantic Connection*, p.161.

²¹⁹ Elfenbein, 'Whitman, Democracy, and the English Clerisy', p.78.

²²⁰ Woods, 'Still on My Lips'; Sedgwick, *Between Men*; William Pannapacker, *Revised Lives: Walt Whitman and Nineteenth-Century Authorship* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

Towards Democracy uses the word both in its intimate sense ('For the glorified face of him I love: the long days out alone together in the woods, the nights superb of comradeship and love'), and in reference to the transformation of society:

[Determined—is the word henceforth—to worship nothing, no ownership, which is unreal—no title-deeds, money-smells, respectabilities, authorities; [...]

Government and laws and police then fall into their places (the Earth gives her own laws); Democracy just begins to open her eyes and peep! and the rabble of unfaithful bishops, priests, generals, landlords, capitalists, lawyers, kings, queens, patronisers and polite idlers goes scuttling down into general oblivion.

Faithfulness emerges, self-reliance, self-help, passionate comradeship.²²¹

As is indicated by the final line, the two uses of 'comradeship' are not oppositional; rather, the development of democratic society was seen to rely on personal relationships, alongside qualities such as 'faithfulness' and 'self-reliance'.

Elfenbein points out that 'the writings of Whitman's [nineteenth-century] English admirers are far more likely to draw attention to his achievement as a poet of democracy than to his homosexuality'. He argues that there is a disjunction between the way that Whitman was discussed in nineteenth-century Britain and the lens through which this response tends to be analysed by contemporary critics; current perceptions about homosexuality introduce an anachronistic bias into such scholarship. This is not to suggest that criticism focused on sexuality cannot also be political, or that it does not engage with issues such as society and democracy, but that homosexuality is not necessarily the most appropriate angle from which to approach the topic of Whitman's reception in Britain. Elfenbein suggests that this is particularly relevant in Carpenter's case, because he was 'the man who more than any other forged this link between Whitman and English democracy'.²²²

An alternative approach has been to focus on the theme of discipleship. Michael Robertson, who has done this most recently in *Worshipping Walt*, goes so far as to suggest that 'none of the disciples was influenced more strongly by Whitman than Edward Carpenter'.²²³ Steven Jay Marsden devotes a third of his doctoral dissertation about Whitman's 'Hot Little Prophets' to Carpenter, also

²²¹ Carpenter, *Towards Democracy* (Manchester and London: John Heywood, 1883), p.112; p.66. Future references to this edition will appear in the text as '*Towards Democracy* 1883'. References to the complete edition of *Towards Democracy* are taken from the Gay Modern Classics reprint of the 17th impression (1931); Carpenter, *Towards Democracy* (London: GMP, 1985). These will appear in the text as '*Towards Democracy*'.

²²² Elfenbein, 'Whitman, Democracy, and the English Clerisy', p.80.

²²³ Robertson, *Worshipping Walt*, p.167.

claiming a particular importance for him on the grounds that ‘of all Whitman’s disciples, Carpenter was probably most personally influential’.²²⁴ Certainly, as with the Eagle Street College, it is useful to consider the relationship between Carpenter and Whitman in these terms, though Carpenter’s discipleship was different to that of Wallace or Johnston. Though he was profoundly affected by Whitman, his discipleship was not as all-consuming: his spiritual and political thought was influenced not only by *Leaves of Grass*, but by a range of literature, ideology and philosophy, and in contrast to the Bolton Whitmanites, his devotion to Whitman became less fervent as time passed. Though he remained convinced that *Leaves of Grass* was a divinely inspired text, his faith in Whitman himself waned.²²⁵ Robertson and Marsden explore the spiritual significance that Carpenter attached to Whitman and his work through the impact that it had on his life as well as his writings, which Marsden defends by suggesting that ‘Carpenter’s life, as much or better than his work, may be considered a reading of Walt Whitman’s writings’.²²⁶ Though this is valid, Carpenter’s life-story has already been told by a number of scholars and so the biographical approach adopted by Robertson and Marsden can be limiting.²²⁷

Andrew Elfenbein and M. Wynn Thomas work against this critical tendency by placing the text at the centre of their historicised readings. Thomas observes that ‘very rarely has [*Towards Democracy*] been examined in any textual detail’ and suggests that the ‘correspondence of vision’ between Whitman and Carpenter ‘as it operates at the most fundamental, quintessential level—that of text’ has been

²²⁴ Steven Jay Marsden, “‘Hot Little Prophets’: Reading, Mysticism, and Walt Whitman’s Disciples’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Texas A & M University, 2004), p.220.

²²⁵ This can clearly be seen in the manuscript versions of Carpenter’s articles about his two visits to Whitman, which later became *Days With Walt Whitman*. The published accounts of his visits convey a deep admiration for Whitman, though they are written in a fairly measured tone. The manuscripts are markedly different: the first (concerning the 1877 visit) reveals an unreserved adulation of the poet, and the second (1884) is overtly, and at times scathingly, critical of his former hero. Carpenter, ‘Walt Whitman in 1877’, ‘Walt Whitman in 1884’, Sheffield, Carpenter Collection, MSS 72-73.

²²⁶ Marsden, ‘Hot Little Prophets’, p.217. Pannapacker makes a similar claim: ‘Carpenter’s writings and evangelical mission suggest that Whitman’s persona as much as his poetry had a significant influence on late-Victorian social progressivism in England.’ Pannapacker, *Revised Lives*, p. xviii.

²²⁷ Though Shelia Rowbotham’s biography was published after *Worshipping Walt* and ‘Hot Little Prophets’, her other work on Carpenter includes (with Jeffrey Weeks) *Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis* (London: Pluto, 1977); ‘“Commanding the Heart”: Edward Carpenter and Friends’, *History Today*, 37:9 (September 1987), 41-46; and ‘In Search of Carpenter’, *History Workshop Journal*, 3:1 (Spring 1977), 121-133. See also Stanley Pierson ‘Edward Carpenter, Prophet of a Socialist Millenium’, *Victorian Studies*, 13:3 (1969-70), 301-18, and Chushichi Tsuzuki, *Edward Carpenter 1844-1929: Prophet of Human Fellowship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

‘overlooked’.²²⁸ Certainly, there are few examples of sustained poetic analysis in Carpenter scholarship, and the textual relationship between Carpenter and Whitman is underexplored, which opens up the possibility for literary critics to analyse the text in a variety of ways. As was discussed in the previous chapter, Elfenbein asserts that Whitman’s poetry anchored a moment of populist elitism, and he argues that Carpenter’s response to Whitman can be understood as a rewriting of Coleridge’s concept of the ‘clerisy’. Thomas focuses on Carpenter’s socialist radicalism and how Whitman’s American poetry was converted ‘into the different sociopolitical idiom of Carpenter’s English culture’.²²⁹ Though different socio-historic arguments are made, two key points are revealed through the importance that both critics attach to the text: first, that an analysis of the formal properties of *Towards Democracy* and *Leaves of Grass* can add to the debate about ideological correspondences between Whitman and Carpenter; and second, that Carpenter’s work can helpfully be considered as an interpretation or ‘translation’ of Whitman’s.

In this sense, the writing of *Towards Democracy* can be treated as an act of reception and the text can be analysed as an English reading of Whitman’s work. Elfenbein outlines the significance of such a critical paradigm:

In the history of Whitman’s reception, critics have seen Edward Carpenter only as an admirer and imitator. Recognizing the centrality of Carpenter’s role in Whitman’s reception, however, demands that critics give him a more active place in the late-nineteenth-century literary scene than they usually have.²³⁰

Elfenbein suggests that ‘a truer understanding of Carpenter would see him less as imitator than as translator: he actively reshaped Whitman to meet English desires’, a judgement which is reiterated by Thomas:

What is singular about *Towards Democracy*, at least in some places, is its uncanny textual approximation to *Leaves of Grass*. What is accomplished is not, however, replication but reproduction—a re-producing of the text from a significantly different kind of “source”: the source of Carpenter’s own personal, distinctive, and English imagination.²³¹

This underpins my analysis of *Towards Democracy*, a text which, like Elfenbein and Thomas, I consider to be a response to *Leaves of Grass* rather than an imitation of it.

²²⁸ Thomas, *Transatlantic Connections*, p.170.

²²⁹ Thomas, *Transatlantic Connections* p.171.

²³⁰ Elfenbein, ‘Whitman, Democracy, and the English Clerisy’, p.81. As an example of the ‘typical treatment’ Carpenter has received, Elfenbein gives the example of D. K. Barua, ‘Where Two Visions Met: Whitman and Carpenter’, in *Modern Studies and Other Essays in Honour of Dr. R. K. Sinha*, ed. by R. C. Prasad and A. K. Sharma (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1987), pp.122-140.

²³¹ Thomas, *Transatlantic Connections* p.171.

Thomas's work, which situates Carpenter within the British socialist tradition, has been particularly relevant to my own, and is complemented rather than rebutted by this chapter, which analyses the ways in which the thematic content and formal properties of *Leaves of Grass* were adapted by Carpenter in *Towards Democracy* in order to communicate a socialist democratic ideal to his British readership.

The act of 'translating' Whitman depended on the negotiation of his Americanness, a major feature of *Leaves of Grass* to which Rossetti drew attention in the preface to *Poems by Walt Whitman*: 'The book, then, taken as a whole, is the poem both of Personality and of Democracy; and, it may be added, of American nationalism'.²³² The way that American nationalism is attached to the first statement about the central themes of *Leaves of Grass* and the hesitance of the phrase 'it may be added' indicates that British admirers had some discomfort about this aspect of the text. Whitman's ideas about 'personality' and 'democracy' had a profound impact on Carpenter's world-view, but his Americanness was problematic: Thomas, for example, states unequivocally that 'Whitman's Americanism was, for Carpenter, not a neutral factor, nor a positive (let alone an inspirational) one, but an actual obstacle.'²³³ Whitman's 'message' had to be reclaimed in such a way that its universality was stressed and its Americanness largely sidestepped, a premise which was sanctioned by Whitman's own changing sense of his work's purpose: 'Up to this time', he told Carpenter in 1877, 'I have had America chiefly in view, but this appreciation of me in England makes me think I might perhaps do the same for the old world also'.²³⁴

The relationship between *Towards Democracy* and *Leaves of Grass* was much discussed by contemporary critics, and Carpenter was rarely considered without reference to Whitman. In response, he addressed the issue in an article first published in *The Labour Prophet* in May 1894.²³⁵ He negotiates between acknowledging Whitman's importance and extracting *Towards Democracy* from the shadow of *Leaves of Grass*. This is demonstrated by the fact that he only mentions Whitman at the end of his explanation about the genesis of his poetry, yet compares

²³² Rossetti, *Poems*, p.5.

²³³ Thomas, *Transatlantic Connections*, p.186.

²³⁴ Carpenter, *Days With Walt Whitman*, p.14.

²³⁵ Carpenter, 'A Note on "Towards Democracy"', *Labour Prophet* (May 1894), pp.49-51; reprinted in *Towards Democracy*, pp.409-415.

his influence to that 'of the sun or the winds'. This sentiment is enacted in the sentence which summarises it: "'Leaves of Grass' 'filtered and fibred' my blood: but I do not think I ever tried to imitate it or its style.' Carpenter shows how Whitman has influenced his own expression by using a phrase from 'Song of Myself' ('filter and fibre your blood', p.88), but the quotation marks ensure that there is a distinction between his and Whitman's voice.

Carpenter vacillates between aligning himself with Whitman and dissociating himself from him:

Whatever resemblance there may be between the rhythm, style, thoughts, constructions, etc., of the two books, must I think be set down to a deeper similarity of emotional atmosphere and intension in the two authors—even though that similarity may have sprung and no doubt did largely spring out of the personal influence of one upon the other. Anyhow our temperaments, standpoints, antecedents, etc., are so entirely diverse and opposite that, except for a few points, I can hardly imagine that there is much real resemblance to be traced.

In order to refute the charge commonly levelled against *Towards Democracy* – that it stood in an imitative or derivative relationship to *Leaves of Grass* – Carpenter attributes literary similarities to personal likenesses, and acknowledges the impact that Whitman had upon his own personal development; however, he makes an abrupt about-turn in his argument and by the time he returns to the word 'resemblance' its validity is denied. Though the first sentence admits that there are similarities the word 'opposite' emphatically distances his work from Whitman's. This was not necessarily paradoxical for Carpenter; as this chapter will demonstrate, he believed that *Leaves of Grass* and *Towards Democracy* emanated from the same divine source, allowing them to be different yet represent the same fundamental 'truth'.

Carpenter uses a figurative register to tease out the differences between his work and Whitman's. Whitman is described thus:

He has the amplitude of the Earth itself, and can no more be *thought away* than a mountain can. He often indeed reminds one of a great quarry on a mountain side—the great shafts of sunlight and the shadows, the primitive face of the rock itself, the power and the daring of the men at work upon it, the tumbled blocks and masses, materials for endless buildings, and the beautiful tufts of weed or flower on inaccessible ledges.

In this sustained catalogue each image is linked associatively with the next, investing Whitman with a range of qualities progressing down from the cosmic ('Earth itself') to the ephemeral ('tufts of weed'), most of which are contained in the long second sentence, reflecting structurally how Whitman was believed to contain all of them at

once. The imagery creates an impression of exhaustiveness and magnitude, and encompasses the force of both nature and man. This is contrasted with Carpenter's metaphorical description of his own poetic style:

"Towards Democracy" has a milder radiance, as of the moon compared with the sun—allowing you to glimpse the stars behind. Tender and meditative, less resolute and altogether less massive, it has the quality of the fluid and yielding air rather than of the solid and uncompromising earth.

Carpenter uses first an astronomical simile and then an elemental metaphor to contrast the qualities of *Towards Democracy* with that of *Leaves of Grass*. However, this comparative imagery does not simply stress the differences between the two texts, but qualifies Carpenter's previous claim that he and Whitman were 'opposite' by placing the texts in an associative and complementary relationship.

Though Carpenter attempts both to clarify and dismiss Whitman's influence, the metaphorical comparisons that he uses do not provide solid evidence of the differences between the two poets. Instead, they rely on the reader sharing Carpenter's 'sense' of the texts and attributing the same qualities to the imagery that he uses – associating the moon with gentleness, the sun with forcefulness, and so on. Many of the reviewers of *Towards Democracy* employed the same technique to compare and contrast the two poets: for example, Whitman was Dionysiac but Carpenter could not intoxicate;²³⁶ Whitman was chaos but Carpenter was a system;²³⁷ Whitman sang 'joyous martial music' but Carpenter fortified tired wanderers to 'fill their places in ranks marching to certain victory';²³⁸ Whitman was like the 'hammered and wrought metal of Vulcan's smithy' but Carpenter was like the 'tempered steel of a sword blade';²³⁹ Whitman was a crag but Carpenter was a boulder (though the reviewer qualifies that the rock was 'hard in both').²⁴⁰ Using different imagery to make the same point, these reviewers seem to agree that *Towards Democracy* was milder and gentler than *Leaves of Grass*; however, the reliance on metaphor and simile suggests that there were difficulties involved in critically explaining the relationship between the two texts. This is alluded to earlier in a letter from Havelock Ellis to Carpenter:

²³⁶ Anon., 'Towards Democracy', *Times Literary Supplement* (20 September 1917), p.450.

²³⁷ Holbrook Jackson, 'Edward Carpenter', *Yorkshire Weekly Post* (13 January 1906), p.15.

²³⁸ Helena Born, 'Poets of the Revolt: Carpenter', *Conservator* (May 1896), p.37.

²³⁹ Anon., 'Towards Freedom and Equality. An Interview with Mr. Edward Carpenter', *Christian Commonwealth* (11 December 1912), p.177.

²⁴⁰ F. J. Gould, 'Carpenter's "Towards Democracy"', supplement to *Literary Guide* (October 1903).

I find that Roden Noel, a warm admirer of Whitman (though he will call him 'disgusting') and who hates imitations, has the same feeling about T[owards] D[emocracy] that I have – that it is not an imitation. At the same time I cannot at present altogether justify my feeling – though I think I shall be able to do so in time.²⁴¹

Ellis is unable to provide a rationale for the impression he has that the texts are different. This is echoed by Ernest Crosby at the beginning of the twentieth century, who posits that 'the two men differ from each other and yet it is not easy to point out the difference.'²⁴²

One way to explain the differences between the texts was to attribute them to nationality. Commentators frequently aligned Carpenter with England and Whitman with America, which is evident in the labelling of Carpenter as 'the English Whitman'. Speaking at a meeting of the Bolton Labour Church, Charles Sixsmith proposed that the differences between the two men and the two texts matched the differences between America and England.²⁴³ He suggested that Whitman and America were 'primitive', 'youthful', 'vigorous', 'ample', 'multitudinous', 'cosmopolitan', 'modern', 'massive', 'elemental', 'egotistic', 'formless', 'coarse' and 'rough', and in contrast, Carpenter and England were 'matured', 'cultured', 'deep', 'sensitive', 'meditative', 'refined', 'gentle', 'intuitive', 'thoughtful' and 'retiring'. Despite such differences, Sixsmith concludes that the two poets expressed an 'identical message': *Leaves of Grass* and *Towards Democracy* had a common 'meaning' but refracted it through different national lenses.

However, nationality was also used by reviewers who believed that *Towards Democracy* was imitative, to criticise Carpenter's style on the grounds that it was at variance with the spirit of England. An anonymous writer in *The Speaker*, for example, claimed that there was 'reason in Walt Whitman's formless rhapsodies':

America, the immense, unmanageable subject, with its great war long-drawn-out—the incomplete, travailing new world—could not be sung, could only be blurted and gasped in mouthfuls, sometimes rhythmic, sometimes not, of wild and whirling words. But we can find no reason in Mr. Carpenter's imitation of Whitman. England, an ancient, lordly country, well-groomed, well-barbered,

²⁴¹ Havelock Ellis to Carpenter (29 March 1885), Sheffield, Carpenter Collection, MS 357/2. Ellis notoriously first dismissed *Toward Democracy* as 'Whitman and water' but later revised this judgement.

²⁴² Edward Crosby, *Edward Carpenter: Poet and Prophet* (Philadelphia: Conservator, 1901), p.4.

²⁴³ Charles Sixsmith, 'Edward Carpenter: Poet and Reformer', Notebooks 1898/1899, JRUL, Sixsmith Collections, MS 1171/1/3/2/1. Sixsmith first gave this lecture at the Farnworth Literary Society.

can never have—at least, for long has not had—any meaning deserving expression that may not find formal utterance.²⁴⁴

Blodgett's claim that 'by 1870 democracy as a public issue was felt to be settled' is challenged by the description of England as 'ancient' and 'lordly', adjectives which associate the nation with feudalism and aristocracy rather than democracy.²⁴⁵ The personification of England as 'well-groomed' and 'well-barbered' juxtaposes it with America as represented by the 'bearded roughs' in *Leaves of Grass*. Style is related to nationality: each nation has a 'meaning' which precedes its expression, and is inherently bound to a particular system of signification. The formal properties of *Leaves of Grass* were defensible because they were appropriate to the 'meaning' of America, but Carpenter's Englishness rendered a similar style undesirable and inappropriate.

Both uses of nationality rely on ideas that can be traced back to Whitman's prose: that the relationship between a poet and his nation was fundamentally important ('[A bard's] spirit responds to his country's spirit', p.7)²⁴⁶ and that each nation 'demands' its own form of poetic expression:

America demands a poetry that is bold, modern, and all-surrounding and kosmical, as she is herself. It must in no respect ignore science or the modern, but inspire itself with science and the modern. It must bend its vision toward the future, more than the past. Like America, it must extricate itself from even the greatest models of the past, and, while courteous to them, must have entire faith in itself, and the products of its own democratic spirit only. Like her, it must place in the van, and hold up at all hazards, the banner of the divine pride of man himself. (pp.1003-1004)

The phrase 'America demands' finely equivocates between its two possible meanings: that America 'needs', but also that America 'calls for'. The repetition of the word 'like' flags up the analogous relationship between subject matter and the poetry that is to embody it, an idea which was also voiced by Emerson in 'The Poet': 'America is a poem in our eyes; its ample geography dazzles the imagination, and it

²⁴⁴ Anon., *Speaker* (2 July 1892), pp.28-29.

²⁴⁵ Blodgett, *Whitman in England*, p.219.

²⁴⁶ Whitman expands upon this concept in an anonymous review of his own *Leaves of Grass* and Tennyson's *Maud and Other Poems*: 'No nation ever did or ever will receive with national affection any poets except those born of its national blood. Of these, the writings express the finest infusions of government, traditions, faith, and the dependence or independence of a people, and even the good or the bad physiognomy, and the ample or small geography. Thus what very properly fits the subject of the British crown may fit very ill an American freeman. No fine romance, no inimitable delineation of character, no grace of delicate illustrations, no rare picture of shore or mountain or sky, no deep thought of the intellect, is so important to a man as his opinion of himself is; everything receives its tinge from that.' Whitman, 'An English and American Poet', *American Phrenological Journal*, 22:4 (October 1855), pp.90-1.

will not wait long for meters'.²⁴⁷ Whitman's metaphor of the military vanguard emphasises his belief that American literature must turn from past poetic conventions and enter new stylistic territory, an argument which the writer in *The Speaker* turns around in order to assert that Britain should conversely find 'formal utterance' for its 'meanings'.

These invocations of nationality also depended on a Whitmanian construction of America. With the exception of 'cosmopolitan', all the adjectives that Sixsmith applied to America and Whitman were used in *Leaves of Grass* to either describe the United States or its citizens. Similarly, in the review in *The Speaker*, words such as 'immense', 'wild' and 'elemental' gesture back to the vision of the United States in *Leaves of Grass* rather than the capitalist and industrial nation that it had become. Whitman's America was a site of promise and, as has already been discussed, a site of democratic promise; some reviewers made use of the fact that parallels could therefore be drawn between what was needed for America and what was needed for democracy. For example, the socialist writer Moncur Sime alludes to Emerson's demand for the ideal poet (often seen to be fulfilled by Whitman), but rewrites it for the socialist cause:

Someone has said that while we have had many able writers who were thoroughgoing Socialists, and many great Socialists who have been able writers, we still await the great Socialist writer. It is suggested that the writer we are awaiting must have prophetic vision and great literary power. In Carpenter such an one has indeed come.²⁴⁸

In short, Carpenter was to be to socialism what Whitman was to American democracy.

Reviewers of *Towards Democracy* did not only look back to *Leaves of Grass*, but considered Carpenter to be part of a British democratic literary tradition into which, as M. Wynn Thomas observes, Whitman was often also assimilated in order to repudiate his Americanness. (Thomas gives the example of Robert Blatchford, who frequently associated Whitman with British writers: 'We are indebted to the idol-breaking of Carlyle, to the ideal-making of Ruskin, and to the trumpet-tongued proclamation by the titanic Whitman of the great message of true Democracy and the

²⁴⁷ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Complete Prose Work of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. by G. T. Bettany, 6th edn (London: Ward, Lock, Bowden, 1889), p.101.

²⁴⁸ A. H. Moncur Sime, *Edward Carpenter: His Ideas and Ideals* (London: Trübner, 1916), p.18.

brave and sweet comradeship of the natural life'.)²⁴⁹ Of these British writers, Carpenter was most often considered in relation to Carlyle, although once again, this strategy was used both to criticise and praise *Towards Democracy*. One scathing review dismissed *Towards Democracy* as 'a haphazard collection of fallacies, to which the semblance of a basis is given by half a dozen truisms, with flavour added by a little Carlylese or by diluted extracts of Walt Whitman'.²⁵⁰ A more positive, though far from enthusiastic, appraisal concluded that 'the author has tried to write Carlylese in the style of Walt Whitman, and it may be granted that he has fairly succeeded.'²⁵¹ On the other hand, an anonymous reviewer in 1914 looked back on the Victorian age and, adapting Whitman's spiritual model, suggested that it 'could justifiably plead one redeeming feature—the production of the "square deific"—Carlyle and Ruskin and Morris and Carpenter'.²⁵² Socialist reviewers tended to trace Carpenter's poetic lineage back through Whitman to Shelley and Blake, again incorporating Whitman into a line of British democratic poets and providing a context for his influence on Carpenter.²⁵³

Like *Leaves of Grass*, *Towards Democracy* was adapted over the period of its publication, though the nature of this reworking differed: *Leaves of Grass* was an open-ended body of work, subject to a continual process of revision, addition and rearranging; conversely, with the exception of the title poem which was rewritten with some significant changes between the first publication in 1883 and the second in 1885, Carpenter revised neither the poems themselves, nor their arrangement in *Towards Democracy*. In a procedure more akin to Whitman's later practice of adding annexes than to his earlier re-ordering, Carpenter added clusters of poems to the text as it stood: the 1883 edition comprised only 'Towards Democracy'; 'Children of Freedom' was added in 1885, and 'After Civilisation' in 1892; 'Who Shall Command the Heart' was published separately in 1902, and the complete edition containing all four parts was first issued in 1905. In both *Leaves of Grass* and *Towards Democracy* the tenor of the poems shifts and changes as the poets' political and spiritual visions were adapted in the light of their personal experiences

²⁴⁹ Thomas, *Transatlantic Connections*, p.166.

²⁵⁰ Anon., 'Democracy in Prose and Otherwise', *Saturday Review* (27 March 1886), p.449.

²⁵¹ Anon., 'Towards Democracy', *Literary World* (30 April 1886), pp.423-424 (p.424).

²⁵² Anon., 'Edward Carpenter', *Co-operative News* (5 September 1914), p.1150.

²⁵³ For example, in 1896 Helena Born wrote a series of three articles in *The Conservator* entitled 'Poets of the Revolt: Shelley, Whitman and Carpenter'.

and those of their nations. This is reflected in both the thematic content and formal properties of the texts. Carpenter is often accused of lacking the rhythmic skill and musicality of Whitman; however, the evidence provided is typically from the more prosaic and overtly didactic poems of 'Who Shall Command the Heart' rather than those like 'Towards Democracy' which more closely recall the cadences of poems such as 'Song of Myself'.

The Unfolding Nature of Democracy

In *My Days and Dreams* Carpenter set apart *Towards Democracy* from his other writing, claiming that it was 'the centre from which the other books have radiated' and that 'it was written from a different *plane* from the other works, from some predominant mood or consciousness superseding the purely intellectual'.²⁵⁴ It was aligned with *Leaves of Grass* and other texts which Carpenter believed to function on this supra-intellectual level. The mark of such a text was the ability to withstand repeated re-readings without 'becoming stale', a phenomenon which Carpenter suggested had not been adequately tackled by 'literary criticism':

How is it possible that the same phrase or concatenation of words should bear within itself meaning behind meaning, horizon after horizon of significance and suggestion? Yet such undoubtedly is the case. Portions of the poetic and religious literature of most countries, and large portions of books like *Leaves of Grass*, the *Bhagavat Gita*, Plato's *Banquet*, Dante's *Divina Commedia*, have this inexhaustible germinative quality. One returns to them again and again, and continually finds fresh interpretations lurking beneath the old and familiar words.²⁵⁵

Read as a temporal trope, the word 'behind' flags up the significance of the past whilst the word 'after' gestures towards an evolving future. The act of reading is depicted as a process of Lamarckian evolution or, as Carpenter calls it, exfoliation.

Carpenter's interpretation of Lamarckian evolutionary theory has been well described by Ruth Livesey and Tony Brown but as it underpins his understanding of society, spirituality and literature, it is worth outlining in brief.²⁵⁶ The term

²⁵⁴ Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, p.190.

²⁵⁵ Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, p.191.

²⁵⁶ Ruth Livesey, 'Morris, Carpenter, Wilde, and the Political Aesthetics of Labor', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 32:2 (September 2004), 601-616 (p.610); *Edward Carpenter and Late Victorian Radicalism*, ed. by Tony Brown (London: Frank Cass, 1990), pp.5-6. For Carpenter's own

'exfoliation' was lifted from *Specimen Days*, though Whitman himself glosses it as Darwinian: 'One of my cherish'd themes for a never-achiev'd poem has been the two impetuses of man and the universe—in the latter, creation's incessant unrest, exfoliation, (Darwin's evolution, I suppose)' (p.945). Carpenter, however, applies it to his adaptation of Lamarck's theory of the inheritance of acquired traits (that what is learnt by one individual can be incorporated genetically and passed along to its offspring). Carpenter did not deny that there were external causes for development, but suggested that the internal force was 'the most consistent and reliable factor in [man's] modification, while the external force—arising from various and remote causes—must rather be regarded as discontinuous and accidental'.²⁵⁷ Instead of translating Lamarck's *besoin* as 'necessity' or 'need', Carpenter used the word 'desire'; evolution is an unfolding that stems primarily from internal yearning. He summarises: 'Desire, or inward change, comes first, action follows, and organisation or outward structure is the result.'²⁵⁸

Applied to the act of reading, this suggests that every meeting with the text produces a 'meaning' which is internalised and developed by each subsequent reading of the 'old and familiar words': 'Begin to-day to understand', commands the speaker of 'Have Faith', 'that which you will not understand when you have read these words for the first time, nor perhaps when you have read them for the hundredth time' (*Towards Democracy*, p.146). In the passage from *My Days and Dreams*, the word 'behind' also functions as a spatial trope, indicating that all meanings are co-existent within the same linguistic space. Each signifier contains multiple signifieds which can be unpeeled or 'unfolded' in order to reveal the others behind. This further clarifies Carpenter's understanding of Lamarckian evolution, and can be illustrated using the biological metaphor of the husk which recurs throughout his poetry and prose:

Thus in the growth of a plant we find leaf after leaf appearing, petal within petal—a continual exfoliation of husks, sepals, petals, stamens and what-not; but the object of all this movement, and that which in a sense sets it all in motion, namely the seed, is the very last thing of all to be manifested.²⁵⁹

detailed description, see the chapter on 'Exfoliation' in *Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure*, Complete Edition (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1921).

²⁵⁷ Carpenter, *Civilisation*, p.185.

²⁵⁸ Carpenter, *Civilisation*, p.186.

²⁵⁹ Carpenter, *Civilisation*, p.199.

The last thing to be 'manifested' is also the beginning of the process. What appears to be a linear progression is in fact cyclical. This is enacted in the structure of 'Towards Democracy' which is book-ended with the same imagery: the mirror, the little red stars, and the cry of the pewit; it is also represented temporally by the annual cycle: 'the year begins again' (*Towards Democracy* 1883, p.118). Each re-reading of these special texts unfolds a new meaning which eventually reveals the source out of which each meaning is written and read.

Carpenter contrasts the text that lends itself to this type of exfoliatory reading with those that are exhausted after one encounter with the text, 'like statements say of church doctrine or political or scientific theory'. The latter are thought to present merely 'an intellectual "view" of some fact', whereas in the former 'in some mysterious way the words succeed in conveying the fact itself'. He explains this metaphorically:

It is like the difference between the actual solid shape of a mountain and the different views of the mountain obtainable from different sides. They are two things of a different order and dimension. It almost seems as if some mountain-facts of our experience *can* be imaged forth by words in such a way that the phrases themselves retain this quality of solidity, and consequently their outlines of meaning vary according to the angle at which the reader approaches them and the variation of the reader's mind. None of the outlines are final, and the solid content of the phrase remains behind and eludes them all.²⁶⁰

The 'fact' presented by such literature is therefore fixed, yet is also somehow open to interpretation. There is a transcendental signifier, yet the reader also contributes to the production of meaning. In some ways this passage can be seen as a precursor to Iser's theory of aesthetic response in that 'one text is potentially capable of several different realizations, and no reading can ever exhaust the full potential, for each individual reader will fill in the gaps in his own way'.²⁶¹ Carpenter understands the relationship between text and reader to be interactive, and he allows for the fact that the same reader can interpret the same text in different ways at different times. However, he restricts this kind of interactive and accumulative reading to a special kind of text, believed to communicate fundamental 'truths' which existed outside of it. The mutability of the text itself is denied: Carpenter does not recognise that 'phrases' are subject to semantic change but likens them to a 'mountain' which retains its essential shape.

²⁶⁰ Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, p.191.

²⁶¹ Iser, *Implied Reader*, p.280.

Carpenter understood this kind of literature to be divinely inspired, in the sense that the divine is the collective spirit of man. In ‘A Note on “Towards Democracy”’, he explained his belief in a ‘region of Self’ which was common to every person; in a letter to Kate Salt he wrote that ‘the individual “I” ascends and becomes one with the universal “I”, and sharer of the most intense happiness, without at the same time losing its true individuality’.²⁶² This recalls Whitman’s thematic and poetic concern with the ‘many in one’, but also draws on ideas found in more canonical Victorian poetry, such as Robert Browning’s ‘Old Pictures in Florence’:

When I say “you” ’tis the common soul,
The collective, I mean—the race of Man
That receives life in parts to live in a whole,²⁶³

The keynote of this idea is universal interconnectedness. For Carpenter, this is connected to his understanding of the divine, which he does not see as an omnipotent and hierarchical figure, but finds it instead in the collective spirit of humankind.

Carpenter believed that writers such as Whitman had tapped into this composite consciousness, and that it was both the source and subject of their writing. Whitman’s thematic concern with comradeship and the merging of identities seemed to substantiate this view. It was also reinforced by Carpenter’s conviction that the same essential message could be found in teachings and texts from different religions, cultures, time periods, and geographic regions. For example, in the same letter to Kate Salt, sent from Ceylon in 1890, he noted how the ‘ancient occult or divine knowledge’ of the East conveyed the same ‘truths’ (Carpenter’s word) that he had intuitively grasped a decade earlier: ‘Of course it interests me tremendously that these facts corroborate the ideas in T[owards] D[emocracy] most closely. I had thought before it wd [sic] be so—but could not feel certain til now’.²⁶⁴ To Carpenter, it was evident that there was a common ‘meaning’ in these ‘mountain-fact’ or sacred texts which preceded their utterance, and the universal ‘I’ was not merely the subject of these works but was an active agent in their creation. Radically, when he was a curate, Carpenter preached that the Bible was not the only scriptural text: ‘With that

²⁶² Carpenter to Kate Salt (24 November 1890), Sheffield, Carpenter Collection, MS 354/11.

²⁶³ Robert Browning, ‘Old Pictures in Florence’, *The Poems of Browning, Vol 3: 1847-1861*, ed. by John Woolford, Daniel Karlin and Joseph Phelan (Harlow: Pearson/Longman, 2007), pp.316-341 (p.325), ll.109-111.

²⁶⁴ Carpenter to Kate Salt (24 November 1890).

faith we shall feel that all pure actions do spring from God as truly as the actions of Christ Himself, that all holy and true words are as much His inspiration as the words of the most sacred of Books.²⁶⁵ Carpenter saw *Towards Democracy* as one such text, and referred to it as his 'prophetic writings'.²⁶⁶

This belief was shared by many socialist activists who described both Carpenter and *Towards Democracy* in spiritual terms. Ernest Crosby, for example, called his book *Edward Carpenter: Poet and Prophet*. Tom Swan claimed that in the future it would be seen that Carpenter was 'undoubtedly one of [England's] sanest and most clear-voiced prophets'.²⁶⁷ As well as claiming *Towards Democracy* as the Bible for his generation of socialists, Fenner Brockway asserted: 'Edward Carpenter was the greatest spiritual inspiration of our lives.'²⁶⁸ Katharine Glasier also saw it as a 'bible', but in conjunction with *Leaves of Grass*: 'It is no exaggeration for many of us inside and outside the political Socialist movement to say that Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and Edward Carpenter's *Towards Democracy* have become as a kind of Twentieth-Century Old and New Testament, fulfilling rather than destroying the works of others that have gone before them in our lives.'²⁶⁹ Glasier's comment supports Carpenter's belief that his work was different to Whitman's but emanated from the same divine source. For Wallace, both Whitman and Carpenter were engaged in the interpretation of the transcendental and pre-linguistic concept of 'true democracy' which would reveal the spiritual nature of democratic thought and have a transformative effect on the individual reader and then out to his or her society. In an article in *The Labour Leader* in 1917 he claimed that Carpenter had 'given to Democracy its deepest and widest interpretation' of all living people, and gave more importance to this than the fact that he had 'served with distinction in all the movements of the time which have made for the complete democratisation of our social and industrial life'.²⁷⁰

Carpenter had reservations about Richard Maurice Bucke's *Cosmic Consciousness* but he shared Bucke's belief in the evolutionary nature of

²⁶⁵ Carpenter, Untitled Sermon, pp.17-18, Sheffield, Carpenter Collection, MS 2-8.

²⁶⁶ Carpenter to Charles Oates (27 November 1882), Sheffield, Carpenter Collection, MS 351/25.

²⁶⁷ Tom Swan, *Edward Carpenter: The Man and his Message* (London: A. C. Fifield, 1913), p.29.

²⁶⁸ Brockway, 'A Memory of Edward Carpenter'.

²⁶⁹ Katharine Glasier, 'Edward Carpenter's Influence', in *Edward Carpenter: In Appreciation*, ed. by Gilbert Beith (London: Allen and Unwin, 1931), p.86.

²⁷⁰ James William Wallace, 'Edward Carpenter and His New Book', *Labour Leader* (27 December 1917), p.4.

consciousness, which he had discussed with him years before the book was published.²⁷¹ This belief is summarised in Carpenter's *Pagan and Christian Creeds* in which he asserts that there are three 'great stages' of consciousness:

These stages are (1) that of the simple or animal consciousness, (2) that of *self*-consciousness, and (3) that of a third stage of consciousness which has not as yet been effectively named, but whose indications and precursive signs we here and there perceive in the rites and prophecies and mysteries of the early religions, and in the poetry and art and literature generally of the later civilisations.²⁷²

Carpenter had previously called this unnamed third stage 'cosmic consciousness', the label later adopted by Bucke. Like Wallace, Carpenter understood this process to be played out through the development of the human race as a whole, yet each person had the potential to reach the third stage of consciousness through their own individual evolutionary process. This helps to explain why 'precurative signs' or 'indications' of cosmic consciousness could be found throughout history, in periods before the human race had reached the highest level of spiritual awareness. Individuals or communal groups who had evolved fully enough to enter into this kind of consciousness were able to communicate their knowledge and experience in various forms: spiritual ritual, myths and legends, art, music, prose and poetry. By claiming that these 'precurative signs' could be perceived in some of the 'early religions', then in the art of 'later civilisations', Carpenter traces the thread of universal consciousness from the religious through to the artistic sphere: for him, artistic works had become more effective conduits of spiritual 'truth' than religion as it was practised in the late-nineteenth century.

This has an impact on the notion of authorship. In the same way that the shaman does not 'create' his stories, but supposedly has access to a spiritual realm that most people are unable to reach and so acts as a channel for them, the poet who writes out of cosmic consciousness acts as a translator or a scribe of this level of spiritual understanding. Carpenter believed that the text was inspired neither by an individual's own creative genius nor, as with the prophets of monotheistic religions, by an omniscient god who had chosen a deserving person to speak through, but by

²⁷¹ In a letter to Charles Sixsmith, Carpenter said that *Cosmic Consciousness* was 'rather a mixture' and joked that his name was 'scattered about in a dangerous way'; Carpenter to Sixsmith (4 September 1901), JRUL, Sixsmith Collections, MS 1171/1/4/9.

²⁷² Carpenter, *Pagan and Christian Creeds: Their Origin and Meaning* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1920), p.16.

the divine that is created out of all humanity past and present. This distances the author from his work and emphasises its communality. Like Whitman in the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*, Carpenter leaves his name off the title page and cover of the first edition of *Towards Democracy*. However, as Thomas observes, he refrains from identifying himself in the text in the same way that Whitman does in 'Song of Myself' ('Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos, p.50), but introduces 'Walt Whitman, Christ, your own Self' at an equivalent point in the text (*Towards Democracy* 1883, p.102). Thomas suggests that this moment offers a 'clue' to the strategy that Carpenter developed in order to deal with Whitman's presence in his life and to 'de-Americanize' the poet: 'Here, as throughout his works, Carpenter treats Whitman as the modern prophetic incarnation of "the eternal Saviour, the sought after of all the world, dwelling hidden; (yet to be disclosed) within each."' ²⁷³ I would add that it is not only Whitman's role that is being negotiated, but also that of the reader and that of the author. Carpenter wrote to James William Wallace:

You must not look upon T[owards] D[emocracy] too especially as my work—since it is only like a letter written from the land which is our common home, which I happen to have visited once or twice, and imperfectly described—and which all may, nay must, not only visit but inhabit. ²⁷⁴

The author's role is glossed over; the 'democratic' text is to be considered collectively; *Towards Democracy* belonged to the equivalent figures of Whitman, Christ, or the reader, as much as it did to Carpenter. A similar sentiment is found in Whitman's 'Song of Myself' and is echoed in *Towards Democracy*: 'These are the thoughts of all men in all ages and lands, they are not original with me, / If they are not yours as much as mine they are nothing or next to nothing' (p.43); '*Not of myself—I have no power of myself— / But out of you who read do I write these words*' (*Towards Democracy*, p.130).

Carpenter was not the only socialist to be concerned with the issue of collective art, and his insistence on the communal nature of *Towards Democracy* should not be considered in isolation. Rather, Anne Janowitz notes the frequent use

²⁷³ Thomas, *Transatlantic Connections*, p.187; Thomas quotes from *Towards Democracy*, p.207.

²⁷⁴ Carpenter to Wallace (19 July 1892), Bolton, Whitman Collection, MS ZWN 9/149. Whitman expresses a similar sentiment in conversation with Traubel; he explains why he omitted his name from the title page: 'It was deliberate—not an accident. It would be sacrilege to put a name there—it would seem just like putting a name on the universe. It would be ridiculous to think of *Leaves of Grass* belonging to any one person: at most I am only a mouthpiece. My name occurs inside the book—that is enough if not more than enough. I like the feeling of a general partnership—as if the *Leaves* was anybody's who chooses just as truly as mine.' Traubel, *Whitman in Camden*, II, pp.77-78.

of identifying tags such as ‘chant’, ‘hymn’ and ‘song’ in the titles of socialist poetry and suggests that they deliberately recall collective oral poetic traditions.²⁷⁵ Janowitz also cites William Morris’s praise for epic poems on the basis that ‘they are in no sense the work of individuals, but have grown up from the very heart of the people’.²⁷⁶ Extending Janowitz’s work, Ruth Livesey argues that the ‘reclamation’ of the lyric poem by socialist writers such as Morris showed ‘an aspect of the lyric that is interventionist and plural, voicing the social instantiation of a lyric “we”, and invited a new reading of lyric poetry ‘as a site of collective engagement’.²⁷⁷ Carpenter and Morris sought art forms that were, in Livesey’s words, outside ‘capitalist individualism’. For Carpenter, this involved exploring aesthetic modes such as Whitman’s that could move beyond the transaction between an individual writing ‘I’ and an individual reading ‘you’. The idea was not new to socialism (for example, in relation to *In Memoriam* Tennyson commented that “‘I” is not always the author speaking of himself, but the voice of the human race speaking thro’ him’), but for Carpenter it was an essential part of the evolution towards an ideal democracy.²⁷⁸

Unlike Whitman, who demanded that the ‘expression of the American poet’ was to be ‘transcendent and new’ (p.8), Carpenter made no stipulations for originality. Rather, in keeping with his belief in exfoliation, he stressed the need for artistic forms to be adapted so as to better communicate and embody democratic principles:

There is a strong impression that the Democratic idea as it grows and spreads will have a profound influence on Art and artistic methods; and that Art, in its relation to life generally, is in these days passing into new phases of development.²⁷⁹

Here, democratic development informs artistic development, but Whitman and Carpenter also believed that art not only reflected democracy, but shaped it and brought it about. This is directly related to style and formal properties: old literary forms must be developed in order to say something new. Carpenter uses Whitman as

²⁷⁵ Anne Janowitz, *Lyric and Labour in the Romantic Tradition* (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1998), p.199.

²⁷⁶ Janowitz, *Lyric and Labour*, p.227; Janowitz quotes from William Morris, *Collected Letters*, ed. by Norman Kelvin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), II, p.515.

²⁷⁷ Ruth Livesey, ‘Socialism and Victorian Poetry’, *Literature Compass*, 1:1 (2004), 1-6, p.3.

²⁷⁸ Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir* (London: Macmillan, 1897), p.255.

²⁷⁹ Carpenter, *Angels’ Wings: A Series of Essays on Art and its Relation to Life* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1898), p.1.

an example, asserting that ‘he *had* to enlarge the boundary of human expression’ in order to communicate his democratic beliefs.²⁸⁰ *Towards Democracy*, which incorporates but adapts key Whitmanian themes, imagery, vocabulary and formal properties, was part of this democratic development.

Both poets, for example, are concerned with the ‘sign’ of democracy, and draw attention to the word itself. In *Democratic Vistas* Whitman states: ‘I shall use the words America and democracy as convertible terms’ (p.954). This reaffirms America’s democratic status whilst implicitly suggesting that other nations were non-democratic. However, the essay has a somewhat anxious tone and is underscored by Whitman’s recognition of the fact that by the 1870s America had yet to fulfil its democratic potential. One strategy that he used to maintain his faith in American democracy in the face of the perceived bleakness of intellectual and spiritual cultural conditions was to project its fulfilment into the future: he asserts that democracy was ‘at present in its embryo condition, and that the only large and satisfactory justification of it resides in the future’ (p.983). It was not, therefore, that American democracy had failed, but that it had not yet had a chance to develop. This placed American democracy in a positive and progressive position: the starting point of its history was the present:

We have frequently printed the word Democracy. Yet I cannot too often repeat that it is a word the real gist of which still sleeps, quite unawaken’d, notwithstanding the resonance and the many angry tempests out of which its syllables have come, from pen or tongue. It is a great word, whose history, I suppose, remains unwritten, because that history has yet to be enacted. (p.984)

There is a tension between the writing of democracy and its implementation: Whitman suggests that the ‘meaning’ of democracy was not yet bound into the word itself, and nor could it be until it was put into practice. The ‘history’ of democracy lies somewhat oxymoronically in the future; as this was acted out, the term itself would acquire additional layers of meaning and the ‘sign of democracy’ vaunted in ‘Song of Myself’ would become filled (p.50).

Carpenter explores the word’s significance in a poem called ‘The Word Democracy’. It begins:

Underneath all now comes this Word, turning the edges of the other words
where they meet it.
Politics, art, science, commerce, religion, customs and methods of daily life,
the very outer shows and semblances of ordinary objects—

²⁸⁰ Carpenter, *Angels’ Wings*, p.11.

The rose in the garden, the axe hanging behind the door in the outhouse—
 Their meanings must all now be absorbed and recast in this word, or else fall
 off like the dry husks before its disclosure. (*Towards Democracy*, pp.217-218)

As is indicated by the capitalisation of 'Word', 'democracy' is elevated above other signifiers; the metaphor of 'turning the edges' gives a visual picture of its all-pervasive influence. Like Whitman, Carpenter is concerned with the issue of filling the sign and imbuing the word 'democracy' with meaning, but he does not consider this in isolation from all other words. Rather, he emphasises the idea of interconnectedness: the meanings of all words must be incorporated into that of democracy. There is an exchange: democracy will change or 'recast' the 'meanings' of all other words, but they in turn will contribute towards its 'meaning'. 'Democracy' as both a linguistic unit and a concept was to include every aspect of life. The second line quoted above prosaically lists the defining components of society; once again, the subject is enacted structurally as the different aspects of political thought, artistic method, commercial dealings, spiritual belief, and the habits of day-to-day living are combined in one poetic line. It is reinforced by the juxtaposition of imagery in the third line: the 'rose' and the 'axe' are representative of opposites, or contradictions, which are to be brought together and 'absorbed' in the 'meaning' of democracy.

'Word' is itself a key word which runs through *Towards Democracy*: for example, 'the word conceals itself' (*Towards Democracy* 1883, p.23); 'That word travels on' (*Towards Democracy* 1883, p.48); 'All depends upon a Word spoken' (*Towards Democracy* 1883, p.63); 'All depends upon a word spoken or unspoken' (*Towards Democracy* 1883, p.67); 'The word which waited so long to be spoken' (*Towards Democracy*, p.117). This 'word' is elusive; it is difficult to pin down in the text and unravel its meaning, but the Christian concept of the 'Word of God' and Christ being the logos offers a clue: it is a life-force. As 'The Word Democracy' demonstrates, it is a democratic life-force, and for Carpenter as for Whitman, there had to be a relationship between the language of democracy and its practical application. As was discussed in relation to Whitman and the Eagle Street College, art and life were not to be in opposition; rather, in another reconciliation of opposites, the speaker states at the beginning of the third stanza that 'art can no longer now be separated from life' (*Towards Democracy*, p.218). Everything must be 'absorbed and recast' in the light of democracy. The word 'all', which is used twice in the

stanza quoted above to emphasise the linguistic 'whole', is returned to in the third stanza to communicate a similar idea, but this time in regard to society rather than words: 'All the customs of society change, for all are significant'.

Whitman does not reject the past, but his focus is more often on the potential of the present and the future. For example, in the passage from *Democratic Vistas* previously quoted in relation to Wallace and the Eagle Street College, he asserts:

America, filling the present with greatest deeds and problems, cheerfully accepting the past, including feudalism, (as, indeed, the present is but the legitimate birth of the past, including feudalism,) counts, as I reckon, for her justification and success, (for who, as yet, dare claim success?) almost entirely on the future. (p.953)

Though Carpenter also looks forward to a democratic future, he makes the influence of the past upon the present and the future a key theme in *Towards Democracy*. It is explored in the poem that follows 'The Word Democracy', which returns to the theme of 'meaning' in its title, 'The Meaning of It All':

Ages and ages back,
Out of the long grass with infinite pain raising itself into the upright position,
A creature—fore-runner of Man—with swift eyes glanced around. (*Towards Democracy*, p.219)

The first line alludes to Whitman's poem 'Ages and Ages Returning at Intervals', which begins:

Ages and ages returning at intervals,
Undestroy'd, wandering immortal,
Lusty, phallic, with the potent original loins, perfectly sweet,
I, chanter of Adamic songs, (p.264)

In this poem, Whitman invokes the past, but not in an evolutionary sense. Though the reference to Adam and the related guiltless sexuality of the speaker seem to draw a line between the 'beginning' of humankind, and the present of the speaking 'I' (the verbs 'calling' and 'bathing' later in the poem locate the speaker in the present continuous), there is no sense of progression. Instead, there is the idea of return and re-return that has been discussed in relation to the 'avataras' in 'So Long!' (p.612). Carpenter, on the other hand, looks 'back' to a pre-Edenic time, in order to place the development of human consciousness as part of the same trajectory as its physical evolution:

Out of the great jungle of Custom and supposed Necessity, into a new and wonderful life, to new and wonderful knowledge,
Surpassing words, surpassing all past experience—the Man, the meaning of it all,
Reappears himself again. (*Towards Democracy*, p.220)

Likening man's social environment to the natural environment, Carpenter uses evolutionary ideas to suggest that man will adapt in order to progress. This sense of progression is emphasised by the repetition of 'surpassing', a word that is also suggestive of transcendence. Spiritual and evolutionary discourses merge, as they often do in Carpenter's work, to indicate the spiritual nature of the democratic ideal towards which humankind was evolving.

In *Towards Democracy* the past is generative; it is not to be dismissed, but built upon. This is explored in 'The Secret of Time and Satan' where, in a process akin to Lamarckian evolution, the individual human body acts as an educational vehicle. The fourth section begins:

The art of creation, like every other art, has to be learnt:
Slowly slowly, through many years, thou buildest up thy body,
And the power that thou now hast (such as it is) to build up this present body,
thou hast acquired in the past in other bodies;
So in the future shalt thou use again the power that thou now acquirest.
But the power to build up the body includes all powers. (*Towards Democracy*,
p.294)

The archaic language recalls that of the King James Bible, and a few lines after this passage the speaker alludes to the tale of Jacob wrestling with the angel. However, having established an authoritative scriptural tone, biblical teaching is recast in the light of evolutionary thought. The new command is that the soul must acquire knowledge through its evolutionary development; each individual must wrestle with a deliberately unnamed 'other power'. In so doing, they must learn how to interpret the unfolding of each body, each past life, in order to reach an understanding that would lead to true freedom. For some, this force would be that of God, for other, the fates, and for others still, the Darwinian process of natural selection, or survival of the fittest. The sixth section of the poem powerfully depicts this process: body after body is cast aside as the poet-speaker wrestles with his Satan; finally, his body is perfected and it is equal to that of his opponent. At this point the anaphoric 'and' relents, Satan ceases to fight and his form changes. Man and divine force are reunited, and they enter into Paradise together.

The Democratic 'I': Combining the Many in One

In *Towards Democracy* the belief in exfoliatory progression runs alongside the theme of cyclicity. It has been touched on in regard to reading, but is also true of Carpenter's beliefs about man's spiritual development: the teleological unfolding of consciousness through its three 'great stages' would lead to an understanding of the source of consciousness, which is the composite divine made up of everything that has existed, or exists still, in the universe. This is Carpenter's 'Paradise'; once people had come to the realisation that they were all part of a universal self a truly democratic society could be brought about.

The idea of a universal self has an impact on the relationship between the author and the reader, and between the speaking 'I' and the implied reading 'you' of the texts. This is a central thematic concern of both *Leaves of Grass* and *Towards Democracy*, and Carpenter remarked on how it underscored his writing process:

I wanted to write some sort of a book which should address itself very personally and closely to any one who cared to read it—establish so to speak an intimate personal relation between myself and the reader.

He stated that a few poems in *Narcissus and Other Poems* were examples of his attempt to realise this goal, but that they had failed:

After a time I began to think the quest was an unreasonable one—unreasonable because while it might not be difficult for any one with a pliant and sympathetic disposition to touch certain chords in any given individual that he might meet, it seemed impossible to hope that a *book*—which cannot in any way adapt itself to the idiosyncrasies of its reader—could find the key of the personalities into whose hands it should happen to come. (*Towards Democracy*, p.409)

The book should be able to interact with its reader in as intimate a way as a person could. Compare Whitman's poem 'So Long!': 'this is no book, / Who touches this touches a man' (p.611). 'Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand' gives this idea its fullest expression, and the speaking voice is that of the book itself:

Or if you will, thrusting me beneath your clothing,
Where I may feel the throbs of your heart or rest upon your hip,
Carry me when you go forth over land or sea;
For thus merely touching you is enough, is best, (p.271)

The poet and the book are inextricably combined in the speaking 'I'; Whitman guides his readers towards the assumption that the voice in *Leaves of Grass* is his own. The erotic register emphasises a sense of tactility, and indicates that the relationship between the reader and the text should extend beyond the purely

intellectual: the speaker demands to be as close to the reader emotionally as the text physically is to the reader's body.

This was the kind of relationship that Carpenter sought to cultivate with each of his readers. He came to think that this could only be possible if the book was written 'on and from' an 'absolutely common ground to all individuals' (*Towards Democracy*, p.409). That is, from the universal self that transcended the ordinary bounds of personality, in which people could interact in a free and equal way, stripped of their idiosyncrasies and inconsequential differences. Carpenter states that he did not seek to give definitive answers but to raise questions about this subject:

Are we really separate individuals, or is individuality an illusion, or again is it only a part of the *ego* or soul that is individual, and not the whole? Is the *ego* absolutely one with the body, or is it only a small part of the body, or again is the body but a part of the self—one of its organs so to speak, and not the whole man? Or lastly is it perhaps not possible to express the truth by any direct use of these or other terms of ordinary language? Anyhow, what am I? (*Towards Democracy*, p.414)

Though only four questions are actually asked, they are loaded with sub-clauses beginning with 'or' which expand the range of possibilities concerning the construction of human identity. Carpenter plays with the literary tradition of analogising the human body with the body-politic; he does not equate the two metaphorically, but teases out the multiple meanings and functions of key words such as 'body', 'self' and 'soul' to communicate his beliefs about interconnectedness, while self-reflexively questioning the ability of both language and literature to do so. Carpenter claimed that he did not know what or who the 'I' of *Towards Democracy* was, only that 'the "I" is myself—as well as I could find words to express myself: but what that Self is, and what its limits may be; and therefore what the self of any other person is and what *its* limits may be—I cannot tell.' He reiterates: 'It seems to me more and more clear that the word "I" has a practically infinite range of meaning—that the *ego* covers far more ground than we usually suppose' (*Towards Democracy*, p.413). *Towards Democracy* explores this 'range of meaning', adapting Whitman's concern with the 'many in one' so as to communicate the idea of universal interconnectedness.

Carpenter invokes a Whitmanian poet-speaker who does not have a fixed identity but moves in and out of different bodies and different genders, and incorporates the universal whilst rooting itself in the local and particular. In 'Song

of *Myself* the fusion of identity is all-encompassing; the speaker expands his diverse self to include every member of the democratic mass. For example, one of the poem's catalogues begins:

The pure contralto sings in the organloft,
The carpenter dresses his plank the tongue of his foreplane whistles its
wild ascending lisp,
The married and unmarried children ride home to their thanksgiving dinner,
The pilot seizes the king-pin, he heaves down with a strong arm, (p.39)

This varied and inclusive list presents an expansive picture of American society, the sheer length of which (sixty-nine lines and over three pages long) foregrounds textually the diversity of the American body-politic. Each image is distinct and complete in itself (mostly, one line is dedicated to each type of occupation, and there is no use of enjambment), yet they are brought together within the stanza's cohesive and equalising anaphoric structure. The catalogue breaks in its concluding lines: 'And these one and all tend inward to me, and I tend outward to them, / And such as it is to be of these more or less I am' (p.42). The very phrase 'one and all' unites the individual and the mass, and the rhythm and tone emphasise the sense of fluidity that these lines express: the pitch rises and peaks in the centre of the lines on the stressed words 'me' and 'these', and then falls away.

For Whitman, this poetic strategy had a specific political purpose. Though Jeffersonian and Jacksonian democratic principles theoretically pointed towards the elimination of social, religious and racial barriers, as David S. Reynolds notes, by the 1850s 'it had become painfully clear that such barriers were on the verge of separating the nation'.²⁸¹ 'Song of Myself' was written against this prospect. Twenty years later, Whitman returned to the subject of the relationship between the individual and the mass in *Democratic Vistas*:

I have no doubt myself that the two will merge, and will mutually profit and
brace each other, and that from them a greater product, a third, will arise. But I
feel that at present they and their oppositions form a serious problem and
paradox in the United States. (p.965)

Carpenter, however, was not concerned with the unification of his nation (when 'Towards Democracy' has a national rather than global focus, it is on 'England' or 'Albion', not the unification of the British Isles); instead, his political agenda was to

²⁸¹ David S. Reynolds, *A Historical Guide to Walt Whitman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.10.

bring about universal democracy, which could be hastened if his readers understood the 'true' nature of their entwined and interconnected selves.²⁸²

This realisation is the theme of Carpenter's poem 'By the Shore', which employs various Whitmanian motifs, themes, and tropes: the location of the sea shore, the 'merge' of identities, the apostrophic 'O', and the centrality of a speaker who sounds very similar to Whitman's bardic 'I'. At times the resemblance is textually close, for example the title recalls Whitman's 'By Blue Ontario's Shore'. The speaker in 'By the Shore' uses the phrase 'I am in love with it' to describe the ocean which in his heightened spiritual state is also understood to be the 'Spirit of Immensity' (*Towards Democracy*, p.161), a phrase which is lifted from 'Song of Myself' where the speaker expresses his feelings about the atmosphere:

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. (p.27)

By using Whitman's words, Carpenter recalls and echoes the speaker's wish to be connected with his surrounding environment. It also gestures back to the illuminative experience that follows shortly afterwards in 'Song of Myself', which causes the speaker to realise 'that all the men ever born are also my brothers . . . and the women my sisters and lovers, / And that a kelson of the creation is love' (p.31).

Carpenter depicts a similar kind of mystic experience, but reformulates it so as to stress the interconnection of everything and everyone. The importance of the theme of identity in 'By the Shore' is highlighted through the frequent repetition of the word 'I': it is used forty-two times in fifty lines, and begins sixteen of them. For the bardic speaker, identity is fluid, and he is able to become part of his surroundings: the 'I' first becomes 'a bit of the shore' then 'the Ocean itself'. At the same time, it maintains a distinctly human speaking voice: it 'loves' the wind and the ocean, it 'kisses', it speaks of 'faces' and 'bodies'. Carpenter uses the image of sand that is passed over again and again by the waves until it is dislodged from the beach and carried out to the ocean:

²⁸² Carpenter does not use the word 'Britain' in the text, and rarely mentions Ireland, Scotland or Wales. The Welsh mountains are included in the speaker's panoramic sweep of the country but as part of the vision introduced by the phrase 'England spreads like a map below me' (*Towards Democracy*, 1883, p.58). For a detailed analysis of Carpenter's treatment of 'England' and nationality in his work see Vincent Geoghegan, 'Carpenter's England Revisited', *History of Political Thought*, 24:3 (Autumn 2003), 509-527.

I am detached, I disentangle myself from the shore; I have become free—I
float out and mingle with the rest.

The pain, the acute clinging desire, is over—I feel beings like myself all
around me, I spread myself through and through them, I am merged in a sea of
contact.

Freedom and equality are a fact. Life and joy seem to have begun for me.
(*Towards Democracy*, p.160)

This climactic moment of 'detachment' is the experience of universal oneness, which is described in orgasmic terms. The alliteration of the plosive 'd' and 't' sounds in 'detached' and 'disentangle' reinforce the sense of breaking away from one's own individual identity. Yet paradoxically, this detachment leads to unification: the ocean is a metaphor for the universal self, and the repetition of 'through and through' creates a wave-like sound which emphasises the act of merge and spreading. Earlier in the poem, the speaker becomes aware that he is 'not sure any more' which his 'own particular bit of the shore is', but this is qualified after experiencing the 'merge': 'I know but I do not care any longer which my own particular body is—all conditions and fortunes are mine.' The realisation that the speaker comes to in 'Song of Myself', that all people are his brothers and sisters, is extended into a vision of universal shared identity, which would have a social impact by leading to 'freedom and equality'.

'Song of Myself' and 'Towards Democracy' both establish a relationship between the speaking 'I' and the reading 'you' in their opening lines. Andrew Elfenbein suggests that these openings show how the 'linguistic and formal differences' between the two poems 'become metaphors for larger differences in the poets' treatment of the reader'.²⁸³ His analysis of the differences in the way that the poets handle the 'merge' of identities concludes that 'Whitman bosses the reader, while Carpenter hints at a gentle interchange'.²⁸⁴ As has often been commented on, the opening stanza of 'Song of Myself' is structured around the linear movement from 'I' to 'you':

I celebrate myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you. (p.27)

The lines become progressively longer, expanding from the 'I' into the other; the speaker claims that the two enter into a state of physical mutuality: every atom is

²⁸³ Elfenbein, 'Whitman, Democracy, and the English Clerisy', p.93.

²⁸⁴ Elfenbein, 'Whitman, Democracy, and the English Clerisy', p.94.

shared. Elfenbein suggests that this is forced upon the reader: 'Whether we want to know it or not, Whitman announces that he belongs to us'. This feeling has been expressed by other readers, such as W. H. Auden, who is said to have answered Allen Ginsberg's enthusiastic recital of the opening lines of 'Song of Myself' with the heated response: 'When I hear that, I feel I must say, "Please don't include me!"'.²⁸⁵ However, the relationships that both Whitman and Carpenter establish with their readers are more nuanced than Elfenbein acknowledges, and cannot be so straightforwardly categorised. This is especially true when the 1883 version of 'Towards Democracy' is considered.

Whether or not one agrees that the opening lines of 'Song of Myself' are presumptuous, Whitman is actually very gentle with the reader in the beginning sections of the poem: the tone is intimate and calm, and the speaker does not simply 'boss' but encourages his readers to question his words: 'You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me, / You shall listen to all sides and filter them from yourself' (p.28). The speaker first turns his attention on the small and local: 'I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass' (p.27). The following stanzas evoke an idyllic sensory experience:

My respiration and inspiration the beating of my heart the passing of
blood and air through my lungs,
The sniff of green leaves and dry leaves, and of the shore and darkcolored sea-
rocks, and of hay in the barn,
The sound of the belched words of my voice words loosed 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 wag, (p.27)

The conjunctive 'and' and use of ellipses pull the reader through a succession of imagery related to the five bodily senses. The composite images of smell, sound, touch, taste and sight are combined in a unified poetic 'whole' through assonance ('green'/'leaves'/'sea', 'play'/'shade'), alliteration ('shine'/'shade'), internal rhyme ('sound'/'around') and parallelism ('the sniff of'/'the smell of'). It is only at this point that the speaker expands his vision to the grand and universal: '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' (p.28). Though this

²⁸⁵ James Campbell, *This is the Beat Generation: New York, San Francisco, Paris* (London: Seeker and Warburg, 1999), pp.214-215.

line can be read as a command, it can also be interpreted as 'if you choose to stop this day and night with me, then you shall possess the origins of all poems'.

The opening of 'Towards Democracy' moves in the opposite trajectory: it begins with the cosmic and moves towards the personal. The 'bodies' of its opening are not those of the speaker or reader, but the celestial bodies of the universe:

The sun, the moon and the stars, the grass, the water that flows round the earth,
and the light air of heaven:

To You greeting. I too stand behind these and send you word across them.
(*Towards Democracy* 1883, p.1)

The speaker's welcome is not called out to an individual reading 'you', but to a capitalised 'You' comprised of the greatest natural phenomena. He follows the custom of many pagan traditions by saluting the sun, stars and moon, and then moves down to the earth which is still depicted in elevated terms: the water is the grand system which 'flows round the earth' and the air is that of 'heaven'. The speaker himself is positioned behind these ruling elements; there is no point of physical contact with the reader. In the first numbered stanza, the focus shifts to the abstract concepts of 'Freedom' and 'Joy' before Carpenter asks: '[How do you know indeed but what I have passed into you?]'.

'You' no longer refers to components of the cosmos but the reader. There is more of this sense of slippage in the 1883 text in which all of these words are in the same-sized font and typeface, whereas the final version uses smaller italicised letters to separate the salutations from the first numbered stanza of the poem. As in 'Song of Myself' the reader is drawn into the relationship between the speaker and the natural world, though the individual 'you' is included in the elevated universal 'You', rather than the 'I' of Whitman's speaker.

Elfenbein contrasts these equivalent moment of interchange between the 'I' and the 'you', and asserts that Carpenter is 'more tentative' because he asks rather than commands, and does so in a parenthetical aside. However, in the 1883 edition, Carpenter abruptly and violently breaks the physical distance between the speaker and the reader: 'These things I, seizing you by the shoulders, will shake you till you understand them!'. This exclamatory line pulls the reader out of the elevated and abstract into the bodily present. Here, the speaker seems more imperious than the speaker in 'Song of Myself': Whitman's speaker leans and loafs, and gently stimulates the senses of his addressee whilst Carpenter's speaker has an aggressive and invasive touch. This becomes even more apparent in the eleventh section of

Towards Democracy in which the speaker uses the metaphor of the tree to describe himself and his purpose: 'my leaves and zigzag branches write wonderful words against the evening sky—for you, for you—say, can you not even spell them?' (*Towards Democracy* 1883, p.9). The line begins tenderly, but the concluding question has an edge of disdain which becomes more pronounced in the following line:

O shame! shame! I fling you away from me (you shall not know that I love you). Unworthy! I strike you across the face; does the blood mount to your cheek now? my glove rings at your feet: I dare you to personal combat.

Will you come forth? will you do the daring deed? will you strip yourself naked as you came into the world, and come before me, and regard unafraid the flashing of my sword? will you lose your life, to Me?

The speaking voice in 'Song of Myself' never enters into this kind of combative relationship. The provocative tone and allusion to feudal duelling sets the speaker against the reader, whilst the succession of questions creates a rising pitch which breaks, after the reader is asked to make the ultimate sacrifice, with the climactic cry 'O child of mine!'.

Abruptly, the speaking 'I' ceases to be a tormentor and becomes a redeemer: 'you are in prison, and I can give you space'; 'you are choked down below there, by the dust of your own raising, and I can give you the pure intoxicating air of the mountains to breathe'; 'I can make you a king'. The rhetoric has biblical overtones, which are accentuated by the capitalised 'M' in the question 'will you lose your life, to Me?'. Carpenter demands a sacrifice which recalls the exchange between Jesus and Peter in John 13:

Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake. Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, the cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice.²⁸⁶

The allusion to Peter's denial of Jesus is suggestive; it is a familiar story of human weakness, and exemplifies the difficulties involved in making such a sacrifice. Peter, however, speaks of laying down his life 'for' Jesus, whereas in 'Towards Democracy' the preposition is 'to'; the reader is required to sacrifice his or her life at the hands of the speaker. This sequence prefigures 'The Secret of Time and Satan', though in the later poem the speaker is the fighting convert rather than the teacher. The principle is the same: once the 'self' has been lost, it can be understood that the 'other' is

²⁸⁶ John 13.37-38.

merely another facet of that self. In this redemptive moment in 'Towards Democracy' the speaker asserts: 'From yourself to yourself I can deliver you'. The 'intimate relationship' that Carpenter wished to forge was not between an 'I' and a 'you' but between one part of the universal self and another.²⁸⁷ The 'you' was not to be absorbed by the speaker, but 'delivered' so it could come to a realisation of its expansiveness.

Significantly, these episodes of violence are removed from later editions of the poem, and the speaker's task is approached in a gentler manner, with the mirror being used as a key symbol. It is not used in 'Song of Myself' but does appear in other poems in *Leaves of Grass*. It first appeared in an unnamed poem in the 1855 edition which later became 'A Song for Occupations':

Will the whole come back then?
 Can each see signs of the best by a look in the looking-glass? is there nothing
 greater or more?
 Does all sit there with you, with the mystic, unseen soul? (p.360)

The mirror is used to show the reader the 'whole' and the 'unseen soul'. Whitman returns to the symbol in 'A Hand-Mirror', and explores the concept of being shown the 'other' in one's own reflection:

Hold it up sternly—see this it sends back, (who is it? is it you?)
 Outside fair costume, within ashes and filth,
 No more a flashing eye, no more a sonorous voice or springy step,
 Now some slave's eye, voice, hands, step,
 A drunkard's breath, unwholesome eater's face, venerealee's flesh, (p.408)

Incorporating the other into the perception of one's self is not necessarily a pleasurable experience. Whitman uses synecdoche to break down bodies into separate parts, but then amalgamates them in a composite reflection in the mirror glass, again combining the many in one.

At the beginning of the second section of 'Towards Democracy' the speaker sets out his aim, which is also Carpenter's poetic goal: 'Who you are I know not, but I have it before me that you shall know' (*Towards Democracy* 1883, p.2). Carpenter uses the symbol of the mirror to illustrate this aim. It appears in the concluding sections of the 1883 'Towards Democracy', and is employed at both the beginning

²⁸⁷ In a discussion in a later text about 'Oriental inner teaching' Carpenter remarked: 'You are not even to differentiate yourself in thought from others: you are not to begin to regard yourself as separate from them. Even to talk about helping others is a mistake; it is vitiated by the delusion that you and they are twain.' Carpenter, *From Adam's Peak to Elephanta* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1892), p.177.

and the end of the poem in subsequent versions. These lines speak forward and back to each other: 'These things I, writing, translate for you—I wipe a mirror and place it in your hands' appears on p.13 and 'I—who write—translate for you these thoughts: I wipe a mirror and place it in your hands [look long, O friend, look long, satiate yourself]' on p.94. As is indicated by the word 'translate', this involves more than Hamlet's holding a mirror up to nature; the poet must act to enable his reader to see the reflection. Whereas Whitman's readers need merely to look in the looking glass, the mirror in 'Towards Democracy' cannot show a true reflection until it has been cleaned. For Carpenter, this is the role of the poet: not simply to tell the reader 'truths', but to facilitate the perception of them. The poet does not 'wipe' a window but a mirror, indicating that the reader is not shown external truths, but the manifold nature of themselves. In 'I Know that You are Self-conscious' Carpenter returns to the symbol, and asks the reader: 'Do you not see, this time, that there is some one else looking in it also / Beside you, over your shoulder?' (*Towards Democracy*, p.150). The 'you' is not merely absorbed into the speaking 'I'; rather, the two are reflected back in one image.

Though Whitman was thematically preoccupied with the democratic paradox of the 'many in one', Carpenter is more insistent that his reader comes to an understanding of it. This is because his socialist vision of democracy depended on it being understood and accepted *en masse*:

The true Self of man consists in his organic relation with the whole body of his fellows; and when the man abandons his true Self he abandons also his true relation to his fellows. The mass-Man must rule in each unit-man, else the unit-man will drop off and die.²⁸⁸

This is the basis of Carpenter's interpretation of Whitmanian democracy, and underlies the more overtly didactic elements contained in *Towards Democracy*.

Towards a Democratic Future

When asked why he had called the book *Towards Democracy*, Carpenter replied that he did not use the word 'in the sense that it is used by politicians', but 'as a key to that conception of personality I tried to express which exists latently or consciously

²⁸⁸ Carpenter, *Civilisation*, p.50.

in all other persons'.²⁸⁹ However, this conception of personality is fundamentally connected to the political state. Carpenter explains in *Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure* how the understanding (or lack thereof) of the universal self has an impact on the political make-up of a nation:

If each man remained in organic adhesion to the general body of his fellows, no serious dis-harmony could occur; but it is when this vital unity of the body politic becomes weak that it has to be preserved by artificial means, and thus it is that with the decay of the primitive and instinctive social life there springs up a form of government which is no longer the democratic expression of the life of the whole people; but a kind of outside authority and compulsion thrust upon them by a ruling class or caste.²⁹⁰

For Carpenter, the very existence of a ruling governmental body worked against the principles of democracy. The word 'artificial' implies that democratic parliamentary concessions could not have a true or lasting impact until the people realised that they were a 'whole'. Carpenter does not explain in practical terms how a government that is 'the democratic expression of the life of the whole people' can be achieved, but instead emphasises the importance of love: 'It is this love which alone constitutes a People, which alone creates nourishes and defends Nations' (*Towards Democracy* 1883, p.65).

This reliance on abstraction and emotion attracted criticism from some sections of the socialist movement, but Carpenter was not alone in believing that parliamentary politics could not bring about democracy. Havelock Ellis, who believed Whitman to be 'significant' because he represented 'the re-integration, in a sane and whole-hearted form, of the instincts of the entire man', explained in greater detail:

Once it was thought that we had but to give a vote to every adult—outside the asylum and perhaps the prison—and democracy would be achieved. This crude notion has long since become ridiculous. We see now that the vote and the ballot-box do not make the voter free from even external pressure; and, which is of much more consequence, they do not necessarily free him from his own slavish instincts. We see that enfranchisement does not mean freedom, since the enfranchised are capable of running in a brainless and compact mob after any man who is clever enough to gain despotic influence over them. This is not democracy, though it is doubtless a step towards it.²⁹¹

²⁸⁹ Anon., 'Towards Freedom and Equality. Interview with Mr. Edward Carpenter'.

²⁹⁰ Carpenter, *Civilisation*, pp.53-54.

²⁹¹ Havelock Ellis, *The New Spirit* (London: Bell and Sons, 1890), p.32; pp.13-14.

Like Carpenter, Ellis advances an expansive understanding of the term 'democracy', which is emphasised by the invocation and juxtaposition of the concepts of slavery and freedom.

Probably unintentionally, his rhetoric recalls Whitman's problematic demand in *Democratic Vistas*: 'Come forth, sweet democratic despots of the west!' (p.998). Whitman stresses the universal nature of his democratic vision, but at times it seems somewhat dictatorial. For example, in one of the catalogues that describe the social whole in 'Song of Myself' the speaker states that he is 'not merely of the New World but of Africa Europe or Asia' (p.43); yet this 'vista' of global unity is undercut by the assertion that America is 'the great nation' ('Song of Myself', p.42), 'the race of races' (1855 Preface, p.7) and, most strikingly, that the republic must soon 'outstrip all examples hitherto afforded, and dominate the world' (*Democratic Vistas*, p.954). Conversely, in Carpenter's democratic ideology any kind of domination was untenable, whether by nation, person, or political party, and Whitman's vision had to be reinterpreted to overwrite these tendencies.

This is evident in Carpenter's *Chants of Labour*, a song book that he compiled as 'contribution' to the labour movement (which he defines as being 'more or less Socialistic').²⁹² Returning to the notion of a democratic, or collective, literature, Carpenter states: 'the book is in no sense (as the index shows) a merely "literary" production—but emanates rather from the heart of the people. May it help give voice to those who have so long been dumb!'.²⁹³ This recalls the catalogue in 'Song of Myself' which begins:

Through me many long dumb voices,
Voices of the interminable generations of slaves,
Voices of prostitutes and of deformed persons,
Voices of the diseased and despairing, and of thieves and dwarfs, (p.50)

In Whitman's text these voices are conspicuous by their absence. 'Through me' stands apart from the anaphoric catalogue and distinguishes the speaker from the other 'voices'; the structural parallelism combines the many voices in the speaker's own, complicating the diversity that he champions. *Chants of Labour*, however, was

²⁹² *Chants of Labour*, ed. by Carpenter, 6th edn (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1922), pp.v-vi. Carpenter initially wanted to use the word 'Socialist' in the title, but Havelock Ellis advised Carpenter that 'if the book is to have a wide circulation' he should omit it. He added: 'The thing is more important than the name'. Ellis to Carpenter (2 December 1887), Sheffield, Carpenter Collection, MS 357/4.

²⁹³ Carpenter, *Chants of Labour*, p.vi.

intended to 'give voice' literally, both in the sense that the songs were intended to be sung aloud, and in the sense of including lyrics not only by established writers but by labourers, students, lawyers and teachers as well.²⁹⁴ Whitman's voice sounds alongside these, and alongside earlier British social agitators such as Ebenezer Elliott, Carpenter's socialist contemporaries like William Morris, as well as Carpenter himself.²⁹⁵

Carpenter's inclusion of an extract from 'Song of the Broad-Axe', called 'The Great City', in *Chants of Labour* demonstrates one obvious way of repudiating the domineering tendencies in *Leaves of Grass*: denying America the primacy that Whitman gave to it.²⁹⁶ Carpenter takes the passage from section five, beginning 'Where the city stands with the brawniest breed of orators and bards' and ending 'There the great city stands' (pp.335-336); he set it to music, and divided it into five verses of five lines, the last of which is the repeated refrain 'there the great city stands'. It envisions an urban ideal and, uncharacteristically for Whitman, there is little sense of industry or occupation. Its focus is on the people of the city: its 'men', 'women', and 'children'. They represent a democratic whole with no individual being elevated above another: 'no monuments exist to heroes but in the common words and deeds'. This ideal society, as shall be discussed further in relation to an article in *The New Age*, is 'where outside authority enters always after the precedence of inside authority; / Where the citizen is always the head and ideal.' This is the antithesis of Carpenter's complaint in *Civilisation* about artificial forms of government which are no longer 'the democratic expression of the life of the whole people'. Other social issues mentioned in the passage also resonate with Carpenter's political concerns; for example, that children should be 'taught to be laws to themselves' and women should 'enter the public assembly and take places the same as men'. There is a strong correspondence of vision between the ideal

²⁹⁴ Carpenter includes a list of contributors to *Chants of Labour* along with their occupations ('the index'). His own occupation is given as 'science lecturer'.

²⁹⁵ Traubel records that Whitman was sent a copy of *Chants of Labour*, but does not indicate what the poet thought about it. Traubel, *Whitman in Camden*, 1, p.103. For more about socialist songbooks see Waters, *British Socialists*, pp.107-120. Waters remarks that 'socialist songbooks published prior to 1914 played a prominent role in the movement's associational life', and observes that Carpenter's *Chants of Labour* was to be found in socialist circles for more than thirty years and 'came to serve as a model for later compilations', p.107.

²⁹⁶ Carpenter, *Chants of Labour*, pp.92-93.

outlined in 'The Great City' and the democratic philosophy that Carpenter propagates, and it is easy to see why it was selected to be used as socialist material.

However, the section is removed from its original poetic context in which America is elevated above other civilisations. The poem is structured around the symbol of the axe and its dual potential to destroy and create: in old European civilisations it was used against the people and brought death and pain, while in America it is used by the people as a tool of construction. Section three begins with the image of the axe outside a 'sylvan hut' ('The log at the wood-pile, the axe supported by it', p.331), and extends outward through a catalogue of settlement-building activity, which creates a composite picture of national development. Expansionism is promoted as a national goal and toward the end of the poem the axe becomes a symbol of a totalising manifest destiny:

The axe leaps!
 The solid forest gives fluid utterances,
 They tumble forth, they rise and form,
 Hut, tent, landing, survey,
 Flail, plough, pick, crowbar, spade, (p.338)

The lexical juxtaposition of 'solid' and 'fluid' signifies a state of change, in which the felled trees become active participants in the settlement of the land. There is no act of human agency; rather, the repetition of the refrain 'the shapes arise!' implies that it is America's destiny to develop the west. Though the concession is made that the 'shapes' are influenced by the past, the poem's strong pro-American bias is not overwritten; America, for example, is described in superlative terms as 'the newest, largest race' (p.338). Carpenter extracts the 'Great City' passage from the poem, divorcing it from its nationalist connotations. In *Chants of Labour*, the 'great city' is not dependent on American progress; instead the extract is placed alongside socialist texts and so is aligned with their political ideals.

A later poem by Carpenter, published in *The Nation & The Athenæum* in 1924, offers another counterpoint to 'Song of the Broad-Axe':

The broken tool lies:
 In the dust it lies forgotten—but the building goes on without delay.
 Who knows what dreams it had—this rusty old shaftless thing?

[Or fancied it had: for what it supposed its own thoughts, were they not the thoughts of the artificer who wielded it?—and *his* thoughts, were they not those of the architect?]

Dreams of the beautiful finished structure, white with its myriad pinnacles,
 against the sky;

Dreams of days and years of busy work, and the walls growing beneath it;
 Dreams of its own glory—absurd dreams of a temple built with one tool!

Who knows?—and who cares?
 In the dust it lies broken now and unnoticed;
 But the building goes on without delay.²⁹⁷

Whitman's poem is recalled through the motif of the tool. As in 'Song of the Broad-Axe' there is a sense of predestined and unstoppable progress, but the tool no longer acts a synecdoche of this; rather, it is personified to metonymically represent the individual within society. The poem can be read as an analogy for evolutionary democratic development: each individual contributes towards the final goal, adding to what has been achieved by those who came before; the individual's role may be brief, but it contributes towards the transformation of the whole. Though the 'shapes' or structures do not rise autonomously in Carpenter's poem, there is a sense of agency outside of humankind: in an unfolding chain the tool's 'thoughts' are determined by the artificer's thoughts which are determined by those of the architect.

In contrast to Whitman's jubilant celebration of progress, and unusually for Carpenter, the tone is melancholic: the tool is 'broken', it lies 'forgotten'. Unlike 'Song of the Broad-Axe' (which was first published as 'Broad-Axe Poem' in the 1856 *Leaves of Grass*), this is a poem of old age. Whitman's poem was written when his democratic optimism was at its height whereas 'The Broken Tool' was written when Carpenter was approaching eighty and was faced with the reality that the 'World of Demos', which he had so passionately fought for, had not yet arrived.²⁹⁸ Both poems are written in the present tense, but this is used to different effect. Whitman's progression is rapid. Results can be seen in the 'now' of the poem: even the final section which seems to look to the future is written in the present tense, as if the 'whole earth' is already 'braced' by American democracy. The most important verb is the active 'arise'; conversely, in 'The Broken Tool' it is the static verb 'lies'. Active verbs are only used to describe 'dreams' for the future, not the present. Though the 'building goes on without delay', neither the individual represented by the 'broken tool' nor the reader see any results. This repeated line has an ambiguous tone; though it has oppressive overtones and seems to deny

²⁹⁷ Carpenter, 'The Broken Tool', *Nation & Athenæum* (17 May 1924), p.205.

²⁹⁸ For a discussion of Whitman's poems of old age, see M. Wynn Thomas, 'Whitman, Tennyson, and the Poetry of Old Age', in *Something Understood: Essays and Poetry for Helen Vendler*, ed. by Stephen Burt and Nick Halpern (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2009), pp.161-182.

individuals their free will, it also communicates a sense of dogged persistence and faith in democratic progress. Its anapaestic-iambic rhythm strains forward, reassuring the reader (and the speaker) that the 'dreams' will one day be realised, though they may not see it come to pass.

Carpenter's reformulation of Whitman's faith in the manifest destiny of America into a faith in exfoliatory destiny was pivotal to his 'translation' of Whitman. Not only did it enable him to resituate England within the progressive movement towards 'true democracy', but it had global ramifications: in *Towards Democracy* all nations are equally able to pioneer the democratic ideal and are all equally responsible for doing so, whereas world democracy in *Leaves of Grass* was dependent on America. Though Whitman's spiritual and social vision incorporates elements from other cultures, particularly Eastern spirituality, his focus is on America:

Sole among nations, these States have assumed the task to put in forms of lasting power and practicality, on areas of amplitude rivaling the operations of the physical kosmos, the moral political speculations of ages, long, long deferr'd, the democratic republican principle, and the theory of development and perfection by voluntary standards, and self-reliance. (p.953)

Carpenter directly challenges this ethnocentricity by looking to the 'far nations' for the first movements towards democracy:

Freedom!
And among the far nations there is a stir like the leaves of a forest.
Joy, Joy arising on Earth!

And lo! The banners lifted from point to point, and the spirits of the ancient races looking abroad—the divinely beautiful daughters of God calling to their children. (*Towards Democracy* 1883, pp.15-16)

Carpenter rejects the primacy that Whitman gave to newness, choosing instead to invoke the past, the 'ancient races' who have contributed towards this exuberant forward-looking moment.

The next stanza foregrounds this synthesis between old and new in its opening exclamation: 'The nations of the old and of the new worlds!'. It continues:

Lo! The divine East from ages and ages back intact her priceless jewel of thought—the germ of Democracy—bringing down! [Gentle and venerable India well pleased now at last to hear fulfilled the words of her ancient sages.]

The jumbled syntax, use of hyphens and exclamatory punctuation creates a breathless excited tone. The birth of democracy is configured as the realisation of old wisdom rather than the achievement of the modern; it hails from the east rather

than the west. The speaker then moves through a series of nations (Arabia, Siberia, India, Kamschatka, Norway, Italy, Greece, Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, Africa, Greenland, Malaysia, Indonesia and Australia), sometimes pausing to praise the culture or the citizens: Arabia is 'peerless in dignity', Africans are 'beautiful children of the sun'. The tone remains jubilant, with each line-paragraph ending with an exclamation mark. The speaker then turns to the 'great users and accumulators of materials', the 'proud and melancholy Titans struggling with civilisation!' which are also included in his democratic vision: England, Germany, France, Russia and Spain. It is only at this point, in the second half of the catalogue, and in the line-paragraph dedicated to 'struggling' nations, that America's destiny is acknowledged: 'And you, too, ye manifold Stars and Stripes—unto what great destiny!'. It is included in Carpenter's vision, but it is not lingered over: the very next line rapidly shifts the focus back onto the global (and interconnected) nature of democracy: 'The peoples of the Earth; the intertwining many-coloured streams!' (*Towards Democracy* 1883, p.17). The speaker proceeds to recognise China, Egypt, Persia, Turkey, and Japan, and the 'Red Indian' before appealing to Democracy itself: 'Do I not know that thou Democracy dost control and inspire, that thou, too, hast relations to these' (p.17). Democracy, not any individual race or nation, is the acting force.

Though Carpenter's democratic vision was global, it had specific ramifications for England. *Towards Democracy* celebrated the English people, but denounced both the vestiges of a land-owning aristocratic social system, and the rise of capitalism and commercialism. It addresses issues such as land reform, the class system, working conditions, dress codes, poverty, the hypocrisy of institutional religion, smoke pollution, and property ownership, somewhat obliquely in 'Towards Democracy', but directly and didactically in several of the other poems.²⁹⁹ In doing so, Carpenter not only adapts the formal properties of *Leaves of Grass* (such as the catalogue), but he also employs other poetic techniques, such as the use of labouring-class narrative voices and vignettes of working class life. In 'Towards Democracy' the speaker criticises the nation's social condition: 'O England, do I not know thee—as in a nightmare strangled, tied and bound?' (*Towards Democracy* 1883, p.27). The apostrophe establishes the personal tone of the invective; the speaker directly appeals

²⁹⁹ See, for example, 'The Curse of Property' (p.278), 'Deep Below Deep' (p.104), 'In a Manufacturing Town' (p.123) and 'In the Drawing Rooms' (p.119).

to the country as if it was a person, responsible for its social state, rather than denouncing the effects of industrialism in the third person:

Thy poverty—when through thy filthy courts from tangles of matted hair
gaunt women with venomous faces look upon me,
When I see the thin joyless faces of their children, and the brick walls scarcely
recognisable as brick for dirt, and the broken windows—when I breathe the
thick polluted air in which not even plants will live; when oaths and curses are
yelled in my ears, and the gibbering face of drink starts upon me at every corner;

The repeated ‘when’ has a cumulative effect, accentuating the sense of degradation. The environment is oppressive, and assaults the bodily sense, while the vocabulary is highly emotive (‘gaunt’, ‘thin’, ‘joyless’). Carpenter uses stock images of the slums from nineteenth-century journalism, poetry and fiction: the depiction of children in want was frequently used to induce an empathetic response in the reader. However, after employing this conventional trope, Carpenter inverts it in order to show the plight of the rich, stifled by ‘deadly respectability’:

When the faces of their children come to me pleading, pleading—every bit as
much as the children of the city poor—pleading for one touch of nature—Of
children who have been stuffed with lies all their lives, who have been told that
they cannot do without this and that and a thousand things.— (*Towards
Democracy*, 1883, p.28)

The repetition of ‘pleading’ reinforces the idea of need; rich and poor suffer alike under the English social and industrial conditions.³⁰⁰

Over the following two and a half pages, the speaker makes a sustained and detailed critique of those engaged in ‘the puppet dance of gentility’. Its climax is despairing:

When I look for help from the guides and see only a dead waste of aimless
abject closeshaven shabby simpering flat pompous peaked punctilious faces:
O England, whither—strangled, tied and bound—whither, whither art thou
come? (*Towards Democracy* 1883, p.30)

An anapaestic-iambic rhythm pulls the reader smoothly through the beginning of the first line, but is disrupted by the glut of adjectives describing the ‘faces’ and the alliterative plosive in ‘pompous peaked punctilious’. The rising pitch created by this string of adjectives breaks in the second apostrophe to the nation. The phrase ‘strangled, tied and bound’ opens and closes the depiction of English life, structurally embodying the acts of tying and binding contained in the phrase. The archaic cry ‘whither art thou come?’ carries connotations of biblical appeal, and the

³⁰⁰ Carpenter expounded this theme in *Desirable Mansions: A Tract* (London: Modern Press, 1886), reprinted with a few alterations from *Progress* (June 1883).

repeated 'whither' communicates a sense of desperation. However, in the opening of the following section Carpenter returns to the exfoliatory symbol of the husk; the England of the speaker's despair is merely a 'natural sheath protecting the young bud' of democracy. Once 'the young thing gains a little more power' the husks will be discarded; this is described in terms that gesture towards a conversion experience: after 'one instant struggle' the bud is born into the daylight, and the speaker is washed by 'sweet rain'.³⁰¹ The biblical tone is resumed and the natural order restored in the final stanza:

Blessings and thanks for ever for the sweet rain; blessings for the fresh air
blowing, and the meadows illimitable and the grass and the clouds;
Blessings and thanks for you, you wild waters eternally flowing—O come
flowing, encroaching, over me, in my ears: (*Towards Democracy* 1883, pp.30-
31)

These lines reverse the effect of the 'when I see thin joyless faces' paragraph: the environment is beautiful and soothing; the air is no longer 'thick' and 'polluted' but 'fresh', and ears are no longer subject to 'yelled' oaths and curses but are submerged in 'flowing' waters. The lexical repetition is peaceful and benedictory.

In 'Our Old Feuillage' Whitman describes the United States by moving through its different regions, describing the topography of the land and the occupations of its citizens in romantic terms: 'Always Florida's green peninsula—always the priceless delta of Louisiana—always the cotton fields of Alabama and Texas'; 'The scout riding on horseback over the plains west of the Mississippi, he ascends a knoll and sweeps his eyes around' (pp.318-323). America's component parts are united poetically in response to the increasingly fragile nature of their political union:

Singing the song of These, my ever-united lands—my body no more inevitably
united, part to part, and made out of a thousand diverse contributions one
identity, any more than my lands are inevitably united and made ONE IDENTITY;
(p.323)

The repetition of 'inevitably' and capitalisation of 'one identity' are emphatic, but by seeking to affirm the nation's unified identity Whitman glosses over its problematic social conditions, even as they were contributing to the fracturing of the federation. Slavery, for example, is slotted into the catalogue and is described in picturesque

³⁰¹ This theme is returned to in 'After Civilisation': 'Slowly out of the ruins of the past—like a young fern-frond uncurling out of its own brown litter— / Out of the litter of a decaying society, out of the confused mass of broken down creeds, customs, ideals [...] I saw a new life arise.' *Towards Democracy*, pp. 215-216.

terms: 'There are the negroes at work in good health, the ground in all directions is cover'd with pine straw; / In Tennessee and Kentucky slaves busy in the coalings, at the forge, by the furnace-blaze, or at the corn-shucking' (p.320).

Carpenter describes England using similar techniques, but for different purposes: the countryside is romanticised in order to promote a reconciliation with the land. As is characteristic of 'Towards Democracy', Carpenter extends Whitman's long poetic line into verse-paragraphs, which allows a more detailed consideration of each locale. The tone is equally tender when depicting the 'beautiful centuries-grown villages and farmhouses nestling down among their trees' and the 'oval-shaped manufacturing heart of England' (*Towards Democracy* 1883, p.61). However, though Carpenter beautifies the industrial cities ('I see streams of pale lilac and saffron-tinted fire', *Towards Democracy* 1883, p.62), his descriptions are underscored by the tacit acknowledgement of the difficult conditions within them: the 'cloud going up to heaven' in Sheffield's midst is 'sulphurous black', and the speaker hears 'the sob and gasp of pumps and the solid beat of steam and tilt-hammers'. The onomatopoeic phrase 'sob and gasp' is also metonymically suggestive of the hardships faced in the factories. The speaker himself is positioned above the land: 'England spreads like a map below me' (*Towards Democracy* 1883, p.58). He is not omniscient, but he is able to move swiftly around the country: 'I ascend the mountains of Wales', 'I descend the Wye'. The description is characterised by motion ('Teddington, Twickenham, Richmond, Brentford glide past') which pulls the reader around the country and creates a sense of anticipation.

This culminates in the next section of the poem where the vision is summarised:

I see a great land poised as in a dream—
 Waiting for the word by which it may live again.
 I see the stretched figure—waiting for the kiss and the re-awakening.
 (*Towards Democracy* 1883, p.62)

Both the fairytale of Sleeping Beauty and the myths of rebirth are invoked. The speaker clarifies: 'I see a great land waiting for its own people to come and take possession of it'. England must come to claim its stories, and find the 'word' to initiate its renewal. As in 'Song of Myself', the 'password primeval' is the 'sign of democracy' (p.50), but in *Towards Democracy* is also contingent upon the renewal of the relationship between the people and their land. Carpenter's phenomenally

popular socialist hymn 'England Arise!' reiterates this premise: the people are oppressed by 'laws that are falsehoods' and the theft of the 'reward' of labour. They must come to an awakening:

People of England! all your valleys call you,
High in the rising sun the lark sings clear,
Will you dream on, let shameful slumber thrall you?
Will you disown your native land so dear?
Shall it die unheard—
That sweet pleading word?
Arise, O England, for the day is here!³⁰²

Carpenter challenges his fellow-citizens to respond both ideologically and practically to his mystical vision of global democracy.

³⁰² Carpenter, *Chants of Labour*, pp.18-19.

Chapter Three. The ‘Labour Prophet’?: Representations of Walt Whitman in the Socialist Press

Socialist periodicals contributed to the spread of socialism both through the dissemination of its political philosophy and by providing information about organisations, meetings, demonstrations and other related activities. Deian Hopkin remarks that ‘socialists and radicals in Britain have always believed in the power of the press to influence politics’, and certainly they helped to foster a socialist community (or rather, a number of socialist communities), while providing a forum where ideas could be exchanged and developed.³⁰³ Whitman’s inclusion in these publications demonstrates very clearly how he was ‘impressed into service’ for the socialist cause.³⁰⁴ However, as can be seen in the article discussed earlier by James William Wallace in *The Labour Leader*, socialist periodicals could also be ‘impressed into service’ for Whitman’s cause. His ‘message’ was brought to people who might not otherwise read his poetry, and if he was used to illustrate or teach about socialism, conversely these publications were used to further his reputation. Here, Jerome McGann’s theory of textuality has purchase: his argument that

³⁰³ Deian Hopkin, ‘The Socialist Press in Britain, 1890-1910’, in *Newspaper History from the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day*, ed. by George Boyce, James Curran and Pauline Wingate (London: Constable, 1978), pp.294-306 (p.294). Hopkin argues that the period from 1890 to 1910 was ‘a climacteric in the history of socialist journalism’, and relates this to technological advances in the printing industry, and to the expansion of the electorate after the 1884 Reform Act which forced political parties to address a new body of electors.

³⁰⁴ Traubel, *Whitman in Camden*, I, p.65.

'different texts' are present in the same literary work and are brought into being not only through variations in the reader but by the physical properties of the text can help to explain the implications of reproducing Whitman's poetry (and sometimes prose) in a socialist journal or newspaper. If a poem is printed on a newspaper page between a report about a labour strike and an article about economics, it will lend itself to a different reading than if it was encountered, for example, in a literary anthology. The 'determinate sociohistorical conditions' of producing Whitman's work in socialist periodicals caused it to acquire socialist connotations, and even if the reader passed over the excerpts re-reprinted from *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman was frequently invoked in articles and commentary, ensuring that his name was associated with socialist ideology.³⁰⁵

It is not always easy to determine what constitutes a socialist publication; at the end of the nineteenth century anarchism and socialism were not such distinct ideologies, and it can be difficult to pinpoint where radical liberalism ends and socialism begins (as will be seen in my analysis of *The New Age*). For the purposes of this study I follow Deborah Mutch (editor of *English Socialist Periodicals, 1800-1900: A Reference Source*) in defining the socialist periodical in the same way that Deian Hopkin defines the 'left-wing press': as 'papers that espoused socialism or one of its variants and generally regarded themselves as politically on the opposite side, so to speak, of the conventional press'.³⁰⁶ For Mutch, 'a periodical cannot be socialist without embracing or creating a definition of the political ideology'.³⁰⁷ Of the periodicals that I consider, *The Labour Leader* and *The Labour Prophet* conform to this requirement. However, in the same way that people often had general socialist beliefs without committing themselves to a particular form or 'definition' of socialism, periodicals could promote a socialist ideology without aligning themselves with specific kinds of parliamentary politics, and *Seed-Time* and *The New Age* are examples of this.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁵ McGann, *The Textual Condition*, p.9.

³⁰⁶ Deborah Mutch, *English Socialist Periodicals, 1800-1900: A Reference Source* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p.xii; Deian Hopkin, 'The Left-Wing Press and the New Journalism', in *Papers for the Millions: The New Journalism in Britain, 1880s to 1914*, ed. by Joel H. Weiner (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), p.226.

³⁰⁷ Mutch, *English Socialist Periodicals*, p.xiii.

³⁰⁸ *The New Age* did not always promote a socialist ideology. I will discuss how it began as a radical liberal paper, but moved backwards and forwards between liberalism and socialism, before finally defining itself as a socialist publication under Alfred Orage in 1907.

The periodicals that I have selected represent a variety of socialisms, and span a period from 1889 (when the first number of *Seed-Time* was published) to 1922 (when *The Labour Leader* became *The New Leader*, and Alfred Orage sold *The New Age*). This gives a sense of progression, showing how socialism developed, and how this had an impact on the way that socialist periodicals treated Whitman, and literature more generally. The selected journals served different socialist purposes, and had different intended readerships. As the journal for the Fellowship of the New Life, *Seed-Time* is associated with what has been described as ‘the *fons et origo* of the later nineteenth-century ethical socialism of England’.³⁰⁹ The Fellowship promoted a form of socialism that prioritised the development of the individual spirit over state reform, and individualism was not seen as being antithetical to socialism:

The true antagonism is not between socialism and individualism, but between socialism and capitalism. That capitalism has come to be called ‘individualism’ I regard as a misfortune. True individualism, I hold, will be the outcome and fairest flower of socialism.³¹⁰

This philosophy has strong resonances with Whitman’s celebration of both the individual and the social whole, and *Seed-Time* devoted more space to Whitman than to any other poet.

The Labour Prophet, the mouthpiece for the Labour Church, was fundamentally concerned with the idea that socialism was a religious movement:

The publication of a paper in connection with the Labour Church movement has been undertaken, not only to meet the demand for a propagandist organ for the furtherance of our own mission, but also more generally to represent the religious life which inspires the labour movement.³¹¹

Its owner, editor, and chief contributor John Trevor was profoundly influenced by the American transcendentalists, and like Katharine Glasier and James William Wallace, explicitly defined himself as a follower or disciple of Whitman. This was reflected in the pages of *The Labour Prophet*, where Whitman was invoked more often than other poets, and in a highly spiritualised manner.

The Labour Leader did not elevate Whitman in the same way, but incorporated him less frequently and (most often) in more neutral terms. It appealed to a broad socialist readership, and was very popular, claiming circulation figures of

³⁰⁹ William Knight, *Memorials of Thomas Davidson*, p.16.

³¹⁰ Herbert Rix, *Sermons, Addresses, and Essays* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1907), p.191. Rix was a member of the Fellowship of the New Life.

³¹¹ John Trevor, ‘Editorial’, *Labour Prophet* (January 1892), p.4.

50,000 under Keir Hardie's editorship. As the organ of the ILP, the weekly paper was associated with ethical socialism, but it had a more pragmatic political focus than *Seed-Time* or *The Labour Prophet*. It is therefore a useful counterpoint, and demonstrates how Whitman was included in a periodical that could not be considered 'Whitmanian', and presented to an audience that was not always interested in the more esoteric interpretations of socialism.

In contrast, *The New Age*, a cultural and political review, was aimed at a progressive intellectual readership, and of the four papers that I consider was closest to the liberal end of the radical spectrum: it began as a radical liberal publication and shifted between liberalism and socialism until Alfred Orage and Holbrook Jackson purchased it in 1907 and it became an independent socialist weekly. Though *The New Age* is generally remembered as an important Modernist publication, I look predominantly at its treatment of Whitman in the late nineteenth century, before concluding with a brief discussion about how Orage's views about the poet had changed from those he disseminated in *The Labour Leader*.

In the nineteenth century journals played a pivotal role in shaping literary culture, circulating literature, reviews, and notice of forthcoming publications.³¹² Socialist journals performed this function in a specifically democratic context. The democratic literary culture that they helped to create was broad enough to encompass both economic theory and creative writing, as Ruth Livesey observes: 'This inclusiveness, this refusal to divide aesthetics and politics (as well as idealism and materialism) as an either/or, was one of the defining characteristics of British socialism as it gained force in the early 1880s.'³¹³ Terry Eagleton colourfully describes this expansiveness:

Fin-de-siècle intellectuals blend belief systems with staggering nonchalance, blithely confident of some invisible omega point at which Baudelaire and Kropotkin consort harmoniously together and Emerson lies down with Engels.³¹⁴

The dissemination of this aesthetic culture served a variety of purposes. Looking back to the articles written by Wallace about Whitman, or the socialist reviews of Carpenter's *Towards Democracy*, literature was used to forward spiritual

³¹² See Jock Macleod, 'Between Politics and Culture: Liberal Journalism and Literary Culture at the *Fin de Siècle*', *English Literature in Translation, 1880-1920*, 51:1 (2008), 5-22.

³¹³ Ruth Livesey, 'Socialism and Victorian Poetry', p.1.

³¹⁴ Terry Eagleton, 'The Flight to the Real', in *Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.12.

interpretations of socialism and to further a deeper understanding of 'true' democracy. However, it was also employed more didactically in order to 'educate' an increasingly literate labouring class.

Drawing on discourses of self-improvement, journalists promoted the principle that art and literature were integral to 'moral and social advancement'. The phrase occurs in a sketch in *Reynolds's Newspaper* that exemplifies this kind of effort; the scene is set: '[Marshall, a Philistine grocer's assistant, wants to know the use of painting and poetry. He meets Johnson, an engine fitter, who has read Ruskin's books]'.³¹⁵ The word 'Philistine' alludes to Arnoldian conceptions of culture, while the reference to Ruskin recalls his belief that the arts were not solely recreational, but were essential for individual and therefore social advancement. Yet Whitman is invoked at the beginning of the exchange:

Marshall: Well, Johnson, where are you going. [sic] Come and have a stroll up and down Holborn.

Johnson: No, thanks. I believe in exercise, and I know the value of fresh air, but to-night I am going to a working man's club, where one of the fellows is to read a paper on Walt Whitman, the Democrat and poet. After that we shall have a debate. I shall be pleased if you will come with me.

Though the author promotes the value of the arts, he makes no attempt to write in a poetic literary style; instead, a rather wooden dialogue is used in order to ensure that his point is clearly communicated. Whitman is specifically introduced as a 'Democrat', indicating that the argument for 'the use of painting and poetry' has a political agenda: 'art and culture' are seen to be social levellers. Culture is a social force and it is each individual's duty to pursue it:

In a community a man has no moral right to please himself solely. He must so order his life that he does not trespass upon the rights of others: he must avoid being a dead weight upon the wheels of progress. By neglecting art and culture you injure yourself and others [. . .] Because of this gross contentment with a mechanical life of working, eating, and sleeping, we wage-earners are considered to be incompetent to form right judgements upon social affairs. When more of us give up a greater part of our leisure to self-culture we shall get our hopes fulfilled [. . .] The more we read and think the more we shall be respected when we make appeal to our legislators [. . .] Are we always to watch our more fortunate countrymen enjoying these pleasures, while we solace ourselves with lower enjoyments? No, let us learn the art of life which teaches that lovely things are necessary to our moral and social advancement.

In its broadest sense this argument has points of contact with some of the ideas Whitman put forward in *Democratic Vistas*: democratic progress is inherently bound

³¹⁵ Walter N. Gallichan, 'Art and Social Progress', *Reynolds's Newspaper* (May 20 1894), p.3.

to the arts. However, Whitman specifically called for a democratic literature, a qualification which is hinted at in the reference to Whitman, but not returned to. Johnson's argument is more Arnoldian than Whitmanian; it elevates the 'culture' that Whitman damns for creating 'supercilious infidels' (p.986), emphasising the acquisition of knowledge rather than the emotional or inspirational impact of art or literature.³¹⁶

One obvious way that socialist journalists helped to create the democratic literary culture was through the recommendation of reading material. *Reynolds's Newspaper*, for example, suggests that British readers should be 'fed on a better mental diet' of 'good Democratic literature', and provides a list of such texts, dividing them into 'argumentative' literature which appealed to reason, and literature which helped 'the imaginative side of Democracy'.³¹⁷ Twenty books were named in the latter category, one of which was *Leaves of Grass*. Robert Blatchford's *Merrie England* (which was made up of a series of *Clarion* columns in which the principles of socialism were explained to an imagined working-class addressee) also included Whitman in a list of pamphlets and books recommended for the socialist reader.³¹⁸ He is first directed to economic and political texts, and then is guided towards an assortment of creative literature including Dickens, Thackeray, Thoreau, Carpenter and Morris. Blatchford even suggests the order in which the books should be read, so as to 'more fully enter into the spirit of "Merrie England"', and Rhys's *Poems of Walt Whitman* (the only poetry to be included) is positioned near the beginning of the list (fifth out of eighteen texts), giving some idea of its importance.

Poetry was used in socialist periodicals in two main ways. First, poetry that was specifically socialist was used directly as propaganda for the movement. This constitutes the vast majority of the poetry that was published and reviewed, and it was contributed not only by people who were primarily poets, but also by columnists,

³¹⁶ For a study of the relationship between popular culture and socialism that extends beyond the literary and artistic spheres into sports, music and recreation, see Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture*. For an examination of the role of culture in the Fabian society and the tension between middle-upper-class elitism and popular culture, see Ian Britain, *Fabianism and Culture: A Study in British Socialism and the Arts c.1884-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

³¹⁷ Anon., 'Democratic Literature', *Reynolds's Newspaper* (14 October 1900), p.4.

³¹⁸ 'Nunquam', [Robert Blatchford], *Merrie England* (London: Clarion, 1893), p.99.

activists and readers.³¹⁹ For example, Keir Hardie, John Bruce Glasier, and Katharine Glasier wrote poetry for *The Labour Leader* (though not whilst they were serving in an editorial role), and Katharine Glasier also contributed to *The Labour Prophet*. Some papers included satiric socialist verse, such as that written by Tom Maguire as Bardolph for *The Labour Leader*. *Fin de siècle* socialist poetry overtly promoted its political ideology, and depicted events and situations relating to the labour movement; the poems usually had conventional stanzaic structures, regular metrical patterns and rhyme schemes, and though they could be comical, more frequently they made use of an emotive register. Anne Janowitz suggests that such poems were part of a 'communitarian strain' of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poetry which claimed and created a poetic and literary culture in the name of the 'people':

Chartism fully engaged itself to the interventionist aspect of romantic poetics, and so provides a literary link between the communitarian strain evinced in the first and second generation romantic poets, and the socialist poetics of the end of the century.³²⁰

Certainly, though Socialist poetry has not caught the academic imagination in the same way that Chartist poetry has, there are clear formal connections between the two, and Chartist poets such as Ebenezer Elliott and Gerald Massey were published in socialist periodicals alongside socialist poets.³²¹

The second key way that poetry featured in socialist periodicals was in the inclusion of established and well-known poets, who were reprinted less frequently but commented on and referred to more often. Though this seems to reinforce the literary culture of an educated elite rather than refuting it in favour of a 'communitarian' literature, socialist journalists often discussed how it worked out of the same 'democratic spirit' as overtly socialist literature. For example, in an article for *The Labour Leader*, Henry Salt, like Janowitz in the twentieth century, drew a revolutionary poetic line between the Romantics through Chartism to the socialist

³¹⁹ Though submissions from readers were encouraged and accepted in *The Labour Leader*, Keir Hardie would only publish those that he perceived to be of sufficient literary merit. Authors that did not meet his standards were rejected publicly, and often scathingly, in the paper's correspondence pages.

³²⁰ Janowitz, *Lyric and Labour*, p.143; p.28.

³²¹ Mutch remarks that socialist literature has not gained the same 'academic status' as Chartist poetry; her index of literature published in socialist periodicals in *English Socialist Periodicals, 1880-1900* works towards redressing this balance (p.viii). For a comprehensive study of Chartist poetry see Michael Sanders, *The Poetry of Chartism: Aesthetics, Politics, History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

poets. He argued that these diverse poets were infused with the same 'spirit' of democracy, and were important to the socialist movement.³²² Despite his conviction that poetry had, in general, become less visionary as the nineteenth century progressed, he asserted that the Chartist poets had a 'direct power', and Francis Adams and John Barlas were named as the best practitioners of socialist poetry. Yet his highest praise was reserved for Whitman and Carpenter (who was a close friend of Salt's), both of whom he believed to have produced democratic poetry of a 'higher' order. In Salt's article, they are set apart from the other poets of their time in an associative relationship, and *Towards Democracy* is lauded as 'the final word of the century on the quest of Freedom—"the word Democracy"—revolution and revelation in one'.

Writing about the Fabian Society in *The New England Magazine* in 1894, William Clarke discussed how literature had contributed towards the increased popularity of socialism, specifically amongst the younger generations of the 'cultivated classes' in Britain.³²³ He names other factors such as the failure of the political economy, the 'exhaustion' of the Liberal party, the 'unsatisfactory character' of republicanism, and the shift away from a religious 'creed of other-worldliness', and then makes the claim that there had grown 'a new spirit' in both art and literature because 'there was a desire to know things as they are, to sound the plummet in the sea of social misery, to have done with make-believe and get at realities'. He states:

I should name among individual writers who have powerfully aided the growth,
I do not say of Socialism itself, but of the feeling in the soil of which Socialism
is easily developed, Dickens, Victor Hugo, Carlyle, Whitman, Ruskin, Tolstoi,
Zola, and Arnold.³²⁴

Clarke makes a useful distinction: established poets, including so-called 'democratic poets' such as Whitman and Shelley, were rarely championed in concrete terms as 'socialist poets', but were instead seen to perform some kind of elusive 'fertilising function'. Thus the literature which had inspired a keen sense of radicalism amongst the intellectual classes was in turn used to prepare the ground for the cultivation of socialist thought in others.

³²² Henry Salt, 'Some Revolutionary Poets of the Century', *Labour Leader* (19 June 1897), p.207.

³²³ William Clarke, 'The Fabian Society', *New England Magazine*, 16:1 (March 1894), pp. 89-100.

³²⁴ Clarke, 'The Fabian Society', p.95.

In *The Labour Leader*, a writer using the initials 'W.B.' also describes a 'new spirit' in Victorian literature which he suggested 'connotes a movement towards Socialism':

That Socialist passion for man, to which we have been referring, and the discontent with the present highly complex life of his, are but two indications of a spirit which, I believe, has informed every thought in every art in this Victorian era; it has been called by many names, but I can conceive of none more comprehensive and illuminative than that which calls it "a return to the earth" [. . .] in a word, simplification.³²⁵

As well as having connotations with an Edenic pre-industrial state, the 'return to the earth' appeals to a religious interpretation of socialism which Caroline Sumpter describes as 'democratic theology heavily influenced by Romantic and pantheistic ideologies'.³²⁶ 'W.B.' adds that 'the apotheosis of the spirit is seen in Whitman, who lies so close to the "mighty mother"', but he also associates the democratic spirit with the poets of the French Revolution:

The poets, necessarily the foster-brethren of all beautiful thoughts, responded with all the sensibility of their natures to the divine ideas—of fraternity and equality and freedom—behind the Revolution, and gave them a new life and a more subtle attraction in their "most heart-remembered verse".³²⁷

Poetry was able to renew and re-clothe 'divine' democratic ideas, and therefore had a powerful social and political potential.

Janowitz draws attention to a passage in *The Chartist Circular* which expounds this idea: 'Poetry is a lever of commanding influence...It penetrates to every nerve and fibre of society, stirring into irresistibility its innermost current, and spiriting into life and activity the obscurest dweller of the valley.'³²⁸ This premise is often echoed in the late nineteenth-century socialist press, though by this time the dweller of the valley had become the citizen of the slum. 'W.B.' goes so far as to claim that Shelley's influence was 'the most powerful, as it has been the most noble, influence for Socialism of the century', while in *To-day* Percival Chubb, a founder of the Fellowship of the New Life and then a member of the Fabian Society (who also visited Whitman on a trip to America), claimed socialism drew its 'vital force' not

³²⁵ 'W.B.', 'The Socialist Spirit in Victorian Literature', *Labour Leader* (19 June 1897), p.206.

³²⁶ Caroline Sumpter, 'Making Socialists or Murdering to Dissect? Natural History and Child Socialization in the *Labour Prophet* and *Labour Leader*', in *Culture and Science in the Nineteenth-century Media*, ed. by Louise Henson, Geoffrey Cantor, Gowan Dawson, Richard Noakes, Sally Shuttleworth, and Jonathon R. Topham (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp.29- 42 (p.30).

³²⁷ I have been unable to identify the source of the quotation 'most heart-remembered verse'.

³²⁸ Janowitz, *Lyrics and Labour*, p.145; quotation from the *Chartist Circular* (24 October 1840).

from economists or Karl Marx, but from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature:

Not from its economists, its Marx and his coadjutors; these are its enlighteners, but not its inspirers and instigators. These latter we find in names such as Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron, Carlyle, Emerson, Dickens, Ruskin, George Eliot, Thoreau, Whitman and the younger Swinburne who have quickened and nourished in us a deeper sense of human dignity, a more exacting demand for freedom, a keener susceptibility to beauty and recoil from ugliness, a wider sympathy, and more uniting spirit of comradeship. Out of the influences of these men it has grown; and such a kindred influence must continue to sustain or impel it.³²⁹

Though 'enlighteners' and 'inspirers' both have spiritual connotations, an 'enlightener' is one who 'imparts intellectual light, informs or instructs' while to inspire is 'to breathe or blow upon or into' (*OED*). Enlightenment is concerned with revealing what is already there, whereas inspiration and instigation are about bringing it into being. For Chubb, poetry was not merely a useful vehicle for the promotion of political ideology but was fundamental to the formulation of the ideology itself.

As the key Whitmanian word 'comradeship' may suggest, in articles of this type, Whitman is almost always named as one of the authors who writes out of and contributes towards this 'new spirit'. However, most socialist publications did not solely, or even predominantly, include poets conventionally hailed as 'democratic', such as Shelley, Whitman and Morris. They drew on a range of well-known British and American poets, including Wordsworth, Byron, Keats, Burns, Tennyson, the Brownings, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Arnold, Longfellow, Whittier, Oliver Wendell Holmes, James Russell Lowell, and Swinburne. The specific ways in which the different poets were invoked differs from paper to paper, from year to year, and from journalist to journalist: Tennyson, for example, was criticised for his lack of democratic zeal in *The Labour Leader* while the newspaper carried a line from *In Memoriam* on its front page masthead, 'Ring in the Christ that is to be'.

Whitman's treatment in the socialist press varied in a similar way. For some writers, Whitman was only one of the many poets, novelists, playwrights and essayists who contributed towards a democratic aesthetic; yet others, like Alfred Orage in *The Labour Leader*, believed that Whitman was crucially important to the socialist movement, and some, such as John Trevor in *The Labour Prophet*, even

³²⁹ Percival Chubb, 'The Two Alternatives', *To-day* (September 1887), p. 76.

elevated *Leaves of Grass* to the status of a religious text. Though Whitman was not always revered, the vehement criticism often found in the mainstream press was absent from socialist periodicals; in the publications that I consulted, the formal properties of *Leaves of Grass* were sometimes satirised, but when they were discussed they were always defended. Whitman's poetry was incorporated into articles on the 'big topics' of religion, politics and literature, but was also used in less weighty, and sometimes light-hearted contexts, such as cycling, school board elections, children's work, physical health, and holidays. He was sometimes used for didactic purposes, but was also often referred to neutrally in passing. The political, spiritual and literary preferences of those involved determined how Whitman was presented to the reader, but the pattern is not always what could be expected. John Trevor declared that Whitman's words were 'worth more than all the rest of the words in this paper put together', so the fact that he received considerably more attention in *The Labour Prophet* than any other poet is hardly surprising.³³⁰ Yet in *The Labour Leader*, Whitman was included more often under Keir Hardie's editorship than that of either John Bruce or Katharine Glasier, despite Hardie being, at best, ambivalent towards the poet, while Whitman was central to the Glasiers' social and spiritual ideology. Likewise, though Alfred Orage's column in *The Labour Leader* was saturated with Whitman references, he was not discussed so often in *The New Age* after Orage and another Whitman admirer, Holbrook Jackson, became owners and editors. I analyse some examples, or 'specimens', of writing about Whitman from these publications in order to examine the different ways that the 'poet of democracy' was used in the socialist press.

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, Whitman and his work appeared less often in socialist publications. This corresponds with the general trend at this time whereby literature, especially by writers who were not socialist, was phased out. In the periodicals that I consulted, the term 'literature' became almost exclusively applied to nonfiction texts that examined the legislative and economic facets of socialism. This relates to the changing nature of the socialist movement itself, which became predominantly concerned with parliamentary politics and trade unionism. With less emphasis on the inspirational and instigational force of the literary and religious 'democratic spirit', Whitman's place in British socialism was less assured.

³³⁰ John Trevor, 'Editorial', *Labour Prophet* (April 1892), p.28.

Seed-Time: Regenerating the Individual

The Fellowship of the New Life was founded in 1883 by a group 'interested in religious thought, ethical propaganda, and social reform' which had gathered around Thomas Davidson, a philosopher and adult educationist, who was originally from Aberdeen but lived in America for nearly two decades and spent time with Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Concord transcendentalists.³³¹ On his return to Britain, he moved to London where he began to discuss his ideas of moral and social regeneration with a group including Percival Chubb, Havelock Ellis, Henry Champion, William Clarke, Hubert Bland, Edward Pease, Frank Podmore and William Jupp. 'After many meetings', recalled one of the Fellowship's first members, 'he proposed the formation of a society for the cultivation of character, a complete education, and social regeneration' and the Fellowship of the New Life was formed.³³²

The ideas debated by the group were central to the socialist revival, and many of its members became actively involved in the movement, but Davidson himself became wary of the emphasis put on social and political reform, and in 1884 there was an amicable split between the Fellowship and what was to develop into the Fabian Society. The rules and principles adopted by the Fellowship show how the moral regeneration of the individual was believed to be necessary for the transformation of society. Mark Bevir summarises:

Members initially were to perfect their individual characters in accord with the ethical precepts of love, simplicity and kindness, before then forming a community to encapsulate these principles, and finally using the example of this community to regenerate humanity as a whole.³³³

The influence of American transcendentalism can clearly be seen in the individualistic slant of Davidson's social project, and it is easy to understand Whitman's appeal; he stated in *Democratic Vistas*: 'This idea of perfect individualism it is indeed that deepest tinges and gives character to the idea of the aggregate' (p.966). After the split in the group, Davidson returned to live in America, and Kevin Manton suggests that the Fellowship 'gave allegiance to an

³³¹ Maurice Adams to William Knight, in Knight, *Memorials of Thomas Davidson*, p.16.

³³² Knight, *Memorials of Thomas Davidson*, p.17.

³³³ Bevir, 'American Romanticism', p.885.

ideology, socialism'.³³⁴ *Seed-Time*, first published in 1889 as *The Sower*, espoused the group's dovetailed ideals of individual improvement and social transformation.

In his 'reconsideration' of the Fellowship, Manton argues that 'this complex, resourceful and potent group have been ill-served by being given the simplistic and pejorative label of "ethical" socialism'.³³⁵ He asserts that the 'doer-dreamer' model generally applied to the split between the Fabians and the New Lifers is false typecasting and is 'diametrically opposed' to the Fellowship's programme which was 'based on the principle of the unity of facets of life that had been artificially separated from each other by late Victorian society'.³³⁶ Manton is right to stress the group's emphasis (like Whitman's and Carpenter's) on synthesis and unification, and he valuably challenges the negative assumptions about the Fellowship which are encouraged by a perceived division among socialists between activists and thinkers. However, the fundamental differences between the outlooks of the Fabians and the Fellowship should not be glossed over; at the most basic level, though they were not necessarily contradictory, their priorities differed: the Fellowship was concerned first and foremost with internal spiritual development while the Fabians agitated for practical social reform.

Davidson regarded social reform as a stopgap measure that was not negative in itself, but could distract attention from the primary issue of moral regeneration. For instance, in November 1899 he congratulated the editor on the latest issue of *Seed-Time*, but tempered his praise with the complaint that it was 'too much carried away by the temporary reform wave of socialism'.³³⁷ The word 'temporary' emphasises Davidson's belief that lasting change could not be brought about simply by eliminating social injustices. He adds: 'It is inexpressibly funny to find an admirer of Thoreau professing socialism. I shall expect soon to hear of a monk advocating the uxoriousness of Solomon.' The comparison places American transcendentalism and socialism in an antithetical relationship, a premise which was rejected not only by socialists such as Wallace, Carpenter, and John Trevor, but also by the Fellowship itself: the group evolved after Davidson's return to America so as

³³⁴ Manton, 'Fellowship of the New Life', p.285. See Manton and Bevir for detailed accounts of the group's development.

³³⁵ Manton, 'Fellowship of the New Life', p.282.

³³⁶ Manton, 'Fellowship of the New Life', p.284.

³³⁷ Knight, *Memorials of Thomas Davidson*, pp.26-27.

to incorporate the practical and political aspects of socialism more fully into its spiritual ideal. For some, such as a 'young Lady' who wrote to *Seed-Time* in 1890, this was the source of the Fellowship's appeal; she contrasts the Fellowship with other socialist movements:

But the Fellowship is quite different, because it puts the spiritual above the material, and yet faces all the material consequences of accepting the principles of Solidarity and Equality—and because it always keeps the Ideal in view, whilst striving for the social changes necessary to realise it.³³⁸

Of course, the Fellowship was not quite as unique as the correspondent suggests, but it certainly offered an alternative to the SDF and the Fabian Society, the two most prominent socialist organisations in 1890. Though the Fellowship adapted Davidson's philosophy, he continued to be very influential, which was reflected in the pages of *Seed-Time*; the same issue quoted above includes an article in which he argues:

My conclusion is that no reform can ultimately help us, save an ethical and a religious reform; that not the law which curbs outward manifestations of selfishness, but the Gospel which uproots selfishness, is the demand of the time.³³⁹

The internal is advanced ahead of the external, and 'dreaming' is advocated alongside, if not over and above, 'doing'.

American romanticism featured prominently in *Seed-Time*: Whitman, Thoreau and Emerson were frequently discussed. Over the paper's nine year quarterly run, Whitman was mentioned more often, and was the subject of more in-depth commentary, than any other poet (also discussed in detail were two contemporary socialist poets Bessie Joynes and Alfred Hayes, Edward Carpenter, and more briefly, Whittier).³⁴⁰ There are three long articles that discuss his work and his character very favourably, and every other time that he was commented on is in positive terms. In articles about other subjects, his was the most frequently-quoted poetry. None of his poems was reprinted, but this is not surprising as *Seed-Time* included at most one poem per issue (often none at all), and all of these were by committed socialists. It did, however, publish a paragraph from *Democratic Vistas* (p.966) in April 1892:

³³⁸ Anon., 'Correspondence', *Seed-Time* (April 1890), p.14.

³³⁹ Thomas Davidson, 'The Source of Economic Law', *Seed-Time* (April 1890), pp.3-7 (p.7).

³⁴⁰ Though Emerson also featured, he was not discussed as a poet but as an essayist.

The purpose of democracy—supplanting old belief in the necessary absoluteness of establish'd dynastic rulership, temporal, ecclesiastical, and scholastic, as furnishing the only security against chaos, crime, and ignorance—is, through many transmigrations and amid endless ridicules, arguments, ostensible failures, to illustrate, at all hazards, this doctrine or theory that man, properly train'd in sanest, highest freedom, may and must become a law, and series of laws, unto himself, surrounding and providing for, not only his own personal control, but all his relations to other individuals and to the State; and that . . . this . . . is the only scheme worth working from, as warranting results like those of Nature's laws, reliable, when once establish'd, to carry on themselves.³⁴¹

The passage appears at the bottom of the page without commentary. Partly, it acts as a space-filler, but it also reinforces and reiterates the principles of the Fellowship: the extract from Whitman corresponds with the group's interpretation of the 'purpose' of socialism, and therefore functions as a rewording of the message that it promoted. The theme of the paragraph is introduced in its opening clause, in an authoritative tone: 'the purpose of democracy'. Neither Whitman nor *Seed-Time* is concerned here with specific methods of bringing about political change or descriptions of the form this should take, but with the very reason for democracy at all. In order to find out this 'purpose', the reader must negotiate a convoluted series of subclauses: the first sentence runs for thirteen lines in *Seed-Time* before a semi-colon indicates that it is syntactically complete, and there is only one full stop at the end of the paragraph. Once these qualifiers are removed, the reason is revealed to be two-fold: first, man must become a law 'unto himself'; second, this would affect his connections with other members of society and the political nation.

The first part of this 'purpose' can be related to Emerson's proposal that man should stand in 'an original relation to the universe', a concept specifically endorsed in other *Seed-Time* articles.³⁴² William Jupp, for example, reflected on the concept of discipleship and invoked both Emerson and Whitman to forward the idea that each person's ultimate goal should be to reach the stage where he 'need be a disciple no more'.³⁴³ Jupp illustrates this principle with an extract from Whitman's 'Starting from Paumanok':

I conn'd old times,
I sat studying at the feet of the great masters.
In the name of these states shall I scorn the antique?

³⁴¹ *Seed-Time* (April 1892), p.9; Whitman, *Poetry and Prose*, p.966. The two point ellipses indicate omissions in the text in *Seed-Time*: see below.

³⁴² Emerson, *The Complete Prose Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, p.310.

³⁴³ William Jupp, 'Freedom in Religious Thought and Life', *Seed-Time* (January 1891), pp.1-5 (p.1).

Why these are the children of the antique to justify it.
Dead poets, philosophers, priests,
Martyrs, artists, inventors, governments long since,
Language-shapers on other shores,
Nations once powerful, now reduced, withdrawn, or desolate,
I dare not proceed till I respectively credit what you have left wafted hither;
I have perused it, own it is admirable (moving awhile among it),
Think nothing can ever be greater, nothing can ever deserve more than it
deserves;
Regarding it all intently a long while, then dismissing it,
I stand in my place with my own day here.³⁴⁴

Whitman advocates a break from all ecclesiastic, monarchic and intellectual figures of authority, but it is qualified by the fact that first the past must be ‘conn’d’ or ‘studied’. The structure of the passage reinforces this concept: the reader must progress through eleven lines that acknowledge the importance of the past before reaching the turn where it is resolutely ‘dismissed’. When used by Jupp, the ‘language-shapers on other shores’ include Whitman himself: here and elsewhere in *Seed-Time* he is not followed apostolically but is treated instead as a philosopher of democracy.

The second part of the democratic ‘purpose’, the subject of the second sentence in the paragraph from *Democratic Vistas*, was its social effect: when an individual attained the ‘highest freedom’ it would radiate into all of his relationships, and so determine the character of first the community and then the nation. This resonates with the way that the Fellowship tended to see social reform as an important but secondary correlate of individual regeneration.³⁴⁵ Whitman introduces the concept of ‘Nature’, which aligns democratic principles with biological law: the way that the extract is edited suggests that once democracy had been ‘establish’d’ it would perpetuate itself, which points towards the idea, often found in socialist rhetoric, that democratic progress was an evolutionary certainty. However, the sentiment expressed in *Democratic Vistas* is distorted; without the omissions, the phrase reads:

³⁴⁴ Jupp, ‘Freedom in Religious Thought and Life’, p.3; Whitman, *Poetry and Prose*, p.178. There are small differences in the punctuation of Whitman’s poem in *Leaves of Grass* and in *Seed-Time*; here and throughout this chapter I give the poems as they appear in the periodicals.

³⁴⁵ For example, *Seed-Time* reported on a lecture by a Dr. Adler where he asked: ‘Socialists laid great stress on Service to the Community. But was not the power of the individual in society ignored in this wide sweeping expression?’. Adler also invokes Whitman, suggesting that he ‘struck the true note of Economics when, to a man who boasted of the industrial greatness of his country, he said “These things are good, but do they turn out *men* down your way?”’. ‘Ethical Standards Applied to Economics’, *Seed-Time* (July 1892), pp.6-7.

And that, while other theories, as in the past histories of nations, have proved wise enough, and indispensable perhaps for their conditions, *this*, as matters now stand in our civilized world, is the only scheme worth working from, as warranting results like those of Nature's laws, reliable, when once establish'd, to carry on themselves. (p.966)

Though Whitman does not directly mention America, he sets up an opposition between it and other nations using a rhetoric which alludes to the concept of manifest destiny, implicitly suggesting that though democracy may not have been appropriate for Britain, it was demanded by the youthful American nation. By removing these lines Whitman's interpretation of democracy and the Fellowship's seem to be in perfect accord, lending the weight of literary support to *Seed-Time*'s ethical position.

Mark Bevir suggests that 'the American romantics drew heavily on Unitarianism in a way the British did not', and out of this an 'immanentist faith' was developed which profoundly influenced *fin de siècle* socialists, such as Edward Carpenter, John Trevor, and (from the Fellowship of the New Life) Percival Chubb and William Jupp.³⁴⁶ This involved 'a belief in a single spiritual deity existing within nature' and the notion that 'everything contains the divine spirit, so everything is united in a single whole'.³⁴⁷ This has already been discussed in relation to Carpenter, and is also evident in *Seed-Time*. For example, shortly after Whitman died, Jupp wrote a three page article called 'Walt Whitman: The Man and his Message', in which he remarks that he feels no sense of pity because Whitman 'belonged so truly, not to men only, but to Nature, and the total life of things'.³⁴⁸ He continues:

It was but a call to him to pass and mingle more completely with the great mysterious elements of the Universe. As he said to a friend, "It does not in the least matter whether I die or live." He belonged to life as a whole, and death seemed to make little difference.

Certainly, Jupp's rhetoric recalls Carpenter's belief in universal interconnectedness, and his understanding of Whitman's death seems to be informed by an 'immanentist' belief of the kind Bevir describes: if the divine was in Whitman as it is in every person, Whitman's death would merely redistribute his divinity back amongst the

³⁴⁶ Bevir, 'American Romanticism', p.879. Jupp was brought up as a Calvinist then became a Congregationalist minister before founding a free religious movement based on the principles of the Fellowship; Bevir draws attention to Jupp's memoir *Wayfarings* in which he states that '*Leaves of Grass*, and *Towards Democracy* took their place with Thoreau's *Walden*, and Emerson's *Essays and Lectures*, and *Conduct of Life* as Scriptures "given by inspiration of God"', p.894; Jupp, *Wayfarings: A Record in Adventure and Liberation in the Life of the Spirit* (London: Headley Brothers, 1918), p.68.

³⁴⁷ Bevir, 'American Romanticism', pp.879-880.

³⁴⁸ Jupp, 'Walt Whitman: The Man and his Message', *Seed-Time* (July 1892), pp.1-3 (p.1).

other interrelated components of the universe. A similar sentiment is voiced in the following paragraph: 'One wants to say of Whitman that Nature seemed personified and made absolutely friendly to man in him.' 'Personified' is not used here solely in its representational sense as symbol or metaphor, but as an 'embodiment of a quality' (*OED*). Nature is equated with the divine, which is within everyone, but is most evident in a few exceptional men such as Walt Whitman.

However, the first of the two selections from *Leaves of Grass* that Jupp uses to conclude, from 'The Mystic Trumpeter', seems to communicate a different idea:

O glad, exulting, culminating song!
A vigour more than earth's is in thy notes,
Marches of victory—man disenthral'd the conqueror at last,
Hymns to the universal God from the universal man—all joy!
A re-born race appears—a perfect world, all joy!
Women and men in wisdom, innocence and health—all joy!
Riotous, laughing Bacchanals filled with joy!
War, sorrow, suffering gone—the rank earth purged—nothing but joy left!³⁴⁹

God and man are in a harmonious relationship, but they are separate entities; there is a 'universal' composite God and a 'universal' composite man, but they are not one and the same. The idea of an earth 'purged' of 'war', 'sorrow', and 'suffering' has millenarian overtones, and recalls the 'New Jerusalem' in Revelation 21. These Christian connotations are reinforced by the reference to re-birth, which suggests a radical change of identity rather than the 'mingling' of interconnected elements. For Jupp, Whitman played an important role in bringing about the Utopian vision he describes; the article concludes: 'This man to me is a great prophecy. He is the herald of a happier age. He is a type of the average man of the time that is to be.' An unequivocal and assured tone is created through the use of three separate sentences and repetition of 'is'. Though he believed that Whitman 'personified Nature' in a way that other men did not, it was not because he was superior to them, but because he represented what was to come. Whitman was not simply a prophet but a prophecy; he embodied the 'divine average' he sang.

The question of Whitman's style is addressed in a later article by J. Wilcock, simply entitled 'Walt Whitman'.³⁵⁰ Taking his lead from Whitman's 'A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads', Wilcock suggests that the two 'impetus-words' of *Leaves of Grass* are 'comradeship' and 'suggestiveness'; 'comradeship' is associated

³⁴⁹ Jupp, 'The Man and his Message', p.3; Whitman, *Poetry and Prose*, p.582.

³⁵⁰ J. Wilcock, 'Walt Whitman', *Seed-Time* (April 1895), pp.2-7.

with its content, and 'suggestiveness' with its formal properties. Whitman explains what he meant by 'suggestiveness':

The word I myself put primarily for the description of [*Leaves*] as they stand at last, is the word Suggestiveness. I round and finish little, if anything; and could not, consistently with my scheme. The reader will always have his or her part to do, just as much as I have had mine. (pp.666-667)

Again, Whitman insists on a collaboration between the text and the reader, and Wilcock suggests that this process causes the poems to gain a sense of vitality while allowing the reader to enjoy a greater freedom.³⁵¹ In contrast, 'the poetry of Culture' which 'depends greatly upon rhyme and metre' is seen to render the reader 'entirely under the control of the poet'. The reader's imagination is restricted to what is presented by the poet, and he 'sees with [the poet] the objects and problems he is striving to interpret'. In *Leaves of Grass* there is 'meaning' outside the text, which cannot be fully communicated: 'Many of [Whitman's] thoughts are too profound for language, and they generate ideas in the reader's mind which the reader himself could not, if he would, limit to the clothing of words'.³⁵² This linguistic inadequacy was not to be regretted because paradoxically it was necessary in order for the reader to understand Whitman's 'profound' thoughts. Wilcock makes a case for a literature that encourages 'self-reliance' in the reader: like the past 'masters' in the 'Starting from Paumanok' passage, 'the poetry of Culture' was not necessarily harmful in itself, but it could prevent the individual from enjoying 'an original relation to the universe', to return to Emerson's phrase. In contrast, reading Whitman prompted the reader towards the kind of individual regeneration which the Fellowship advocated: it was held to be 'the poetry of futurity, of the possibilities of the present, and the infinite'.³⁵³

³⁵¹ Wilcock, 'Walt Whitman', p.4.

³⁵² Wilcock, 'Walt Whitman', p.5.

³⁵³ Wilcock, 'Walt Whitman', p.4.

The Labour Prophet: Preaching a Free Religion

There are similarities between the underlying ideologies of *Seed-Time* and *The Labour Prophet*. Established by John Trevor in 1892 as the organ of the Labour Church, the monthly *Labour Prophet* also championed an 'original' relationship between each individual and the divine, and rejected the notion that the Bible was the only sacred text; Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman were considered to be of prime importance, and their characters as well as their work were invoked for spiritual inspiration. Similarly, there is some degree of overlap between the central tenets of the Fellowship of the New Life and the five principles of the Labour Church, which expressed a similar conviction that both internal and external transformation were needed for man's liberation. These were printed in every issue of *The Labour Prophet*:

1. That the Labour Movement is a Religious Movement.
2. That the Religion of the Labour Movement is not a Class Religion, but unites members of all classes in working for the Abolition of Commercial Slavery.
3. That the Religion of the Labour Movement is not Sectarian or Dogmatic, but Free Religion, leaving each man free to develop his own relations with the Power that brought him into being.
4. That the Emancipation of Labour can only be realised so far as men learn both the Economic and Moral Laws of God, and heartily endeavour to obey them.
5. That the development of Personal Character and the improvement of Social Conditions are both essential to man's emancipation from moral and social bondage.³⁵⁴

Bevir draws parallels between William Jupp and John Trevor, asserting that they 'did not so much convert to socialism as redescribe their immanentist theology and ethic of fellowship as socialism'.³⁵⁵ Though discourses of Christianity are also renegotiated, this is evident in *The Labour Prophet*; for example, in one editorial Trevor asserts:

To my mind Socialism is to our corrupt age what Christianity was to the world at the beginning of our era. Of course I mean the new life lying beneath the new economic formula. It is the new expression of Religion in the world, as it

³⁵⁴ *Labour Prophet* (February 1892), p.16. For accounts of the establishment of the Labour Church and analyses of its role see Stanley Pierson, 'John Trevor and the Labor Church Movement in England, 1891-1900', *Church History*, 29:4 (December 1960), 463-478 and Mark Bevir, 'The Labour Church Movement'.

³⁵⁵ Bevir, 'Welfarism, Socialism, and Religion', p.652.

is the new expression of Ethics and of Philosophy or Reason. The Divine creative energy of life is within it.³⁵⁶

Leaves of Grass was bound into this act of 're-describing'; alongside the writings of Emerson, it had played a major role in Trevor's personal spiritual development and so became fundamental to his interpretation of socialism.

There were differences however between the publications, in both their content and their format. Like the Fellowship of the New Life, Trevor criticised the 'one-sidedness of the Socialist gospel' but *The Labour Prophet* placed a much greater emphasis on the need for social and political reform than *Seed-Time* did. The Labour Churches had strong links with the ILP and *The Labour Prophet* drew many of its readers from the ILP support base; it therefore attached a greater importance to current events than *Seed-Time*, which had a more philosophical focus. There is a marked difference in the general tone of the two periodicals; though there was internal variation, the writing in *Seed-Time* tended to be detached while *The Labour Prophet* was more emotive and often had an evangelical tone. These distinctions gave different nuances to the way that Whitman was discussed: *Seed-Time* advanced Whitman as a teacher, but *The Labour Prophet* held him to be a prophetic or a messianic figure. Like Jupp, Trevor believed that Whitman embodied what the human race could become, but he explained it in religious terms: the American poet was 'nearer to God than any man on earth'.³⁵⁷ Accordingly, he urged the socialist reader to enter into an intimate spiritual relationship with Whitman.

For most of *The Labour Prophet's* run, John Trevor's voice dominated the paper. Accordingly, though most of the print-space in *The Labour Prophet* was dedicated to the discussion and coverage of social and political activism, Whitman was invoked again and again in a way that other poets were not. *The Labour Prophet* conformed to the pattern of printing mainly contemporary socialist poetry: in 1892 there was no earlier work by established poets; in 1893 and 1894 there were poems by Whitman and Lowell; in 1895 there were poems by Oliver Wendell Holmes, William Dean Howells and Lowell; in 1896 there were poems by Swinburne, Whittier, Blake and Lowell; and there were none again in 1897, *The Labour Prophet's* final year of publication. This list seems to reveal the importance of the American romantics, especially Lowell, rather than Whitman, and yet the

³⁵⁶ Trevor, 'Perfidious Albion', *Labour Prophet* (April 1896), p.57.

³⁵⁷ Trevor, 'Editorial', *Labour Prophet* (April 1892), p.28.

other poets were not used in the same messianic or prophetic way. Whitman was discussed in detail and mentioned in passing more often than any other poet in the paper's publication history, and he was the only poet to be the subject of long articles, some of which appeared on the front page.³⁵⁸ He was frequently used to punctuate moral, political or spiritual points; for example, phrases such as 'let us quote an appropriate word from Whitman', 'if, as Whitman puts it', and 'as Whitman says' recur through pieces on social and political rather than literary themes. This indicates that for Trevor, Whitman had not merely written words that were beautiful or illustrative like those of Lowell and other poets that he included; rather, Whitman was believed to be a visionary spiritual guide for the socialist movement. After Trevor, for reasons of ill-health, handed over editorial responsibilities to Reginald Beckett the treatment of Whitman changed: he appeared less, and usually in articles contributed by Trevor; when he was mentioned by Beckett, it was as one of many poets of democracy, not as a prophet who had a special importance.

Trevor's claim that Whitman was 'nearer to god than any man on earth' identifies Whitman as a Christ-like figure, and he generally discussed the poet within a Christian rhetorical framework. This mirrors the way that Labour Churches appropriated the institutional structure of Christianity, holding alternative Sunday services and singing socialist hymns, rather than approaching spirituality from a radically different angle. It introduces a tension that runs through Trevor's treatment of Whitman in *The Labour Prophet*, and can clearly be seen in the editorial published in April 1892, the month after Whitman's death.³⁵⁹ His subject is the need for each person to have an original relationship with the divine, which is introduced using quotations from *Leaves of Grass*. Trevor then begins, using an intimate style which reveals a sense of his own personality and creates the impression of direct and personal communication with the reader:

I cannot get along with "the editorial 'we.'" I must abandon it. I am very conscious of being myself, and only myself. I am tired, worried, overworked [. . .] I am in a mood to understand the words of that simple-minded Galilean who threw up his carpentering and trusted God and Life.

The confession of weakness aligns the writer with the reader, but as the reference to Jesus suggests, this is a pastoral relationship and therefore Trevor assumes a position

³⁵⁸ Thoreau and Emerson were the only other literary figures to feature in similar long articles. Again, Emerson was discussed as a writer of prose, not poetry.

³⁵⁹ Trevor, *Labour Prophet* (April 1892), p.28.

of moral and spiritual authority. This is sealed in his appeal to the reader at the end of the article: 'my friend, have YOU anything to thank Walt Whitman for?'. Whitman is introduced as an alternative messianic figure who was able, like Christ, to aid the reader in everyday life, and the editorial closes with an address to the poet which reads like a prayer of gratitude: 'Thank you, Walt Whitman, for the lift you have given me along the road of life. I feel rested, contented, resolute to trudge on my way and not turn back'. Trevor explains his relationship with Whitman using a register that could be used to describe the relationship between a Christian and Jesus Christ, which places Whitman in an equivalent spiritual position.

Trevor contends that Jesus comes 'at second-hand', his words having been 'imagined' by men and filtered through Christian institutions, yet Whitman is seen as being unmediated; Trevor claims that Whitman's words came to him as straight from the poet's heart 'as ink and paper permit'. Christian conceptions of the sacredness of scripture are contested, and personal experience is elevated above the text; in his spiritual autobiography he instructs the reader:

Base your religion on a book, and the book may be upset, and your religion go with it, at any rate for a long time. Determine that you will base your religion on your own experiences—which means that you will guide your life day by day by your own conclusions—and whatever art of living you acquire you will never lose.³⁶⁰

This idea is illustrated with three extracts from *Leaves of Grass* that are given at the beginning of the article. The first is from 'A Song for Occupations':

We consider Bibles and religions divine—I do not say they are not divine.
I say they have all grown out of you, and may grow out of you still,
It is not they who give the life—it is you who give the life,³⁶¹

Whitman challenges the traditional Christian understanding of sacredness, but disputes the dominance of established faiths and sacred texts rather than rejecting

³⁶⁰ Trevor, *My Quest For God* (London: Labour Prophet Office, 1897), p.228. Though Whitman does not feature so much as Emerson in this account, a quote from 'Prayer of Columbus' is used on the title page as epigraph:

All my emprises have been fill'd with Thee,
My speculations, plans, begun and carried on in thoughts of Thee,
Sailing the deep or journeying the land for Thee;
Intentions, purports, aspirations mine, leaving results with Thee.

O, I am sure they really came from Thee,
The urge, the ardour, the unconquerable will,
The potent, felt, interior command, stronger than words,
A message from the Heavens whispering to me even in sleep,
These sped me on. (*Poetry and Prose*, p.540)

³⁶¹ Whitman, *Poetry and Prose*, p.359.

them outright. Their position is reconsidered: they are part of a 'whole' but are not the whole itself. This is reinforced by the structure of the extract: each of these three lines is balanced over a caesura; the first clause is syntactically complete, but is qualified and added to by the second. The repetitions across the caesura divide of 'divine', 'grown/grow' and 'life' emphasise the sense of repositioning: the words are re-contextualised in the second clause to put the focus of divine energy onto the 'you'.

This movement is reiterated in the second extract, the concluding stanza of 'A Song for Occupations' which begins:

When the psalm sings instead of the singer;
When the script preaches instead of the preacher;
When the pulpit descends and goes instead of the carver that carved the
supporting desk;
When I can touch the body of books, by night or by day, and when they touch
my body back again;
When the holy vessels, or the bits of the Eucharist, or the lath and the plast
procreate as effectually as the young silver-smiths, or bakers, or the masons in
their over-alls;
[. . .]
I intend to reach them my hand, and make as much of them as I do of men and
women like you.³⁶²

Religion is represented synecdochally through the component parts of a church: the objects in it ('script', 'books', 'holy vessels') and the structure itself ('lath and plast'). Like the passage above, this stanza is also characterised by a sense of balance: Whitman's anaphoric catalogue juxtaposes each item with a person, highlighting how inadequate 'sacred' objects are when compared to the power of the individual. Sex is procreative, suggesting that this power is specifically generative. The final quotation, from 'Song of Myself', emphasises the idea that God is found through the acts of daily life rather than in books: 'Why should I wish to see God better than this day? / I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four, and each moment then'.³⁶³

Whitman's value therefore lay in the fact that he offered a direct and unmediated source of spiritual guidance, which would in turn enable all individuals to have their own direct and unmediated relationship with the divine. Obviously, this is paradoxical: not only does Whitman himself act as a mediating figure, but

³⁶² Whitman, *Poetry and Prose*, p.362.

³⁶³ Whitman, *Poetry and Prose*, p.85.

Trevor mediates Whitman for the reader through the writing of the article and the selective use of passages from *Leaves of Grass*. Trevor's elevation of experience over literature does not prevent him from forming his own canon of sacred texts, and he reads *Leaves of Grass* as scripture: 'To-day [Whitman] is part of my Bible'; 'I take down my familiar volume of Whitman, well thumbed, and marked all through, and say at once that here is a volume of my Bible, my Book of Life'.³⁶⁴ He presses a relationship with Whitman on the reader, rather than simply offering it as a possibility or model. In the fifth paragraph of the April editorial he makes a sustained challenge to the reader:

Do you understand these words of Walt Whitman's which I have written out for you? [. . .] It will pay you to ponder them, to go over them again and again, and yet again, until you clearly understand and feel what they are saying to you. Have you scanned them over and found them meaningless? Do you pass them by, thinking Whitman a mystic fool? [. . .] Go to, my friend, go to! Read them once more, and yet once more, and go not away condemned.

Having established a pastoral bond with his readers, Trevor now preaches to them. His style recalls pulpit oratory: an insistent sermonising tone is created by the combination of rhetorical questions, imperative commands and exclamatory punctuation. The syntactical inversion of the final phrase recalls the style of the King James Bible and the introduction of the notion of condemnation resonates more with the Christian doctrine that the article overtly refutes than with the free religion promoted by the Labour Church (its third principle is that each man is 'free to develop his own relations with the Power that brought him into being').

In the same article, socialist agitation is also described using a Christian lexical register: 'We incontinently desire to have God's kingdom set up "on earth," and this means rough work in an age in which Mammon is chiefly worshipped'. Though Trevor does not seem to recognise the irony in using Christian discourses to champion Whitman, he is alert to the rhetorical strategies at play here. He addresses the fact that he employs Christian terminology, and explains it on the grounds that his opponents were of the Christian faith, implying that a familiar discourse was strategically employed in order to communicate the principles of socialism more effectively. Like the extracts that Trevor uses from *Leaves of Grass*, the biblical reference to bringing about the kingdom of God on earth is concerned with the

³⁶⁴ Trevor, 'Review', *Labour Prophet* (March 1896), p.40; Trevor, 'Walt Whitman', *Labour Prophet* (February 1895), p.1.

manifestation of the divine in the physical present, and socialism is thus associated with Whitman's spiritual ideas. Significantly, socialism is inserted into an article about Walt Whitman rather than the other way around; for Trevor, it was not so much that Whitman was part of a socialist literary culture, as that socialism was considered to be a part of a Whitmanian spiritual democracy.

Labour Leader: Educating Socialists

There was a strong connection between the Labour Church and the ILP. Stanley Pierson observes that the majority of Labour Churches were established in northern ILP strongholds such as Yorkshire and Lancashire, and suggests that Labour Church expansion 'coincided rather closely with the growth of the ILP'.³⁶⁵ Churches were often established by local branches of the ILP, and contributed towards an expansive and varied socialist culture. Correspondingly, there was a link between *The Labour Prophet* and *The Labour Leader*; not only did each periodical report on the activities of the other movement, but in 1894 Trevor changed the format of *The Labour Prophet* in an attempt to reduce printing costs, and the Labour Church news section was transferred to *The Labour Leader*.³⁶⁶ Though *The Labour Leader* did not always consider the religious aspect of socialism to be vital, spirituality was incorporated into the coverage of a broad socialist program that included strikes and protests, political reform, welfare work, children's education and recreational activities. *The Labour Leader* included pieces about literature and democratic philosophy, but its focus was more on current events than either *Seed-Time* or *The Labour Prophet*. It sought to provide an alternative source of information to the mainstream press, and did so by adopting a weekly broadsheet format which incorporated a variety of columns by different correspondents.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁵ Pierson, 'John Trevor and the Labor Church Movement', p.468.

³⁶⁶ This proved to be so unpopular with *The Labour Prophet* readers that the previous format was returned to after only one issue, though the funding of the paper was restructured to relieve Trevor from financial responsibility for the paper.

³⁶⁷ The newspaper began life as *The Miner* but was re-launched as *The Labour Leader* in 1888. It changed format and began to be published as a weekly in 1894, which is where I begin my analysis. Hardie's hopes that the paper would one day be produced daily were never realised. Robert Blatchford expressed some concern to Edward Carpenter about the seriousness of *The Labour Leader*: 'Have you seen Hardie's new paper? The Labour Leader; I am disappointed with it. I fear it will

These contributors held different opinions about the nature of socialism and the best way to pursue the democratic ideal: some thought that electoral gain was the only effective medium by which social reform could be achieved, while others believed in a spiritual socialism which they felt was limited or sullied by parliamentary politics. This affected the way that Whitman was treated in *The Labour Leader*, which was much more varied than in either *The Labour Prophet* or *Seed-Time*. Whitman was less important to those who considered parliamentary politics to be paramount than he was to those who embraced a more Utopian socialism. Generally speaking, Whitman was not such a dominant figure in *The Labour Leader*, though he was invoked more frequently during first few years of the paper's run in the mid-1890s. His work was occasionally reprinted, but socialist poetry featured much more prominently.³⁶⁸ In some years Whitman was one of the established poets that was most commented on, but Burns, Tennyson, Shelley, Browning and Morris appeared more often in other years.

In contrast to *The Labour Prophet*, the beliefs that the editors of *The Labour Leader* held about Whitman did not determine how he was used in its pages. Whitman featured most during Keir Hardie's editorship (from 1894 to 1904), despite Hardie's own indifferent attitude towards Whitman and his poetry. For example, in a letter to James William Wallace, Hardie conceded that Whitman had 'a powerful faith in the Democracy', but undermined his praise by adding playfully 'due probably to good digestive organs'. He asserted that Whitman's faith was 'not one whit greater nor his message other than that outlined by Burns' and stated that Whitman's personality had failed to 'impress' him to the same extent that Carlyle's and Mazzini's had done.³⁶⁹ However, as discussed earlier, he did concede that his opinion may have been caused by the 'emasculated form' in which he had read Whitman.³⁷⁰ This ambivalence is evident in the issues of *The Labour Leader* that he

never stand. I wish it would – or that it were a better paper, for I want to get away from the work of Labor [sic] newspapers and do something better, and if Hardie could fill the place he would be more than welcome to it.' Blatchford to Carpenter (17 April 1894), Sheffield, Carpenter Collection, MS 386/49.

³⁶⁸ The extracts or poems of Whitman's that were printed in isolation, rather than as an epigraph or part of an article, were: from 'Years of the Modern' (23 June 1894); from 'Europe' (7 July 1894); 'To Him That was Crucified' (27 August 1898); from 'Song of the Exposition' (4 February 1899); 'Come Up from the Fields Father' (28 April 1900); 'Reconciliation' (14 June 1902); from 'Song of the Broad-Axe' (16 October 1908).

³⁶⁹ Keir Hardie to Wallace (24 December 1892), Bolton, Whitman Collection, MS ZWN 9/297.

³⁷⁰ Hardie to Wallace (29 December 1892), Bolton, Whitman Collection, MS ZWN 9/928.

edited: Whitman is sometimes revered, sometimes satirised, and sometimes mentioned neutrally in passing.

He was included less often during the editorships of John Bruce Glasier (from 1904 to 1909) and Katharine Glasier (from 1916 to 1922), despite the fact that both believed in the political importance of poetry; for example, John Bruce Glasier claimed that 'poetry is to Socialism as the daybreak is to the day—the heralding light, suffused with song, flushing the clouds with the glory that is about to overspread land and sea'.³⁷¹ Both were avid Whitmanites, yet they rarely expressed their admiration for the poet in *The Labour Leader*. One exception was an article by John Bruce Glasier in which he describes a conversation held with an 'incensed Whitmanite'.³⁷² It is not explicitly stated, but the conversation appears to be fictional and has a didactic purpose: the anonymous Whitmanite heavily criticises the hypocrisy of those who revered Whitman yet failed to dedicate themselves to social reform: 'I do not abate my Whitmanism one jot. But the more I appreciate the greatness I cannot define in Whitman, the more I am enraged with those who honour him with their lips and deny him with their lives.' Glasier alludes to Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees in Matthew 15.8: 'This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me'. 'Lives' is substituted for 'heart', as an internal response was perceived to be inadequate; Whitman's democratic principles were not to be only honoured in words, or feelings, but in social action.

Though the overarching religious context in which *The Labour Prophet* considered matters of social and economic reform was mostly absent from *The Labour Leader*, a notable exception was Alfred Orage's literary column 'Past, Present, and Future: A Bookish Causerie'. The column ran between 30 November 1895 and 31 July 1897, and the frequency with which it invoked Whitman caused him to be mentioned more in *The Labour Leader* in 1896 than in any other year. Like Trevor, Orage used a spiritual vocabulary to discuss Whitman, but he moved away from a Christian framework. He informed Edward Carpenter that 'A Bookish Causerie' was an attempt to 'read modern literature in the light of the new old conception you and Whitman have done so much to spread':

³⁷¹ John Bruce Glasier, 'The Banner of Poetry', *Labour Leader* (29 April 1910), p.6.

³⁷² Glasier, 'An Incensed Whitmanite', *Labour Leader* (15 July 1904), p.177.

To go still further and more persistently into what inwardly I feel to be the deepest need of thousands like myself, the need for a sure foundation in one's own soul for the more or less superficial and transitory beliefs, intellectual physical and ethical.³⁷³

The oxymoronic 'new old' suggests that Whitman and Carpenter's 'conception' relates to old truths which had been discovered anew, which echoes Carpenter's own belief that progress was bound into the notion of cyclicity. Stanley Pierson suggests, 'Like Carpenter and a number of others within the Socialist movement, [Orage] was blending the mysticism of the East with the evolutionary optimism characteristic of late Victorian culture to provide a new foundation for personal and social hopes.'³⁷⁴ Though Pierson does not acknowledge that there was a counter-current of thought bound into ideas about degeneration that could be described as 'evolutionary pessimism', he is certainly right to define Orage's beliefs as optimistic. In one example, a poem dedicated to Whitman and written in a similar style is reprinted from Horace Traubel's *The Conservator*, and Orage then comments:

See, comrade? Then about Socialism—there is a profounder cause than that lying indeed beneath all causes. Socialism is a mood of the great mind. It is a recognisable point in the evolution of the profounder cause of humanity, which itself, maybe, is only a point in a still profounder cause. Who knows? I give it up for a while, perhaps for a millennium. Who knows?³⁷⁵

Despite the lack of Christian rhetoric, there are parallels between Trevor's editorial and this passage. Orage also adopts an oratorical style, and directly addresses the reader, with whom he establishes a pastoral relationship; he teaches the reader while acknowledging that he does not understand everything. The philosophy recalls Carpenter's belief in a far-reaching evolution of human consciousness, and the reference to Whitman guides the socialist reader towards a realisation that the socialist movement is only one manifestation of a higher mystical process.

Orage believed that alongside Carpenter's *Towards Democracy*, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* was of particular importance in this evolutionary development towards the democratic ideal. He asserted that Whitman and Carpenter were elevated 'above the ordinary rank of poets into that of prophets of democracy'.³⁷⁶

³⁷³ Alfred Orage to Carpenter (3 February 1896), Sheffield, Carpenter Collection, MS 386/63.

³⁷⁴ Pierson, *British Socialists: From Fantasy to Politics*, p.193.

³⁷⁵ Orage, 'A Bookish Causerie', *Labour Leader* (22 February 1896), p.64. The poem, 'To Walt Whitman: In His Own Spirit' by William Jay, reads: 'You say to me continually that I am as good as you: Very well, I am as good as you, / You shall not be master, nor I disciple, / I come to you on equal terms, / I love you, but I do not love you any more than I love others.'

³⁷⁶ Orage, 'A Bookish Causerie', *Labour Leader* (24 October 1896), p.368.

On more than one occasion he offered to procure the texts for readers who were unable to find them: 'If there are any comrades who would like a complete edition of Whitman's "Leaves of Grass"—indeed, his own big, splendid, lordly edition—I can get it for them'; 'If you have any difficulty getting "Towards Democracy" (5s.) or "Leaves of Grass" (9s.) send to me.'³⁷⁷ No other books were promoted in such a way. Orage's offer specifically applies to the 'complete' (1892) *Leaves of Grass*, which implies that he believed, as Whitman did, that it was important to read the poetry in its entirety. This places a value on the 'whole' which runs through his appreciation of the two poets: 'Whitman and Carpenter, and indeed the whole democratic movement, are testimonies to the growth of the conception of non-Differentiation, or non-Separateness.'³⁷⁸ In a later article he added, 'To express the universal in terms of humanity—this is the function of the poet of Democracy.'³⁷⁹

For Orage, the expression of the 'universal' was reliant on form:

That, it seems to me, is the one essential difference between the poets of democracy and the poets of old time. They of the romantic age had the form void of spirit; we have the spirit void of form. That it is a spirit capable of a form which shall displace all previous forms produced under opposite conditions we can only surmise: but there is Whitman to lend our surmise strength, and who now shall give it certainty?³⁸⁰

The distinctive formal properties of Whitman's poetry were seen to be both evidence of the growth of an all-encompassing spirit of democracy and the means by which it could be communicated.

Most *Labour Leader* contributors did not treat Whitman with the same degree of reverence shown by Orage. On a few occasions in the mid-1890s satirists who wrote under pseudonyms parodied Whitman's poetic style for didactic purposes. In one such piece a writer calling himself 'The Wastrel' presents a series of short mock-editorials for *The Labour Leader* in the style of eleven writers including Morris, Burns, Carlyle, Tennyson and Longfellow. He begins with Whitman:

O, reader mine, you cannot escape me! This is no paper; it is a man. i long to enter your heart (many are the empty hearts) and lodge there. Were the *Leader* a twopenny paper, all's well; were it otherwise, all's well. i assert that all past issues were what they should have been, and that they could nohow have been better than they were, and that this number is what it should be, and that the

³⁷⁷ Orage, 'A Bookish Causerie', *Labour Leader* (18 January 1896), p.18; (15 February 1896), p.60.

³⁷⁸ Orage, 'A Bookish Causerie', *Labour Leader* (21 March 1896), p.102.

³⁷⁹ Orage, 'Towards Democracy', *Labour Leader* (6 June 1896), p.197.

³⁸⁰ Orage, 'A Bookish Causerie', *Labour Leader* (25 January 1896), p.26.

I.L.P. Directory is, and that this number and directory could nohow be better than the way they are.³⁸¹

Parody relies on familiarity, and so the inclusion of Whitman is significant in itself: it shows that readers of a popular socialist newspaper were assumed to have read, or at least heard of, Whitman's poetry. Initially it seems that the piece was intended simply as entertainment, but after the parodies there is a turn:

If i hadn't been in the dry dock for want of boots i'd never have written the above. Poverty has its own revenge. As i remarked long ago there's nothing new but style, yet style is easily imitated when you have'nt one of your own.

'The Wastrel' self-reflexively examines the notion of satire, using style as a metaphor for political voice. Lack of possessions is associated with lack of style (exacerbated by the use of the lower case 'i'), a silencing which implies a lack of power. However, as 'the Wastrel' makes a show of demonstrating, aesthetics can be appropriated and made to speak for the voiceless, and here, as elsewhere in socialist discourse, Whitman's 'voice' is put to work for this cause.

In 1896 a writer using the pseudonym 'Ben' uses Whitman's voice to speak 'against' something rather than 'for' someone. The subject matter is introduced in the first one-word line, 'Advertisements!', and materialism and unnecessary reliance on consumer goods is also implicitly challenged.³⁸² The second stanza reads:

Hoardings, shop fronts, sky signs, back and front pages of magazines and periodicals,
Then between boards promenading in the gutters,
Railway stations, embankments,
The old weather-beaten fences by the sides of the railways and roads,
Boards standing on private lands,
Designs and letters variegated, illuminated, gas-lighted, electric.
Omnibuses, tramcars, vans and carts used in trade;
Popular novels are not greater in fiction than you.

Ben employs the Whitmanian catalogue in order to emphasise the extent to which advertising pervaded daily life, creating the impression that advertising dominated every aspect of the social whole. The ironic application of the word 'greater' mimics the celebratory style often adopted by Whitman whilst denouncing advertising as deceptive. Similarly, like Whitman in 'Respondez!' (pp.678-681), 'Ben' uses the technique of ironically lauding the very thing that he censures:

Intolerant persons would limit you, O advertisements;

³⁸¹ 'The Wastrel', 'Immortals as Editors', *Labour Leader* (21 December 1895), p.6. The lower case 'i' is sic: see below.

³⁸² 'Ben', 'Whitmanesque', *Labour Leader* (30 May 1896), p.183.

I bid you not to be limited.
Uprear yourselves militant, triumphant for ever.

Thus 'Ben' co-opts Whitman's style to warn, in a light-hearted way, against the dangers of advertising. This can be interpreted as a 'friendly' use of the poet, in the sense that 'Ben' has joined with the 'poet of democracy' in order to more effectively denounce materialism. However, 'Ben' uses parody to ridicule the ubiquity and command of advertising, and so also ridicules Whitman. On one level, this is simply a matter of humour, but it can also be seen to challenge one of the central tenets of Whitman's verse, that good and bad should be equally included: 'What is called good is perfect, and what is called bad is just as perfect' ('To Think of Time', p.557). The opening line 'Advertisements!' also acts as an apostrophe, and so 'Ben' plays with the slippery 'you' in *Leaves of Grass*, questioning whether everything in the social 'whole' should be celebrated indiscriminately.

As these parodies show, Whitman was incorporated into *The Labour Leader* as part of a democratic reference system; *Leaves of Grass* was part of a familiar literary culture that could be drawn upon as an illustrative tool. Another example can be seen in a feature article by Sam Hobson, using the pseudonym 'Olympian', which addresses the subject of physical wellbeing.³⁸³ When writing as 'Olympian', Hobson did not usually write this kind of piece, but authored the weekly sports column which covered sporting events and gave advice to participants, a use of print-space which reflects the holistic nature of ILP socialism. The article argues that British workers should be more physically active:

Comrades, if you, too, loved outdoor games, would you, think ye, give all your strength, waste all your nerve, exhaust all your energies cooped up in the factory, or be semi-roasted before the blast-furnace? Would you listen to the futile inanities of the money grubber imploring you to protect him against the foreign competitor? Indeed no.

Exercise is offered as a panacea that can cure the ills of industrialism, and Hobson suggests, somewhat strangely, that the British workforce allowed itself to be enslaved because it did not participate in 'outdoors games'. As an alternative, Hobson gives a passage from 'I Sing the Body Electric', a poem which celebrates the

³⁸³ 'Olympian' [Sam Hobson], 'The Cult of the Athlete', *Labour Leader* (25 August 1894), p.5. Sam Hobson stood for parliament as an ILP candidate the following year and in 1900 was elected to the Fabian Society's executive committee. Later, he promoted guild socialism in Alfred Orage's *The New Age*. For more detailed biographical information consult Hobson's memoir *Pilgrim to the Left: Memoirs of a Modern Revolutionist* (London: Arnold, 1938).

beauty of the healthy body. He includes the whole of section three, which describes 'a common farmer, the father of five sons'. It ends:

He was a frequent gunner and fisher, he sailed his boat himself, he had a fine
one presented to him by a ship-joiner, he had fowling pieces presented to him
by men that loved him,
When he went with his five sons and many grandsons to hunt or fish, you
would pick him out as the most beautiful and vigorous of the gang,
You would wish long and long to be with him, you would wish to sit by him in
the boat that you and he might touch each other.³⁸⁴

The farmer is a representation of Whitman's ideal American: he was self-reliant and independent, but also part of a community; he had longevity ('he was over eighty years old') but was healthy and strong ('this man was of wonderful vigor'). Guided by the phrase 'I knew a man' which begins the description, Hobson treats the 'common farmer' as a real person and urges his readers to live up to his example:

There's a picture to look upon, ye academic respectable clerks with white
transparent fingers. Watch the old man sailing his own boat, you Sheffield
artisans (save the mark!) with your lungs half full of steel-filings. Let the
British working man, dying prematurely at the average age of thirty, ponder
upon the old man of eighty being "The most beautiful and vigorous of the gang."
The contrast between you and him makes angels weep.

In *Leaves of Grass*, 'culture' had an enfeebling effect, whilst the labouring class epitomised the quality of health; in contrast, Hobson suggests that British workers were debilitated and weak, a comparison which the worker (and therefore the reader) is commanded to consider by the imperatives 'watch' and 'let'. Implicitly, the British industrial system is contrasted with the healthiness of an idealised American democracy, and Hobson tries to persuade his working readers that they must change both their working conditions and themselves.

R. L. Gorton's 'Evadne, Or Defeated: A Story founded on Atalanta's Race' provides another example of how Whitman was used for didactic purposes. This serialised three-part love story, published in October 1894, explained the philosophy and principles of Utopian socialism.³⁸⁵ A summary of the plot: Evadne is an orphan educated at a Utopian socialist girl's school who meets Roland, a Liberal whom she teaches about socialism; after studying at Cambridge, Evadne moves to Yorkshire where she works as an activist and becomes involved in the suffragist movement; she stands for election, but is defeated by Roland, after which she has a serious

³⁸⁴ Whitman, *Poetry and Prose*, p.252.

³⁸⁵ R. L. Gorton, 'Evadne, Or Defeated: A Story Founded on Atalanta's Race', *Labour Leader* (6 October 1894), p.3; (13 October 1894), p.3; (20 October 1894), p.3.

accident, recovers, and marries him; in their married life, they learn how to work together in order to best serve humankind and bring about social change. Each part is published with an epigraph from Whitman's 'To a Foil'd European Revolutionaire':

Do we call victory great?
Yes; but when it cannot be helped defeat is great.
And death and despair are also great.

In fact, this is an adaptation; the poem actually reads:

Did we think victory great?
So it is—but now it seems to me, when it cannot be help'd, that defeat is great,
And that death and dismay are great'. (p.498)

The alteration brings the statement into the present tense and removes the qualifying subclauses; this gives the statement a greater sense of certainty. As well as associating the socialist cause with revolutionary activity, the epigraph introduces the Whitmanian theme of the story: that defeat should not be seen as final but as an important part of an overall process; for instance, having been beaten in the elections, Evadne comforts herself with the thought that 'the cause of "Women Suffrage" was but a *detail* in a vast and comprehensive scheme. She was still free to work for *Humanity*.'³⁸⁶

Evadne uses *Leaves of Grass* to explain her socialist beliefs to Roland: 'Whitman's lines are applicable—"Something escaped from a puny life, escaped from the anchorage and driving free."' Roland objects:

"Do you read Whitman? I thought he was too rough for ladies."
"Really!" with a smile of amusement. "The wind is rough, but those who do not face it grow anaemic. Life is rough at times, and Whitman writes of life. He is rugged, but he is genuine."
"But is it poetry, supposing it is wholesome?"
"Certainly. Whatever dignifies life is poetry. Aspasia [the director of the school] has not reared us on the inane and sentimental."³⁸⁷

Through Evadne's use of Whitman in Roland's 'education', Gorton educates the reader: about the principles of socialism, the morals and aesthetics of Whitman's poetry, and the education of girls. Whitman is central to the story's depiction of visionary socialism: when Roland becomes more interested in Evadne and her socialist beliefs he does not turn to Marx or other political and economic theorists; instead he 'bought a volume of Whitman and studied it religiously' in order to make

³⁸⁶ Gorton, 'Evadne' (20 October 1894), p.3.

³⁸⁷ Gorton, 'Evadne' (13 October 1894), p.3.

himself 'less grossly ignorant'. The story does not fully endorse Utopian socialism as Evadne is made to compromise her beliefs in order to work with her Liberal husband; yet this works both ways: 'While some thought that Evadne influenced her husband unduly, others rejoiced that instead of desiring Utopia she bent her energies for plain, practical everyday reforms.'³⁸⁸ Not only does this conclusion advocate a middle road for socialism, but it reinforces the Whitmanian theme that the 'whole' is expansive enough to include all its parts.

Pierson suggests that 'the rapid growth of the ILP brought a mounting concern with political power and class interest at the expense of ethical and religious idealism.'³⁸⁹ Certainly, the spiritual and philosophical elements of socialism became less of a force in *The Labour Leader* as the nineteenth century came to a close. This had an impact on the way that literature was included, as Henry Salt complained in *The Labour Leader* in 1897:

I doubt whether Socialists nowadays feel much interest in the poetry of the revolutionary movement. We have, it is true, our song-books and socialist choirs; but on the whole we seem at the present to be so intoxicated by the charms of statistical science and the study of economics that we have but little time for the trivialities of the Muse.³⁹⁰

As the transcendent interpretation of the socialist ideal was phased out, so was its visionary literature. Alfred Orage's 'A Bookish Causerie' began to appear less frequently and was written by other contributors; its tone became more serious and it began to discuss and review only non-fiction texts written explicitly about socialist practice and policy, an approach which was continued in the later column 'Labour and Literature'. Some contributors resisted this development in *The Labour Leader*, and pressed for the recovery of the 'soul of socialism' into the twentieth century.³⁹¹ However, for many socialists coming up through the ILP ranks, immediate political gains were far more important than any intangible (and therefore unrealisable) Utopian ideal; for them, Whitman's poetic vision had lost its relevance.

³⁸⁸ Gorton, 'Evadne' (20 October 1894), p.3.

³⁸⁹ Pierson, 'John Trevor and the Labour Church Movement', p.472.

³⁹⁰ Salt, 'Some Revolutionary Poets of the Century'.

³⁹¹ J. H. Harley, 'The Soul of Socialism', *Labour Leader* (28 May 1905), p.42.

The New Age: Reviewing a Democratic Culture

The New Age had a varied publishing history which caused its political sympathies to move between radical liberalism and socialism. Alfred Orage and Holbrook Jackson's purchase of the paper in 1907 is sometimes given as the point at which it turned from the former to the latter: not only were Orage and Jackson socialists, but it was financed with Fabian money (George Bernard Shaw contributed towards the costs), and for the first time it specifically announced itself as a 'Socialist Review'. However, though the paper adopted a liberal political stance during the first decade of the twentieth century, it was more complicated during the 1890s. It was founded in 1894 by Frederick A. Atkins as 'a weekly record of Christian culture, social service, and literary life', and Wallace Martin, author of *The New Age Under Orage*, describes the paper's editorial bias as Christian liberalism 'not unfavourably disposed towards Socialism'.³⁹²

The following year, Alfred Ewan Fletcher took over editorial responsibilities, and Martin states that the magazine entered 'a socialist phase' of its history.³⁹³ Socialist ideas featured prominently and socialists such as Ramsay MacDonald and Edward Carpenter were regular contributors. However, this does need to be qualified, for in 1897 *The New Age* declared that its aim was to promote the 'Progressive cause', and as P. F. Clarke shows in 'The Progressive Movement in England', progressive ideology encompassed both liberal and socialist reformism, and included both liberals and socialists.³⁹⁴ Clarke gives the example of *The Progressive Review*, which drew together the Fabian socialist William Clarke (as editor), MacDonald who had recently joined the ILP and Charles Trevelyan, an aristocratic Liberal. *The New Age* worked similarly. Fletcher's own political position shifted from progressive liberalism with socialist sympathies to outright socialism: he sought nominations to be the Liberal candidate in the Barnsley by-election of 1897, but in the 1900 election ran as an ILP candidate for Glasgow. In

³⁹² Wallace Martin, *The New Age Under Orage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967), p.23. Though the word 'Christian' was later dropped, the subtitle was kept until A. E. Fletcher became editor.

³⁹³ Martin, *The New Age Under Orage*, p.23. Fletcher had previously been editor of the *Daily Chronicle*, which William Clarke wrote for.

³⁹⁴ 'To Our Readers', *New Age* (11 February 1897), p.316; P. F. Clarke, 'The Progressive Movement in England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 24 (1974), 159-181 (p.160).

1898 he resigned from his editorial position, but continued to contribute to the magazine under the editorship of Arthur Compton-Rickett and then Joseph Clayton, both committed socialists. In an article published in *The New Age* in 1899, Fletcher argued that not only were liberalism and socialism reconcilable, but that socialism offered the 'only way of securing economic freedom'. He stated: 'The Liberal party has a splendid record, which justifies the belief that Liberalism makes for liberty. But it has only made for liberty on lines upon which Socialism is prepared to go a great deal farther.'³⁹⁵ This exemplifies how, during the final years of the nineteenth century, *The New Age* was often used to promote socialist philosophy to an anti-Tory, though not necessarily socialist, readership. In the twentieth century, the paper swung back towards liberalism under Harold Rylett, before Jackson and Orage purchased it in 1907.

The New Age therefore offers the opportunity to explore the discursive space where socialism and liberalism overlap, and to consider the impact that this had on the idea of 'democracy' and on how Whitman was incorporated in it. Central to this is the relationship between the individual and the social whole, which is addressed in the same article that asserts that the periodical's aim was the 'progressive cause':

The method adopted is the very simple one of cultivating in individuals the spirit that pervades the Sermon on the Mount. THE NEW AGE desires to be the guide, Counsellor, and friend of those earnest and devoted men and women, scattered throughout the country, who believe that the most effective way to improve the world is to improve themselves. But it should be ever borne in mind that those who would carry a great cause to victory must be true yoke-fellows. Bear ye one another's burdens.³⁹⁶

The individual is prioritised over the collective, though each person is also expected to work towards the good of all. This passage does resonate with what M. Wynn Thomas, in his analysis of how Whitman was included in *The New Age* during the first decade of the twentieth century, calls 'a classic expression of the ideology of reforming liberalism'.³⁹⁷ Thomas states that a 'socially-reformed but still essentially individual-centred version of British "Democracy"' dominated the paper before 1907 in which Whitman was 'made to seem the heir to a great English tradition of writers who emphasized the sense of social obligation implicit in any civilized economic,

³⁹⁵ Alfred Ewan Fletcher, 'Are Socialism and Liberalism Reconcilable?', *New Age* (23 February 1899), p.73.

³⁹⁶ 'To Our Readers'.

³⁹⁷ Thomas, *Transatlantic Connections*, p.198.

social, or political assertion of individual interest'. This 'Liberal' Whitman, Thomas argues, was superseded by a 'Socialist' Whitman after 1907.³⁹⁸ Thomas supports his case by reference to comments and articles about Whitman in the first decade of the twentieth century; yet the dividing line between 'liberalism' and 'socialism' is not so clear if we extend the analysis further back, into the 1890s, when Whitman was claimed for socialism as well as liberalism.

This duality is acknowledged in an 1895 article whose author recalls meeting the American poet:

His aim was to reach the individual, teach him to be manly, full of public spirit, devoted, courageous, careless of money or other rewards, and to permeate his nature with the feeling of comradeship. Both Individualists and Socialists can quote Whitman; for, like all great men, he belongs to both and includes both.³⁹⁹

The anonymous author refrains from aligning himself either with the individualists or the socialists, but presents both parts of Whitman's message. Though the idea of the individual precedes that of the social whole, the word 'permeate' indicates that 'comradeship' was a central component of Whitman's message, not merely an addition. Elsewhere, as I shall discuss, Whitman is invoked in relation to a 'democracy' that is not defined in terms of individual liberation but comradeship and brotherhood. As Thomas argues, radical liberalism certainly displayed a tendency 'to produce Whitman as evidence of the progressiveness of its own enlightened agenda', yet so did socialism, and often in ways that were remarkably similar.⁴⁰⁰ It is hard to determine, for example, what makes the 'individual-centred' appropriation of Whitman for liberalism different to the use of him by the Fellowship of the New Life's to advance the idea that the individual must be free before society can be. This overlap is exacerbated by the fact that democracy is often talked about in very general terms in relation to Whitman.

This is evident in an 1898 article by Fletcher in which he compares Whitman and Tolstoy, who was also often invoked in *fin de siècle* socialist discourse.⁴⁰¹ After an introductory paragraph, Fletcher explains what he perceived to be the fundamental similarities between the two authors, drawing on ideas about the simple

³⁹⁸ Thomas, *Transatlantic Connections*, pp.195-198.

³⁹⁹ 'Philo', 'Men I have Known. 1.—Walt Whitman', *New Age* (24 October 1895), p.52.

⁴⁰⁰ Thomas, *Transatlantic Connections*, p.197.

⁴⁰¹ Fletcher, 'Tolstoy and Whitman', *New Age* (4 August 1898), pp.260-261.

life, nature, and human relations, which seem to be more influenced by socialism than liberalism:

Both men are filled with a strong, active love for the common people. Both turn from the society of rich and fashionable people, to “go freely with powerful, uneducated persons.” Both feel keenly the joys of open-air life, the healthy contact with earth and nature. Tolstoy’s tremendous indictment of war is answered sympathetically in “Drum Taps”:—

“Over the Carnage rose prophetic a voice,
Be not dishearten’d, affection shall solve the problems of freedom
yet.”

And the civic ideal of self-governing communism expressed by Tolstoy is not far removed from Whitman’s “Great City,” “where outside authority enters always after the precedence of inside authority.”

The importance of individual freedom is emphasised: Tolstoy’s communism is ‘self-governing’ and ‘inside authority’ has precedence over ‘outside authority’ in Whitman’s ‘Great City’. As we have seen, this refers to the fifth section in ‘Song of the Broad-Axe’; the next line states that ‘the citizen is always the head and ideal—and President, Mayor, Governor and what not, are agents for pay’ (p.335). This inverts the power dynamic, re-investing it in the individual. Significantly, the ‘President’, the ‘Mayor’, and the ‘Governor’ are not dictators, but democratically elected representatives of the ‘people’: ‘democracy’ is criticised in its current political form, and it must come to mean something more.

Though the notion of limited government leans towards liberalism, Fletcher’s interpretation of the two authors is not centred on their treatment of the individual, but what they had to say about social relationships: ‘Love for the common people’ is the first idea to be mentioned. The quotation used from *Drum-Taps* conveys the belief that ‘affection’ can have a profound social effect; ‘freedom’ is not associated primarily with the individual but with the social collective. This idea is returned to later in the article:

Whitman fearlessly avows:—

“I give nothing as duties; what others give as duties I give as impulses”
All is to be left free. Life and love are before man; let him walk therein
bravely. The continent shall be made indissoluble:

“With the love of comrades—
With the lifelong love of comrades.”

The light has come into the world, the light of human love pervades it. No one is rejected from Whitman’s fellowship.

Fletcher’s choice of quotations is more in accord with spiritual socialism than with radical liberalism: as has been seen, the notion of comradeship was central to socialist interpretations of Whitman, and these lines from ‘For You O Democracy’

(p.272) were frequently invoked. Fletcher does not promote the idea that individual freedom brings with it a 'social obligation'; conversely, this freedom can only be brought about through 'fellowship': in 'For You O Democracy', Whitman's ideal continent is only made 'indissoluble' through comradeship. It is recognised that Whitman does not teach about 'duties' but about 'love'.

Like socialists such as Trevor and Wallace, Fletcher uses a spiritual register: Tolstoy and Whitman are called 'prophets' and 'seers', and their work is described as 'the literature of the immortals'. Similarities between Whitman and Jesus are either remarked on or alluded to: both men were in their thirties when they began to preach their message, were sons of carpenters, lived in poverty, and were unmarried. Fletcher argues that Tolstoy and Whitman 'preached' the same fundamental 'message', and uses the metaphor of the Bible to explain the differences between them:

It may be said, indeed, that the difference between Tolstoy and Whitman amounts to the difference between the Old Testament and the New, between John the Baptist and Jesus.

Tolstoy, with all his fervour for Christ, embodies the spirit of the older Hebrew Scriptures, recalls to us the solitary figure of the Baptist. Whitman breathes the spirit of the Gospel, is more closely allied to the Man of Nazareth.

By associating the Russian with the Old Testament and the American with the New Testament, Fletcher reinforces the dichotomy that Whitman establishes between the old and the new. Despite the fact that Tolstoy and Whitman began publishing within a few years of each other and both wrote throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, Tolstoy and his style of literature are associated with the social needs of the past, and Whitman with those of the present and the future. Tolstoy is compared to the 'Hebrew prophets of old': 'he warns, denounces, threatens'; conversely, in Whitman's work there 'is no word of sin, no exhortation to repentance, no lengthy list of forbidden fruits, no service of duty demanded'.

Fletcher does not criticise Tolstoy's 'Old Testament' spirit but avers that 'it was necessary in an age of unbelief, an age when the splendour of the human body should be counted dim beside its passing passions, that Tolstoy should come preaching the gospel of Repentance'; it was, however, 'equally necessary to-day' that Whitman should be 'taken up', an idea which resonates with the passage from *Democratic Vistas* that was edited out of *Seed-Time*: 'While other theories, as in the past histories of nations, have proved wise enough, and indispensable perhaps for

their conditions, *this* [American democracy], as matters now stand in our civilized world, is the only scheme worth working from' (p.966). Fletcher uses Christianity as Trevor did in relation to socialism, as a familiar reference system that enabled the 'message' to be clearly understood. Fletcher's interpretation of this 'message' is summarised near the end of the article:

The infinite possibilities of mankind, the unfaltering pronouncement that the growth of man extends beyond the limitations imposed by Church or State, the real belief in the divinity of man and the progress of souls "toward the best," form the common ground on which Tolstoy and Whitman stand.

This passage demonstrates how it can be difficult to tease apart the differences between liberal and socialist appropriations of Whitman. Though the concept that 'the growth of man extends beyond the limitations of Church or State' could indicate a liberal position, it was also frequently propounded in spiritual or utopian socialist discourses, especially in relation to the other ideas that Fletcher identifies: the divinity of man, and the evolutionary progress of humanity.

In Fletcher's article, the social ideal towards which humanity is said to be progressing is depicted in abstract and conceptual terms. Like many of the socialists that I have considered, Fletcher uses Whitman who hints and suggests, in order to hint and suggest himself, rather than giving a concrete outline of what reform would entail. Ideas such as freedom, comradeship and love are evoked, but precise goals are omitted. An article called 'Democracy', written in 1900 by an anonymous author, works against this trend: it first uses Whitman to explain the ideas surrounding democracy, and then it explores how these ideas should be practically applied in order to bring the ideal about.⁴⁰² The author is concerned with 'meanings' and 'definitions':

For a definition of Autocracy we might well turn to the Tsar of Russia, and his enemies say that President Kruger could best tell us the meaning of oligarchy. Lord Salisbury could probably inform us as to the signification of Aristocracy, and certain it is that as to the definition of Plutocracy, Mr. Cecil Rhodes is the greatest living authority. But to whom shall we turn for instruction as to the meaning of Democracy? To whom, but to "the Old Gray Poet."

In order to explain the 'definitions' of autocracy, oligarchy and plutocracy the author selects people who have played an active and leading political role, not those who have philosophised about these forms of government. 'Meaning' is associated with 'doing'. It is significant then that Whitman, a poet not a politician, is chosen to

⁴⁰² Anon., 'Democracy', *New Age* (5 April 1900), pp.216-217.

explain the meaning of democracy. It suggests that the author believed that the principles of democracy had not yet been acted out, despite the fact that many countries had a democratically-elected government, an idea which relates to Whitman's statement in *Democratic Vistas* that 'the real gist' of the word democracy had not been understood because its history had 'yet to be enacted' (p.984).

Of all the writers who had something to say about democracy, the author chooses Whitman. The use of a poet rather than a political theorist, and particularly a poet who was deliberately suggestive rather than prescriptive, allows the author to impose his own specific interpretation of democracy over Whitman's general ideas, investing it with the weight of the poet's authority. 'Old Gray Poet' was a common adaptation of William Douglas O'Connor's famous 'good gray poet' appellation, and in this case it serves to stress Whitman's wisdom. His teachings about democracy are explored through the subsections: 'Democracy a Faith', 'It is a Dream', 'Democracy a Religion' and 'To This End, What Means'. This is, therefore, a specifically spiritual interpretation of democracy; once again, utopian socialism merges with radical liberalism. The 'perfection of the individual' is one of the author's key themes: he suggests that 'Whitman regards the development of the whole man—which means the dominance of the spiritual—as essential to Democracy'. This seems similar to Carpenter's or Bucke's belief that a true democracy would be brought about when people evolve a highly spiritual or cosmic consciousness, yet the word 'dominance' indicates that the author's interpretation is somewhat different:

The perfection of which Whitman speaks means not the elimination of the physical or animal altogether, but simply its relegation to its proper place. Man is the being who thinks, and the perfect man is he whose faculties are so ordered as to produce the highest possible quality of manhood.

This interpretation of perfection, which overlooks Whitman's emphasis on physical health and sexuality, and his insistence that the body is equal to the mind and to the soul, seems more applicable to a writer such as Arnold than the American poet. It gestures towards the progressive notion of self-improvement, which is returned to at the end of the article; in order to 'realise' the democratic ideal, the reader is told that 'we may begin with the elevation of our own individual life' (as the author observes, this is a Carlylean idea). The specific suggestion given is the renunciation of alcohol, which 'incapacitates for thinking'.

However, democracy itself is explicitly defined in terms of the collective: 'Individual perfection carries with it perfection in human relationships, and Democracy accordingly means human brotherhood'; later, he reiterates, 'For Democracy means "the brotherhood of man, the Federation of the World."' ⁴⁰³ *Leaves of Grass* is specifically used to illustrate a communally-focused interpretation of democracy: the importance of the 'lifelong love of comrades' is once again illustrated with 'For You O Democracy', which is printed almost in its entirety, and the author also gives 'I Dream'd in a Dream', another Calamus poem that describes an ideal society founded on 'the quality of robust love' (p.284). These poems are followed by an explanation of how the author understands this to work practically:

In comparatively rough sorts of ways we are making for this Democracy—realising the dream. Enfranchisement makes for it. Therefore real Democrats are all for enfranchisement, whether of men or women, blacks or whites. Democracy means government of all by all—not the physical paramountcy of some men over others, of men over women, or whites over blacks, but the government of all men and women by and with their free consent. Real Democrats accordingly as to present day reforms ask one question—does this or that proposed "reform" make for universal enfranchisement, individual perfection, and the brotherhood of man, the love of our neighbours as ourselves? Again, Municipalism is a gradual realising of the dream. It signifies co-operative effort to promote the commonweal.

The author does not rely on democracy being an evolutionary certainty, but explores how it can be achieved. There is a symbiotic relationship between the vision of democracy and legislative reform: reforms are inspired by the vision, but the vision can only be realised through the reforms. The positioning of this passage immediately after poems from *Leaves of Grass* causes Whitman's democratic philosophy to be associated with universal enfranchisement, despite his own misgivings about such a development; in *Democratic Vistas*, for example, he states: 'I will not gloss over the appalling dangers of universal suffrage in the United States' (p.954). Similarly, in the description of the desired outcomes of reform 'universal enfranchisement' is named alongside 'individual perfection', 'the brotherhood of man', and 'the love of our neighbours as ourselves', three concepts that featured in

⁴⁰³ This phrase was used by Elihu Root in a speech at the first Pan-American Conference in New York in 1889; he told the delegates that they were 'the advance guard in the greatest movement since civilization began toward the brotherhood of man and the federation of the world'. Cited by A. Curtis Wilgus, 'James G. Blaine and the Pan American Movement', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 5:4 (November 1922), 662-708 (p.702). However, the author may have been adapting Tennyson's 'Locksley Hall': 'Till the war-drum throb'd no longer, and the battle-flags were furled / In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world' (ll.127-128). Alfred Tennyson, *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. by Christopher Ricks, 3 vols, 2nd edn (London: Longman, 1987), II, p.12.

the author's interpretation of Whitmanian democracy. More generally, as is indicated in the final two sentences, Whitman is associated with a social philosophy that has Fabian overtones.

After 1907 the version of socialism that Orage promoted in *The New Age* was also strongly committed to both the individual and the collective. Thomas observes that in the eight-part account of his socialist vision, published in *The New Age* in October and November 1907, Orage both advanced the idea of 'solidarity of souls' and an individuality which he qualified as being 'not a claim to possess but a claim to give'.⁴⁰⁴ As Thomas explains, Whitman was evoked in the third instalment, and is said, alongside Carpenter, Shaw and Shelley, to have shown Orage that purely economic theories of socialism were inadequate; Orage himself defined his socialism as Utopian, and believed that politics should be intertwined with the arts (Thomas points to the journal's new subtitle: 'An Independent Socialist Review of Politics, Literature and Art'). Thus Orage's socialist beliefs seem much the same as they were a decade earlier when he was writing for *The Labour Leader*. Yet Whitman did not carry the same force in *The New Age* that he did in 'A Bookish Causerie'; he continued to be used as a democratic literary reference, but was not championed in the same way as one of the most important teachers of democracy. Given how important Whitman had been to the spiritual democracy that Orage promoted in 'A Bookish Causerie', and the frequency with which he had been referred to, it is something of a surprise to see how comparatively little he was commented on in *The New Age*, both in Orage's own writing, and in the journal as a whole. In terms of casual references, more detailed commentary, and the reproduction of his poetry (in extracts or as epigraphs), Whitman actually received less attention in *The New Age* after it had become specifically socialist than it did before Orage and Jackson took it over.

After 1907 Whitman was rarely discussed in detail, but was more often referred to in passing, or in relation to other poets or writers. For example, a review of Henry Bryan Binns's collection of Whitmanesque poetry commented that 'Mr. Binns is rather created than a creator; he is a disciple of Walt Whitman', and in another review Viélé Griffin was said to be 'the direct descendent of Walt Whitman,

⁴⁰⁴ Thomas, *Transatlantic Connections*, p.198.

only with a more delicate touch'.⁴⁰⁵ One of the few longer discussions of the poet (though the whole article is only one column long) incorporates him into an article about 'Mark Twain':

Great as are Emerson and Poe, they are a continuation of the European tradition; they might just as easily have been the products of London or Paris. But there are two American writers of the first order, who can hold their heads up among the best of the Old World and yet retain their individuality. One of them was the good grey poet, Walt Whitman, and the other is Mark Twain.⁴⁰⁶

Though the piece is not explicitly political, it is printed between two articles about socialism and reform which give it a democratic subtext.⁴⁰⁷ The opening paragraph refers back to the idea of America's manifest destiny ('America seems to be set apart by destiny for big events'), and the writer asserts that the American people were born out of a revolutionary spirit, choosing to 'make a tradition of their own in the wilderness'. The biblical allusion associates the American nation with a divine spiritual mission, yet Whitman and Twain, who are set apart from other American writers, are not considered as prophets or preachers. The article returns to the idea proposed by Whitman and Emerson that America needed its own distinctive literature. As representatives of their nation Whitman and Twain articulated and embodied its progressiveness: they are said to have a 'robust and independent humanity' and 'a matter-of-fact irreverence for the past, and a generous and humane interest in the occurrences of the present'. That they were seen to create America's own political and literary traditions, rather than being dependent on those that had been previously established, reinforces the notion that America was at the vanguard of the democratic movement. Thomas remarks that some uses of Whitman in *The New Age* before 1907 can be linked to 'a Liberal's admiration for [Whitman's] self-reliance'; here, the poet's self-reliance is used in a socialist context, to celebrate those who look forward from 'the faded hierarchy of Europe'.⁴⁰⁸

Under Orage's editorship, Whitman is not referred to dismissively but little passion is evinced. Partly, this can be explained by *The New Age's* editorial policy: Orage did not seek only to advance his own beliefs, but prided himself on providing an independent forum where different and often contradictory opinions could be

⁴⁰⁵ Anon., 'Review', *New Age* (15 August 1908), p.313; anon., 'Review', *New Age* (18 January 1908), p.234.

⁴⁰⁶ Anon., 'Mark Twain', *New Age* (18 July 1907), pp.180-181.

⁴⁰⁷ 'Mr. Balfour and Land Values', 'Where Socialism Was Tried', *New Age* (18 July 1907), pp.180-181.

⁴⁰⁸ Thomas, *Transatlantic Connections*, p.196.

voiced. Another possible reason can be found in an unsigned review of Stopford Brooke's *Studies in Poetry*, which seems as though it could have been written by Orage, and even if it was not, acts as a valuable counterpoint to the socialist responses that appeared frequently during the 1890s which claimed a special importance for Whitman in the democratic movement. The writer suggests that, 'The moment a man begins to care for Browning and to look affectionately on Whitman, that moment dates the beginning of his allegiance to prose literature. Browning and Whitman are convenient half way houses'.⁴⁰⁹ It is claimed that the movement towards the preference of prose is a natural and common development as the intellectual faculty develops:

To the majority of us who care about literature, there comes a time when we cease to read poetry [. . .] We read the poets in our youth—they charmed us, held our imaginations captive—inspired our ideals. But when we became men and women we put away—poetical things.

The writer alludes to 1 Corinthians 13.11 ('When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things'), but replaces the word 'childish' with 'poetical', a substitution which he draws attention to by using the em dash to create a pause. The genre of poetry is therefore associated with immaturity.⁴¹⁰ It was not that poetry had no value, but that its purpose was to inspire the young. As Orage became older, he became less interested in Whitman, and more stimulated by philosophers such as Nietzsche; *Leaves of Grass* had perhaps fulfilled its function in his own literary and political development.

⁴⁰⁹ Anon., 'Review', *New Age* (15 February 1908), p.314.

⁴¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 13.11.

Chapter Four. William Clarke's *Walt Whitman: A Socialist Exposition*

William Clarke is not a well-remembered figure in the history of British socialism, though he played a significant role in British radical political and literary circles during the 1880s and 1890s. Peter Weiler remarks:

None of the early Fabians remains more obscure today than William Clarke (1852-1901). Although his contribution to the *Fabian Essays* ranks as perhaps the most interesting and perceptive essay in that volume, histories of the Fabian Society pass over Clarke with a line or two of praise.⁴¹¹

He was born into a lower middle-class family, and transferred from a commercial to a private school when his family moved to Cambridge in 1866; according to a friend, this 'so bored him that he was quite willing to leave and acquiesce in his father's determination to put him to business'.⁴¹² However, in 1872 he entered the

⁴¹¹ Peter Weiler, 'William Clarke: The Making and Unmaking of a Fabian Socialist', *Journal of British Studies*, 14:1 (November 1974), 77-108 (p.77). Weiler posits that this is due in part to lack of information: 'Clarke left few papers. Much of his work has been lost in the anonymity of daily journalism' (p.77). To date Weiler's is the only published article primarily about Clarke; Eric Hobsbawm discusses him in 'The Lesser Fabians', in *The Luddites, and Other Essays*, ed. by Lionel M. Munby (London: Michael Katanka, 1971), pp.231-244; Stefan Collini dedicates a few paragraphs to Clarke's Fabianism in *Liberalism and Sociology: L. T. Hobhouse and Political Argument in England, 1880-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp.75-76; Jock Macleod comments on his role as a liberal journalist and editor in 'Between Politics and Culture'; and Ian Britain discusses him intermittently throughout *Fabianism and Culture*. Otherwise, as Weiler observes, in most histories of British socialism Clarke is only mentioned briefly.

⁴¹² 'J. E. C.', in *William Clarke: A Collection of His Writings*, ed. by Herbert Burrows and John A. Hobson (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1908), p.xiv. The two 'biographical sketches' which preface this publication are the only known sources of information about Clarke's early life. Peter Weiler's descriptions of Clarke's upbringing in 'The Making and Unmaking of a Fabian Socialist', and in the

University of Cambridge, becoming involved in liberal reform movements such as temperance and church disestablishment. A growing interest in American culture led him to Whitman, and his fellow-student Herbert Burrows recalled that Clarke 'made a speciality of American history, literature, and politics' whilst working as a lecturer and writer in Cambridge.⁴¹³ Between 1881 and 1882 he travelled around the United States, financing himself through the lecturing circuit, before moving to London and establishing himself as a freelance journalist. He was the London correspondent for *The Boston Advertiser*, *The Springfield Republican*, and *The New England Magazine*, and became a staff writer for Alfred Ewan Fletcher at *The Daily Chronicle*; in the course of his career he also contributed articles to *The British Quarterly Review*, *The Spectator*, *The Political Science Quarterly*, *The Fortnightly Review*, *To-day*, *The Contemporary Review*, *The Economist*, *Reynolds's Newspaper*, *The Manchester Guardian*, and *The New Age*. In 1896 Clarke co-founded *The Progressive Review*, a journal which sought to facilitate a progressive party under Clarke's editorship. Though literature was not often discussed, Whitman was featured more than any other poet over the journal's short run. Edward Carpenter was a regular contributor, and the journal first published the accounts of his two visits to Whitman.⁴¹⁴

The collapse of *The Progressive Review* after only twelve months left Clarke bitterly disappointed. He resigned from the Fabian Society, writing to his American friend Henry Demarest Lloyd: 'I have been in the movements here for some twenty years and I see nothing in them'. The following year he distanced himself from his former political beliefs more emphatically, stating 'I never was a Socialist in the sense of Marx, and I am not at all a Socialist now'.⁴¹⁵ Clarke had believed in the inevitability of democratic progression, but the 1880s and 1890s had not developed as he had expected; capitalism seemed to be becoming increasingly dominant in both

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography are drawn from these accounts; 'Clarke, William (1852–1901)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2006 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/42334>> [accessed 11 Jan 2010].

⁴¹³ Herbert Burrows, *William Clarke*, p.xv.

⁴¹⁴ Edward Carpenter, 'A Visit to Walt Whitman in 1877', *Progressive Review* (February 1897), pp.407-417; 'Walt Whitman in 1884', *Progressive Review* (April 1897), pp.9-29. Only three other poets were commented on in detail, and each only once: Wordsworth, Francis Adams, and Paul Laurence Dunbar. In addition to Carpenter's 'Visits', Whitman was discussed on three other occasions.

⁴¹⁵ William Clarke to Henry Lloyd (26 August 1897; 28 March 1898). Quoted by Weiler, 'Making and Unmaking', p.102.

England and America, and by 1899 Clarke was no longer convinced of either nation's democratic future:

If, therefore, the chances of the safe establishment of democracy in its chosen haunt, the United States, are yet problematical, what are we to say of its conquest of a country without any democratic ideal, like England? We must say that it is as unlikely an issue as we can well conceive.⁴¹⁶

As this passage indicates, America was a particular source of disappointment. Like many British democrats, Clarke had been convinced that the United States was at the vanguard of a world-wide movement towards democracy while England lagged behind. Its feudal and aristocratic past had an impact on the national mindset, and Clarke contended that 'no such democratic ideal animates the mass of English people'.⁴¹⁷ By 1892 however, Clarke had come to believe that 'the capitalist system of America is that of England, only more despotic, ambitious, and less scrupulous'.⁴¹⁸

Before his break with socialism, Clarke's political beliefs passed through a number of phases. In the mid-1880s he moved from radicalism to socialism, which he defined in an article written in 1888:

A socialist is one who believes that the necessary instruments of production should be held and organized by the community, instead of by individuals or groups of individuals within or outside of that community [. . .] The socialist, then, for my purpose, is one who would transfer gradually or otherwise, by direct or indirect means, the ownership of the instruments of production (land, mines, telegraphs, railways, machinery, banks of issue) from individuals to the community.⁴¹⁹

Clarke includes phrases which present alternative possibilities ('gradually or otherwise', 'direct or indirect'). By doing so, he acknowledges that there were conflicting views about the best methods of social reform, yet suggests that these are less important than the overarching socialist goal. This goal is described in pragmatic terms using non-emotive (though not disinterested) rhetoric. This is in keeping with most of Clarke's political writing, which tended to resist transcendental descriptions of socialism. In a later article, for example, he supported the drive for state and municipal control, remarking that 'collectivism is no more a Utopia than is

⁴¹⁶ Clarke, 'The Social Future of England', *Contemporary Review* (January 1899), reprinted in *William Clarke*, pp.44-58 (p.45).

⁴¹⁷ Clarke, 'The Social Future of England', p.45.

⁴¹⁸ Clarke, *Walt Whitman* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1892), p.30. It was reissued by A. C. Fifield in a cheaper edition in 1906. Hereafter referred to in the text as *Clarke*.

⁴¹⁹ Clarke, 'The Influence of Socialism on English Politics', *Political Science Quarterly*, 3:4, pp.550-551

commercialism: it is merely another and, as things are, a better way of doing business'.⁴²⁰

Clarke joined the Fabian Society in 1886, attracted by its focus on the practical application of socialist principles, and Peter Weiler observes that his practical proposals (such as increased progressive taxation, shorter working hours, and an extension of the Factory Act) 'all came from the Fabian armory'. However, Weiler maintains that Clarke's relationship with Fabianism was always 'ambiguous'.⁴²¹ Stefan Collini agrees, suggesting that he 'was a radical journalist first and only secondarily and temporarily a Fabian', and adding that 'he always yearned for an ethico-religious faith which would endow his far from easy existence as a free-lance journalist and reformer with some meaning'.⁴²² It is certainly true that though Clarke had fairly utilitarian ideas about socialism, he saw these as working towards an 'ultimate aim', something he saw lacking in the Fabian Society.⁴²³ Before he joined the Fabians he had been a founding member of the Fellowship of the New Life and Clarke never abandoned the conviction that the awakening of spiritual or moral consciousness was vital for lasting social change. He did not move to the Fabian Society because he rejected these principles, but because he came to believe that people had to be released from the burden of physical want before there could be a widespread spiritual transformation.

Collini's assessment is also supported by a letter that Clarke wrote to Henry Lloyd, where he describes how socialism provided an alternative to religion:

Several of the most active Socialist workmen were formerly Secularists: but they felt the emptiness of mere Secularist anti-religious propaganda, and turned, like myself, to Socialism as furnishing a motive and a reason for action and as holding out a hope for a better and happier life.⁴²⁴

However, Collini's terminology – 'ethico-religious faith' – should be treated with caution: Clarke's socialism incorporated a spiritual goal, but it was not a 'faith' in the way that it was for John Trevor, nor was it incorporated into a mystical belief system as it was by Edward Carpenter, James William Wallace and John Johnston.

⁴²⁰ Clarke, 'The Limits of Collectivism', *Contemporary Review* (February 1898), reprinted in *William Clarke*, pp.24-43 (p.35).

⁴²¹ Weiler, 'Making and Unmaking', p.95-96.

⁴²² Stefan Collini, *Liberalism and Sociology*, p.75.

⁴²³ Clarke complained to George Bernard Shaw that he was 'isolated among men who have no "ultimate aims"' in the Fabian Society. George Bernard Shaw, *Collected Letters*, ed. by Dan Laurence (New York: Max Reinhardt, 1965), p.275.

⁴²⁴ Clarke to Lloyd (23 November 1888). Quoted by Weiler, 'Making and Unmaking', p.89.

Clarke 'yearned' not so much for a religion as for the freedom that he believed a collective social structure would generate:

[Collectivism] is a good tendency, since it leads to greater substantial freedom, while curtailing in some ways mere formal liberty. It is, in the main, confined to organised material industry, carried on by machine labour on the large scale. It leaves untouched the intellectual conquests of civilisation, and gives every person opportunity for free range in the spiritual and aesthetic spheres. Under these conditions art will receive an immense impetus, and the new era will be dominated by artistic rather than by scientific conceptions, by synthesis and imagination rather than by analysis and calculation.⁴²⁵

The distinction that Clarke draws between 'substantial freedom' and 'formal liberty' suggests that democracy must involve more than enfranchisement: society must be fundamentally transformed. In contrast to the belief held by some socialists that this must involve some kind of a 'return to Nature', Clarke encouraged progressive industrialism and the use of machine technology for the greater benefit of each member of society. He negotiates the tension between the individual and the social whole by suggesting that collectivism should only be applied to the practical organisation of society, not its spiritual or artistic development. Though Wallace and Carpenter also celebrated the freedom of the individual, their belief that a widespread understanding of interconnectedness should have an impact on every aspect of society, especially art and spirituality, is very different from Clarke's position: these were to remain individual rather than collective endeavours, even though the democratic 'new era' was to be dominated by the artistic and religious 'spheres'. Clarke maintains an even and practical tone when discussing abstract concepts such as freedom, creating a dialectic between the pragmatic and the visionary which characterised his political journalism.

Weiler argues that Clarke's importance to Fabian socialism lay in his 'analysis of the evolution of monopoly capitalism that he derived from Marx and his own observations of the United States'. For the Whitman scholar, his significance lies in how such an analysis was employed in relation to the poet; it was not only that Clarke used his socialist beliefs to interpret Whitman, but that Whitman was used to develop Clarke's political philosophy. As with his political journalism, *Walt*

⁴²⁵ Clarke, 'The Limits of Collectivism', p.43. See also p.37: 'The greatest gain civilisation has achieved is not material at all, it is the gain of liberty of speech, of thought, of teaching; and this liberty prepares the way or opens up the conditions for free spiritual and aesthetic activity. Democracy will, when once material conditions are properly organised, give opportunities for that activity which monarchy and aristocracy could never give.'

Whitman engages with the pragmatic and economic facets of socialism as well as the spiritual, and even the spiritual facets are generally discussed in a fairly utilitarian manner. It therefore offers an alternative viewpoint to much of the writing about Whitman by British socialists. It was the only book that Clarke wrote, and the tenth to be published in Swan Sonnenschein's 'Dilettante Library'. *The New York Times* noted that this was 'a rather odd title for a series of which the writings of a man like Whitman form a part', but it seems that the word 'dilettante' was intended in its meaning of 'a lover of the fine arts; originally, one who cultivates them for the love of them rather than professionally' (*OED*), and the series consisted of relatively cheap books (2s 6d) on famous figures in the arts including, among others, Dante, Goethe, Ibsen and Browning.⁴²⁶

Walt Whitman was published in 1892 in the months following Whitman's death, and there is evidence that the book was rushed into print to maximise its sales potential; on 28 March William Swan Sonnenschein wrote to Clarke:

I called at your place on Sat., but you were out. You will have seen the telegram as to Whitman's death; so have no doubt realized [anent?] this the importance of hurrying the book on. Shall we begin to print the first part of the MS. at once? Every day will count now. Could you kindly send us the 3 portraits, indicating which you prefer, so that we may choose it if it will reproduce well? I have to dine out tonight, but shall be glad to drop in on you tomorrow (Tuesday) if you will be at home. I could then take the MS.⁴²⁷

Henry Burrows claims that Clarke wrote the book in eleven days, and a letter from Sonnenschein shows that the proofs were with the printers at the end of April.⁴²⁸ However, Sonnenschein accepted Clarke's proposal to write a book on Whitman for the Dilettante Series in the February before Whitman died, and Clarke had already written to John Johnston asking to use *Diary Notes of a Visit to Walt Whitman*.

⁴²⁶ 'Literary Notes', *New York Times* (25 April 1892), p.3. In a review of Walter Jerrold's *Oliver Wendell Holmes* two years later, *The New York Times* again commented on the name of the series: 'The Dilettante Library, to which this volume belongs, has a special object, aptly exemplified here. The book conveys the generally accepted but not an individual opinion of the work of Dr. Holmes. It is well written, from trustworthy sources in relation of incidents, with accurate knowledge in reviews of works, and when one has read it, one has not the least inclination toward profound analysis, which is fatal to dilettantism'. 'An English Book About Holmes', *New York Times* (24 March 1894), p.3.

⁴²⁷ William Swan Sonnenschein to Clarke (28 March 1892), Swan Sonnenschein Letterbooks 1878-1911, Reading, Archives of Swan Sonnenschein.

⁴²⁸ Burrows, *William Clarke*, p.xxix; see Sonnenschein's response to a query from Clarke: 'The printers follow the instructions written in the proof, as to whether they shall send a revise or go to press. As you returned the proofs to them direct, we cannot say in exactly what position the book is now. Probably, however, the book is nearly all machined off, as the first two signatures (which we sent to press, as being practically faultless) went straight to the machine.' Sonnenschein to Clarke (20 April 1892), Swan Sonnenschein Letterbooks, Reading, Archives of Swan Sonnenschein.

Though the poet's decease had an impact on the speed at which *Walt Whitman* was written, it should not, therefore, be considered primarily as a response to Whitman's death.

Sonnenschein used two snippets from reviews that *Walt Whitman* had received to advertise it. The first was from *The Daily Chronicle*: 'It leaves nothing to be desired in point of critical insight'.⁴²⁹ As Clarke was one of the lead writers for the *Daily Chronicle*, its enthusiastic response is not surprising, and it is clear why Sonnenschein used this complimentary comment. It is less immediately obvious, however, why the second quotation, from the *Pall Mall Gazette*, was selected: 'A plain and straightforward exposition of a difficult subject, written without subtlety, and without anything of the unusual intemperance in praise or blame shown by Whitman's critics'.⁴³⁰ The praise is so understated that it seems to be critical, especially in the phrase 'written without subtlety'. However, the sense of even-handedness and balance that it identifies was one of the features of *Walt Whitman* that most appealed to contemporary reviewers. For example, in *The Speaker*:

What is less to be expected, given such sympathy [towards Whitman], is that he should approach his subject with so much comparative philosophy of mind. It would almost seem as if he had been impressed by the failure, from undue extravagance, of his predecessors; and so determined to be, for his part at any rate, securely temperate.⁴³¹

And in *The Academy*:

The author has made himself master of his subject, and as a consequence is self-possessed and dignified. Herein he differs from too many of the professing admirers of Walt Whitman who do not understand him, and think all that is required of them—and indeed all that is befitting when he is the topic—is to gush. Of course writers like Mr. Clarke do him, as well as themselves, more real justice; and they are useful in a way the gushing enthusiasts are not useful, in attracting and helping new comers to study and understand a teacher, by no means attractive at the outset or readily understood.⁴³²

The word 'useful' introduces the notion of service. The reviewer's suggestion that Clarke's temperance enabled him to introduce the poet to new readers who may be deterred by his style or subject matter recalls Rossetti's aim to present Whitman to the reader in such a way that a 'fair verdict' could be reached 'on poetic grounds

⁴²⁹ For an example of the use of the *Daily Chronicle* quotation see *Saturday Review* (11 June 1892), p.707.

⁴³⁰ For an example of the use of the *Pall Mall Gazette* quotation see *Academy* (1 October 1892), p.275.

⁴³¹ Anon., 'Triumphant Democracy—With a Difference', *Speaker* (August 20 1892), p.236.

⁴³² Anon., 'Review', *Academy* (2 July 1892), p.11.

alone' (though neither Rossetti nor Clarke saw Whitman as a 'teacher' in the way that the reviewer does).⁴³³

It was also important to Clarke that his treatment of Whitman should be thought balanced, and in the preface he stated that *Walt Whitman* was 'written as an exposition rather than as a criticism', distancing himself from the judgemental connotations of the latter. Clarke's reluctance to use the word 'criticism' can be linked to a passage in 'The Limits of Collectivism':

The age of dissection, of criticism, of analysis, is as necessary a stage in human progress as the age of art, religion, synthesis, of which it is an essential preliminary. But it is nothing more than that. And if human progress is to continue on this planet we may be certain that this scientific period will be followed by a great creative epoch—an "epoch of rest" William Morris calls it—when the satisfaction of man's aesthetic and imaginative nature will, bodily needs being satisfied through collective effort, be the main incentive.⁴³⁴

'Criticism' was associated with present social conditions rather than the democratic future that humanity was seen to be moving towards; over-reliance on it would therefore hinder social progression. Clarke challenges the privileged status of critical analysis in nineteenth-century thought in a way that recalls Carpenter's treatment of science in *Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure*: it is understood to have played an important role in the development of humankind, but is not to be thought its apotheosis. In *Walt Whitman* Clarke mediates between the two 'stages'; his examination of Whitman looks towards the 'age of art, religion, synthesis', and concludes that Whitman did the same.

This passage can also be seen as an introduction to some of the key themes that run through *Walt Whitman*: the notion of progress; the process of synthesis; art and the aesthetics of reform; spiritual freedom; and the need for a collective social structure. These concepts are interrelated; for example, one means of progression is through the synthesis of two opposites, out of which something new can be created. Another way is through evolution, and Clarke also incorporates this rhetoric into the text: discourses of synthesis and evolution are used to explain or envision the

⁴³³ Rossetti, *Poems*, p.22. Clarke was familiar with Rossetti's work on Whitman, and comments in *Walt Whitman*: 'In each of these instances one finds, with Mr. W. M. Rossetti, "a deep and majestic rhythmical sense"' (p.59). *Walt Whitman* was reviewed favourably in the socialist press. *Seed-Time* published a detailed review which commended it as being 'of extreme interest and value'; anon., 'Our Library Table', *Seed-Time* (July 1892), p.14. *The Labour Leader* reviewed its 1906 reissue more briefly, but also favourably, and concluded that 'many of our readers will, no doubt, desire to possess this new and cheaper edition'; 'H', 'The Poet of the People', *Labour Leader* (23 November 1906), p.419.

⁴³⁴ Clarke, 'The Limits of Collectivism', p.37.

development of a democratic form of literature, metaphysical understanding, and a collective social structure. These ideas recur in different combinations in the five sections of *Walt Whitman*: 'His Personality', 'His Message to America', 'His Art', 'His Democracy', and 'His Spiritual Creed'.⁴³⁵

'His Personality'

The section on Whitman's personality mainly consists of biographical information and descriptions of the poet, taken from *Specimen Days* and books by Whitman's friends such as William O'Connor, John Burroughs, Richard Maurice Bucke and John Johnston, material which Clarke maintains is useful on the grounds that those who regard Whitman as 'the most representative Bard of Democracy' must be interested in 'tracing the early influences which helped to mould the poet's body and character' (Clarke, p.1). Though this chapter is less analytical and more descriptive than the following four, Clarke introduces the notion of synthesis by relating these 'influences' to the dialectic claim made by the poet-speaker of *Leaves of Grass* to be the 'poet of the body' and the 'poet of the soul'. This in turn has an impact on the relationship between poetry and daily life, another key pairing in Whitman's work. Clarke had already alerted the reader to the significance of this section from 'Song of Myself' by using it as an epigraph:

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.
The first I graft and increase upon myself, the latter I translate into a new
tongue.⁴³⁶

These lines lend themselves easily to a Hegelian analysis: quoting them in 1929, Mody C. Boatright argued: 'Here is the Hegelian triad: soul, thesis; body, antithesis; "I," synthesis. This is the "I" of the *Song of Myself*, for which there is no name in the dictionary.'⁴³⁷ Referring also to the lines from 'Pioneers! O Pioneers!', 'I too

⁴³⁵ Sonnenschein encouraged Clarke to keep this structure, advising him that '5 sections is not much: people like a book a bit broken up, even if a little scientific'. Sonnenschein to Clarke (30 March 1892), Swan Sonnenschein Letterbooks, Reading, Archives of Swan Sonnenschein.

⁴³⁶ Whitman, *Poetry and Prose*, p.207. As in the previous chapter, there are some differences in punctuation and capitalisation between the poems as they appear in *Walt Whitman* and in the 1881 *Leaves of Grass* that Clarke worked from. I reproduce the poems as they are in *Walt Whitman*, and give their page numbers in *Poetry and Prose* as footnotes.

⁴³⁷ Mody C. Boatright, 'Whitman and Hegel', *Studies in English*, 9 (1929), 134-150 (p.138).

with my soul and body / We, a curious trio', Alfred H. Marks reiterated in 1951 that 'when Whitman said, "I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul" he believed that he himself was "triadic"'.⁴³⁸ In the 1881 edition of *Leaves of Grass* that Clarke used, Whitman rearranged the structure of this section: there had been a stanza break in earlier editions after 'poet of the soul', but in 1881 Whitman conflated the lines into one stanza. The new three-line stanza, like the one that opens 'Song of Myself', is characterised by a sense of balance, but also by a sense of expansion. As in the opening of the 1855 'Song of Myself' the lines become progressively longer, reflecting the 'increase' of the speaking self that is able to contain such contrasting elements. Moreover, in previous versions of the poem the body/soul binary spilled over two lines: 'I am the poet of the Body, / And I am the poet of the Soul'. In 1881 Whitman removed the comma and joined the antithetical phrases together in one line, causing it to enact structurally the synthesis that is expressed in it. Whitman chooses not to use the zeugmatic form 'I am the poet of the body and the soul', but repeats the words 'I am'. Rhythmically, this balances the line evenly over the word 'and', whilst separating the body from the soul syntactically. This emphasises the fact that each remains an equal yet distinctive component; however, the removal of the comma suggests that the two are not so much counterbalanced as conjoined in the poetic 'I' to create something new. The importance of this speaking 'I' is also stressed by the repetition.

Like many nineteenth-century commentators, Clarke takes this speaking 'I' to be Whitman himself, and he looks to the poet's life in order to explain how Whitman could be both the poet of the body and the poet of the soul. Though he does not analyse the body-soul conjunction explicitly in Hegelian terms, he does show in the next chapter that he was aware that Whitman was familiar with the philosophy of Hegel, and that he considered it to have a specific application to poetry, by giving a quotation from *Democratic Vistas* where Whitman asserts that the poets of the future should be 'consistent with the Hegelian formulas' (Clarke, p.38).⁴³⁹ Clarke moves towards this by speaking of Whitman's power to 'absorb' the

⁴³⁸ Alfred H. Marks, 'Whitman's Triadic Imagery', *American Literature*, 23:1 (March 1951), 99-126 (p. 100).

⁴³⁹ Whitman, *Poetry and Prose*, p.1012. Clarke was not the only British socialist to observe the Hegelian aspects of *Leaves of Grass*. Havelock Ellis asserted that 'he had gained from the philosophy of Hegel—with its conception of the universe as a single process of evolution, in which vice and disease are but transient perturbation'. Ellis, *The New Spirit*, p.114.

influences of his (heavily idealised) surroundings, which was thought to make him the poet of both the body and the soul:

Country life, honest labour, simple tastes and rural joys, out-of-door living, the sea with its infinite suggestiveness and perpetual grandeur, the tramp by the shore or through the woods, life in the saddle and on the water, perfect health, the steeping of every sense in the voluptuous beauty of earth—all these things enabled Whitman to be the poet of the body. And the strong ties of home, the deep human sympathies, the manly republican character of his father, the spiritual intuition of his mother, the spirit of peace which brooded like a dove over the simple Quaker homestead—these made him also the friend of man and the poet of the soul. (Clarke, pp.5-6)

This ability to ‘absorb’ is returned to a page later in relation to urban rather than rural life: the poet ‘absorbs the influences coming from a gang of stevedores or a crowd of young men from a printing-office as he does these of “the splendid silent sun,” so that he can say with truth—“I have loved the earth, sun, animals [...] Gone freely with powerful uneducated persons”’ (Clarke, p.7).⁴⁴⁰ ‘Absorb’ implies the loss of separate existence: Whitman, like the speaker in ‘Song of Myself’, is able to ‘merge’ the social whole in his own capacious identity. Though ‘absorbing’ has passive connotations, the tense Clarke uses is active; it is not only that Whitman provides the ‘site’ for synthesis, but that he is an active agent in the process.

This is also true of the second binary relationship that Clarke introduces: like Wallace and Johnston, Clarke believed that literature and life were often in opposition, and that Whitman was able to reconcile the two in a way that most other contemporary authors were not:

For literature, in Whitman’s eyes, is once more vitally associated with life, as it was in the days of the Elizabethan dramatists, of the buoyant Cervantes, of the majestic Dante. It is not a profession, a separate calling, an affair of libraries and literary coteries, but a transcript from actual contemporary life. (Clarke, p.8)

Jock Macleod summarises what this means for Clarke: ‘Literature *is* life, not so much in the sense of classic realism’s reliance on correspondence as in the sense of coherence, manifesting a meaningful, authentic wholeness’.⁴⁴¹ Clarke’s argument is accentuated by the use of the word ‘vitally’, which not only indicates importance but means ‘in a manner which imparts life’ (*OED*). The word ‘transcript’ introduces a tension however, as it suggests that the author is engaged in copying and reproduction, rather than in an inspirational or ‘vitally’ creative act.

⁴⁴⁰ Clarke is quoting from ‘By Blue Ontario’s Shore’; Whitman, *Poetry and Prose*, p.479.

⁴⁴¹ Macleod, ‘Between Politics and Culture’, p.13.

The synthesis of literature and life had a practical political purpose; Clarke suggests that English men of letters had not assimilated a 'democratic spirit', and so were out of touch with the uneducated classes:

It may reasonably be suspected whether the popularity of Tennyson's exquisite poetry is much more than middle-class popularity. The average trade-unionist probably would somewhat resent Tennyson's attitude to his class were he acquainted with the Laureate's verse. Browning has vigorous popular sympathies, but, with a few exceptional poems, his subtle thought carries him far beyond the slow mind of the British artisan. Arnold's pensive muse attracts only the cultured few. (Clarke, p.9)

Clarke gives three examples in order to emphasise the disjunction between the most important figures in nineteenth-century literature and the working-class reader (yet seems to be immune to the irony in his own attitude towards the British artisan). He concludes that 'the result of this isolation of our chief writers from actual popular life is unquestionably loss of influence'. This seems to reinforce the hierarchical class relationship that the passage overtly rejects: Clarke does not appear to be concerned with recognising and representing 'the People' as Whitman and Wallace were, or with showing them the nature of their interconnected 'higher self' as Carpenter was, but with being able to use literature as a means of social propaganda to 'educate' them.

'His Message to America'

In 'His Message to America', Clarke returns to the theme, but now describes the role of 'democratic literature' in a way that resonates more with the ideas in *Democratic Vistas*: Whitman, Clarke claims, perceived the 'remedy' for America's social 'disease' to be the development of 'a great, powerful democratic literature, profoundly religious, modern, spacious, healthy, no more Pagan than Christian, treating frankly of man as body as well as soul' (Clarke, p.39). Clarke does not, however, hold that *Leaves of Grass* was the fully-developed embodiment of such a literature, but its 'germinal seed':

This is the mere beginning, the first rough draft of a literature that shall be to modern democratic society at the same time its pourtrayal [sic] and natural expression and yet also its nutriment, its spiritual food. (Clarke, p.40)

The two-fold purpose of 'democratic literature' returns to the problematic idea that literature should be a 'transcript' but also 'impart life'; it was to represent current life, but also, somewhat paradoxically, to shape the way that it was to develop. This idea is at the centre of Clarke's analysis of *Leaves of Grass*: Whitman is seen to both depict America as it was, and show its people what it could become. The literary metaphor of a 'first rough draft' and Clarke's use of the seed image, with its implicit connection to the idea of progress, acknowledges the significance of Whitman's pioneering contribution to the creation of a 'powerful democratic literature', but denies that it has been achieved in *Leaves of Grass*. Unlike admirers such as Bucke, who saw Whitman as the 'avatar' for far-reaching social and spiritual change, and *Leaves of Grass* as the means by which he would do so, Clarke saw Whitman as beginning rather than ending the process that would develop such a literature.⁴⁴² Accordingly, though Clarke believed that Whitman had a vital 'message' for America, he considered it to have limitations.

One of Whitman's perceived strengths was his sense of balance. This is related to the idea of showing America both what it was and what it could become:

Whitman very clearly perceives both sides of the shield, and is as severe in his denunciation of the radical American vices, as he is confident in the grand future of "these States." We must note alike the warning voice of condemnation, and the resonant utterance of clear-sighted and sympathetic hope and faith in the people. (Clarke, pp.22-23)

This dualism can clearly be seen in *Democratic Vistas*, in which Whitman offers a critique of social conditions in America while celebrating the nation's democratic potential. Clarke draws his first examples from this essay, beginning with Whitman's call for Americans to examine the state of their nation:

I say we had best look our times and lands searchingly in the face, like a physician diagnosing some deep disease. Never was there, perhaps, more hollowness at heart than at present, and here in the United States.⁴⁴³ (Clarke, p.23)

The personification of a sick America locates the 'disease' at its centre, emphasising that the nation's problems were not merely superficial; the external physical symptoms originate from the most vital organ, the 'heart', which is used in its common metaphoric sense of being the emotional, spiritual and moral core of a being. This leads back to the relationship between the body and soul, which is also

⁴⁴² Ferguson, 'Typescript of the College Farewell to Dr. R. M. Bucke and J. W. Wallace'.

⁴⁴³ Whitman, *Poetry and Prose*, p.961.

invoked at the end of the page-and-a-half-long paragraph that Clarke reproduces: 'It is as if we were somehow being endow'd with a vast and more and more thoroughly-appointed body, and then left with little or no soul' (*Clarke*, p.25).⁴⁴⁴

This lack was evident in America's chosen representatives. Emory Holloway goes so far as to suggest that 'it was in the spirit of the government and in the personnel of the governing class that [Whitman] was most disappointed'.⁴⁴⁵ Though this is not borne out in the light of the paragraph discussed above (in which Whitman heavily criticises the 'littérateurs', the religious organisations, the 'business class', and the public sector, and states that 'we live in an atmosphere of hypocrisy throughout'), the governing class are certainly included in his condemnation of American society. This can be seen in the next example that Clarke gives, 'To the States, To Identify the 16th, 17th, or 18th Presidentiad':

Who are they as bats and night-dogs askant in the capitol?
 What a filthy Presidentiad! (O South, your torrid suns! O North, your arctic
 freezings!)
 Are those really Congressmen? are those the great Judges? is that the President?
 Then I will sleep awhile yet, for I see that these States sleep, for reasons.⁴⁴⁶
 (*Clarke*, p.25)

'Askant' introduces the notion of corruption; it indicates that something is not straight or square, whilst also suggesting 'disdain, envy, jealousy, and suspicion' (*OED*). The effect that this has on the American people is alluded to through the image of the 'night-dog' which recalls a line from *The Merry Wives of Windsor*: 'When night-dogs run, all sorts of deer are chased'.⁴⁴⁷ This simile casts the government as hunters who attack their prey under the obscurity of darkness; not only is the public at threat, but the attack is less likely to be foreseen.

Whitman's poem, first published in 1860, criticises the presidencies of Millard Filmore, Franklin Pierce and James Buchanan at a time when the Union was looking increasingly insecure. This concern with national unity is evident in the poem; for example, the final line refers to America's 'awakening', and specifies that this comprises 'South, North, East, West'. The speaker's anger is directed equally at the north and the south: 'O South, your torrid suns! O North, your arctic freezings!'.

⁴⁴⁴ Whitman, *Poetry and Prose*, p.187.

⁴⁴⁵ Emory Holloway, 'Whitman as Critic of America', *Studies in Philology*, 20:3 (July 1923), 345-369 (p.363).

⁴⁴⁶ Whitman, *Poetry and Prose*, p.415.

⁴⁴⁷ William Shakespeare, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, ed. by Harold James Oliver (London: Methuen, 1971), p.149.

The parallel structure of the line and its contrasting meteorological imagery emphasise the point that though the regions differ they are equally culpable for the problems facing America. Clarke's theme, however, is not national unity but political corruption, and he uses the poem to reinforce the critique in the extract from *Democratic Vistas*. Though the poem is short, Clarke does not include the opening and closing lines:

Why reclining, interrogating? why myself and all drowsing?
What deepening twilight—scum floating atop of the waters,

(With gathering murk, with muttering thunder and lambent shoots we all duly
awake,
South, North, East, West, inland and seaboard, we will surely awake.)

Whitman's speaker questions why the nation is 'drowsing', and though he acknowledges that there are valid 'reasons', it is implied that the condition of America is as much the result of national inertia as it is the corruption of its leaders. By removing these lines, Clarke puts the focus squarely on the 'filthiness' of government, rather than the inactivity of the American people, in addition to removing the hope that Whitman's ending offers.

Clarke does not comment directly on 'To the States' or the extract from *Democratic Vistas*, but uses them to introduce his own comprehensive critique of postbellum America, a lengthy indictment which runs for eight pages before Whitman is mentioned again. This was not only intended for an English readership: all of the books in Sonnenschein's 'Dilettante Library' were published both in London and in New York (through Macmillan), so Clarke would have known that *Walt Whitman* would reach an American audience; indeed, notice of it was given in *The New York Times* on 25 April 1892.⁴⁴⁸ His critique can therefore be read in the same way that he reads Whitman's work, as a 'message to America' through which he hopes to effect change. A review of *Walt Whitman* in *The Labour Leader* rightly remarks: '[Clarke] does not attempt to claim for him too much. Whitman was not a Socialist nor ever pretended to be one'.⁴⁴⁹ However, Clarke uses Whitman as springboard from which to launch his own explicitly socialist ideology. The rhetoric in this section is more Fabian than Whitmanian and Clarke's analysis draws on socialist economic theory as well his own observations: 'It is impossible to separate

⁴⁴⁸ Anon., 'Literary Notes', *New York Times* (25 April 1892), p.3.

⁴⁴⁹ 'H', 'The Poet of the People', *Labour Leader* (23 November 1906), p.419.

social life from economic conditions, for the latter all but invariably constitute the formative mould of the former' (Clarke, p.31). He structures his argument around the three 'problems' identified by Matthew Arnold in 'A Word More About America': the political, the social, and the human, which Clarke interpreted as 'a high standard of national life, works of creative genius, and superb and beautiful ideal of manners, of conduct, of faith and aspiration, an ease and grace of living' (Clarke, p.26).⁴⁵⁰ Arnold felt that America had solved the first two but not the latter, whereas Clarke disagreed, contending that all three areas remained problematic.

He maintained that there was too wide a gap between the cultured and working classes for the 'human problem' to be resolved. The 'cultivated people' had no solution as they were 'too cold, critical, conventional', and neither did the 'swarm' of 'poorly-paid' European immigrants and 'nominally enfranchised negroes' who outnumbered the 'vigorous, alert, clean American workman' (Clarke, pp.27-28). Clarke's hostility to the European workers may be related to the increase in Eastern European immigration to Britain in the 1890s, but can also be explained by the fact that, like Marx, he associated American immigration after the Civil War with 'the opening up of the West, and the submergence of the country in a tidal wave of materialism' (Clarke, p.27).⁴⁵¹ He connects America's democratic potential with the romanticised figure of the healthy and clean American workman evoked throughout *Leaves of Grass*, gesturing nostalgically to a mythological 'idea' of the United States, a kind of 'Merrie America', to adapt Robert Blatchford's phrase. In terms of the 'political problem', Clarke felt that America was hindered by its constitution, which was capable of being a 'good vessel in fair weather' but could not manage issues such as slavery, the 'encroaching' of Federal power over the States, the power of the president and the electoral process, the labour question, or the government of cities (Clarke, pp.28-29). In regard to the 'social problem', Clarke believed that capitalism had brought about the same problems in America as in England, and so challenged

⁴⁵⁰ Matthew Arnold, 'A Word More About America', *First and Last Impressions of America* (Boston: Cupples and Herd, 1888), p.152. Also, 'Civilization in the United States', p.157. Both essays were first published in *The Nineteenth Century*.

⁴⁵¹ In the preface to the 1882 Russian edition of *The Communist Manifesto* Marx writes: 'European immigration fitted North America for a giant agricultural production, whose competition is shaking the very foundations of European landed property—large and small. In addition it enabled the United States to exploit its tremendous industrial resources with an energy and on a scale that must shortly break the industrial monopoly of Western Europe'. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Washington: Regnery, 2009), p.45. Unlike Marx, Clarke does not welcome this as a means of facilitating a reaction against the European bourgeoisie.

the popular myth that America ‘was “free” in some sense in which England is not free’ (Clarke, p.33). He describes the situation in Marxist terms:⁴⁵²

The poor are mainly employed in competing against one another for a livelihood, while the rich are engaged in competing for a fortune. This fortune does not arise from genuine payment for social services, but from manipulation of unearned wealth. (Clarke, p.31)

In another article, ‘The Social Future of England’, Clarke argues that the industrial movement in the United States has led to ‘a new aristocracy of wealth’ not democracy.⁴⁵³ The word ‘aristocracy’ aligns America with England, and emphasises the belief that America was no longer in the vanguard of democratic progress.

Clarke argues that the ‘mass of the American people’ had not yet ‘awakened to the fact that their social structure is substantially identical with that of Western Europe’ (Clarke, p.32). For Clarke, this was Whitman’s essential weakness: he suggests that America was more flawed than the poet was ‘perhaps aware of’, and that his faith in the ability of ‘American conditions’ to eventually eliminate poverty was misplaced (Clarke, p.35). This leads to another failing: if Whitman did not perceive the gravity of the situation and did not engage with America’s problems on an economic level, he could not offer any practical or effective solutions:

How the vast mass of men can become appreciably better off, while a few are permitted to appropriate such a large share of the total income, does not appear. Nor is it obvious how this condition of things which has developed with such startling rapidity in America be altered without considerable economic changes, to be partly affected [sic] by political means. (Clarke, pp.36-37)

Clarke admits that Whitman did not profess to be a political economist and concedes that ‘these are questions for the statesman, the publicist, the practical reformer, not for the poet or the seer’ (Clarke, p.37). Yet this seems to contradict his earlier assertion that literature ‘is not a profession, a separate calling’; he no longer insists on Whitman’s ability to reconcile life and literature, but re-inscribes him into a conventional register of poets. The word ‘seer’ seems to indicate that Clarke thought that Whitman was better at showing America what it could be than what it was, but this is complicated by the way that he discusses Whitman’s portrayal of America’s strengths in poems such as ‘When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d’, ‘There was

⁴⁵² A few examples from *The Communist Manifesto* include: ‘Wage labour rests exclusively on competition between the labourers’; ‘Since the division of labour increased the competition between workers, competition grew and wages decreased’; ‘Competition between wage workers and the “reserve army of labour” (the unemployed) keeps wages fluctuating near subsistence’. Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, p.233; p.265; p.266.

⁴⁵³ Clarke, ‘The Social Future of England’, p.44.

a Child Went Forth', 'Warble for Lilac-Time' and 'Pioneers! O Pioneers!'. Again, Clarke believed that these poems served a two-fold purpose: 'Whitman, in short, while resolutely dealing with the real, at the same time idealises America. He writes to show her people and the world what she may really mean' (Clarke, p.45). Though Clarke commends these poems, he does so using a dialectic that is unclear; he feels Whitman's positive impressions of America to be real, yet shifts them to the plane of fantasy. He recalls the idea advanced in *Democratic Vistas* that the 'meaning' of American democracy is to be acquired, which justifies Whitman's perceived 'idealisation' of America: Clarke takes this not as a naive expression of patriotism, but as a means of prompting America towards fulfilling its democratic potential.

In terms of practical solutions, Clarke (the political commentator and 'practical reformer') does no better than Whitman:

Perhaps the political problem never will be solved; possibly the solution may be in a perpetual process of "becoming" according to the Hegelian conception. Perhaps as soon as we have chopped off one head of the political hydra, another is destined to rear its horrid crest (Clarke, p.29).

He emphasises his uncertainty by including the words 'perhaps' and 'possibly', and by positioning them at the beginning of each sentence. In this moment of despondency, all that Clarke is sure of is change and, unusually for *Walt Whitman*, change is not perceived to be synonymous with progress.

'His Art'

Clarke turns from the political content of Whitman's work to its poetic form, and examines the 'new language' that is pioneered. He first discusses what he understands to be the faults of *Leaves of Grass*, and then finishes with a longer appraisal of its strengths, ensuring that his analysis is balanced, but that the final assessment is positive. As discussed, it was important to Clarke that he should be seen to treat Whitman in an even-handed manner, and he self-consciously distanced himself from critics who did not; for example, Clarke suggests that Whitman's catalogues cannot be defended by critics 'except at the risk of being rightly charged with "Whitmania"' (Clarke, p.54), and remarks, 'Those are very doubtful guardians of Whitman's reputation who do not admit his serious defects, mingled as these are

with passages of surprising and even sublime beauty' (Clarke, p.53). In his quest for fairness, however, Clarke is sometimes contradictory, and some of his objections to parts of *Leaves of Grass* seem to be incongruous with his assessment of its worth as a whole.

In the first chapter, in a somewhat mischievous appropriation of Arnold, Clarke maintains that 'in Matthew Arnold's sense of the word culture—a knowledge of the best that has been said and thought in the world—we may fairly class Whitman among cultured men' (Clarke, pp.18-19). He criticises the notion that a 'cultivated person' is one who is well read, and praises Whitman's choice in 'confining himself to the world's greatest spiritual products': the Bible, Shakespeare, Homer, Cervantes, and Epictetus, as well as Hegel, Carlyle, Emerson, Tennyson and Arnold. However, in the opening paragraph of 'His Art' he asserts that Whitman 'was unable, through lack of literary culture, to clothe his novel and often glowing conceptions in any ideal poetic form' (Clarke, p.50). This paradoxical treatment of Whitman's 'culture' raises questions about the role of literary culture itself, and the extent to which an established canon of 'good' literature should set the template for work to come. The 'ideal poetic form' is another problematic concept, and the implication that it should be learned from the literature of the past contradicts Clarke's earlier statement that America needed to develop a 'democratic literature'. He is forbearing but not approving: 'We may tolerate much from the uncultured bard of the "divine infant," which we could not put up with from the poet of a rich, full-orbed era' (Clarke, p.52). He admits that Whitman's 'imperfect artistic form' added poetic force and was appropriate for the expression of America, but the word 'imperfect' signifies a critical position that seems at odds with Clarke's democratic impulses.

He gives examples of lines that he perceived to be artistically 'shocking', such as these from 'Song of the Broad Axe':

The six framing-men, two in the middle and two at each end, carefully bearing
on their shoulders a heavy stick for a cross-beam.

The constructor of wharves, bridges, piers, bulk-heads, floats, stays against the
sea.

Goods freely rifled from houses and temples, screams of women in the gripe of brigands.⁴⁵⁴ (pp.53-54)

He asserts unequivocally that ‘every rational person who knows what poetry is, and who is willing to concede the widest limits to poetic form, will rightly declare that this is not poetry’ (Clarke, p.54). The word ‘rational’ gives this statement a veneer of fairness and balance, but implies that anyone who does not agree with Clarke is lacking in the faculty of critical judgement. Apart from mentioning a ‘lack of harmony’ (p.53) Clarke does not explain why he believed that these lines did not constitute poetry. The reviewer in *The Academy* disputed Clarke’s judgment:

Yet we confess that even in some of these passages, specially chosen to be scorned, we discern, or fancy we discern, melody and appropriateness which gives them a title to be called poetry, if Whitman’s chants are admitted to be poetry at all. The “shocking lines” from “Song of the Broad Axe,” do not appear to us, in their own proper place, in the least shocking, but on the contrary, decidedly picturesque.⁴⁵⁵

If by ‘lack of harmony’ Clarke meant a prosaic style or subject matter, these lines are admittedly written in a more factual tone than others in *Leaves of Grass*, but as the reviewer suggests, they are considered in isolation. As has been discussed, ‘Song of the Broad-Axe’ is concerned with the construction and destruction of civilisations, a theme to which both the content and the formal properties of the example lines contribute: the first two are from sections that depict the rise of America, and demonstrate how Whitman used the settlement of the land both literally and metonymically to represent its growth as a democratic civilisation, while the third is taken from part of the poem that focuses on the decline of old civilisations, where Whitman uses a matter-of-fact poetic style to suggest that the atrocities described were routine acts. These lines, then, have a particular poetic purpose, which can be seen more clearly when they are read in the context of the complete poem.

Clarke proceeds to suggest the grounds on which Whitman’s diction might be defended. In his first chapter he had praised Whitman’s openness to ‘actual popular life’, in contrast to most of his ‘renowned’ contemporaries (Clarke, p.9); now he returns to this argument using both one of Whitman’s favourite images (the crowded city street) and one of his most provocative self-descriptions:

It must be confessed that when we turn from the solemn organ music of Milton, the rhythmical perfection of Coleridge, the lyric beauty of Shelley, or the sweet

⁴⁵⁴ Whitman, *Poetry and Prose*, p.333-334.

⁴⁵⁵ Anon., ‘Review’, *Academy*, p.11.

cadence of Tennyson, to Whitman's "barbaric yawp," we seem at first to have quitted the haunts of the muses for a modern street where we are jostled by a rough crowd of busy folk, and are splashed with mud from the passing wagons and drays (*Clarke*, p.53).

Though Clarke admits that the reader may initially find this effect discomfoting, he urges perseverance, describing an appreciation of Whitman in figurative terms as an acquired taste: 'Those who have long been accustomed to the choicest peaches and hot-house grapes may be excused at first for making wry faces at the wild berry of the woods; although, after a time they will discover its barbaric fascination' (*Clarke*, p.53).⁴⁵⁶ Clarke switches from a city to a country metaphor, which suggests that both are equally appropriate to Whitman (this can again be related to the first chapter, where Whitman is said to 'absorb' both urban and rural influences). The repetition of Whitman's word 'barbaric' joins the two metaphors, and reiterates the notion that his poetic style was 'uncultured' or 'uncivilised'. This is particularly evident in the comparison of Whitman to the 'wild berry of the woods' which uses images of agrarian cultivation to comment on intellectual and literary cultivation.

Though Clarke commended Whitman's close association with 'actual popular life', he balked at many of the poetic techniques that were used to depict it: he states that the catalogue 'amuses us by its imitation of a cheap shopkeeper's advertisement'; the coining of 'new and ugly' words shows a 'strained affectation'; and that the use of foreign-sounding words 'seems a kind of a stage trick' (*Clarke*, pp.54-56). Clarke is sympathetic to the democratic principle behind Whitman's work, but objects to its execution:

Whitman wants to tell us that the modern man, as a democrat, shares in the general life of mankind; a true and fruitful idea. But the way in which this idea is set forth, shocks our sense of form. (*Clarke*, p.54)

Clarke's 'sense of form' is that of the 'cultivated' British reader; though he values Whitman's 'barbaric yawp', he seeks to modulate it. He condemns the use of 'American vulgarisms' such as 'belong in' (presumably rather than 'belong to') (*Clarke*, p.55), which implies that when Clarke stated that the great literature of the future was to be the 'natural expression' of democratic society, he did not mean that it should be expressed in the natural language of the people. Additionally, Clarke shows a reluctance to recognise that the American nation was formed out of a variety

⁴⁵⁶ Towards the end of the chapter Clarke uses a similar simile: 'Whitman's writings are, it may be said, like olives, an acquired taste', p.77.

of cultures and languages, complaining again about the influence of the European. He criticises Whitman's use of the French language, and his creation of Spanish-sounding words, 'as though Spanish was the language of the American people' (Clarke, p.56), rather than considering them to be poetic manifestations of the varied 'influences' which Whitman has absorbed.

His argument changes direction as the chapter progresses. Having criticised specific formal components of *Leaves of Grass*, Clarke discusses passages that he perceives to display qualities such as a 'spirit of loveliness' and a 'sweet cadence' (Clarke, p.58); in doing so, the focus is shifted from Whitman's poetic representation of 'actual popular life' to his treatment of universal themes such as death, sex, and love, which are related to what Clarke perceives to be the 'dominant note' of Whitman's poetry: 'vastness' (Clarke, p.61). After this twelve-page appreciation Clarke returns to the question of whether Whitman was a poet, this time from a positive perspective. First, poetry itself must be defined, and the proposal that poetry is the adherence to certain formal conventions of rhyme, rhythm and stanzaic structure is immediately discarded. Clarke looks instead to the way that other poets and critics have defined the genre: he refers to Shelley's 'Defence of Poetry', and suggests that his 'large and far-reaching view of the poet's nature and function' should be accepted; in another selective use of Arnold, the phrase 'criticism of life' is singled out from 'The Study of Poetry' and Clarke claims that 'it comes as near to a true definition as any mere phrase can if we add to it the idea of a heightened and expansive power' (Clarke, p.72). Thus Clarke introduces the abstract idea of a 'creative spirit' which 'seizes on the facts of Nature and of life', and 'shows them to be fluid and related' (Clarke, p.73); he gives the early Celts as a group who produced poetry out of this spirit, and classifies Whitman as a poet in their bardic tradition. This sets him apart from other poets, even those generally considered to be 'democratic': 'He is too primitive and elemental to be classed even among such literary rebels as Byron and Shelley, while his sweep is too vast, his thoughts too deep, to admit of rank with such a poet as Burns' (Clarke, p.73). With this, Clarke circles back to the theme of the interplay between life and literature, noting that 'life' was not merely an 'influence' on Whitman's poetry, or contained within it, but an important effect of it: 'We must ever remember that he endows us with the gift of life rather than with literature' (Clarke, p.74).

Regarding poetic structure, Clarke concludes that Whitman's 'formlessness holds the germs of new forms; that the old rhymes will rather be used in the future for mere *vers de société* than for great poetry' (Clarke, p.74). Once more, the poetic form is understood to be in evolution, with the 'ideal' being located in the future. For Clarke, the appreciation of such an 'ideal', or a literary work that aided its development, would require a similarly forward-looking reader:

Our acceptance of Whitman, therefore, mainly depends on whether we accept the advent, welcome or unwelcome, of a new world; on whether we really believe that the old forms are exhausted. (Clarke, pp.75-76)

Having conducted his discussion of Whitman's art primarily in literary rather than political terms, Clarke closes his chapter by putting the onus on us, as the readers, and our social and political persuasions:

Here is the ultimate ground of judgement on Whitman's verse; here is the ultimate test which will decide whether he is welcomed or repulsed. Do we long for a larger, deeper life, for a richer experience, no matter how bought? Have we courage enough to quit the shallows for the deep blue? Shall we be content to "glance, and nod, and bustle by," pleased with the gay show, cynically amused by the "pickle-herring farce-tragedy," satisfied to be polite and suave, and to skim gracefully the surface of things? Or must we dive down to the tangled roots beneath the ocean floor, penetrate beyond the external show, search eagerly for hidden meanings and subtle suggestions? Do we care supremely for the soul of man, do we readily concede to others that which we claim for ourselves, have we faith in our fellowmen, and in the order of which humanity is a part? Or if not, at least do we desire it, do we reach out with longing for it, do we feel that all else may well be given for this pearl of great price? (Clarke, pp.76-77).

Though socialism is not specifically mentioned in the penultimate question, a world-view is described that is motivated by equality and love for others; this is compared to the Kingdom of Heaven through the reference to the 'pearl of great price', suggesting that it is of the utmost importance.⁴⁵⁷ As the allusion to Christianity demonstrates, Clarke's rhetoric is influenced by the pulpit; this is evident in the volley of questions, the syntactic formation of many of them (for example, the inverted 'have we?' in place of 'do we have?'), the emotive language ('have we courage', 'do we care supremely', 'have we faith'), and the repeated pronoun 'we', which aligns the speaker with his addressees, even as he preaches to them. This emphasises both the importance of the 'message', and the fact that it is believed to be

⁴⁵⁷ Matthew 13.45-6: 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.'

relevant to all. The readers of *Walt Whitman* are prompted to pass judgement not on the poet, but on themselves:

But those whose heart are stout and daring, whose imagination dilates with wonderment as this great and awful, but splendid mystery in which we are enfolded, whose affections go forth to all the sons and daughters of men, who with all the strength and sincerity of their nature desire fraternity and justice, as they desire personal good for themselves, who are determined to bow to no idols however venerable, but to stand up on their own feet, and confront whatever destiny may bring – these will love Whitman (*Clarke*, pp.77-78)

The verb and object are delayed to climactic effect by the series of qualifying sub-clauses which builds up a romanticised depiction of those with socialist sympathies; an appreciation of Whitman is no longer a question of poetic taste, but evidence of a strong and enlightened set of social and personal principles. Clarke challenges his and Whitman's readers: the poet's message was not intended solely for America, but for an expansive 'modern democracy' (*Clarke*, p.79), a theme which Clarke explores in the next chapter.

'His Democracy'

As with 'His Message to America', 'His Democracy' is as much about Clarke's own conception of democracy as it is of Whitman's. Many of the ideas in 'The Limits of Collectivism' regarding the spiritual and aesthetic aims of democracy are prefigured here, but with Whitman as the focal point. Clarke explores the evolution of democracy and examines the effect that its political manifestation would have on the development of the individual, suggesting that 'the general course of things is now tending towards a new type of life and to a new attitude of the individual towards the world' (*Clarke*, p.80). Clarke now presents democratic progress as an evolutionary certainty, which seems to conflict with his conclusions about the development of the United States. This is a paradox which Clarke does not address, choosing like Whitman in *Democratic Vistas* to maintain his faith in the long-term fulfilment of the democratic ideal, even when recent changes pointed in the other direction. 'Expansion is, in short,' Clarke asserts, 'the dominant idea of our time':

Petty states give way to great aggregations; international co-operation becomes more and more general; world beyond world reveals itself to the wondering gaze of man; the local deity in his local heaven yields to the conception, "God is spirit." (*Clarke*, p.81)

As in Whitman's work, the external and social manifestations of democracy are connected to those that are internal and spiritual; Clarke moves from political and social organisation, through individual consciousness, to the realm of the divine. The present tense is used to indicate that this process of expansion is believed to be already happening; it is presented as a fact rather than a prediction.

In an article entitled 'Political Defects of the Old Radicalism' Clarke observes that 'all political as well as all scientific thinking has been vitally affected by the conception of evolution'.⁴⁵⁸ This had an impact on his interpretation of Whitman's political principles; like many *fin de siècle* socialists, Clarke projects his own evolutionary world-view onto Whitman:

He seems to discern unending progress, till the universe itself appears one vast conscious whole, informed with the spirit of love, and justifying in its ever-ripening issues all the long past of man's painful path from the lower forms of nature to an expanding being utterly beyond our present imagination to conceive. (Clarke, p.80)

The phrase 'till the universe itself appears one vast conscious whole' recalls the idea of the 'third stage' of cosmic consciousness: like Carpenter and Bucke, Clarke draws on evolutionary principles in order to substantiate a belief in spiritual evolution. He does not turn to a specific theory of evolution but makes use of general ideas, such as 'the long past of man's painful path from the lower forms of nature'; this seems to have Darwinian overtones, but the metaphor of 'ever-ripening issues' is suggestive of Carpenter's Lamarckian exfoliation. Clarke's use of evolutionary theory was not related to the idea of adapting to the surrounding environment, but to an overarching principle of progressive development; as was common in socialist discourse, Clarke did not address the evolutionary implications of degeneration but looked forward to a better future. However, he did not disagree with Darwinism itself, but the way that it had been applied, as he explains in another article, 'The Curse of Militarism':

We are all dominated to-day by Darwinian conceptions of nature, which has been subtly interwoven into political and social generalisations. Darwinism has been interpreted in a way that Darwin himself would have been the first to protest against, for he was a modest man, and he said himself that he did not profess to explain all things in the universe in terms of the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest.⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁸ Clarke, 'Political Defects of the Old Radicalism', *Political Science Quarterly*, 14:1 (March 1899), pp.69-86 (p.78).

⁴⁵⁹ Clarke, 'The Curse of Militarism', *Young Man* (May 1901), reprinted in *William Clarke*, p.120.

He gives the example of Darwinian evolution being used to justify capitalism, competition, and imperialism, a tendency which Clarke's own application of evolutionary theory worked against.

As we have seen, Clarke casts Whitman as a 'seer' of the evolution of humankind. The turn to esoteric concepts such as 'the spirit of love' and universal consciousness seems not to be congruent with his emphasis on 'balance' and rationality. However, he recognises no such disjunction between the concrete and the visionary aspects of his philosophy, and having introduced the topic within a transcendental framework, he uses less abstract terms to explore Whitman's treatment of the interrelated themes of average man, the role of the state, and reform. Clarke begins by discussing Whitman's belief in the divinity of man, which he illustrates with the lines analysed earlier from 'A Song for Occupations': 'We consider bibles and religions divine—I do not say they are not divine, / I say they have grown out of you' (Clarke, p.82).⁴⁶⁰ He considers this re-conceptualisation to be of the utmost importance: 'This anthropocentric position in literature as in philosophy will produce as vast results as were brought about by the adoption of the heliocentric theory in our conceptions of the physical universe' (Clarke, p.83).

There would be far-reaching social and political consequences if it was accepted that man was the locus of the divine: Clarke states that 'the State, religion, industry will be directed solely towards the good of man' (Clarke, p.83); his use of the future tense 'will' rather than the conditional 'would' indicates a certainty that this would come to pass. He expands:

In times past, humanity has been sacrificed to regal power, to the assumed rights of a caste, to the supposed claims of an external deity on the implicit obedience of his creatures. To-day man is enslaved to money-making, in thrall to machinery, a weary drudge attendant on the incessant demands of the iron monster which he serves. All these forms of slavery are at variance with democracy, every one must be abolished root and branch. The State exists for no other purpose than to realise the collective will of its subjects. If a man sees nothing divine in himself and his fellows, he shall find no divinity in the world at all. Industry shall clothe, feed, and comfort men; man shall not be the slave of the machine. This is the meaning of democracy.

The reviewer in *Seed-Time* specifically recommends this section of *Walt Whitman* to its readers, stating that it is a 'masterly statement of the Democratic position'.⁴⁶¹ Clarke defines democracy by extending Whitman's criticism (in *Democratic Vistas*)

⁴⁶⁰ Whitman, *Poetry and Prose*, p.359.

⁴⁶¹ Anon., 'Our Library Table', *Seed-Time* (July 1892), p.14.

of the sway that 'feudalism, caste, the ecclesiastic traditions' held over man into the era of industrial capitalism (p.955). For Whitman, democracy was to supplant the 'old belief in the necessary absoluteness of establish'd dynastic rulership, temporal, ecclesiastical, and scholastic', but from Clarke's viewpoint the old order had been superseded by one that was equally oppressive (p.966). This is emphasised by the structural parallels in the sentences that he uses to outline past and present 'forms of slavery': the 'regal power' of the past corresponds with the 'money-making' of the present; 'machinery' takes the place of a ruling 'caste'; and an 'external deity' is replaced by an 'iron monster'. The short unequivocal sentences that close the extract decisively position the divine human at the centre of a democratic political and industrial system.

Clarke claims that 'almost the entire volume of *Leaves of Grass* is permeated with this idea' of the centrality and divinity of the average man, but suggests that 'To You' is 'specially apt'. He prints an extract, beginning:

I will leave all and come and make the hymns of you.
 None has understood you, but I understand you;
 None has done justice to you—you have not done justice to yourself.
 None but has found you imperfect; I only find no imperfection in you.
 None but would subordinate you; I only am he who will never consent to
 subordinate you.
 I only am he who places over you no master, owner, better, God, beyond what
 waits intrinsically in yourself.⁴⁶² (Clarke, p.84)

This is one of the many moments in *Leaves of Grass* where Whitman plays with the effects of dialectic pairings. The speaker fixes his attention on the 'you' that represents everyone. The importance of this pronoun, which can be both individual and collective, is stressed through its repetition, especially at line-endings where the reader lingers over the final end-stopped word. The anaphoric 'none' establishes an authoritative tone whilst emphatically distancing the speaker from those that have gone before him. The antithetical phrases in each line are balanced across a caesura, causing the negativity of the word 'none' in the first set of clauses to be counteracted by the positive 'I' in the second; similarly, the past tense of the verb in the first half of each line, is replaced by the affirmative present. As in 'A Song for Occupations' Whitman carries words across the caesura ('understand'/'understood', 'justice', 'imperfect', 'subordinate') which emphasises the difference between the way that the

⁴⁶² Whitman, *Poetry and Prose*, p.376. All of the caesuras are commas in *Leaves of Grass*.

speaker claims the average man is usually treated and the way that he treats him. The idea that there is no master (earthly or divine) over man beyond what he contains within himself is associated with and communicated through a similarly 'anthropocentric' aesthetic:

Painters have painted their swarming groups, and the centre figure of all;
From the head of the centre-figure, spreading a nimbus of gold-coloured light.
But I paint myriads of heads, but paint no head without its nimbus of gold-
coloured light;

Later in the chapter, Clarke contrasts Whitman's treatment of the individual with the capitalist tendency to consider the average man merely as a 'machine', or the embodiment of 'labour-force', a view which he claims is 'expressed in the terms of the economic relations existing between them' (Clarke, p.96). Whitman is seen to propose a democratic aesthetic which challenges 'the terms' of this political and economic discourse, preventing the 'cash-nexus' from being the only bond which 'unites the severed classes' (Clarke, p.96).

Whitman's elevation of the individual leads Clarke to ask whether the poet was an individualist or a collectivist; in doing so he redefines what Terry Mulcaire calls the 'productive tension' in *Leaves of Grass* between the individual and the mass within the parameters of socialist discourse.⁴⁶³ Clarke uses the opening 1881 inscription, 'One's self I sing, a simple separate person / Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse' as evidence that Whitman was 'neither absolutely collectivist nor individualist' though 'the care and culture of the individual, his spiritual growth, is, indeed, the final end' (Clarke, p.85).⁴⁶⁴ This was also Clarke's position, and he launches from Whitman's inscription into a comprehensive defence of this compromise between collectivism and anarchism as the principle on which the political system of a nation should be structured: whilst the 'absolute collectivist' would have the state control every area of life, and the 'absolute anarchist' would have no state control at all, Clarke contends that 'modern society is coming to see that, in the sphere of opinion, there must be no coercion; while in that of practical material affairs increasing, collective regulation is essential' (Clarke, p.86). Clarke's focus is not Whitman, but his own democratic ideal, which is expounded for two pages before the poet is referred to again. He returns to the concept of expansion,

⁴⁶³ Terry Mulcaire, in *Walt Whitman: An Encyclopaedia*, p. 483.

⁴⁶⁴ Whitman, *Poetry and Prose*, p.165.

observing that 'where there is the possibility of expansion for all, there is freedom' and asserting that this possibility could not exist in conditions of material poverty, a premise that is supported by the claim that 'Whitman sees this very clearly', though no evidence is given from his work (pp.87-88).⁴⁶⁵ Though the reviewer in *The Speaker* contends that 'Mr. Clarke allows hardly enough for the individualism implied in "Leaves of Grass," and the author's prose-writings', Clarke does suggest that Whitman did not fully recognise the extent to which 'public organised action can do more for the physical betterment of men', and attributed this to the fact that he leant more towards anarchism than collectivism, as was 'the general bent of the American mind' (Clarke, p.88). Conversely, if reformers only pursued the goal of state control without Whitman's understanding of 'free spiritual union', social changes would be 'little more than surface changes, with the leaven of the old corruption still working underneath' (Clarke, pp.90-91).

'His Spiritual Creed'

In the final chapter Clarke turns from Whitman's political ideology to his spiritual philosophy; he suggests that 'almost every line' of Whitman's poetry contains 'an insight into the essential substance of things' (Clarke, p.101). As he does throughout *Walt Whitman*, Clarke puts forward his own 'creed', greatly influenced by Whitman's but not identical to it, alongside his analysis of the poet. At the beginning of *Walt Whitman*, Clarke suggested that the poet was 'blending the Pagan and the Christian elements with a thoroughly new tone' (Clarke, p.20); here the issue is probed further:

Those who are impressed in Whitman's writings by this passion for athleticism and sensuous beauty may be inclined to regard the poet as Pagan. In truth he is no more Pagan than Christian; he is modern and inclusive. Were he Pagan he would be reactionary, and therefore impossible as the democratic poet, for the world will never go back to Paganism; as, indeed, it will never "go back" to any faith or form that has been outlived. (Clarke, p.104)

This analysis demonstrates the flaw in dialectical thinking: it thrives only on duality. Clarke treats paganism as a cohesive faith rather than a collection of spiritual

⁴⁶⁵ In 'His Message to America', Clarke repeats Whitman's declaration recorded in Johnston's *Visits to Walt Whitman*: 'No man can become truly heroic who is really poor' (Clarke, p.35); Johnston and Wallace, *Visits*, p.44.

traditions, and presents the relationship between paganism and Christianity in antithetical terms. Whitman is seen to synthesise the two so as to bring about a new kind of spiritual understanding; the Hegelian implication is that this would in turn synthesise with another oppositional philosophy and the process of spiritual development would continue to perpetuate itself.

This reductive analysis of Whitman's 'spiritual creed' overlooks the other faiths that Whitman assimilated into *Leaves of Grass*, and into its speaking 'I'. As Clarke understands the speaker to be Whitman himself, this is particularly pertinent; for example, in 'Song of Myself' the speaker incorporates but supersedes a range of gods and goddesses:

Magnifying and applying come I,
Outbidding at the start the cautious old hucksters,
Taking myself the exact dimensions of Jehovah,
Lithographing Kronos, Zeus his son, and Hercules his grandson,
Buying drafts of Osiris, Isis, Belus, Brahma, Buddha,
In my portfolio placing Manito loose, Allah on a leaf, the crucifix engraved,
With Odin and the hideous-faced Mexitli and every idol and image,
Taking them all for what they are worth and not a cent more, (p.233)

Using the metaphor of a 'spiritual scrapbook', Whitman playfully depicts the speaker collating, organising and presenting various divine beings. Two key themes are enclosed in the dual meaning of the line 'Taking myself the exact dimensions of Jehovah'. First, it suggests that the speaker becomes the same size and shape of the god, which returns to the idea that the divine is in humankind itself rather than any of the gods that it creates. Second, it means 'taking my own measurement' (and therefore not accepting the valuation of others), which self-reflexively alludes to Whitman's poetic practice, but also refers to the idea discussed in relation to 'Starting From Paumanok': that each person's goal should be to reach the stage where he or she is no longer a disciple and can say 'I stand in my place with my own day here' (p.178).

Though Clarke did not fully recognise the range of influences that informed Whitman's spirituality, he also considered the notion of progression to be vital. This was in keeping with his evolutionary world-view: if Whitman was to be the 'most representative Bard of Democracy' (Clarke, p.1) he could not go backwards to a pagan faith. For Clarke, the value of Whitman's spiritual vision lay in the fact that it contained the suggestion of what was to come. For these reasons he criticises how

Darwinian evolution was often employed, stating that the future should be focused on rather than the past:

We have gone backward instead of forward in our application of evolution to man. Instead of interpreting man in the terms of that which he is becoming, we have tried to interpret him in the terms of that from which he has emerged. The natural result has been a wide-spread pessimism, as must always be the case when we worship the established fact, forgetting that a fact is fluid, that it is in a perpetual state of dissolution. (*Clarke*, pp.106-107)

Conversely, a forward-looking application of evolutionary theory would move from the physical realm to the spiritual (a trajectory also outlined by Bucke and Carpenter) and so have a profound and positive impact: 'If it is necessary to trace the natural and economic history of man in order to understand him, still more necessary is it to envisage his spiritual aspirations, to supplement the historic by the prophetic and reforming element' (*Clarke*, p.107).

Fundamental to this interpretation was the recognition, as Clarke puts it, that the 'fact' of existence is not 'established', but 'fluid'; elsewhere, he states that evolutionary theory has shown the 'modern thinker' that 'all things are in a state of flux'.⁴⁶⁶ Clarke uses the same vocabulary to attribute this belief to Whitman: 'Whitman's view seems to be identical with that of ethical idealism:—Conceiving the universe not as a fixed thing but as a fluid movement' (*Clarke*, p.112). For Clarke, Whitman's significance as a democratic poet lay his ability to project this vision of an evolving universe to the reader; he gives an example from 'Years of the Modern':

Years prophetic! the space ahead as I walk, as I vainly try to pierce it, is full
of phantoms,
Unborn deeds, things soon to be, project their shapes around me,
This incredible rush and heat, this strange ecstatic fever of dreams, O years!
Your dreams, O years, how they penetrate through me! (I know not whether I
sleep or wake;)
The perform'd America and Europe grow dim, retiring in shadow behind me,
The unperform'd, more gigantic than ever, advance, advance upon me.⁴⁶⁷
(*Clarke*, p.109)

In the dream-like vision of this apostrophic poem, the speaker addresses the future. The years are 'prophetic'; though they are not yet known, what they contain can to some extent be foreseen. However, the 'seer' cannot clearly grasp what is to come; rather, there are 'phantoms', intangible apparitions whose 'shape' can be seen, but

⁴⁶⁶ Clarke, 'Political Defects of the Old Radicalism', p.78. He acknowledges that the idea was not new, but suggests that the theory of evolution brought it back into the popular consciousness.

⁴⁶⁷ Whitman, *Poetry and Prose*, p.598.

not the detail of their appearance. This inability to clearly see the whole gestures to the limitations of human consciousness and suggests that nothing is 'fixed'. The word 'perform'd' indicates that one stage of civilisation has been completed, and that it must now pass into a new phase. The inevitability of this progression is illustrated by the configuration of the 'unperform'd' as a 'gigantic' force bearing down upon the speaker, with the word 'advance' being emphasised through repetition.

However, there is an unresolved tension between Clarke's belief in the continuity of the evolutionary process, and what P. F. Clarke calls the 'element of teleology' in his theory of progress.⁴⁶⁸ Though Clarke champions the notion of constant evolutionary change, he perceives it as having a definite teleological goal or a 'mighty *dénouement*' (Clarke, p.109): the fulfilment of the democratic ideal. He claims: 'Now, whatever else may or may not be, it is certain that reason is in the world, and that it has a *τέλος* which must partake of its own nature' (Clarke, p.107). The Greek word 'telos' refers to an 'end, purpose, ultimate object or aim' (OED), which suggests that the process of evolution will have an end-point. This paradox resonates through his analysis of Whitman; though the poet is understood to conceive of the universe as 'fluid' rather than 'fixed', he is also said to believe in a 'telos' which is 'good' and 'beneficent' (Clarke, p.107). Clarke elaborates on the nature of this telos:

Evolution is not an external entity which works independent of our volition. We are not only factors in the world-process, but the supremely necessary factors [...] Man works for the conversion of the world into a Kosmos, an ordered whole'. (Clarke, p.116)

Here, his concept of evolution resembles Carpenter's Lamarckian exfoliation: inward desire precedes outward change. This can be related to the idea that the divine is man himself: if this is true, then it follows that he is the teleological force behind evolution. Progress, therefore, necessitated a response; Clarke asserts that this was Whitman's strength:

The divine realises its aims in the world, and when the human race collectively perceive this, a universal human religion will arise [...] But this can only come about through human action; and here is where Whitman rivets a link of gold between religion and democracy. The view is not merely speculative; it has its practical side. (Clarke, p.116)

⁴⁶⁸ P. F. Clarke, 'The Progressive Movement in England', p.169.

However, when he explains the nature of this 'practical side' it seems purely ideological rather than 'practical': Whitman insists on 'the identification of the individual with the larger self, so that no man shall desire either to have or to be anything that his fellows may not have or become' (Clarke, p.116).

By 1899 Clarke's conviction in the evolutionary certainty of democracy had dissipated. In 'The Social Future of England' he asserts that 'no democratic movement can make headway under conditions such as ours'. Rejecting a spiritual interpretation of democratic evolution, such as that outlined in *Walt Whitman*, he states:

For democracy is no ideal scheme born of the moral consciousness; it is a political state, based on economic conditions and brought to the birth by ideal convictions widespread among the people. But England's economic conditions are not making for democracy, while her convictions by no means tend towards any democratic ideal. Economic causes mainly determine political evolution, and all the economic factors in England to-day appear to be making against democracy.⁴⁶⁹

In 'The Industrial Basis of Socialism', Clarke had noted that 'both democracy and the new capitalist combinations which threaten it are inevitable growths of an evolutionary process'; by the turn of the century he saw no possibility of the latter being prevented.⁴⁷⁰ Ideological interpretations of democracy, such as those attributed to the 'Bard of Democracy' and acclaimed in *Walt Whitman*, were unable to resist the economic advance of capitalism.

⁴⁶⁹ Clarke, 'Social Future of England', p.58.

⁴⁷⁰ Clarke, 'The Industrial Basis of Socialism', from *Essays in Fabianism*, reprinted in *William Clarke*, p.20.

Chapter Five. 'Have the elder races halted?': Uses of Whitman's 'Pioneers! O Pioneers!'

British socialists engaged with a range of Whitman's poetry, yet certain poems, or extracts from them, were used more frequently than others, both in public and private communication. 'Pioneers! O Pioneers!' was one such poem, as were the two that Carpenter set to music in *Chants of Labour*: 'For You O Democracy' (entitled 'Love of Comrades' both in *Chants of Labour* and in Rossetti's selection), and the 'Great City' section from 'Song of the Broad-Axe'.⁴⁷¹ It is not clear whether Carpenter included these poems because they were already popular in socialist circles, or whether they became popular due to their inclusion, but it is easy to see their appeal: they depict an ideal democratic society very much in line with the broad precepts of ethical socialism. 'For You O Democracy' describes a nation (that is also a 'continent') founded on companionship (the phrase 'love of comrades' is repeated four times, and the cities are personified as being 'inseparable' with 'their arms about each other's necks', p.272), and as has been discussed, the extract from 'Song of the Broad-Axe' describes the qualities of an ideal city. It is less obvious why 'Pioneers! O Pioneers!', a poem with strong nationalist overtones, was so often drawn upon. One way to think about it is through Bakhtin's suggestion that a word 'becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and

⁴⁷¹ Carpenter, *Chants of Labour*, pp.56-58; pp.92-93.

expressive intention'.⁴⁷² This principle could also be applied to particular groups or communities: for example, in the 'great city' extract the speaker says that 'speculations on the soul are encouraged' (p.336); the word 'speculations' would carry different currency with critics of industrial capitalism in late-nineteenth century Britain than it did in mid-century America where land speculation had played a major role in the nation's development. 'Pioneers! O Pioneers!' was employed in such a way that Whitman's words were made to 'speak' for British socialism and so became 'populated' with its 'intentions' or meanings.

First published in *Drum-Taps* less than a month after the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, 'Pioneers' (pp.371-375) is often, and with good reason, read in the context of the period of reconstruction after the American Civil War. M. Wynn Thomas notes that it was written as America's 'citizen-soldiers' returned to civilian life and calls it a 'demobilization poem'.⁴⁷³ The martial energy of war is harnessed and directed towards the pioneering of the west; Whitman gives a new mission to America's soldiers, his 'tan-faced children' (l.1): not simply to rebuild the nation, but to improve, extend, and better it. By combining martial symbolism with the topos of westward expansion, Whitman reshapes the rhetoric and imagery of war to serve a reconstructive and unifying purpose. Luke Mancuso observes that the word 'pioneer' can be traced back to the French *peonier*, or 'foot soldier' and asserts that in Whitman's poem it 'denotes an imagistic parallel to the martial images of the war troops'.⁴⁷⁴ Certainly, this parallel is the poem's central conceit: Whitman exploits the semantic duality of a word which could refer both to 'a member of an infantry group going with or ahead of an army or regiment to dig trenches, repair roads, and clear terrain in readiness for the main body of troops' and 'a person who is amongst the first to explore or settle a new country, territory, or region' (*OED*); westward expansion is presented in combative terms. Much of the vocabulary used to refer to the development of the land has martial overtones, for example 'debouch' (l.18) and 'detachments' (l.21). Metrically, Gay Wilson Allen has argued that its predominantly trochaic rhythm corresponds with a 'LEFT-right, LEFT-right marching

⁴⁷² Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981), p.293.

⁴⁷³ M. Wynn Thomas, *The Lunar Light of Whitman's Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), p.201; p. 270.

⁴⁷⁴ Luke Mancuso, *The Strange Sad War Revolving: Walt Whitman, Reconstruction and the Emergence of Black Citizenship, 1865-1876* (Columbia, South Carolina: Camden House, 1997), p.82.

rhythm'.⁴⁷⁵ This military trope frames the poem: in the opening stanza the pioneers are not called to get tools ready, but 'weapons' (l.2), and in the final stanza the trumpet sound at daybreak calls the 'army' of pioneers to their places (l.103). Whitman employs the symbolism of the battle ('through the battle, through defeat', l.51), and extends the metaphor of the war march throughout the poem, even moving 'Pioneers' to a new cluster called 'Marches Now the War is Over' in the 1871-2 *Leaves of Grass*.

As the frontier was only officially declared closed in the 1890 census, Whitman presented real as well as symbolic possibilities in both the figure of the pioneer and the westward movement of the poem. However, though the 'myth of the west' and its more sinister cousin 'manifest destiny' were forward-looking ideas, concerned with what America would become, they were also familiar discursive traditions, embedded in America's history and part of its symbolic mythology; therefore, the discourse of westward expansion acted as a link between America's past and its future. Whitman offers 'the Western movement' (l.58) as a common cause that northerners and southerners, Unionists and Confederates, could work for together: 'All the hands of comrades clasping, all the Southern, all the Northern, / Pioneers! O pioneers!' (ll.35-36). North and south are brought together under the 'mighty mother mistress' (l.41) which presumably, as is suggested by a letter that Whitman wrote to a soldier during the war, refers to the Union flag: 'I don't know what secesh would do—the ground seems to be slipping more & more from under their feet—Lew, the *Union & the American Flag* must conquer, it is destiny.'⁴⁷⁶ Yet the fact that this is not specified is significant; unity is emphasised rather than the division between Unionists and Confederates. These symbolic images of unity are reinforced by Whitman's use of the plural pronoun 'we'. Throughout *Leaves of Grass* catalogues are used to stress the variety of individuals and occupations that make up the social whole (for example, 'The duck-shooter walks by silent and cautious stretches, / The deacons are ordained with crossed hands at the altar, / The spinning-girl retreats and advances to the hum of the big wheel', 'Song of Myself',

⁴⁷⁵ Gay Wilson Allen, 'On the Trochaic Meter of "Pioneers! O Pioneers!"', *American Literature*, 20:4 (Jan 1949), 449-451 (p.450).

⁴⁷⁶ Whitman to Lewis K. Brown (15 August 1863), *The Walt Whitman Archive*, <<http://whitmanarchive.org/biography/correspondence/cw/tei/loc.00888.html>> [accessed 25 May 2010] (para 4 of 5).

p.39), but in 'Pioneers! O Pioneers!' there is no such division of labour. In the first seven stanzas the 'tramping' (l.11), 'throwing' (l.21), 'conquering', 'holding', 'daring', venturing' (l.23), 'felling' (l.25), 'stemming', 'vexing', 'piercing' (l.26), 'surveying', and 'upheaving' (l.27) are all carried out by an integrated and undifferentiated 'we', a word which is emphasised by the trochaic metre and its use at the beginning of lines: for example, 'we the surface broad surveying' (l.27). The repetition of this structure also stresses the sequence of present participles, adding a sense of urgency and relentlessness to the unified force of the 'we'.

The speaker's notion of 'development' unites his American compatriots by setting them apart from other 'lands' and 'races', in the vanguard of a progressive westward movement. This is explored in the fourth and fifth stanzas:

Have the elder races halted?
Do they droop and end their lesson, wearied over there beyond the seas?
We take up the task eternal, and the burden and the lesson,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

All the past we leave behind,
We debouch upon a newer mightier world, varied world,
Fresh and strong the world we seize, world of labor and the march,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

The speaker does not define precisely what this 'task' is, nor what is being advanced towards, but in the context of *Leaves of Grass* it has democratic associations. Though Britain is not directly referred to, it is implicitly criticised in the familiar trope of the aged mother country across the Atlantic Ocean. In stanza five the 'elder races' seem to be emphatically rejected as the past is 'left behind'; the old world is not transformed or developed, but an entirely new 'fresh' world is set upon. The rhetoric in stanza four, however, suggests that the New World has not superseded the Old but that it continues its mission: the task is 'eternal', and has been passed on to the nation most able to fulfil it. Though America may not be in opposition to other 'lands' and 'races', it has assumed a dominant position. The rest of the world is seen to support America as it leads the march: 'All the pulses of the world, / Falling in they beat for us, with the Western movement beat' (ll.57-58).

Despite these nationalist overtones Ernest Rhys not only included 'Pioneers' in *The Poems of Walt Whitman* but used the 'elder races' stanza as the epigraph to his preface.⁴⁷⁷ Gerard Genette describes the role of such paratextual material:

⁴⁷⁷ Rhys, *Poems*, p.ix.

[The paratext is] a zone not only of transition but also of *transaction*: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that – whether well or poorly understood and achieved – is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it (more pertinent, of course, in the eyes of the author and his allies).⁴⁷⁸

Of course, in selections such as Rhys's, the word 'editor' must take the place of 'author', a substitution which adds a degree of tension, as editorial perceptions of what is a 'better reception' for the text or a 'more pertinent reading' may strain apart from those of the author. Genette proposed that there were at least four functions of the epigraph: to comment on the title, to comment on the text, to put the name of the person being quoted to the new text, and to act as a password of intellectuality.⁴⁷⁹ In this case only Genette's second function seems applicable as Whitman himself is quoted with a passage that can be found elsewhere in the book. As the stanza is used as an epigraph for the preface which appears before the poetry, there is a kind of 'doubling': the 'elder races' stanza comments on the preface which in turn comments on the verse (which includes the same stanza).

Edward Whitley proposes that by using the 'elder races' stanza as the preface's epigraph:

Rhys seems to position America as the geographic site of democracy and Whitman's poetry as the means for accessing [sic] it for British ends. He seems to be trying to recuperate from Whitman and America the democracy he saw lacking in Victorian England.⁴⁸⁰

So far as Whitman's role is concerned, Whitley's assessment holds true. In the final paragraphs of the preface, there are allusions to the rhetoric and themes of 'Pioneers', and Rhys concludes with a 'call to arms' that echoes that of Whitman's speaker, while placing Whitman himself at the forefront of the movement towards democracy:

And with his tones of heroic incitement and earnest remonstrance ringing in our midst, we who are young may do much in the stress and tumult of the advance to a new and endangered era for the high order of love and truth and liberty.⁴⁸¹

As in 'Pioneers', 'advance' not only signifies progression but carries the martial connotations of a war march. Similarly, one page earlier, Rhys states: 'We who are young may well respond to him, too, in turn, and advance fearlessly in the lines of

⁴⁷⁸ Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.2.

⁴⁷⁹ Genette, *Paratexts*, pp.156-160.

⁴⁸⁰ Edward Whitley, 'British Editions of *Leaves of Grass*', *The Walt Whitman Archive*, <<http://www.whitmanarchive.org/published/foreign/british/intro.html>> [Accessed 15 March 2010] (para 8 of 12).

⁴⁸¹ Rhys, *Poems*, p. xxxix.

his unique initiative'.⁴⁸² The dual meaning of the word 'lines' conflates the military with the poetic; the reader is cast as a combatant following Whitman's advance. Rhys's tone recalls that of 'Pioneers': it is dauntless and galvanizing. Nevertheless, Thomas's assessment that every line of Whitman's poem is 'held in vibrant tension between the divergent feelings of hope and fear' is also applicable to Rhys's preface.⁴⁸³ Rhys's overt millennial confidence is fractured: phrases such as 'endangered era', quoted above, introduce a note of uncertainty similar to the fear lurking behind Whitman's relentless insistence on the 'march', that American democracy might not be fulfilled.

Though Whitman's poetry may indeed be positioned as a means of 'accessing' democracy for British ends, America is not. Placing the 'elder races' stanza on its own as epigraph removes it from its national context, making the distinction it implies between America and Britain less apparent. Rhys does more than reiterate the conceit that America was the nation of youthful promise while Britain was aged and decrepit. In 'Pioneers' Whitman engaged with the popular discourse that stressed the youth of America: the speaker addresses his countrymen and women as 'children' and 'youths'. In Whitman's work these words often connote health, vigour, and potentiality, and perhaps in response to the poem's subtext of the death and wounding of so many young American men in the Civil War, witnessed firsthand in the Washington hospitals, this is the use he puts them to in 'Pioneers'. Rhys also utilises the sense of potential that can be conveyed by 'youth': variants of the word 'young' are used five times in the preface's final paragraph, which begins:

It is the younger hearts who will thrill to this new incitement,—the younger natures, who are putting forth strenuously into the war of human liberation. Older men and women have established their mental and spiritual environment; they work according to their wont. [. . .] To the younger hearts and minds, then, be these *Leaves of Grass*, gathered and interwoven as the emblem of a corresponding fellowship of men and women, dedicate!⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸² Rhys, *Poems*, p.xxxviii. The phrase 'we who are young' recalls the final lines of *King Lear*: 'we that are young / Shall never see so much, nor live so long'. William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. by Kenneth Muir (London: Methuen, 1972), p.206. Rhys inverts the notion that modernism is a diminished phenomenon, and presses his reader to work towards bringing a positive future about.

⁴⁸³ Thomas, *Lunar Light*, p.270.

⁴⁸⁴ Rhys, *Poems*, p.xxxviii.

This recalls the 'elder races' epigraph, specifically using the war metaphor to refer to the movement towards 'human liberation'. As in 'Pioneers', the old are not able to 'advance', and it falls upon the young to take up the 'task'.

Yet Rhys defines the old and the young along generational rather than national lines: as epigraph, the stanza is made to speak to the British youth and urge them towards socialist action. This interpretation ensured that Britain was not excluded from a place in the movement towards the democratic ideal. 'We who are young may well respond to him': Rhys demands not only that the idealistic young read Whitman's poetry but that they act upon it and 'advance fearlessly'. In Genette's terms, Rhys guides both the 'reception' and 'reading' of Whitman's poetry: the 'elder races' stanza is used to prepare the reader for the rallying cry in the preface for the establishment of democracy, which then directs the reader towards a socialist reading of the poems that follow. Of course, readers may resist editorial persuasion, and the effectiveness of such 'guidance' depends on the reader progressing through the text in its given order. Nevertheless, Rhys chose not to acknowledge the nationalistic elements of 'Pioneers' in order to put the poem to use for the British socialist cause.

Rhys was not alone amongst British readers in adapting the military metaphor of 'Pioneers' to broader social ends. James Wallace, of the Eagle Street College, also used the poem, though in speeches rather than publications. Here I consider two of Wallace's speeches, both of which conclude with a reading of 'Pioneers! O Pioneers!': the first was made at the College's celebration of Whitman's birthday in 1893, the year after the poet's death, and the second the following year at the conference of the Bolton branch of the Independent Labour Party.⁴⁸⁵ That Wallace chose to end a public speech to a political audience with the same poem that he had used in a more private talk to the group of Whitman lovers at the birthday event is significant in itself: the 'call to arms' of 'Pioneers' is first used to urge his friends to forward the 'great idea' of democracy, which then becomes explicitly socialist in the second speech, when the poem's 'call to arms' is then used as a summons to the wider community. Wallace did not directly analyse the poem,

⁴⁸⁵ Wallace, 'Speech for Whitman's birthday' (31 May 1893), Bolton, Whitman Collection, MS ZWN 2/6; 'Paper read before ILP Conference at Bolton' (26 May 1894), Bolton, Whitman Collection, MS ZWN 6/2/23.

but drew on its themes and motifs: of 'war' in the first speech, and the 'pioneer' in the second.

The birthday speech focuses on Whitman's poetic representation of the Civil War, and a large part of it is taken up by reading poems from *Leaves of Grass* that address this subject, such as 'To Thee Old Cause', 'As I Lay with My Head in Your Lap Camerado' and 'Beat! Beat! Drums!'. Wallace states, 'It is a very important and significant fact that *Leaves of Grass* really centers [sic] on the American War, that is the pivot on which the work turns.' Here then, Wallace sees 'Pioneers' not in isolation, but as part of a cohesive poetic project, in which the war poems played a fundamental role. Like Rhys, Wallace adopts Whitman's 'message' to post-bellum America for *fin de siècle* Britain, but unlike Rhys, he discusses the reasons for doing so:

It is as well to say that great as the American War was in itself it was only as a symbol of still mightier battles, it was only a fractional part of the battles which were to follow and which we too have to engage in. In Walt's expressions referring to that particular War we may read in our own applications to the War in which we are or ought to be ourselves engaged and to the still mightier struggle which is looming ahead.

It is not simply that Whitman's message is for everyone, but that the reader must take an active role and 'read in' their own social context. Thus Wallace encourages an open-ended reading process that self-consciously invests Whitman's poetry with additional meanings. This had an impact on how the poem could be used: for Wallace, the 'Americanness' of 'Pioneers' did not need to be overlooked or edited for it functioned as a symbol of a universal condition.

Wallace believed, like Whitman, that the Civil War was a battle for democracy itself, and therefore, in *Leaves of Grass*, the War was a synecdochal image: it was a part that stood for the whole, which Wallace described later in the speech as 'an active sustained war, a war for the great idea—that of perfect, free individuals' which each person is 'summoned to help in forwarding'. This interpretation recalls Blake's 'And Did Those Feet in Ancient Time':

I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:
Till we have built Jerusalem,
In England's green & pleasant Land.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸⁶ William Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. by David V. Erdman (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), pp.95-96, ll.13-16.

Blake and Wallace both draw on the biblical discourse of spiritual warfare: every follower is called to fight to further the message that leads to ultimate freedom for humankind.⁴⁸⁷ For Wallace, the Civil War in Whitman's poetry had a symbolic value that could and should be used for these greater ends, and this is exactly what he does in this speech; after reading some of Whitman's poems about war, Wallace calls on the College to enter this struggle:

It seems to me that we fall into the smug and comfortable way of thinking. It is partly to shake myself and rouse the College out of that feeling into the feeling of being engaged in a battle in which we have duties to perform.

Having made his own 'summons', he reads Whitman's in 'Pioneers', stressing its authority: 'I do not need to say much of my own. Walt's words ought to be sufficiently strong'. 'Pioneers' is used not as a poem of demobilisation, but of conscription.

In the second speech Wallace speaks to British socialists about the nature of socialism using ideas that echo those of the birthday speech. Like the American War, socialist agitation is understood to be one part, or symbol, of the movement towards democracy, which is referred to as 'the cause of humanity':

The stream of tendency toward the Socialism of the future is far wider than the narrow channels of our own organization, or of the United Socialist bodies of the country, and it is advanced by myriads who are today ignorant of our ideas.

This argument is book-ended with references to the 'pioneer': near the beginning of his paper Wallace proposes that those who are morally advanced in the sense that they have a great capability for sympathy and love 'no matter what their political or other creed may be – no matter how indifferent or hostile they may now be to the Socialist movement – are the true pioneers of the Socialism of the future', and in closing he commented that 'we shall become the pioneers of the true, the human society towards which our Socialism itself is but a stage'. Though the pioneer motif is not exclusively Whitmanian, by alluding to Whitman's poetry in the speech, using the poet as an 'illustrious example' of democratic living, and finishing with a reading of 'Pioneers! O Pioneers!', Wallace clearly associates his use of the pioneer with Whitman's. In this speech however, the motif's martial connotations are only referred to once, and even then obliquely: referring to the 'true pioneers', Wallace

⁴⁸⁷ See, for example, Ephesians 6.11-12: 'Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.'

states that 'intellectual enlightenment is sure to follow upon their moral advance'. Instead, he draws on the idea of developing uncharted regions, and uses 'Pioneers', the speech's only poem, to put forward the idea that advances had to be made in the spiritual and moral spheres before more overtly socialist work could have a lasting effect. This process began internally:

We pay too much homage to what is showy and superficial – to bustling activity to prominent place – political power. We forget that Gods are usually obscure – unrecognized – and that it is depth of thought – and range and power of personality – which have always the deepest and longest influence. And these we may each cultivate and develop in ourselves.

Before reading the whole poem aloud he specified that it was 'addressed to each and all of us', making it very clear that its message was not only for America, but for the ILP, and British socialism in general.

In contrast, the Labour Church used the poem selectively, using specific sections to promote the organisation and its aims. This can be seen in a pamphlet produced to promote the 'Labour Church Pioneers', an affiliation of supporters who did not live near a Labour Church.⁴⁸⁸ The aim of the pamphlet was to recruit volunteers to undertake Labour Church work in areas where the Church did not yet have an active support-base, with the long-term goal of planting new churches. The very choice of the name 'Pioneers' is intended to be persuasive: the Labour Church offered its potential volunteers a romanticised vision of themselves and of the work they would do, imbuing it with a sense of (to use another pioneering metaphor) ground-breaking importance. The association between the 'pioneer' and Whitman is made on the first page; after giving information about the 'Labour Church Pioneers' and explaining the different forms of membership, there is a quotation from Whitman's 'To a Pupil', clearly also a source for Wallace's argument in the ILP speech: 'Is reform needed? Is it through you? / The greater the reform is needed the greater the personality you need to accomplish it'.⁴⁸⁹ This also persuades by flattery, the implication being that if the reader has a 'great personality' he or she will join up;

⁴⁸⁸ The pamphlet is unsigned and undated, and neither name nor date has been attributed by archivists in either Bolton Central Library or the University of Warwick, where copies are held. However, it seems likely that John Trevor was the author, and *The Labour Prophet* first refers to the Labour Church Pioneers in April 1892. Once again, there are some differences in this chapter between the punctuation and capitalisation in *Leaves of Grass* and in the source material I analyse, and quotations from *Leaves of Grass* are given as they are reprinted.

⁴⁸⁹ Whitman, *Poetry and Prose*, p.515. Wallace drew a line down the left-hand side of these lines in his copy of the 1892 *Leaves of Grass*.

the Labour Church principles are given immediately afterwards, followed by a list of 'Work Suggested for Labour Church Pioneers' such as distributing Labour Church literature, establishing new churches, and studying the 'economic and moral aspects of the Social Problem'.

Having included all the necessary Labour Church information, eleven stanzas from 'Pioneers! O Pioneers!' are then printed: 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 12, 13, and 23 to 26. This selection produces a skewed version of the poem's narrative that focuses exclusively on the 'march'. Betsy Erkkila observes that 'as the controlling image of Whitman's Civil War poems, the figure of the march has a dual suggestiveness as both an army march and the march of humanity', and this is certainly what the pamphlet's selection draws out of 'Pioneers'.⁴⁹⁰ The 'march of humanity' is very deliberately removed from its American context; the elements of nationalism are not simply ignored but are actively edited out. All references to American geographic regions are omitted, such as the eighth stanza, beginning 'Colorado men are we', and the ninth:

From Nebraska, from Arkansas,
Central inland race are we, from Missouri, with the continental blood
intervein'd,
All the hands of the comrades clasping, all the Southern, all the Northern,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

This stanza, so central to Whitman's narrative trajectory of a unified America extending to fulfil its destiny, was entirely surplus to the Labour Church's 'march of humanity'. Likewise, lines that privileged the west are excluded: 'Western youths, / So impatient, full of action, full of manly pride and friendship, / Plain I see you Western youths, see you tramping with the foremost' (ll.9-11); 'All the pulses of the world, / Falling in they beat for us, with the Western movement beat' (ll.57-58); 'O you daughters of the West' (l.81). The American framework of the poem is removed: the 'task eternal' (l.15) is universalised and its completion is no longer located in the American west but in the success of the labour movement.

The regular stanzaic structure, unusual in Whitman's poetry, and the repetition of the insistent refrain 'Pioneers! O pioneers!' may give an impression of uniformity that belies the range of emotion that the poem contains. Though some

⁴⁹⁰ Betsy Erkkila, *Whitman the Political Poet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.225.

stanzas certainly beat the war drum, others are more contemplative; for example, stanzas eighteen and nineteen:

I too with my soul and body,
We, a curious trio, picking, wandering on our way,
Through these shores amid the shadows, with the apparitions pressing,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

Lo, the darting bowling orb!
Lo, the brother orbs around, all the clustering suns and planets,
All the dazzling days, all the mystic nights with dreams,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

The slow, gentle verbs 'picking' and 'wandering' contrast with forceful verbs in other stanzas, such as 'conquering' and 'advancing'. The speaker invokes the cosmos and describes the nights as 'mystic'. The 'trio' raises complex questions about identity, and the shift from the poetic 'I' to the 'we'. This is a far cry from Rhys's assessment of 'Pioneers' as a 'simply tuneful summons', yet this is precisely how it acts in the Labour Church pamphlet.⁴⁹¹ Only the stanzas that emphasise the martial elements of the poem are included; the softer, more pensive stanzas, and those that depict the development of the land, are omitted. Conversely, it is easy to see why stanzas such as twenty-three and twenty-four were used to appeal to those with socialist sensibilities:

Not for delectations sweet,
Not the cushion and the slipper, not the peace and the studios,
Not the riches safe and palling, not for us the tame enjoyment,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

Do the feasters gluttonous feast?
Do the corpulent sleepers sleep? have they locked and bolted doors?
Still be ours the diet hard, and the blanket on the ground,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

These lines contrast materialism and unnecessary consumption with the 'blanket on the ground' and the 'diet hard' of those working towards democracy, and so lend themselves readily to a socialist interpretation. In this edited version of 'Pioneers' the speaker calls the reader to enter willingly into a hard-fought and enduring battle, and in its position in the Labour Church pamphlet this was translated into the struggle for socialism.

Whitman's 'Pioneers' and its theme of the war march are again applied to the labour movement (and specifically to the work of the Labour Church) in an article

⁴⁹¹ Rhys, *Poems*, p.xxxiv.

about the 'Labour Church Pioneers' in *The Labour Prophet*.⁴⁹² Probably written by John Trevor, the article has an overtly religious register, which encourages a reading of 'Pioneers' that interprets both its march and the labour movement in terms of spiritual warfare. The final two stanzas, which draw on the metaphor of the march, are used as epigraph:

Has the night descended,
Was the road of late so toilsome, did we stop discouraged nodding on our way?
Yet a passing hour I yield you in your tracks to pause oblivious,
Pioneers! O Pioneers!

Still [sic] with sound of trumpet
Far, far off the daybreak call—hark! how loud and clear I hear it wind,
Swift! to the head of the army!—swift! spring to your places,
Pioneers! O Pioneers!

Trevor's diction refers back to the imagery in these lines, and so aligns the Labour Church workers with the marchers in the poem. For example, even bureaucratic housekeeping is conducted using a military metaphor:

A circular is being issued to our Pioneers in which they are invited to enrol their names for the current year. This yearly enrolment is necessary to enable those to fall out of the ranks who desire to do so.

This metaphor runs into the next paragraph, where the reader is persuaded to join the 'ranks' of the Labour Church. Unlike the pamphlet or Wallace's speech, this is not done by emphasising the need for 'great' personalities, but conversely by focusing on man's innate unworthiness:

There are some who think they are not GOOD enough to join our ranks. Ah, my friends, when you say these things you make us blush for shame at our own unworthiness. Not one of us is good enough for this work. Not one of us ever will be. Let us set aside the thought of an achieved goodness to fit us to serve the good God, but rather regard this high service as a means of making both us and our fellows better and ever better.

Trevor appeals to the reader, as he does in other *Labour Prophet* articles, by using conventionally Christian rhetoric. The principles of the Labour Church state that the movement is 'Free Religion', yet 'good God' makes the divine specifically Christian, by alluding to Luke 18.18-19: 'And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none is good, save one, that is, God.' Similarly, though the principles also specify that each person should be 'free to develop his own relations with the Power that brought him into being', blanket assertions are made that are based on Christian

⁴⁹² John Trevor, 'Labour Church Pioneers', *Labour Prophet* (May 1894), p.56.

notions of man's 'unworthiness' and the goodness of God. The military 'pioneering' of Whitman's poem is placed in a Christian context in order to add force to its call to join the socialist 'ranks'.

However, this transposition works in both directions: Trevor states that one of the Labour Churches' groups is to be renamed: 'OUR MISSIONARY CLASS will now be called OUR PIONEER CLASS'. This distances the class from the religious connotations of 'missionary', whilst still communicating a sense of 'going on ahead' and performing ground-breaking work. It is not clear exactly what this 'Pioneer Class' is, but Trevor goes on to state: 'We want to build up individuals, in the Churches and out of the Churches, who shall become the living embodiments of the principles for which the Labour Church stands'. Like Wallace, Trevor claims that the success of the labour movement depends on the development of 'great' personalities, without which it 'cannot make any real progress'. Trevor sees no tension between this 'building up' of the individual and the collective nature of socialism. As in Whitman's poem, the 'pioneers' may be an 'advance party', but they can and should also be a force *en masse*. If the singular word 'pioneer' carries connotations, like 'missionary', of isolated and lonely endeavour, these are overwritten by its use in the plural in the stanzas from 'Pioneers! O Pioneers!' that Trevor reproduces.

To conclude the article, Trevor gestures back to the themes and imagery introduced in these two stanzas. He not only uses the metaphor of the 'march', but, like Whitman, draws on the contrasting symbolic value of night and dawn. This final paragraph first addresses problems that have arisen in the Labour Church movement ('Organisation has, in our own movement, got ahead of life [. . .] It does not express life so much as it fetters it') but then turns optimistically to the future in the final sentence: 'There will be developments of the Labour Church which will gladden the hearts of all who believe in it. Meanwhile we will march steadily towards the sunrise'. This mirrors the progression of the 'Pioneers' extract, which recognises the hardships of the journey ('toilsome', 'discouraged') but moves swiftly on to welcome 'the daybreak call' summoning the army to 'spring' to their places. This is where Whitman's poem ends, not with a final conflict but with the perpetual journey, as is described in the thirteenth stanza:

On and on the compact ranks,

With accessions ever waiting, with the places of the dead quickly fill'd,
Through the battle, through defeat, moving yet and never stopping,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

The poem's only mention of a 'battle' occurs here, but the reader does not pause on it; rather, the line enacts itself metrically: the trochaic rhythm and repetition of 'through' pulls the reader forward. The 'battle' is subsumed in the relentless motion of the stanza, the march that goes 'on and on'. Trevor's article also ends with the journey still in motion, with the metaphor of the march emphasising the value of continuous and steady progress.

Gay Wilson Allen suggests that the theme of 'Pioneers' is 'less the celebration of the American pioneers than the journey itself', and perhaps this journey motif helps to explain why British socialists used 'Pioneers! O Pioneers!' so often rather than other poems from *Leaves of Grass*.⁴⁹³ I have described how the poem was co-opted as a 'summons' to join the democratic fight, and the same pattern prevails in other socialist newspapers and periodicals: the stanzas that were selected to be reprinted were generally those that contained martial imagery. Yet Whitman had written other poems that contained such imagery and which could also be seen to make a 'call to arms', such as 'Beat! Beat! Drum!' and 'Song of the Banner at Daybreak', which were rarely used by British socialists; they chose instead to illustrate their 'summons' with a poem that was ultimately about reconstruction rather than the war itself. This may be partly due to its formal properties: its regular stanzaic structure, repeated refrain, and predominantly trochaic metre bring it closer than most of Whitman's poems to the chartist and socialist poetry printed in these periodicals. However, the focus on the 'journey' rather than the 'fight' seems particularly appropriate to British socialism. Indeed, William Morris's 'The March of the Workers', first published in *Commonweal* in February 1885 and then in *Chants for Socialists*, has strong parallels with 'Pioneers'. As the title of the collection suggests, the poem was specifically written for a socialist readership, and, like 'Pioneers', it is structured around the poetic motifs of the development of the land and the war march. As in Whitman's poem, the battle is not depicted, but can be heard in the distance:

⁴⁹³ Allen, *Walt Whitman as Man, Poet and Legend* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1961), p.66.

On we march then, we the workers, and the rumour that ye hear
Is the blended sound of battle and deliv'rance drawing near;
For the hope of every creature is the banner that we bear,
And the world is marching on.⁴⁹⁴

In both 'Pioneers' and 'The March of the Workers' the call is to join the march rather than the battle itself, and the use of these poems can perhaps be linked to the fact that though there were groups and individuals that advocated the use of violence, the biggest and most influential groups – the ILP, the SDF, the Socialist League, and the Fabians – were concerned with reform not revolution; they sought to move a democratic movement with a gathering mass force behind it, a vision that correlated, or could be made to correlate, with that of 'Pioneers! O Pioneers!'. Justification for such a correlation can be found in the fifth stanza of the poem: 'Fresh and strong the world we seize, world of labor and the march' (l.19). The unclear syntax of the first clause allows the adjectives 'fresh' and 'strong' to be applied either to the pioneers or the world which they seized; this duality idealises both the principle and those that bring it about, characterising both as new, progressive and forceful. The second clause describes this world by conjoining 'labor' with the 'march', a pairing which is emphasised by its zeugmatic structure. The word 'labor' undergoes a transition between Whitman's writing of 'Pioneers! O Pioneers!' and British socialists' use of it. On a typographical level, the spelling was anglicised when the line was reprinted in socialist periodicals, as it was in both Rossetti's and Rhys's selection. It also acquired different connotations and significations. In Whitman's mid nineteenth-century American context, the word 'labor' was bound into ideas that included, amongst others, agrarianism, the Puritan work-ethic, and the idealised simple-living, hard-working American backwoodsman. In the context of *fin de siècle* British socialism, 'labour' was inherently associated with class consciousness and protest, which gives a different nuance to the poetic line: socialist agitation is married with the 'march'.

Moreover, the 'march' is not always metaphorical: it became a popular form of protest during the nineteenth century. Dieter Rucht observes that before the development of mass media the march had a particular advantage as 'it allow[ed] the protestors to show themselves to a much larger number of people in the course of

⁴⁹⁴ William Morris, *Chants For Socialists* (London: Socialist League Office, 1885), pp.11-12. It was also included in Carpenter's *Chants of Labour*, pp.64-65.

their procession than if they merely assemble in one place'; other strengths include providing 'opportunities to speak to sympathizers along the way', the fact that marches are 'associated with making sacrifices', that they allow the participants 'to grow together as a feeling of "us" develops', and, importantly, that 'marches convey the symbolic sense of moving forward and approaching a goal'.⁴⁹⁵ Thus the physical act of demonstrating works on some of the same principles that run through Whitman's use of the march as metaphor. In a *Labour Leader* article published in April 1895, Sam Hobson, who stood as an ILP candidate in the same year, used four stanzas from 'Pioneers' to illustrate his description of a thirteen-mile march in Sileby, an 'industrial village' in Leicestershire.⁴⁹⁶ Hobson reports that the organisers had 'thought well to go thither, a thousand or so strong, to demonstrate the strength of the Union, and so encourage, exhort, move, stir, and provoke the Sileby people to join'. Though probably not employed consciously, the linguistic parallel between the trade 'Union' of the Leicestershire labour movement and the American 'Union' in 'Pioneers' anticipates the way that Hobson aligns the socialist march with the march in Whitman's poem. In the demonstration, the pairing between 'labour' and the 'march' is literal rather than figurative, but Hobson's description of the event harnessed Whitman's metaphoric use of the march in such a way that its symbolic value was retained.

In Hobson's account there is a sense of excitement and gathering force. If his numbers are accurate, the crowd was four times larger than expected, and he describes how there were 'bands playing' and 'flags flying'. These are familiar components of a parade, but are also symbols of a war march, a duality that is explicitly drawn out with the quotation from 'Pioneers':

It is impossible to describe one's sense of joy and hope as we march in the ranks with such an army of noble men and women. Involuntarily the words of Whitman crossed my mind whilst we marched through the villages with their open doors and windows full of curious faces, and children all agog with excitement:

"All the past we leave behind,
We debouch upon a newer, mightier world, varied world,
Fresh and strong the world we seize, world of labour and the march—
Pioneers! O pioneers!
"We detachments steady throwing,

⁴⁹⁵ Dieter Rucht 'On the Sociology of Protest Marches', in *The Street as Stage: Protest Marches and Public Rallies since the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Matthias Reiss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.55.

⁴⁹⁶ Sam Hobson, 'The Boot War', *Labour Leader* (13 April 1895), p.10.

Down the edges, through the passes, up the mountains steep,
Conquering, holding, daring, venturing as we go the unknown ways,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

See my children, resolute children,
By those swarms upon our rear we must never yield or falter,
Ages back in ghostly millions frowning there behind us urging,
Pioneers! O pioneers!"

And so in battle array we tramped up and down the hills, the wagons bearing
provisions went on before, the bands were martial in their musical selections,
"the women walking in and out of the procession with the men".

The final phrase is not a direct quotation, but it refers to the 'Great City' passage from 'Song of the Broad-Axe': 'Where women walk in public processions in the streets the same as the men' (p.336). As with the parodies in *The Labour Leader*, this unattributed use of Whitman's poetry assumes that the newspaper's readers were familiar with it. 'Pioneers' is inserted between passages that describe the Leicestershire march, and they do so using military metaphors which recall the poem's imagery: 'we march in the ranks with such an army of noble men and women'; 'and so in battle array we tramped up and down the hills'. This imagery does not feature strongly in the given stanzas but the use of it in the surrounding paragraphs further connects the theme of the war march with Whitman's lines. This has the effect of emphasising the march specifically rather than the notion of protest in general.

Hobson seems keen to show that his use of Whitman's poem was not part of a clever literary argument. He specifies that Whitman's words were thought of at the time of the march rather than in recollection, and makes a point of noting that they came to mind 'involuntarily'. This adds a degree of experiential authenticity to the parallel drawn between the march of Whitman's pioneers and that of the Leicestershire labourers, yet the fact that the remembered lines are given word perfect suggests that, at least to some extent, this was itself a deliberate rhetorical strategy. The supposed immediacy heightens the sense of excitement and energy transposed onto the demonstration by the trochaic rhythm, exclamatory punctuation and bold tone of the stanzas from 'Pioneers'. The combination of military metaphors and Whitman's poem charges the march with a sense of importance and forcefulness, though there are times when there seems to be a discrepancy between what Hobson is describing and the register he employs: for example, he asserts that the marchers 'are ready to suffer and dare many things' immediately after describing them

partaking in 'bread and cheese, ginger beer, lemonade, beer, and whatever kind of liquor our souls most fancied'. However, working conditions and industrial relations were undoubtedly hard: the march followed a lock-out by the Manufacturer's Federation in response to strikes by the national Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives; six of these strikes took place in 1895 in Leicester, the Union's headquarters.⁴⁹⁷ This action is explicitly linked both with the ideology of socialism and the pioneering spirit: '[The Leicester people] are indeed genuine pioneers, fearless, outspoken, companionable, and determined. They are going to do great things for Socialism.' This is epitomised in the article's conclusion:

The Lock-out has been a great educator; it will send Leicester politically farther forward than ten years of ordinary propaganda could have done; it has materially advanced Socialism, and the Leicester men have scented the battle and are ready.

"Till with sound of trumpet,
Far, far off the daybreak call—hark! how loud and clear I hear it wind,
Swift! to the head of the army!— swift! spring to your places,
Pioneers! O pioneers"

The socialist 'army' is called to action with Whitman's trumpet cry; the march that Hobson reports on is contextualised within the overarching progress of socialism, as one manifestation of its metaphoric war march.

The examples I have considered demonstrate some of the ways in which writers and orators used 'Pioneers' as a kind of 'short-hand' to illustrate and energise socialist discourse. Its interconnected tropes of the war march and the pioneering conquest of the land were easily applied to the labour movement, and though it may not have a comprehensive narrative structure, there is a sense of progression in its march: the journey does not have an end, but it has a beginning and it passes through different stages. In 1915, *The Labour Leader* printed an obituary that opened with three stanzas from 'Pioneers! O Pioneers!': those beginning 'All the past we leave behind' (stanza 5), 'O to die advancing on!' (stanza 14) and 'Till with sound of trumpet' (stanza 26).⁴⁹⁸ Then came a one-sentence paragraph that read simply 'Keir Hardie is dead'. 'Pioneers! O Pioneers!' was thus used to introduce the life of one of the most famous *fin de siècle* British socialists, with the three stanzas embodying different phases of the democratic 'march': the fifth stanza, as well as uniting the

⁴⁹⁷ For a discussion of the causes and results of this industrial dispute see Elizabeth Brunner, 'The Origins of Industrial Peace: the Case of the British Boot and Shoe Industry', *Oxford Economic Papers*, 1:2 (June 1949), 47-59.

⁴⁹⁸ W. C. Anderson, 'The Life and Ideals of Hardie', *Labour Leader* (7 October 1915), p.7.

'world of labour and the march', is concerned with beginnings, with turning from the 'past' towards a 'newer mightier world'; the fourteenth stanza concerns failure, and specifically death ('Are there some of us to droop and die? has the hour come? / Then upon the march we fittest die, soon and sure the gap is fill'd'); and the final stanza urges the pioneers to resume their march after the night. Hardie's death is contextualised within the poem's narrative: his was the death of a great 'pioneer' – 'Above all else', the writer later states, 'Hardie was a pioneer' – but the socialist movement continued with new people to take his place in the march.

Conclusion

Looking back at the late nineteenth century, socialist writer Holbrook Jackson remarked: 'People said it was a "Period of Transition," and they were convinced that they were passing not only from one social system to another, but from one morality to another, from one culture to another, and from one religion to a dozen or none!'.⁴⁹⁹ *Fin de siècle* socialism both contributed toward and reflected this sense of far-reaching and imminent change, and though 'transition' does not always mean progress, as we have seen, this phase of socialism was characterised by evolutionary (and millenarian) optimism in which a better future was often considered to be a certainty. Within this phase Whitman and his words had particular force, and the aim of this thesis has been to examine how Whitman was interpreted, responded to, and put to use in this specific period of socialist history.

'Translation' has been a key word, and I have investigated the way in which Whitman's democratic vision was removed from its American context so that it could be assimilated into British socialism. Some socialists, such as Carpenter, Wallace, and Alfred Orage, came to Whitman before they adopted socialism, and *Leaves of Grass* had a profound impact on the development of their political ideology. Others encountered Whitman's poetry for the first time in a specifically socialist context (for example, in a Labour Church or ILP speech, or through a

⁴⁹⁹ Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties: A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century*, 2nd edn (London: Grant Richards, 1922), p 29.

socialist publication), and this would have an impact on how it was read and interpreted. Both Whitman's personality and *Leaves of Grass* were used to illustrate or teach about the socialist cause, whether as part of a democratic literary reference system, or as having a special role in the democratic movement (almost always directed towards a spiritual interpretation of socialism). I have considered a broad range of sources, many of which were unpublished or have received little or no critical attention, so as to give a comprehensive account of the different ways that Whitman was incorporated into British socialism, and to explore how personal responses to the poet had an effect on the wider socialist community. It is my hope that this analysis will help critics (both of Walt Whitman and of British socialism) to understand better the dynamic between the poet and the political movement, and that this will lead to further research on the topic.

The chapter on the Eagle Street College showed the impact that Whitman had on a group of lower middle-class men who had (mostly) received very little formal education. The group's interpretation of Whitman's democratic vision fundamentally affected its group identity, and this in turn shaped its understanding of socialism. For James William Wallace, and therefore for many members of the College, socialism was merely one (important) way of bringing about Whitman's vision of 'true democracy', and as the group began to develop an apostolic sense of duty, this message was preached to the socialist community. Edward Carpenter also understood socialism to be part of the movement towards a universal spiritual democracy; his beliefs in Lamarckian exfoliation and a universal interconnected 'higher self' underscored his interpretations of both socialism and Whitmanian democracy, and helped to shape *Towards Democracy*. In this text, which was important for many British socialists, the formal properties of *Leaves of Grass* were adapted so as to communicate a 'de-Americanised' version of Whitman's democratic message and prompt the reader towards an understanding of 'the third stage of consciousness', which Carpenter believed would bring about the socialist ideal: a society founded on fairness and equality, but most importantly, love.

Whitman was also invoked for more overtly didactic socialist purposes: socialist journalists appropriated *Leaves of Grass* and *Democratic Vistas* as part of a democratic literary aesthetic. Whitman's work was brought to socialists who may not have otherwise have encountered his poetry, and was used to educate about

socialism, to illustrate certain aspects of it, and also to entertain. This did not take only one form – presenting Whitman as the ‘prophet of socialism’, for example – but rather, Whitman was employed in different ways to serve a range of interrelated purposes. Conversely, William Clarke’s *Walt Whitman* illustrates not how socialist texts incorporated literature, but how a literary text incorporated socialist critique: Clarke used the analysis of Whitman’s work as a means of forwarding his own explicitly socialist philosophy. For Clarke, Whitman’s literary achievements were the beginning rather than the culmination of a search for a democratic form of literature, and though he praised Whitman’s democratic vision, he also censured him for not going far enough in his political criticism or offering any tangible solutions for society’s problems. Finally, ‘Pioneers! O Pioneers!’ shows how the same Whitman text could be used in a number of different ways for the socialist cause: to persuade people to join the ‘humanitarian struggle’, to teach socialists about the spiritual principles believed to underlie its political work, to urge them to become actively involved in agitation for labour reform, or simply to explain the movement’s history.

My research has raised some general questions about the relationship between literature and politics: to what extent can (or should) poetry have an effect on political ideology? are the author’s own political views irrelevant, or secondary, to the ‘message’ believed to be contained in his or her writing? can there be a special type of literature that communicates spiritual and political ‘truths’ in a way that other literature does not? do different styles and formal properties lend themselves to a particular political viewpoint? These questions were answered differently in the late-nineteenth century to how they would be today. Ruth Livesey suggests that the two terms in the title of her article ‘Socialism and Victorian Poetry’ appear to ‘strain apart’ in the twenty-first century because there is a ‘current separation of aesthetics and politics’ that there was not at the end of the nineteenth century:

That historical moment in which socialism was understood to emerge from reading the later works of John Ruskin and was then reinforced by discussing the works of Walt Whitman and brought closer by reciting William Morris’s *Chants for Socialists* passed with the passing of those mid twentieth-century Labour politicians who cited such ‘aesthetic’ texts as the source of their political education back at the turn of the century.⁵⁰⁰

⁵⁰⁰ Livesey, ‘Socialism and Victorian Poetry’, p.1.

Certainly, as my thesis has shown, Whitman had a significant (though unintended) impact on late nineteenth-century British socialism, often through a pairing with Edward Carpenter and *Towards Democracy*. His poetry was not only important to one or two socialist 'Whitmaniacs', but informed the socialist ideology of prominent reformers such as John Trevor, Katharine Glasier, Henry Salt, William Jupp, Percival Chubb, William Clarke and Carpenter, who introduced it either directly or indirectly to a large socialist audience.

However, the situation is more complicated than Livesey allows: literature and the arts were not valued equally by every section of the socialist movement, some of which did not embrace or even engage with Whitman and other so-called 'democratic' writers. Broadly speaking, groups that were part of the broad category of ethical socialism tended to ascribe a more significant role to literature than the Fabian Society or SDF, yet this is still too reductive: to take some obvious examples, art and literature were of prime importance to William Morris and Walter Crane, who were members of the SDF before founding the Socialist League, and George Bernard Shaw and Edith Nesbitt were well-known both as Fabians and as writers.⁵⁰¹ Moreover, within ethical socialism generally, and the ILP specifically, there were differences of opinion between those who believed that literature was fundamental to the 'soul of socialism' and those who considered it to be irrelevant. The relationship between aesthetics and politics in the socialist movement was not always harmonious, and it caused some division. For example, a biographer of George Bernard Shaw observed in 1911 that Edward Carpenter was part of a socialist 'coterie' in which 'there was no question of Henry George and Karl Marx, but a great deal of Walt Whitman and Thoreau', and Shaw himself suggested that the split in the Fellowship of the New Life led to the creation of two socialist factions, 'one to sit among the dandelions, the other to organise the docks', a distinction which foregrounds how opinion was divided about whether the main purpose of socialism should be to transform the 'people's' world-view or to instigate practical reform.⁵⁰² As I discussed in the introduction and in the third chapter, this can be related to

⁵⁰¹ For a detailed discussion of the complicated relationship between the Fabian Society and the arts see Britain, *Fabianism and Culture*.

⁵⁰² Archibald Henderson, *George Bernard Shaw: His Life and Works, a Critical Biography* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1911), p.50; Shaw quotation given by W. H. Armytage in *Heavens Below: Utopian Experiments in England 1560-1960* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), p.332.

conceptions of socialism itself: for people who interpreted the political movement in spiritual terms, literature was often perceived to communicate some fundamental 'truth' about democracy, especially 'spiritual' literature such as Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* or Carpenter's *Towards Democracy*.

The categorisation of socialists as 'doers' or 'dreamers' can be related to another tension that has been explored in this thesis: the supposed opposition between literature and life. As I have suggested, socialist admirers of Whitman such as Wallace and Clarke believed that the American poet had been able to reconcile the two by pioneering a literature such as he himself called for in *Democratic Vistas* (p.986) that was 'not restricted by conditions ineligible to the masses'. This conviction was not always shared. In 1924 *The Manchester Guardian* printed an article by a Bolton spinning-room piecer that described the first public speech of J. R. Clyne in 1891, before Clyne had become an MP and the Labour Party's leader in the House of Commons. The author recalled:

We were agitating for improved conditions—higher wages and greater opportunity for promotion. There wasn't much education amongst us. We were anxious for any help we could get. The editor of a new weekly Labour journal had come forward to help. We had also a leader in a Socialist shoemaker [...] We had a difficult job on hand. The millowners were not at all concerned about the noise we were making. The operative spinners were our employers, and they were not very polite about us and our cause. A prominent disciple of Walt Whitman in the town tried to come to our rescue, but as he knew but little about the economic problems of the "wheelgate," he was treated with more sarcasm than respect.⁵⁰³

For this particular member of the 'democratic masses', Whitman's poetry was not synthesised with the actualities of his working life, but removed from it. Though the protestors were 'anxious' for help, they were dismissive of the Whitman disciple (who was almost certainly a member of the Eagle Street College, and probably either Wallace or Johnston), because it seemed that he had no understanding of the central issues of labour agitation.

In the third chapter I mentioned that when the formal properties of Whitman's poetry were commented on in socialist publications they tended to be praised rather than criticised. Yet Whitman's poetic style was adopted less frequently by socialist poets than might be expected: 'Whitmanesque' poetry was sometimes printed in papers like *The Labour Leader*, but far less frequently than

⁵⁰³ James Haslam, 'A Piecer's Prophecy', *Manchester Guardian* (28 January 1924), p.12.

poetry with conventional metrical and rhyme schemes. Aside from Carpenter's *Towards Democracy*, the only published collections of poetry by socialists written in a Whitmanian style that I have found are Joseph Clayton's *Before Sunrise and Other Pieces* and Henry Bryan Binns's *The Great Companions*.⁵⁰⁴ These are not good poetic texts but their adaptation of the Whitmanian form could be usefully discussed in further research on the topic, as could the reasons why the style of *Leaves of Grass* did not have more of an influence on socialist poets.⁵⁰⁵ One answer can be found in a review of Clayton's *Before Sunrise* by Alfred Orage: 'Comrade Clayton has done well to collect and reprint his fragments. Of course, readers need not expect anything entirely new. Carpenter and Whitman have left little field to this generation even for speculation.'⁵⁰⁶ This indicates that though Carpenter thought that a 'more universal feeling' could be expressed if 'distinct metrical forms' were abandoned, other readers and writers may have felt that the style could not be universally adopted because there were limitations to what more could be done with it after Whitman and Carpenter.⁵⁰⁷

My research could be extended in other directions. As I commented on in the introduction, this thesis is very much oriented around masculine responses to Whitman, and it would be helpful to explore how female socialists interpreted and used Whitman's poetry, especially in the light of the New Woman movement. For example, Caroline Eccles, a socialist writer who published on the emancipation of women, broached the topic in a letter to John Johnston:

Yet not because I am a woman do I feel hesitation in claiming comradeship with the members of your circle and with the immortal Comrade whose birthday you meet to celebrate. For I have always felt that Walt Whitman's greatest and most glorious message to women was implied rather than expressed – in that he did not deem it necessary to leave them any special or separate message. There is no division of the wealth of his gift to Humanity, he gave himself with equal freedom and fullness to Man and Woman also. Perhaps in this omission to separate, proving his gift to women as great or greater than any they have ever received from any seer or saviour before.⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁴ Joseph Clayton, *Before Sunrise and Other Pieces* (Manchester: Labour Press Society, 1896); Henry Bryan Binns, *The Great Companions* (London: A. C. Fifield, 1908).

⁵⁰⁵ Thomas discusses *The Great Companions* briefly in his chapter on 'Lawrence's Whitman' in *Transatlantic Connections*, pp.193-225.

⁵⁰⁶ Alfred Orage, 'A Bookish Causerie', *Labour Leader* (18 April 1896), p.134.

⁵⁰⁷ Carpenter, 'A Note on "Towards Democracy"', *Towards Democracy*, p.411.

⁵⁰⁸ Caroline Eccles to John Johnston (30 May 1918), JRUL, Papers Relating to Wallace, MS 1186/3/1/5. Eccles was also the author of the biography *James William Wallace: An English Comrade of Walt Whitman* (London: C. W. Daniel, 1936).

Though Eccles claims that her sex does not distance her from the poet's 'message', this letter gestures towards an underlying anxiety: if women were not left a 'special or separate message', maybe they were not left a message at all. Whitman's poetic presentation of women has been the subject of much critical debate, and some critics have suggested that women mainly serve as procreational vehicles in *Leaves of Grass*.⁵⁰⁹ It would be illuminating to study this in relation to Andrew Elfenbein's claim that the admiration of Whitman was a way of rebelling against 'bourgeois conventions of respectability', and to investigate how socialist women negotiated Whitman's radicalism with his ambiguous treatment of their sex.⁵¹⁰

I would also like to broaden the scope of this project and look away from Britain to explore the relationship between Whitman and nineteenth-century socialism from a more global perspective. It could be fruitful to investigate whether Whitman was appropriated in similar ways for the socialist movement in other countries, and to explore the impact that foreign-language translations of his poetry had on this process. This could usefully be extended into the twentieth century, when the terms of this discourse began to change and 'socialism' and 'democracy' came to assume an oppositional rather than an associative relationship. This was exemplified in the growing tension between Soviet Russia and America, and as could be expected, Whitman was 'impressed into service' and claimed for both nations as their 'Poet of Democracy': for example, a 1918 review in *The New York Times* was entitled 'Walt Whitman's Songs of Democracy: A Collection of "Patriotic Poems" in Which the "Good Grey Poet" Celebrates the Ideals for Which America is Fighting Today', while Anna Strunsky Walling (a Russian-American socialist) wrote in 1919, 'Of all the poets who come nearest the Russian conception of democracy, the greatest is Walt Whitman'.⁵¹¹ Walling describes how the Russian 'comrades' carried translations of Whitman's poetry, and directly relates its content to their cause: 'When Walt Whitman exclaims: "By God! I will accept nothing which all cannot have their counterpart of on the same terms" he was expressing the well-

⁵⁰⁹ M. Jimmie Killingsworth debates the case in 'Whitman and Motherhood: A Historical View', *American Literature*, 54:1 (March 1982), 28-43.

⁵¹⁰ Sherry Ceniza begins this discussion in *Walt Whitman and 19th-Century Women Reformers* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998). Her work focuses on female reformers who were personal friends with Whitman rather than his impact on readers who were further afield.

⁵¹¹ Anon., 'Walt Whitman's Songs of Democracy', *New York Times* (16 June 1918), p.51; Anna Strunsky Walling, 'Walt Whitman and Russia', *The Modern School* (April-May 1919), p.142.

springs of the social democracy in which Russia today lives and moves and has her being.’ Post-socialist Hungary also associated Whitman with revolutionary communism, and in 1923 banned his works alongside those of Marx and Lenin for having a ‘destructive tendency’.⁵¹²

It did not trouble Whitman’s nineteenth-century British socialist admirers that the poet did not share their specific political beliefs. Despite his protestations against socialism itself, Whitman’s democratic vision was broad enough to accommodate their ideology. Traubel outlines this position in one of his many heated conversations with Whitman about the topic; speaking about socialists in general, and specifically about Edward Pease, one of the founders of the Fabian Society, he told Whitman:

All these fellows find texts in Leaves of Grass: not figures, not names, but electrifying intimations. They don’t any of them claim you as a partisan: they only claim you in the general way. We say Jesus is on our side. In the same sense we say you are on our side. With the people as against the elect few: with the people: even when things go wrong, with the people.⁵¹³

Some of the most significant aspects of Whitman’s reception by *fin de siècle* British socialists can be found in this passage. Whitman inspired by ‘intimation’ not explanation, which allowed his poetry to be ‘translated’ into a different national and political context. He was not only claimed for socialism but for a wider democratic movement, and as a result was often appropriated in the same way that a spiritual teacher, such as Jesus Christ, would be. Finally, and most importantly, at the centre of socialist interpretations of Walt Whitman lay the belief that he was of and with ‘the people’.

⁵¹² Reported in ‘Whitman in Hungary’, *New York Times* (2 January 1923), p.12.

⁵¹³ Traubel, *Whitman in Camden*, III, p.480.

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