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## The Poetry In-Between: Presence and Absence in Whitman, Rimbaud, and Hopkins.

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**The poetry in-between: Presence and absence in Whitman,  
Rimbaud, and Hopkins**

**Alexander, Jonathan Flint, Ph.D.**

**The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical Col., 1993**

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**THE POETRY IN-BETWEEN:  
PRESENCE AND ABSENCE  
IN  
WHITMAN, RIMBAUD, AND HOPKINS**

**A Dissertation**

**Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
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requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**in**

**The Interdepartmental Program in Comparative Literature**

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May 1993**

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## **Abstract**

"The Poetry In-Between: Presence and Absence in Whitman, Rimbaud, and Hopkins" analyzes three major nineteenth-century poets and their development of a poetics, which has as its chief focus of concern the issue of presencing an eternal and universal "Other" by which to assess self identity. After the Kantian critique and the seeming reduction of human knowledge to phenomenal perceptions, early nineteenth-century poets and theorists feared the entrapment and isolation of the self in subjective awareness. The romantics, such as Friedrich Schlegel, sought ways to overcome such alienating subjectivity and ultimately conceived of the poet as a privileged spokesman and arbiter for a harmonious and "divine" origin of life; it is through the poet's imagination, argue Schlegel and his followers, that the noumenal or total, eternal "Other" is presenced. Through such presencing, which essentially involves the collapsing of boundaries between the phenomenal body and the transcendent soul, the individual self gains identity as part of an integrated, universal, and eternal cosmos.



However, each poet faced crises of separation which challenged their presencing of this "Other"; in general, the death of the body in war or sickness threatened to cut the poet off from his vision and participation in an eternal, harmonious "Other." Ultimately, towards the end of their poetic careers, Whitman, Rimbaud, and Hopkins negotiated a poetic stance which views the self as in-between a full presence and a complete absence of cosmic totality; the desire of the self for the "Other" banishes its complete absence, but the self must also recognize the transiency of humanity and our inability to grasp individually the complete presence of an eternity.

## Chapter One: Introduction

Self identity remains one of the most challenging and problematic issues of post-Renaissance modernism. We continually ask ourselves a series of baffling questions: What is the self? What is the self's relation to other selves? What is the self's relation to a Divinity? What is the self's relation to itself? The complexities of modern psychology attest to this difficulty in defining the self and stress the complexity of self identity and fulfillment.

It is a commonplace but crucial assertion that the self is in large part defined by its relation to an "other." The Austrian philosopher Martin Buber beautifully characterizes the primacy of the self/other relation in his classic *I and Thou*; he writes, "There is no *I* taken in itself, but only the *I* of the primary word [or relationship] *I-Thou*" (4). But the mutual definition of the "I" by a "you" (and vice versa) is hardly without its problematics. For instance, the contemporary understanding of the self has been radically complicated by the deconstructive critique of our ability to "know" the world around us, the "other"; from the "death of God" to the advent of the absurd to

the philosophical complexities of the postmodern, we seem to have lost fixed points of reference by which we can measure or determine our own self identity.

In many ways, our current critical crossroads is quite similar to the philosophical ideas and dilemmas which gave birth to the Romantic movement. Initially, the pre-Romantic Enlightenment aimed to provide the self with an uncompromised, totalizing view of the universe through which the individual could establish identity. According to Hans Eichner, the Eighteenth Century saw a "widespread, optimistic belief that any problem whatever could be solved by the powers of reasoning, that human intelligence could both produce and ensure the observance of a system of natural morality and, hence, that man had no need of supernatural tutelage" (106). With the rapid advances in understanding achieved through science by such figures as Newton, the belief in the power of man's mind to comprehend the universe increased exponentially; "under scrutiny, nature's blur was found to be provisional rather than final. With patience the structure of the universe could be brought into marvelous focus. Newton's exclamation caught the excitement perfectly: 'O God, I think thy thoughts after thee!' Although nature's marvels were infinitely greater than had been supposed, man's mind was equal to them. The universe was a coherent, law-abiding

system. It was intelligible" (Smith, 6). With the application of reason, all mystery would one day vanish.

With such a philosophical and cultural backdrop, artistic criticism of the Eighteenth century encouraged didacticism; Samuel Johnson informs us that "The end of writing is to instruct; the end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing" (331); Pierre Corneille had purported adherence to certain laws of verisimilitude in the attempt to represent reality more accurately; even Alexander Pope, who often satirized human pride, the "never-failing Vice of Fools," urged poets to follow the seemingly graspable laws of Nature:

First follow Nature, and your Judgment form  
By her just Standard, which is still the same;  
*Unerring Nature*, still divinely bright,  
One *clear, unchang'd*, and *Universal* Light,  
Life, Force, and Beauty, must to all impart,  
At once the *Source*, and *End*, and *Test* of Art.  
[ . . . ]  
Those RULES of old *discover'd*, not *devis'd*,  
Are *Nature* still, but *Nature methodiz'd*;  
*Nature*, like *Liberty*, is but restrain'd  
By the same Laws which first *herself* ordain'd. (555; 556)

The "universal" laws guiding life and art are "unchang'd" and "clear," the source of life and the obtainable knowledge required of all good art. Scrupulous observation, combined with "good sense" and rational thought, would lead the way to a fuller understanding of this "Universal Light": "*Good-Nature* and *Good-Sense* must ever join" (Pope, 561).

Such a firm belief in the ability to understand the "laws of Nature" bespeaks a confidence in the role and place of the self in relation to the "Universal." The "Source, and End, and Test of Art" are also the source and end and test of the individual, subordinating the self to the Natural Realm but affirming the power of man to understand his position and consequently define what it means to be a human self. Thus, Dr. Johnson could confidently claim that the end of art is to "instruct," to dictate how humanity should act and what that humanity should be.

However, by the end of the Eighteenth century, several practical and philosophical difficulties had arisen which shook this optimism. First, a widespread reaction began to set in against the Enlightenment:

[W]hen the Goddess of Reason was triumphantly enthroned in Paris, the Terror had already commenced; and, in Germany no less than in France, the age-old problems of suffering, evil, greed, and folly refused to yield to the sweet voice of reason. The basis for human actions and convictions provided by enlightened rationalism turned out to be less reliable than had been hoped, and people began, once again, to long for a less arduous path to certainty and for a more satisfying source of consolation and reassurance in times of trouble than secular systems of thought could provide. (Eichner, 106)

Additionally, philosophical problematics began to complicate the notion of knowing the "Universal Laws." For instance, the artistic philosophy of Friedrich Schiller, one of the century's most important

neoclassical writers and theoreticians, began to express the belief that we would never obtain the harmony with nature that the ancient Greeks had enjoyed. In his *Aesthetical Letters* (1793), Schiller draws sharp contrasts between the "naive" poetry of the ancients, who wrote seemingly at one with the natural world, and the "sentimental" poetry of the moderns who are doomed to an awareness of the self's distance from nature and a loss of harmony. Schiller characterizes the ancients thus: "At the period of Greek culture, which was an awakening of the powers of the mind, the senses and the spirit had no distinctly separated property; no division had yet torn them asunder" (45). Schiller contrasts this classical unity of "sense and spirit" with a modern "division" between the two, perhaps represented in the "enlightened" disposal of God and spirituality in favor of deism, empiricism, and rational thought.

Whether or not Schiller's appraisal of Greek poetry, or *modern* poetry for that matter, is accurate, his characterization of the modern mind as being acutely, even painfully aware of a separation between itself and a lost, idealized world, finds reflection in much significant late eighteenth-century philosophical writing. Kant's ground breaking distinction between the noumenal and the phenomenal, highlighting our inability to know the Ding-an-sich,

suggests a consciousness of separation, even of alienation. Although Kant believed strongly in reason and man's ability to progress from an animal-like state of instinctual responses to a highly reasoned, rational existence, his later work, especially the *Critique of Judgment*, places a great emphasis on subjectivity, individual response, and the inability to obtain an objective stance vis-à-vis works of art. We are trapped in our phenomenal perception of the world, unable to obtain a noumenal awareness of reality, but having that reality ordered for us by the structuring mechanisms of our minds; quoting the American philosopher C. I. Lewis, T. Z. Lavine says, "With the philosophy of Kant, the world order has become mind-dependent" (197).

With all of these notions of separation and the emphasis on human consciousness, philosophers such as Kant bequeathed their nineteenth-century followers several ontological and epistemological difficulties. The removal of the self from an immediate awareness and understanding of the natural world complicates the ability to define the self vis-à-vis that now distant realm. The self may be potentially trapped in an isolating, alienating phenomenal existence -- unless a philosophy can be developed which will help the self transcend a purely phenomenal

understanding of the world. Edward G. Ballard characterizes the post-Kantian situation thus:

[H]ad [Kant] developed the distinction between natural phenomena (belonging to physics) and phenomena as experienced by men engaged in the pursuits of living, he would have encountered fewer difficulties in understanding the relation of man to his world, and he might have worked his way through to a more thorough-going transcendental view of the whole of human experience. As it was, he took some of the most difficult steps in this direction, if not all of them. Romantic philosophers and literary men attempted to continue the movement in this same direction. (165)

Fearing the isolation and alienation of the self that the Kantian critique implied, the early Romantics desired to bring the phenomenal self into a consciousness of the noumenal essence of things. With such consciousness, the individual could define the self both in relation to and against an eternal, universal "Other"; without such knowledge of this "Other," the self seemed cut adrift, distanced from an understanding of the essence of things, and trapped in a highly subjective awareness provided only by the physical sensations. For the Romantics, this "Other" is essentially characterized by its eternalness and ability to impart a sense of harmonious wholeness. Wishing to escape a life seemingly epitomized by individual isolation, physical separation, and the seemingly ultimate separation of death, the poets and theorists imagined and projected a realm of never-ending interconnection and



unity, which strives to heal an alienating split between self and other, body and soul, the spiritual and physical, signifier and signified. Distinction and death are banished as the writers envision the self partaking in the presence of the "Other," which offers the self an integrated part in a universal, infinite reality.

The major Romantic theorists, such as Friedrich Schlegel, accorded the poet and his imagination the ability and task of reaching this "Other." Schlegel's famous Athenaeum Fragment No. 116 provides many key insights into this Romantic project and the special role assigned to poetry, beginning with an emphasis on poetry as a unifying and harmonizing force:

Romantic poetry is a progressive, universal poetry. Its aim isn't merely to reunite all the separate species of poetry and put poetry in touch with philosophy and rhetoric. It tries to and should mix and fuse poetry and prose, inspiration and criticism, the poetry of art and the poetry of nature; and make poetry lively and sociable, and life and society poetical; poeticize wit and fill and saturate the forms of art with every kind of good, solid matter for instruction, and animate them with the pulsations of humor. It embraces everything that is purely poetic, from the greatest systems of art, containing within themselves still further systems, to the sigh, the kiss that the poetizing child breathes forth in artless song. (31)

If the philosophies of import at the end of the eighteenth century accentuated man's separateness and isolation, this new poetry emphasizes the unity and harmony of existence; "poetry" is "universal," fusing poetry, prose, philosophy, rhetoric, life and

society in an interconnected relationship which should dispel alienation and separation: genres, the hallmarks of critical distinction and discrimination, will consequently cease to exist.

The focal point of this harmonious totalization will be the artist himself:

It [romantic poetry] can so lose itself in what it describes that one might believe it exists only to characterize poetical individuals of all sorts; and yet there still is no form so fit for expressing the entire spirit of an author: so that many artists who started out to write only a novel ended up by providing us with a portrait of themselves. It alone can become, like the epic, a mirror of the whole circumambient world, an image of the age. and it can also -- more than any other form -- hover at the midpoint between the portrayed and the portrayer, free of all real and ideal self-interest, on the wings of poetic reflection, and can raise that reflection again and again to a higher power, can multiply it in an endless succession of mirrors. It is capable of the highest and most variegated refinement, not only from within outwards, but also from without inwards; capable in that it organizes -- for everything that seeks a wholeness in its effects -- the parts along similar lines, so that it opens up a perspective upon an infinitely increasing classicism. Romantic poetry is in the arts what wit is in philosophy, and what society and sociability, friendship and love are in life. (31-32)

The boundaries between the artist and his work blur, so that the novel becomes the "portrait" of the artist, as well as "a mirror of the whole circumambient world, an image of the age." The mirror image is significant in that it threatens a degree of solipsism, the author and his work merely reflecting one another, not leading to any

knowledge or awareness outside the individual self. Schlegel maintains, however, that the work of art can "hover at the midpoint between the portrayed and the portrayer, free of all real and ideal self-interest"; the reflection of the portrayer (the artist) and the portrayed (the art work) produces another "entity" which is able to free the artist and his art from pure solipsistic subjectivity. The mirror becomes an "endless succession of mirrors," creating a multitude of views and "refinements." Yet all these images and reflections are part of a "wholeness."

In the fragments of *Ideas* (1800), Schlegel situates the harmonizing power of poetry and the poet in relation to an eternal "divinity" or Divine Other, which is presenced through the imagination. First, he tells us, "Only in relation to the infinite is there meaning and purpose; whatever lacks such a relation is absolutely meaningless and pointless " (94). The finite, limited individual human life must come to terms with a perception of an infinite otherness, which Schlegel attributes to "God": "Eternal life and the invisible world are to be found only in God. All spirits dwell in him. He is an abyss of individuality; he alone is infinitely full" (94). The infinite exists in God, who seems to be the infinitely full archetype of the self, but note that that infinity seems removed into an "invisible world." The terms "abyss of individuality" and

"infinitely full" echo Schlegel's view of Romantic poetry in *Athenaeum* 116, but this infinite individuality threatens to separate itself from the finiteness of mankind. Schlegel overcomes this difficulty in the following fragment: "The mind . . . can understand only the universe. Let imagination take over and you will have a God. Quite right: for imagination is man's faculty for perceiving the divinity" (95). The imagination links man to the infinity of God, allowing the artist and art work to reflect continuously the divine infinity. In his 1755 *Dictionary of the English Language*, Samuel Johnson defined imagination as the "power of forming ideal pictures" (2345); Schlegel, though probably unaware of Johnson's definition, seems to capitalize on such a concept, expanding the "ideal pictures" into infinite divinity.

Wordsworth and Coleridge, informed by Schlegel, formulated similar ideas at roughly the same time, proclaiming in the Preface to the Second Edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, that the poet, with his "comprehensive soul," "sing[s] a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoic[ing] in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion" (167). As with Schlegel, Wordsworth conceives of poetry as universal and capable of linking us to an eternal realm: "the poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole

earth, and over all time . . . Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge -- it is as immortal as the heart of man" (167).

In his *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge explains that such immortal unity is brought about by the powers of the imagination:

The poet, described in *ideal* perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity that blends and (as it were) *fuses*, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination. (Coleridge's emphasis, 402)

The imagination, as with Schlegel, is the "living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" (396). If the Kantian critique had established the subjectivity of man's experience and knowledge of the universe, separating him from noumenal identity, then the Romantics would overcome such separation through the power of the mind. Schlegel meditates on this ideal in Fragment No. 44:

We cannot see God but we can see godlikeness everywhere -- first and foremost in the heart of a thoughtful man, in the depths of a living human creation. Nature, the universe, can be felt and conceived of without mediation: but not God. Only a man among men can write divine poetry, think divine thoughts, and live religiously. [...] A mediator is one who perceives the divinity within himself and who . . . reveal[s], communicate[s], and represent[s] to all mankind this divinity in his conduct and actions, in his words and works. If this impulse is not present, then what

was perceived was not divine or not really his own. To mediate and to be mediated are the whole higher life of man and every artist is a mediator for all other men. (98)

Schlegel admits that God, the infinitely full abyss of individuality, cannot be perceived without mediation, but the artist and his imagination are themselves mechanisms of mediation. Because God is infinite, the mediation is continuous, requiring a never-ending willingness to mediate divinity, and such mediation connects the poet not only to the divine, but to all other men as well as he mediates for them. Like Wordsworth and Coleridge, Schlegel perceives, however, that that divinity is already inside us, waiting to be revealed.

Thus, the Romantic theorists posit "divinity" -- totality, harmony, unity -- as an eternal process of self-realization through the imagination; Schlegel continuously reminds us in his fragmentary form: "An artist is someone who carries his center within himself" (98); "Individuality is precisely what is original and eternal in man" (99); "Conceive of something finite formed into something infinite, and you have a man" (103). Knowledge of the universe is self-knowledge; eternity is internal.

Much has been made of the Romantic conception of the imagination, its powers of transcendence, and its claims of presenting an eternal, perfected realm. In his *Theories of the*

*Symbol*, Tzvetan Todorov claims that the Romantics, recognizing the failure of the Enlightenment to find an "external finality" in the physical cosmos, posited an "internal finality" in the interior mind and imagination (177). But for many of the Romantics, this "finality" -- this accessing of the totalizing, infinite other -- was equally significant for the body as for the soul. The linkage of the human self to the divine "other" established the suffusion of the eternal into and throughout the physical realm. For many writers and theorists, obtaining connection with a *universal, harmonizing* "divinity" implied that man's essential physicality and physical awareness could also partake in a consciousness of the eternal "other." Additionally, if the Kantian critique proved correct, then the Romantics' collapsing of boundaries between natural physicality and the supernaturally noumenal would equate the phenomenal and the noumenal, thus physically presencing the "Other" to us. For instance, in "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," Wordsworth speaks of an ideal realm where

. . . meadow, grove, and stream,  
The earth, and every common sight,  
To me did seem  
Apparelled in celestial light. (209)

In "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," the conflation is even more dramatic:

. . . [I am] well pleased to recognize  
 In nature and the language of the sense[s],  
 The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,  
 The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul  
 Of all my moral being. (154)

In the Enlightenment, Deism had replaced theistic religion; a "god" did not actively participate in his creation, but rather stood behind the vast, seemingly mechanistic structure he had created, not interfering with the already perfected laws he had set in motion. But the Romantics, with a strong interest in the supernatural and a belief in their ability to presence the divine, saw the natural and the supernatural, the fleshly and the celestial, as harmoniously intertwined. Friedrich Schlegel ultimately defined the Romantic poetic ideal with a quasi-mathematical equation:

$$\text{poetic ideal} = \frac{\frac{1}{0} \left/ \begin{array}{c} \text{F S M} \\ \hline 0 \end{array} \right. \frac{1}{0}}{\quad} = \text{God}$$

The letters F, S, and M stand for the "fantastic," the "sentimental," and the "mimetic"; ideal poetry would fuse the supernatural, the emotions, and the physical sensation into an absolute or god-like awareness (Eichner, 65). Thus, the union of the physical and the spiritual, the senses and the soul, became a commonplace in Romantic thought, the natural realms and the body able to incarnate or presence the noumenal "Other."



However, such a move is not without its complications. The erasure of boundaries between body and soul entailed the paradoxical equation of a seemingly universal and eternal realm with a limited and mortal physicality. The self desires the presence of the "Other" but cannot forget its own imminent death and absence. The juxtaposition of an eternal "Other" with the natural dissipation of the body becomes a sinister problematic for the Romantics, as depicted in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. In her imaginative work of romantic fiction, Shelley ruminates on the dangers of exploring and toying with the connection between bodily matter and the eternal life force; Victor Frankenstein's desire to fathom the "secrets of heaven and earth" (23) and to break through the "ideal bounds" of "life and death" (38) does not result in the creation of a new and glorious species but rather in a monster, characterized by physical deformity and spiritual alienation. The problem becomes even thornier when we consider that many Romantic theorists considered the process of creating poetry to be an infinite task; Schlegel says in *Athenaeum* 116,

Other kinds of poetry are finished and are now capable of being fully analyzed. The romantic kind of poetry is still in the state of becoming; that, in fact, is its real essence: that it should forever be becoming and never be perfected. It can be exhausted by no theory and only a divinatory criticism would dare try to characterize its ideal. It alone is infinite, just as it alone is free; and it recognizes as its

first commandment that the will of the poet can tolerate  
no law above itself. (32)

But the intricate beauty of the early Romantic project is its attempt to arrive at a compromise between the circularity of natural life and the self's desire to transcend. The emphasis on the "eternally becoming" reflects the organicity of physical existence, but the natural seems to repeat itself in an endless cycle of birth and death, never escaping its circularity or reaching a point of transcendence, much less perfection. Schlegel warns in the *Ideen*: "If you cast yourself into a human mold, you've done enough; but you'll never reach the *heights* of art and the depths of science without some portion of divinity" (100). This tension between the desire for a transcendent "Other" and the cycles of nature centers on a concern with the problem of death, and the Romantic goal is essentially to escape the circularity of existence and overcome the threat of death to the imagination. Catching the spirit of the time, Soren Kierkegaard wrote in *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849), "[I]n human terms death is the last thing of all, and in human terms hope exists only so long as there is life" (37-38). Thus, to posit life as "eternally becoming" is a potential way to maintain hope and to dispel death by denying life a beginning and an end. According to Paul de Man, the result of such positing is the romantic idealization of "the natural object, safe in its immediate being, [which] seems to

have no beginning and no end. Its permanence is carried by the stability of its being, whereas a beginning implies a negation of permanence, the discontinuity of a death in which an entity relinquishes its specificity and leaves it behind, like an empty shell" (4).

Natural objects can thus claim a certain permanence, intrinsic to their being and solidifying their identity. But can the same occur for the identity of the human self? Schlegel has proclaimed the linkage of the self to the eternal through the imagination, man's faculty for perceiving the divinity, and the self's individuality, which is "precisely what is original and eternal in man" (99). At the same time, however, the individual self will eventually die, individuality and imagination potentially being lost and proven not eternal.

It is essentially this tension between the desire for the physical presence of the divine "Other" to the self and the inevitable absence of such a presence due to human mortality that gives much nineteenth-century poetry its compelling power. Three of the century's most significant poets, Walt Whitman, Arthur Rimbaud, and Gerard Manley Hopkins, encountered this tension in their beliefs and work, and their view of the self as reflected in their verse undergoes a profound metamorphosis because of it. Although their work bears many significant stylistic dissimilarities, each poet

essentially begins with a Romantic understanding of the self in which the individual gains identity through the spiritual and physical presence of an eternal, universal "Other"; ultimately, however, the threat of bodily dissipation and death challenges their connection with the "divine" through the senses, forcing them to rethink and reshape their conceptions of the self.

In the following chapters, I will map out these writers' journey from youthful optimism, through crisis, and to a mature, albeit less idealistic poetics. First, each poet embraces the Romantic ideal of erasing the boundaries between the physical and the spiritual in an attempt to engage the eternal "Other"; noumenal awareness becomes a physical presence. Although each writer envisions and portrays the "Other" in slightly different ways, it is, like the Romantic "Other," essentially characterized by its eternalness and ability to impart a sense of harmonious wholeness through the collapse of separating distinctions. In the third chapter, however, we will see how various encounters with death, dissipation, or physical separation force the poets to reconsider the equation of body and spirit; physical absence threatens their connection with the eternal "Other," and the conceptions of the self become characterized by separation and distance. Finally, as discussed in the last chapter, each poet offers a new conceptualization of the self which places

the individual "in-between" the presence of the "Other" and its absence; the desire for the "Other" seemingly banishes its absence, but the poets must also admit their inability to obtain its presence, a situation placing the self in-between negation and realization.

Throughout this development, each poet's relationship with the material world is of great significance, since it is through the physical that they initially posit their awareness of and connection to the "Other." The body, of course, is of crucial importance, but so also is language, the material medium of communication and connection. The poets view language, especially poetic language, as an expression of the presence of the self to the "Other" as well as to human others, connecting the poet to an eternal realm. Paul De Man maintains that the epiphanic moment in a Romantic poem is the "rediscovery of a permanent presence" (5), an affirmation of life which denies a beginning and an end and thus escapes death. But the question is, can poetry provide and sustain such a moment? Answering as a deconstructionist, de Man casts doubt on the Romantic project:

[I]t is in the essence of language to be capable of origination, but of never achieving the absolute identity with itself that exists in the natural object. Poetic language can do nothing but originate anew over and over again: it is always constitutive, able to posit regardless of presence but, by the same token, unable to give a foundation to what it posits except as an intent of consciousness. (6)

Language can posit but cannot fix identity; it can allude to but never obtain a "permanent presence." Like the body, language is subject to "dissipation"; words can distance a physical expression from an intended meaning, just as the body can distance or separate one self from other selves as well as from an eternal source.

As we analyze the works of Whitman, Rimbaud, and Hopkins, we will concentrate on their responses to this distance as they initially try to overcome it through proclamations of presence, encounter its force through the threat of absence, and ultimately seek to establish a compromise between a fully present "Other" and a totally separating, alienating absence.

## Chapter Two: The Poetry of Presence

The early works of Whitman, Rimbaud, and Hopkins express the Romantic ambitions of physical and spiritual transcendence, characteristic of Schlegel's romantic theory which will allow the interior self to escape isolation and subjectivity. In particular, the poets believed that the body and poetic language could presence and embody the "inexpressible" and allow man to achieve communion with a divinity. A new concept of the self emerges -- energetic, vital, and life-affirming, with the poet ushering in a new age of identity and self-actualization.

To trace the contours of this ambitious project and its particularly romantic characteristics, we must turn our attention to the early journal sketches, letters, and poems of our three poets. A desire to break with the past, expressed with an occasional belligerence, give these youthful manifestos a daring quality, and we easily recognize the poets' enthusiasm for their talent and poetics.

Chronologically, we begin with Whitman's Preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, the first appearance in print of the poet's

life-long work. Although composed after the poems had been written, the Preface unequivocally presents the reader with both the aims of the poems and a bold statement of the divine mission of the poet. Ultimately, the poet's remarks form less a sustained and logical argument than an energetic rhapsody on the ascendancy of the poet in the new "American age."

Whitman begins the Preface by claiming that "The Americans of all nations at any time upon the earth have probably the fullest poetical nature" (5), which arises out of the "largeness and generosity of the spirit of the citizen" (6); speaking in one of his famous lists of their "manners speech dress friendship," Whitman praises the democratic spirit of the Americans, lauding their "self-esteem and wonderful sympathy." Americans are self made and free, and out of their self-styled freedom exudes a spirit that Whitman will try to capture in poetry.

Indeed, Whitman rather jingoistically declares, "The American poets are to enclose old and new for America is the race of races. Of them a bard is to be commensurate with a people" (6). The combined diversity and equity indicative of the American democratic project is one of the supreme accomplishments of human civilization, and Whitman calls for a "bard" on the scale of Homer and Virgil to tell the epic tale of the American people.



Considering the time period and despite the initial emphasis on America, Whitman's epic poet possesses strikingly romantic characteristics. Influenced by the prevalent criticism and theories of Ralph Waldo Emerson, who had some knowledge of the German theorists and philosophies, Whitman formulates his vision of poetry in familiarly romantic terms. Of primary concern is the relation of the individual self to the world around it. In fact, Whitman's "Other" is the connection between self and all other selves which generates a universal harmony and projects the individual self into eternity. The union of self and other creates a "universal soul," the vast, immortal conglomerate of all (physical and spiritual) life eternally present and harmoniously all-inclusive.

Like Schlegel, Whitman assigns the poet a special role in the relationship between self and other since it is the poet who is sensitive to all the various fluctuations of life surrounding him, and he understands the "essence of real things" (7); he is able to unite and unify all experience and has, in Wordsworth's phrase, a "comprehensive soul." Such awareness engenders creativity in the poet, and Whitman declares that "the expression of the American poet is to be transcendent and new. It is to be . . . epic" (8). The poet's "comprehensive soul" allows him to express a "transcendent"

view of life, one which accounts for not just things, but the "essence" of things.

Indeed, Whitman's concern with the comprehensive soul arises in part out of a rejection of Kantian subjectivism. Thomas Byers notes the poet's concern with the German philosopher's view of individual perceptions:

"For Whitman, by contrast, an individual perspective is more than a mere fraction of a sum known only to God; it may be a way of attaining, or at least moving toward, the divine unity . . . Thus, Whitman asks (rhetorically) "Whether after all allowances for Kant's tremendous and unquestionable point, namely that what we realize as truth in the objective and other Natural worlds is not the absolute but only the relative truth from our existing point of view . . . whether it [the soul] does not somehow, even now, by whatever removes and indirections, by its own laws, repel the inconsistent, and gravitate forever toward the absolute, the supernatural, the eternal truth." (from *The Complete Writings of Walt Whitman*, VI., 185)

For Whitman, the individual is not trapped in a relative understanding based solely on phenomenal perceptions, but contains within himself an awareness which can link the self to noumenal consciousness -- an awareness of the "essence of things." Thus, the self is not isolated in individualized sensual perceptions, but can attain communion with the transcendent absolute which permeates all things and beings.

What generates such a special and transcendent vision? In Whitman's view, the poet's particular triumph is his ability to see

and presence eternity in the physical world around him. Reminiscent of Schlegel's characterization of the poetic task, Whitman aims at a conflation of the physical and "spiritual" realms: "His [the poet's] thoughts are the hymns of praise of things. In the talk on the soul and eternity and God off of his equal plane he is silent. He sees eternity less like a play with a prologue and denouement . . . he sees eternity in men and women . . . he does not see men and women as dreams or dots" (9). The empirical realm and the spiritual realm join, with the poet as intermediary, "indicat[ing] the path between reality and their souls" (10). Thus, the individual self becomes part of an eternal communion, not isolated in individual "dreams" or "dots."

In this conflation, the body assumes much significance; Whitman maintains, "The spirit receives from the body just as much as it gives to the body" (19). Harold Aspiz points out in *Walt Whitman and the Body Beautiful* that the poet rejects Cartesian dualism, and, as we shall see in "Song of Myself," Whitman's early ambition is to equate soul and body, to merge, like Schlegel, the mystical and the empirical in the creation of a poetic and divine ideal: "re-examine all you have been told at school or church or in any book, dismiss whatever insults your own soul, and your very flesh shall be a great poem and have the richest fluency not only in its words but in the

silent lines of its lips and face and between the lashes of your eyes and in every motion and joint of your body" (11).

In the equation of body and soul, the internal workings of the soul/spirit become physical, palpably expressing themselves. The internal, unseen self (the soul) is not isolated by a phenomenal subjectivity, but instead becomes part of a community of expression as it is revealed through the flesh, which in turn presences it to the vast, eternal spiritual realm.

Such a "favor[ing] of body and soul the same" influences all aspects of the Whitmanian project; four major poetic concerns express the merge of soul and body and the move from an interiority of selfhood to community and the presence of the self. First, Whitman maintains that the poet himself is the supreme orderer and embodier of the human experience: "He is seer . . . he is individual . . . he is complete in himself" (9). Whitman has become famous for his lists, which, through their use of polysyndeton, are an expression of his desire to obtain connection, completeness and fullness as a person by incorporating everything around him into himself; yet he remains an individual -- much like Schlegel's poets produce "portrait[s] of themselves" which are both "mirror[s] of the whole circumambient world" *and* expressive of the artist's individuality. The two poles -- the poet as provider of the universal epic and poet

as individual -- are complementary, producing a tension which is productive and creative for the artist. Ultimately, this tension comprises the poet's "center"; just as Schlegel maintains that "an artist is someone who carries his center within himself," so Whitman says the poet "is complete in himself"; the poet is the tension between self and other, individual and universal, which finds expression in the artistic product.

Second, such a view of art calls for new poetic forms. Schlegel's "poetic ideal" is a "novel" [a "Roman"] which would combine all genres, much like Schlegel's own novel, *Lucinde*; the work of art could then lay claim to being universal, "embrac[ing] everything that is purely poetic." Whitman echoes a similar sentiment:

Of the traits of the brotherhood of writers savans musicians inventors and artists nothing is finer than silent defiance advancing from new forms. In the need of poems philosophy politics mechanism science behaviour, the craft of art, an appropriate native grand-opera, shipcraft, or any craft, he is greatest forever and forever who contributes the greatest original practical example. The clearest expression is that which finds no sphere worthy of itself and makes one. (13)

The poetic project transcends not just the boundaries of genre, but also partakes of science and philosophy; as with Schlegel, poetry is mixture and fusion, incorporating all, and Whitman's bold experimentations in free verse are the result of the desire to

combine poetry and prose, to speak with a direct and universal voice which allows for everything to partake in its chorus.

Third, the production of such "poetry" is, as the German theorist would say, "eternally becoming": "A great poem is no finish to a man or woman but rather a beginning. Has any one fancied he could sit at last under some due authority and rest satisfied with explanations and realize and be content and full? To no such terminus does the greatest poet bring . . . he brings neither cessation or sheltered fatness and ease" (22). The poem will not ultimately deposit us at a terminal point, and, as with Schlegel, the poem is "forever . . . becoming and never [to] be perfected." The poet thus engages in a project which is intrinsically eternal, transcending the limitations of the mortal self and opening that self to immortality. Unconsciously borrowing Schlegel's phrase, Malcolm Cowley says of Whitman, "The universe was an eternal becoming for Whitman, a process not a structure" (xxiv). The poem is a reflection of the eternal "process" of the universe, and it is useful to remember that *Leaves of Grass* underwent change and transformation throughout Whitman's life; it was a poem always "becoming."

Finally, Whitman's early poetics maintains the idea that poetry could presence the divinity. Just as Schlegel's equation linked the expression of the poetic ideal to God, so Whitman declares that

poetry "is the medium that shall well nigh express the inexpressible" (23). Poetry shall replace the priesthood for "There soon will be no more priests. Their work is done" (22); the poet shall become priest, linking the self through his poetry to the divinity.

Thus, Whitman's initial poetic project is essentially romantic, propounding, even if unconsciously, all of the major romantic motifs and ambitions. To this, Whitman adds a significant contribution: the notion of the "divinity of sex." The Preface to the 1856 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, ostensibly a reply to Emerson's famous letter in praise of the book's first appearance, unequivocally states that "the body of a man or woman, the main matter, is so far quite unexpressed in poets, but that the body is to be expressed, and sex is" (II, 771). If the body is to be coequal with the soul, as stated in the 1855 Preface, then sexuality must of necessity enter into the equation; as M. Jimmie Killingsworth says about Whitman's view of sexuality, "The body is erotic and as such demands intercourse with others" (II, 46). Indeed, Whitman goes a step further, linking sex and immortality:

To me henceforth, that theory of any thing, no matter what, stagnates in its vitals, cowardly and rotten, while it cannot publicly accept, and publicly name, with specific words, the things on which all existence, all souls, all realization, all decency, all health, all that is worth being here for, all of

woman and of man, all beauty, all purity, all sweetness, all friendship, all strength, all life, all immortality depend. The courageous soul, for a year or two to come, may be proved by faith in sex, and by disdaining concessions. (771)

Transgressing custom and nineteenth-century senses of decency, Whitman hopes to speak of what he feels is vitally essential to any discussion of poetics which aims at a universal conceptualization of the human experience: sex. Indeed, the poet seems to postulate that sexual expression sustains all existence, even immortality, in that it brings all beings together, engendering and sustaining community. But we shall soon enough see what difficulties such a postulation gives birth to.

As we turn to Whitman's poetry, the expected embodiment of these various ideas and hopes, we discover that all of Whitman's romantic ambitions, loosely expressed in the Preface, find their point of convergence in the attempt to understand the self. As Schlegel maintained that the individual is the mediator of divinity, the meeting point between the finite and the infinite, so too does Whitman make the individual -- namely himself -- his chief focus of concern; the poet's emphasis remains throughout on the attempt to save the self from becoming isolated in its own perceptions; for Whitman, the self, through the equation of the body and the soul, achieves communion with others and the eternally "divine."



Whitman's "Song of Myself" becomes a "Song of Selves" as the individual self enjoys an eternal communion.

Labeled by Malcolm Cowley as the "buried masterpiece of American writing," the 1855 version of "Song of Myself," is Whitman's earliest, most exuberant, and most consistently romantic definition of himself and what selfhood is. Cowley divides the poem, which was originally published without stanzaic breaks, into nine sections, and it will be useful to discuss briefly each section in an attempt to understand Whitman's poetic expression of his romantic self.

The first half of the poem (Cowley's first four sections) introduces the basic problematics of defining selfhood and sets the stage for the full expression of the self in the second half. Whitman's initial concern is an exploration of self and other and the establishment of a total and universal "otherness" which his individual selfhood can be defined against and in relation to. Section one, which consists of what in later edition is divided into chants or stanzas one through four, inaugurates the exploration:

I celebrate myself  
And what I assume you shall assume,  
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you. (25)

Whitman immediately establishes his emphasis and focus on himself and a sense of interrelated connection with an "other." In fact,

Whitman seems to suggest that the "I" and "you" are almost identical, with "every atom belonging to me" also "belong[ing] to you." For the rest of the poem, his concept of himself will emerge as a tension hovering over the "boundaries" between self and other -- between "I" and "you."

Part of the erasure between poet and reader arises out of Whitman's emphasis on "contact"; the second chant begins with Whitman's declaration of self-intoxication:

I breathe the fragrance of myself, and know it and like it,  
The distillation would intoxicate me also, but I shall not let it.  
(25)

The poet wants to experience his own fragrance, which he declares to be good; he will not accept any "distillation," dilution, or variant, but rather desires a direct encounter with himself.

This meditation on his own person immediately opens up into a consideration of the earth and universe as seen through the eye of the "other":

Have you reckoned a thousand acres much? Have you reckoned  
the earth much?  
Have you practiced so long to learn to read?  
Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems? (26)

The "I" cannot resist addressing the "you"; a probing of the self continuously brings the poet to the "other," and he promises that such probing will lead to a direct understanding of universal origins:

Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the  
 origin of all poems,  
 You shall possess the good of the earth and sun . . . . there are  
 millions of suns left,  
 You shall no longer take things at second or third hand . . . . not  
 look through the eyes of the dead . . . . nor feed on the  
 spectres in books,  
 You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from  
 me,  
 You shall listen to all sides and filter them from yourself. (26)

In the convergence of self and other is the romantic desire for  
 universal understanding; the poet possesses the power to  
 understand and impart understanding of seemingly noumenal  
 existence. For a moment, the you seems to break off from the poet,  
 "filtering" things for himself, but such an individual filtering can  
 only occur if the you will "stop this day and night with me";  
 however, the you will not be subordinated, and Whitman maintains an  
 equality of experience in the connection between the two.

This noumenality finds greater clarification in the third chant,  
 which comments more on the "directness" of experience offered by  
 the poet:

I have heard what the talkers were talking . . . . the talk of the  
 beginning and the end,  
 But I do not talk of the beginning or the end.

There was never any more inception than there is now,  
 Nor any more youth or age than there is now;

And will never be any more perfection than there is now,  
 Nor any more heaven or hell than there is now. (26)

Whitman deposits us in an "eternal present," leaving behind

conceptualizations of beginning and endings and working his way toward an articulation of the "eternally becoming." Such a view, the postulation of immediate existence as complete in itself, helps Whitman sustain his declared ability to experience directly and noumenally; if the moment is complete, then we can have direct cognizance of totality at any given moment. But he immediately seems to contradict himself by commenting upon the

Urge and urge and urge,  
Always the procreant urge of the world.

Out of dimness opposite equals advance . . . . Always substance  
and increase,  
Always a knit of identity . . . . always distinction . . . . always a  
breed of life. (26-27)

Sexuality, in its first appearance in the poem, is the power of "advance" and "increase," seeming to complicate the notion of an eternally full presence.

Procreation, "always a breed of life," also reminds the poet of "distinction," of his separateness from others, and the fourth chant draws clear-cut distinctions between the poet's self and the other:

Trippers and askers surround me,  
People I meet . . . . the effect upon me of my early life . . . . of  
the ward and city I live in . . . . of the nation,  
The latest news . . . . discoveries, inventions, societies . . . .  
authors old and new,  
My dinner, dress, associates, looks, business, compliments,  
dues,  
The real or fancied indifference of some man or woman I love,  
The sickness of one of my folks--or of myself . . . . or ill-doing.

. . . or loss or lack of money . . . . or depressions or  
exaltations,  
They come to me days and nights and go from me again.  
But they are not the Me myself. (28)

This whole process of differentiation seems to contradict the first two chants' move toward unity and fusion of self and other. Whitman will later tell us that he is allowed to contradict himself, but indeed such impasses propel the poem, establishing the focal concerns of the piece. In this first section, Whitman introduces the tensions between self/other and totality/distinction that will dominate the remainder of the poem and extend to all of *Leaves of Grass*. The project, however, remains essentially romantic: the definition of the self in terms of a totality, with a marked emphasis on the ability of the individual to perceive existence and the universe -- the *total* other -- directly.

The fifth chant, Cowley's second section of *Song of Myself*, begins the process of working through these tensions and contains some of Whitman's most striking lines introducing his conceptualization of the body and soul:

I believe in you my soul . . . . the other I am must not abase  
itself to you,  
And you must not be abased to the other. (28)

Before the poet can work on defining the self in terms of other selves, he must heal the seeming split inside himself between his soul and that "other," his body. As with the early romantics,

Whitman aims at a conflation of the spiritual self and the physical self, and he speaks of the union of the two in highly erotic terms:

I mind how we lay in June, such a transparent summer morning;  
 You settled your head athwart my hips and gently turned over  
 upon me,  
 And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your  
 tongue to my barestript heart,  
 And reached till you felt my beard, and reached till you held my  
 feet. (28-29)

The spiritual soul of the poet assumes physical form, encompassing with the body the totality of the self, literally from head to foot.

Once the poet obtains this internal unity, he recognizes his unity with the totality of the universe:

Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and joy and  
 knowledge that pass all the art and argument of the earth;  
 And I know that the hand of God is the elderhand of my own,  
 And I know that the spirit of God is the eldest brother of my  
 own,  
 And that all men ever born are also my brothers . . . . and the  
 women my sisters and lovers,  
 And that a kelson of the creation is love;  
 And limitless are leaves still or drooping in the fields,  
 And brown ants in the little wells beneath them,  
 And mossy scabs of the wormfence, and heaped stones, and  
 elder and mullen and pokeweed. (29)

The fusion of his own soul and body allows him to obtain communion with the rest of creation and the Godhead. The tension of distinction in chant four dissipates as all created selves participate in a universal physical transcendence of brotherhood. Sex becomes the "kelson of creation," which, although it may multiply and increase,

only intensifies and reaffirms the sisterhood of unity and identity, erasing the difference between an eternally becoming (i.e. sex) and an eternal present. In such a configuration, the self is limitless and divine.

Such optimistic and enthusiastic belief in the equality of the physical body and soul with the concurrent desire for physical transcendence arises out of Whitman's profound appreciation of the surrounding natural realm, which he discusses at length in Cowley's third section, chants six through nineteen. Contemplating a single blade of grass, the poet jubilantly proclaims the immortality of all existence:

They are alive and well somewhere;  
The smallest sprout shows there is really no death,  
And if ever there was it led forward life, and does not wait at  
the end to arrest it,  
And ceased the moment life appeared.

All goes onward and outward . . . and nothing collapses,  
And to die is different from what any one supposed, and  
luckier. (30)

The vitality of living things seemingly has the power to dispel death, and although he is obscure on this point, life can transform death into a "lucky" experience, for somehow death too affirms life. This proclamation of the ability of life to transcend death becomes

the thesis of *Leaves of Grass*, the motivation which inspires and propels the poetry:

I am not an earth nor an adjunct of an earth,  
 I am the mate and companion of people, all just as immortal  
 and fathomless as myself;  
 They do not know how immortal, but I know. (31)

The poet's project is to proclaim the immortality of the self as a physical yet eternal being.

As in the fifth chant, the recognition of the self's immortality promotes connection with the entire universe and all other selves, and Whitman provides us with lists and lists of those with whom he identifies in their and his common immortality; catching his breath at the end of the fifteenth chant, he summarizes for us:

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. (40)

Even when he cannot be physically present with all of these others, the poet affirms his ability to connect with them mentally. A striking example of this occurs in the eleventh chant, describing twenty-eight young men bathing by the shore; the poet, speaking for an unseen woman watching the nude bathers, comments,

An unseen hand also passed over their bodies,  
 It descended tremblingly from their temples and ribs.

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



bending arch,  
 They do not think whom they souse with spray.  
 (34)

Through the rather romantic powers of the imagination, the mind and internal thoughts can presence themselves in remarkably powerful ways, emphasizing the connection between fantastical flights of fancy and mimic reality.

Whitman declares the universality of his thoughts on immortality in chant seventeen:

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,  
 If they do not enclose everything they are next to nothing,  
 If they are not the riddle and the untying of the riddle they are  
 nothing,  
 If they are not just as close as they are distant they are  
 nothing. (41)

Interestingly, the belief in this immortality must be sustained by the "you"; the interconnection of self and other and immortality are interdependent and mutually affirming, the self establishing its identity in relation to an eternal other. The earlier tensions and threats of distinction are forgotten, and Whitman celebrates his vision of totality.

Having concentrated on the universal harmony of self and other and their shared identity, Whitman begins turning to a consideration of his own self and his special role as poet in Cowley's fourth section

(chants 20-25). He reiterates his claims of personal physical transcendence:

I have pried through the strata and analyzed to a hair,  
And counseled with doctors and calculated close and found no  
sweeter fat than stick to my own bones.

And I know I am solid and sound,  
To me the converging objects of the universe perpetually flow,  
All are written to me, and I must get what the writing means.

And I know I am deathless . . . . (43)

Besides such continual affirmation, the significance of this section lies in its further exploration of the body/soul and a consideration of the role of poetic writing. He links these two spheres in the first few lines of chant 21:

I am the poet of the body,  
And I am the poet of the soul. (44)

We receive our first inkling that poetry is the mechanism of unification of the body and the soul, but it also possesses the power to link all of creation:

Endless unfolding of words of ages!  
And mine a word of the modern . . . . a word en masse.

A word of the faith that never balks,  
One time as good as another time . . . . here or henceforward it  
is all the same to me.

A word of reality . . . . materialism first and last imbuing. (47)

Words contain within themselves the multitude of existence, the "en

masse" of the universe, and it is through the power of poetry that all are joined and unified:

I speak the password primeval . . . . I give the sign of  
democracy;  
By God! I will accept nothing which all cannot have their  
counterpart of on the same terms.

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,  
Voices of cycles of preparation and accretion,  
And of the threads that connect the stars -- and of wombs, and  
of the fatherstuff,  
And of the rights of them the others put down upon,  
Of the trivial and flat and foolish and despised,  
Of fog in the air and beetles rolling balls of dung.

Through me forbidden voices,  
Voices of sexes and lusts . . . . voices veiled, and I remove the  
veil,  
Voices indecent by me clarified and transfigured.

I do not press my finger across my mouth,  
I keep as delicate around the bowels as around the head and  
heart,  
Copulation is no more rank to me than death is. (48-49)

The poet gives the universe voice, expressing its unity and totality, and he especially links poetic expression to sexual expression; words partake in the "procreant urge," multiplying, increasing, constantly reaffirming the maintenance of life. As sexual expression continually rejuvenates life, so words also partake in the process of "eternally becoming," especially as the poet gives voice

to all facets of humanity and existence, emphasizing totality and unity. As Thomas Byers comments, " . . . speech and love become parallel and equivalent acts of presence. The principle of correspondence that relates self, word, and world is the projection of passion for a sense of oneness, of being at home in the cosmos" (41).

The end result is that the poet attains divinity:

Divine I am inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or am touched from. (49)

As with Schlegel's equation, the poetic ideal fusing body and soul, the natural and supernatural, leads to divinity, always with the production of poetry highlighted as the unifying, totalizing mechanism:

My voice goes after what my eyes cannot reach,  
With the twirl of my tongue I encompass worlds and volumes  
of worlds. (50)

Thus far, the first half of "Song of Myself" has concentrated on the interconnectedness of existence, on the harmony of self and other and the universal project of poetry. The "I" almost always turns into the "you," creating a circularity of identification. However, in the remainder of the poem, and especially in Cowley's next three sections (chants 26-41), we find a desire to delineate the self in more specific terms. Having established the infinity of

existence, the eternal "other" by which to assess identity, the poet turns more to a consideration of himself:

I think I will do nothing for a long time but listen,  
And accrue what I hear into myself . . . . and let sounds  
contribute toward me. (51)

This time, the "I" does not lead outward to the "you," but self-reflexively returns to "me"; his goal, as we discover at the end of the twenty-sixth chant, is to unravel the "puzzle of puzzles, and that we call Being" (52).

Almost immediately in the twenty-eight chant he provides the beginnings of an answer: "Is this then a touch? . . . . quivering me to a new identity[?]" (53). Since the poet has determined the equality of the body and the soul, the physical equally transcendent and immortal with the supernatural, then his physical powers of perception can link him with the totality of the universe, and he can thus establish his identity in relation to an absolute "other." He affirms his view in chant thirty:

All truths wait in all things,  
They neither hasten their own delivery nor resist it,  
They do not need the obstetric forceps of the surgeon,  
The insignificant is as big to me as any,  
What is less or more than a touch? (54);

and again, at the beginning of chant thirty one:

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journeywork of the  
stars. (55)

Through perception he will discover "all truth" and his own identity, but note that the desire to concentrate on the self still leads him to a consideration of the absolute other; the self can never exist in isolation.

Knowing the key to identity, Whitman launches into chant thirty three, one of the poem's most exuberant climaxes:

Swift wind! Space! My Soul! Now I know it is true what I  
guessed at;  
What I guessed when I loafed on the grass,  
What I guessed while I lay alone in my bed . . . and again as I  
walked the beach under the paling stars of the morning.

My ties and ballasts leave me . . . . I travel . . . . I sail . . . . my  
elbows rest in the sea-gaps,  
I skirt the sierras . . . . my palms cover continents,  
I am afoot with my vision. (57)

The "Soul" and the "Swift wind" collide; his powers of physical perception, the loafing and walking on the beach, ignite his soul into a vision, and several pages of highly physical description follow as the poet sails in his mind over the course of history, taking in everything he can imagine and incorporating all into himself. It would seem that the powers of the imagination could outstrip the physical body since the poet certainly imagines things, such as walking with Christ in Galilee, that he could never physically experience; but for Whitman, the imaginative faculty of the soul

and physical perception are inseparable, one feeding into the other;  
he says of his vision,

All this I swallow and it tastes good . . . . I like it well, and it  
becomes mine,  
I am the man . . . . I suffered . . . . I was there. (62)

He describes his ability to imagine in physical terms, as tastable, palpable; imagination manifests itself physically, affirming his own identity as a physical being. As Cowley says,

His secret is the power of identification. Since everything emanates from the universal soul, and since his own soul is of the same essence, he can identify himself with every object and with every person living or dead, heroic or criminal. (xix)

Whitman himself proclaims, "I become any presence or truth of humanity here" (67), and he insists that such powers of identification are affirmation of his individual selfhood:

I do not ask who you are . . . . that is not important to me,  
You can do nothing and be nothing but what I infold you. (70)

In earlier sections, the "I" always slipped into the "you," but this time Whitman identifies his own "I" as all important; the "you" not only becomes the "I," but it is seemingly dependent upon the poet for its very existence. In the first half of the poem, the power of identification established the totality of the infinite universe; now it establishes with equal force the totality of the individual ego, and the poet declares at the end of chant forty one that he is "becoming already a creator" (72).

The essentially romantic nature of such a stance can not be overstated. Schlegel had declared that the individual self would be the mediator of the divinity for all other men, and Whitman, if anything, goes a step further, proclaiming his self to be the center of existence:

All forces have been steadily employed to complete and delight  
me,  
Now I stand on this spot with my soul. (78)

His "completion," his self realization is the focal point of the universe, and he grandly offers us this summary of his views:

I have said that the soul is not more than the body,  
And I have said that the body is not more than the soul,  
And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's-self is,  
And whoever walks a furlong without sympathy walks to his  
own funeral, dressed in his shroud,  
And I or you pocketless of a dime may purchase the pick of the  
earth,  
And to glance with an eye or show a bean in its pod confounds  
the learning of all times,  
And there is no trade or employment but the young man  
following it may become a hero,  
And there is not object so soft but it makes a hub for the  
wheeled universe,  
And any man or woman shall stand cool and supercilious before  
a million universes. (83-84)

Fulfilling Schlegel's equation, the poetic imagination has culminated in the fusion of the body and the soul and has actually surpassed the Deity into an idealization of the self. But Whitman carefully reminds us (and himself) that this self identification is one of empathy and connection; the self can be a "hub for the wheeled



universe" because all selves are connected. We are thrown back to the beginning of the poem and the slippage of the "I" and the "you" into one another. Whitman has variously emphasized the identity and selfhood of each, but their identity, as noted before, is mutually dependent; selfhood emanates from their presence to each other, which also brings them into the presence of the eternal "Other."

At the end of the poem, Whitman offers us his farewell comments, and, fittingly enough, discusses the problem of death. As we noticed earlier, death periodically creeps into the discussion, staking a claim to be included in any consideration of the totality of existence and human experience. Especially in an equality of body and soul, death needs a hearing: how can the individual body, destined to die, be equal with a presumably eternal soul?

Whitman has a tendency to "rage against the dying of the light," and at one point, after imagining the carnage of a battle, he passionately cries,

I seize the descending man . . . . I raise him with resistless will.

O despairer, here is my neck,  
By God! you shall not go down! Hang your whole weight upon me.

I dilate you with tremendous breath . . . . I buoy you up;  
Every room of the house do I fill with an armed force . . . .  
lovers of me, bafflers of graves:  
Sleep! I and they keep guard all night;  
Not doubt, not decease shall dare to lay finger upon you,

I have embraced you, and henceforth possess you to myself,  
And when you rise in the morning you will find what I tell you  
is so. (71)

In the last few chants, Whitman waxes more philosophical,  
recuperating death in more physical, if humble terms:

And as to you death, and you bitter hug of mortality . . . it is  
idle to try to alarm me.

[ . . . ]

And as to you corpse I think you are good manure, but that does  
not offend me,

I smell the white roses sweetscented and growing,  
I reach to the leafy lips . . . I reach to the polished breasts of  
melons,

And as to you life, I reckon you are the leavings of many  
deaths,

No doubt I have died myself ten thousand times before. (83-84)

He holds to the eternalness of the physical, and he says of himself at  
the very end of the poem,

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,  
If you want me again look for me under your bootsles.

You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,  
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,  
And filter and fibre your blood. (86)

Believing that "others will punctually come forever and ever" (83),  
Whitman physically projects himself into their existence,  
maintaining the primacy of his body with his soul and ensuring the  
presence of his eternal identity.

But there are doubts and questions, and the reader suspects that  
Whitman wishes to be released from the "bitter hug of mortality," no

matter how much he says he is "at peace about God and about death"

(83). He tries to remain hopeful in chant fifty:

There is that in me . . . . I do not know what it is . . . . but I  
know it is in me.

Wrenched and sweaty . . . . calm and cool then my body becomes;  
I sleep . . . . I sleep long.

I do not know it . . . . it is without name . . . . it is a word  
unsaid,  
It is not in any dictionary or utterance or symbol.

Something it swings on more than the earth I swing on,  
To it the creation is the friend whose embracing awakes me.

Perhaps I might tell more . . . . Outlines! I plead for my brothers  
and sisters.

Do you see O my brothers and sisters?  
It is not chaos or death . . . . it is form and union and plan . . . .  
it is eternal life . . . . it is happiness. (84-85)

The poet desires "form and union and plan" -- and "eternal life" --  
but what is the "word unsaid"? What is that "without name"?  
Couched in the middle of a discussion of death, this chant reveals a  
curious slippage in identity: "There is that in me . . . . I do not know  
what it is . . . . but I know it is in me." For a poet who has "yawped"  
at great length about establishing his identity, he has reached a  
point of uncertainty about the main subject of his poetic musings --  
himself. The problem is poetic as well since the poet who sought  
the "password primeval" can not find the words to express himself.  
It will become clearer as we move into the remainder of *Leaves of*

*Grass* that this uncertainty -- the problematic of his identity -- is the mystery of his own mortality and a steadily increasing fear of what happens after the body passes away. Death, no matter how the poet may attempt to rationalize it, presents the greatest foil to his concept of physical transcendence.

Even the comfort offered by future generations suffers from this fear. The poet places his hope for immortality in the hands of the future, but instead of certainty, we get a question:

I concentrate toward them that are nigh . . . . I wait on the  
door-slab.

Who has done his day's work and will soonest be through with  
his supper?  
Who wishes to walk with me?

Will you speak before I am gone? Will you already prove too  
late? (85)

But Whitman remains hopeful to the very end, and the last three lines of the poem almost prayerfully render us his request:

Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,  
Missing me one place search another,  
I stop somewhere waiting for you. (86)

Recalling that his identity is intimately connected to others, emphasized by the poem's ending with the word "you" after having begun with the word "I," Whitman tries to keep himself encouraged, but future poems will reveal further doubts, questions, and concessions to the problem of death.

As we turn to Rimbaud, we discover there are fewer texts to examine since the poet only wrote for a few years, his poetic output probably ceasing when he was only eighteen. But the few early texts we have -- the poetic juvenilia, the "Lettres du voyant," and the famous "Le Bateau ivre" -- are significantly commanding documents of post-romantic, pre-modern poetics; indeed, they help define modernism as the reshape romanticism.

The intensity of these works reveals the passions of a gifted young man, bursting with creative ideas and energy, almost exploding in a frenzy of inspiration. As Paul Schmidt notes, much of this inspiration came from the wealth of poetry produced in France at mid century: "what seems clearest in all Rimbaud's work is his overwhelming consciousness of himself as a poet. His first poems are strongly influenced by the popular poets of his day: Victor Hugo, Alfred de Musset, Charles Leconte de Lisle, Francois Coppée, Theodore de Banville. Their tropes, their allusions, their subjects, are his . . . . at this time they were Rimbaud's ideal of poetic creation" (4).

Influenced by these romantic poets, Rimbaud's juvenilia reveals many of the romantic, optimistic beliefs in the power of the poet to obtain a transcendent presence that we encountered in Whitman's

early work; the first verse of "Soleil et chair" is positively Whitmanesque in sentiment and expression:

Le Soleil, le foyer de tendresse et de vie,  
 Verse l'amour brûlant à la terre ravie,  
 Et, quand on est couche sur la vallée, on sent  
 Que la terre est nubile et déborde de sang;  
 Que son immense sein, soulevé par une âme,  
 Est d'amour comme dieu, de chair comme la femme,  
 Et qu'il renferme, gros de sève et de rayons,  
 Le grand fourmillement de tous les embryons!

Et tout croît, et tout monte!  
 -- O Venus, o Deesse! (23-24)

Binding the physical and the spiritual, the fleshly and the divine, Rimbaud speaks of a throbbing universe, alive, vibrant, endless, and completely satiating.

But the very next line reveals that such a time has passed: "Je regrette les temps de l'antique jeunesse" (24). At one point, "La terre bercant l'homme, et tout l'Océan bleu Et tous les animaux aimaient, aimaient en Dieu!" (24); but now the poet must mourn, like Schiller, his distance from a realm of unity and embodied divinity, and the poem is the trace of his remove from the presence of the divine.

Rimbaud blames such a distance in part on Christianity: "Oh! la route est amère Depuis que l'autre Dieu nous attelle à sa croix" (25). The Christian mortification of the flesh denies the spiritual and physical unity of the young poet's ideal, and he yearns for an earlier,

idealistic time: "L'ideal, la pensée invincible, éternelle, Tout le dieu qui vit, sous son argile charnelle, Montera, montera, brûlera sous son front! . . . Et le rayon soudain de la beauté première Fait palpiter le dieu dans l'autel de la chair!" (26). In a passage building toward a climax revealing the way to reclaim the divine within, Rimbaud links man's physicality to the presence of the "Absolute" in a stunningly romantic vision:

--Et l'Homme, peut-il voir? peut-il dire: Je crois?  
 La voix de la pensée est-elle plus qu'un rêve?  
 Si l'homme naît si tôt, si la vie est si brève,  
 D'où vient-il? Sombre-t-il dans l'Océan profond  
 Des Germes, des Foetus, des Embryons, au fond  
 De l'immense Creuset d'où la Mère-Nature  
 Le ressuscitera, vivante créature,  
 Pour aimer dans la rose, et croître dans les blés? . . .

Nous ne pouvons savoir! -- Nous sommes accablés  
 D'un manteau d'ignorance et d'étroites chimères!  
 Singes d'hommes tombés de la vulve des mères,  
 Notre pâle raison nous cache l'infini!  
 Nous voulons regarder: -- le Doute nous punit!  
 Le doute, morne oiseau, nous frappe de son aile . . .  
 -- Et l'horizon s'enfuit d'une fuite éternelle! . . .

Le grand ciel est ouvert! les mystères sont morts  
 Devant l'Homme, debout, qui croise ses bras forts  
 Dans l'immense splendeur de la riche nature!  
 Il chante . . . et le bois chante, et le fleuve murmure  
 Un chant plein de bonheur qui monte vers le jour!  
 --C'est la Rédemption! c'est l'amour! c'est l'amour! (26-27)

The power of love will maintain the "endless splendor of abundant Nature," recreating again and again the perception of eternity and divinity through the expense of sexual energy.

The concluding stanza of the poem elaborates on this vision of eternal nature as Rimbaud recounts several mythical sexual encounters between the gods and mortals. His emphasis remains on "love" as the meeting ground between the flesh and the divine, and he links such a meeting with a piercing into the "Absolute," divine awareness, and an affirmation of a "Monde infini" (29).

Although Whitman does not borrow from classical mythology to the extent that Rimbaud does, the French poet's ideas bear more than a passing resemblance to those of his American contemporary and their philosophical forefather, Schlegel: man has within himself the ability to presence the divinity through a fusion of the spiritual and physical realms. Granted, "Soleil et chair" is not very revealing about how such fusion is to take place; its rather banal optimism in the divine powers of love and sex speak much of the poet's youth and naively romantic sensibilities. But in the "Lettres du voyant," Rimbaud's poetic manifestos, the young poet offers compelling and provocative statements on the power of poetry, and he links himself more firmly with the romantic project we have unveiled in Schlegel and the early Whitman. Specifically, Rimbaud's project turns from a nostalgic yearning for a lost, idealized time to an attempt to create an awareness of a fully present ideal through the senses. Such



presence will engender within the self a sense of unity and harmony, collapsing boundaries between self and other.

The first, written on 13 May 1871 to his old teacher, Georges Izambard, is a mocking letter, nastily expressing the young man's break with bourgeois sentiment and his desire to experience the full glory of the poet's life: "Maintenant, je m'encrapule le plus possible. Pourquoi? Je veux être poète, et je travaille à me rendre voyant" (200). He breaks with Izambard's "poésie subjective," a concept of individualistic and impressionistic poetry, and wants to become a voyant, a "seer"; like Whitman, who uses the word "seer" to describe the poet, Rimbaud wants to probe into the "essence of things," to understand things objectively, in their noumenal reality. Indeed, the concept of "la poésie objective," with the differentiation between objective and subjective poetry, recalls Whitman's response to the Kantian critique of judgment. Both poets refuse to accept the limitation of man's cognizance to phenomenal reality and a necessarily subjective view of the universe imposed upon it by the structures of the individual mind. Instead, the romantic poet professed the power to overcome such subjective isolation and allow the self to enjoy communion with others and the divinity -- to experience the essence of reality directly.

Rimbaud's method of accomplishing such a task is famous: "Il s'agit d'arriver à l'inconnu par le dérèglement de *tous les sens*" (200). Although, as W. H. Frohock points out, "The 'Lettre [sic] du voyant' is far from telling us what we would like to know . . . about the process of attaining the hallucinated trance [the "dérèglement de *tous les sens*]" (87), Rimbaud nevertheless clearly associates communing with the unknown with the senses; such arrival at "l'inconnu" may have to be aided by hallucinatory drugs (and we shall discuss their use in *Une Saison en enfer*), but the release of the senses from their *usual* phenomenal perceptions allows the poet to experience physically the unknown and perhaps arrive at the essence of things. The self-induced altered state(s) of consciousness will (hopefully) fuse physical and metaphysical or fantastic experience into a new awareness, an objective awareness of the essentially non-objective. As Enid Rhodes Peschel points out, "Intoxication here implies communion on erotic, poetic, and spiritual levels" (83).

Such perception for Rimbaud is the goal of the poet who "no longer recounts his subjective self but creates an objective reality that is true for all men" (St. Aubyn, 20). As Schlegel and Whitman maintain, the poet is mediator of these essences, divine and eternal, but the mediation is such that it transcends the distance and remove implied by mediation and brings both poet and reader into a new

realm of interrelation and interconnection -- of the presence of the self to the other, of the other to the self. In the same paragraph discussing his desire to be a seer through the derangement of his senses, Rimbaud says, "C'est faux de dire: Je pense: on devrait dire on me pense" (200). Mediating the unknown essences, Rimbaud leaves his own subjectivity behind and becomes part of an intersubjectivity that allows his own self to be objectified. Entering into the unknown breaks down the barrier between self and other, and Rimbaud declares, "Je est un autre" (200). As mediator of the universal and absolute, the poet no longer exists in subjective isolation, but partakes in the eternal interplay of self and other, much as Whitman's cognizance of the eternal results in the continual slippage between the "I" and the "you" in "Song of Myself." The awareness of the eternal unknown promotes the erasure of difference, a breakdown in mediation necessitated by the dichotomy of self and other, and a recognition of harmony and unity in the direct experience of the "essence of things."

This new awareness of the self and the special role of the poet in its establishment are given more detailed treatment in the second letter, written on 15 May 1871 to Paul Demeny. Announcing "une heure de littérature nouvelle," Rimbaud praises the "Vie harmonieuse" of "la poésie grecque" and repeats his declaration that

"Je est un autre." The poet desires to recapture the supposed harmony of the ancient Greeks, and, more emphatically than in the letter to Izambard, he places the burden of attaining such harmony on the poet; he says,

La premiere étude de l'homme qui veut être poète est sa propre connaissance, entière; il cherche son âme, il l'inspecte, il la tente, l'apprend. Des qu'il la sait, il doit la cultiver! [. . .] Mais il s'agit de faire l'âme monstrueuse: à l'instar des comprachicos, quoi! Imaginez un homme s'implantant et se cultivant des verrues sur le visage. (202)

In addition to a thorough exploration of the soul, Rimbaud advises again the "dérèglement" of the earlier letter:

Le Poete se fait *voyant* par un long, immense et raisonné *dérèglement de tous les sens*. Toutes les formes d'amour, de souffrance, de folie; il cherche lui-même, il épuise en lui tous les poisons, pour n'en garder que les quintessences. Ineffable torture où il a besoin de toute la foi, de toute la force surhumaine, où il devient entre tous le grand malade, le grand criminel, le grand maudit, -- et le suprême Savant! -- Car il arrive à *l'inconnu*! Puisqu'il a cultivé son âme, déjà riche, plus qu'aucun! Il arrive à l'inconnu, et quand, affolé, il finirait par perdre l'intelligence de ses visions, il les a vues! Qu'il crève dans son bondissement par les choses inouïes et innommables: viendront d'autres horribles travailleurs; ils commenceront par les horizons où l'autre s'est affaissé! (202-203)

Two significant points must be made about this process of becoming a "voyant": as with Schlegel and Whitman, it equally involves body and soul, the senses and the spiritual. Georges Poulet points out that "Between outside and inside, subject and object, contact could be not closer. And of all the senses, the one dominating the

realization of the connections is that which emphasizes the proximity most successfully, overtly, concretely. That sense, obviously, is touch" (89). Just as a "touch" could quiver Whitman to identity, so too does Rimbaud's equation of body and soul, outside and inside, aids his own self-realization. The interior becomes palpably manifest and connected, overtly realized. This, of course, leads us to our second major point, the collapse of discrimination between (in Poulet's words) subject and object, the breakdown of self into "l'autre," further emphasizing the individual self's sense of connection with the "Other."

For Rimbaud, language, especially poetic language, assumes a special role in the establishment and maintenance of this harmony, and the remainder of the letter to Demeny comments on its use and function. Just as Whitman sought the "password primeval" (48), Rimbaud calls for a universal language: "Trouver une langue; -- Du reste, toute parole étant idée, le temps d'un langage universel viendra!" (203). Furthermore, "Cette langue sera de l'âme pour l'âme, résumant tout, parfums, sons, couleurs, de la pensée accrochant la pensée et tirant" (204). The significance of this view to the romantic project is twofold. First, St. Aubyn comments that Rimbaud believes, "The poet creates form, even giving a formless form to the formless" (21). The presencing of the universal divine

and unknown does not neglect the physical, and Rimbaud holds to an equality of physical and spiritual perception; language will embody the essentially formless, the unknown becoming perceptible as smells, sounds, and colors. Secondly, their embodiment will allow language to be universal, "résumant tout"; no longer will language discriminate and differentiate in its mediation, but it will encompass within itself totality, much as Whitman strives after the "word" which will be "en masse" (47). Again, we see the romantic desire to overcome a distance or remove from noumenal experience, a distance often accentuated by the remove of language from what it signifies. But Rimbaud's (and Whitman's and Schlegel's) concept of language raises it to a poetic ideal, where, in the fusion of form/content, body/soul, signifier/signified, language becomes a complete, universalizing presence; Poulet characterizes this Rimbaudian attitude as one of "immanence" and being "eternally aware" (82, 75). In many ways, the view of language is all but identical to the view of the self; just as the "Je" signifies its harmony by recognizing its equality with "l'autre," so too does language contain within itself both signifier and signified -- at least in the Rimbaudian dream.

In his letters, Rimbaud quotes several of his early poems to emphasize his points, and it will be useful to examine one to

comprehend the vigor and passion of the poet's ideas. The three poems he quotes in the letter to Demeny -- "Chant de Guerre Parisien," "Mes petites amoureuses," and "Accroupissements" -- are shockingly avant-garde and anti-bourgeois. Various poeticizing about the erotic nature of war, sickeningly painted whores, and a cleric with indigestion, Rimbaud seems more determined to disgust his reader than direct them toward the discovery of a language for the soul. But the brutal physicality of the poems is apparently necessary to impress upon the reader the fundamental nature of our existence -- which, if it is spiritual, is also undeniably physical. And this physicality must assume a place of equal importance with the spiritual if the two are to merge into one another.

The last poem to Demeny, "Accroupissements," graphically pairs the grotesquely physical with the spiritual in its description of a Brother Milotus suffering from indigestion and defecating:

Bien tard, quand il se sent l'estomac écoeuré,  
 Le frère Milotus, un oeil à la lucarne  
 D'où le soleil, clair comme un chaudron récuré,  
 Lui darde une migraine et fait son regard darne,  
 Déplace dans les draps son ventre de curé.  
 [. . .]  
 L'écoeurante chaleur gorge la chambre étroite;  
 Le cerveau du bonhomme est bourré de chiffons.  
 Il écoute les poils pousser dans sa peau moite,  
 Et parfois, en hoquets fort gravement bouffons  
 S'échappe, secouant son escabeau qui boite . . . . (65-66)

Certainly the picture of this "priestly gut" is meant to satirize the bourgeois Christianity that Rimbaud (and Whitman for that matter) disliked so intensely, but it also emphasizes the essential physicality of even the most supposedly spiritually-minded. Moving along these lines, images of the ethereal and the erotic coalesce in the final stanza:

Et le soir, aux rayons de lune, qui lui font  
 Aux contours du cul des bavures de lumière,  
 Une ombre avec détails s'accroupit, sur un fond  
 De neige rose ainsi qu'une rose trémière . . .  
 Fantastique, un nez poursuit Vénus au ciel profond (66).

Moonlight and the cleric's ass merge in a vision of Venus, the divinely erotic goddess of love idealized in Rimbaud's earlier poetry. Such physical spirituality -- or spiritual physicality -- is reminiscent of Whitman's declaration that "The scent of these arm-pits is aroma finer than prayer" (49). Any spiritual contact is presenced through the physical, and Rimbaud's lewd poem celebrates, if perversely, the importance of our recognition of our fundamental physicality as creatures.

"Voyelles," an important poem not included in the "Lettres du voyant" but composed at about the same time, expresses the same linkage between the physical and the spiritual through the mechanism of language. Ostensibly written as a sonnet, the first two quatrains graphically equate a brute physicality with language:



A noir, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O bleu: voyelles,  
 Je dirai quelque jour vos naissances latentes:  
 A, noir corset velu des mouches éclatantes  
 Qui bombinent autour des puanteurs cruelles,

Golfes d'ombre; E, candeurs des vapeurs et des tentes,  
 Lances des glaciers fiers, rois blancs, frissons d'ombelles;  
 I, pourpres, sang craché, rire des lèvres belles  
 Dans la colère ou les ivresses pénitentes. (78)

The poet links each vowel to a color, attempting to emphasize the physical solidity of lingual sounds, and his descriptions further ground the vowel and its corresponding color in an organic relationship. The process described here undoubtedly hearkens back to the "Lettres" in which Rimbaud declares his ambition to find a "language of the soul" containing perfumes, sounds, colors, and thoughts. But note that the project is characterized as a process: "Je dirai quelque jour vos naissances latentes"; the full physicality of the vowels is yet to be realized, remaining now, as it were, "latent." The poem at this point, like the Rimbaudian project of voyancy, is one of process, progressing towards some future point. Rimbaud may not express Schlegel's stance of an "eternally becoming" poetic ideal, but the young poet's view is clearly of a poetics not yet perfected but in a state of becoming.

Returning to the poem, Rimbaud shifts from the blatant physicality of the first two quatrains to a mystical and ethereal vision in the concluding stanzas:

U, cycles, vibrations divins des mers virides,  
 Paix des pâtis semés d'animaux, paix des rides  
 Que l'alchimie imprime aux grands fronts studieux;

O, suprême Clairon plein des strideurs étranges,  
 Silences traversés des Mondes et des Anges:  
 -- O l'Omega, rayon violet de Ses Yeux! (79)

The vowels U and O conjure up images of the divinity, concluding with the Omega of the violet eyes of God. indeed, the poem maintains that language as represented by the vowels contains within it the entirety of experience -- from Alpha to Omega; from the laughter of an angry face to the silences of the angels, language can signify the starkly physical and the ineffably divine. Of course, to signify such completion, language must be more than representative; it must, as Rimbaud desires, contain everything, and the language of the poem "Voyelles" is one transcending sound and embracing sight and vision in its move toward totality and full presence.

These ideas find their most compelling expression in one of Rimbaud's early poetic masterpieces, "Le Bateau ivre." According to W. H. Frohock, "movement by movement, it [the poem] follows the prescriptions of the 'Lettre [sic] du voyant'" (108), and Wallace Fowlie maintains that "the will to be a poet, a creative artist, is the real experience narrated in 'Le Bateau ivre'" (34). In the long poem, Rimbaud literally embarks on his poetic voyage and renders us an

account of his findings; the ambitions expressed in the letters of voyancy take poetic shape in a work about the powers of the imagination.

Fowlie divides the poem into four sections or movements, and it will be useful to follow his division of the poem in our exposition of its significant passages. First, the poem begins with an introduction (stanzas one through five) in which the poet recounts his initial departure:

Comme je descendais des Fleuves impassibles,  
Je ne me sentis plus guidé par les haleurs:  
Des Peaux-Rouges criards les avaient pris pour cibles  
Les ayant cloués nus aux poteaux de couleurs.

[...]

La tempête a béni mes éveils maritimes.  
Plus léger qu'un bouchon j'ai dansé sur les flots  
Qu'on appelle rouleurs éternels de victimes,  
Dix nuits, sans regretter l'oeil niais de falots!

Plus douce qu'aux enfants la chair des pommes sures,  
L'eau verte pénétra ma coque de sapin  
Et des taches de vins bleus et des vomissures  
Me lava, dispersant gouvernail et grappin. (94)

Commenting on these stanzas, Fowlie says, "The boat speaks and is obviously the symbol of the poet who in his drunkenness has discovered a release from the stable world of convention" (31). Indeed, the emphasis seems to be on release, if not even escape; the poet spurs any attempt at restraint, leaving behind the guiding hands of the bargemen and no longer missing the lights of the lanterns. He

desires freedom and equates the escape from convention and "normalcy" with the "rouleurs éternels de victimes"; without "gouvernail et grappin," he sports with eternity.

The importance of intoxication to this freedom cannot be forgotten. Peschel comments that "The central metaphor of 'Le Bateau ivre' equates intoxication with liberation: the boat is the drunken body (or mind) which travels on various imaginary fluids" (83). If anything, the physical drunkenness, the "dereglement" of his senses, seems to give presence to a transcendence of the spirit, a liberation of the soul.

The second section, stanzas six through fifteen, renders an account of the "disordered, uncharted" journey, and "it relates the boat's discovery of the universe: its splendor, its giganticism, its violence" (Fowlie, 31, 32):

Et dès lors, je me suis baigné dans le Poème  
De la Mer, infusé d'astres, et lactescent,  
Dévorant les azurs verts; où, flottaison blême  
Et ravie, un noyé pensif parfois descend;

Oh, teignant tout à coup les bleuités, délires  
Et rythmes lents sous les rutillements du jour,  
Plus fortes que l'alcool, plus vastes que nos lyres,  
Fermentent les rousseurs amères de l'amour! (94-95)

In the poet's hallucination -- his consciousness altered as prescribed in the "Lettres" -- he is struck by a grand intermingling of earth, sea, sky, death, love, and life -- all bound in the bath of the

Poem. As the stanzas progress, his imaginative flight brings him erotic visions of the sun, the night, the Virgin Mary, "d'incroyables Florides," "flots nacreux," and "cieu de braises"; all of his visions are graphically described, his description aided by his ability as a voyant to see the "essences of things": "Et j'ai vu quelquefois ce que l'homme a cru voir!" (95).

As in "Voyelles," the poet envisions a striking coalescence between the natural physical and the spiritual realms:

J'ai suivi, des mois pleins, pareille aux vacheries  
Hystériques, la houle à l'assaut des récifs,  
Sans songer que les pieds lumineux des Maries  
Pussent forcer le mufler aux Océans poussifs! (95)

The ethereal luminosity of the Virgin Mary, one of the most primal and potent figures of Catholic spirituality, cannot curb the "Océans poussifs"; the two images link spiritual transcendence with an equally transcending natural realm, and the use of Mary, herself the human link between God and man, highlights the merging of the divine and the physical. The divine becomes physically present to the poet. Rimbaud summarizes these movements in the last two lines of this section:

Des écumes de fleurs ont bercé mes déradés  
Et d'ineffables vents m'ont ailé par instants. (96)

The foam flowers and ineffable winds, ethereal though they be,

border on the physical, giving the poet's fancy flight and becoming embodied in the poem.

In the third section, however, the poet's "dérades" becomes a "bateau perdu"; stanzas sixteen through twenty-two recount Rimbaud's growing consciousness of his flight into the imagination and he is somewhat horror struck:

Moi qui tremblais, sentant geindre à cinquante lieues  
Le rut des Béhémots et les Maelstroms épais,  
Fileur éternel des immobilités bleues,  
Je regrette l'Europe aux anciens parapets! (97)

The occasional violence of his visions makes him long for the "anciens parapets" of Europe, for stability and a sense of familiarity.

The eternity he desires frightens him:

J'ai vu des archipels sidéraux! et des îles  
Dont les cieux délirants sont ouverts au vogueur:  
-- Est-ce en ces nuits sans fond que tu dors et t'exiles,  
Million d'oiseaux d'or, ô future Vigeur? (97)

But in the very next stanza, opening Fowlie's last section of the poem, the poet expresses his unwillingness to return from the voyage:

Mais, vrai, j'ai trop pleuré! Les Aubes sont navrantes.  
Toute lune est atroce et tout soleil amer:  
L'acre amour m'a gonflé de torpeurs enivrantes.  
O que ma quille éclate! O que j'aille à la mer! (97)

It is interesting that the thought of dawns, moons, and suns provokes such a bitter response; but the three are markers of time,

representative of the cycles of life. In his imagination, the poet experienced the immediacy and full presence of eternity, with the oppositions of the spiritual and the physical, life and death, completely reconciled; but Rimbaud cannot sustain the vision of eternity and he is thrown back into a harsh "reality":

Je ne puis plus, baigné de vos langueurs, ô lames,  
 Enlever leur sillage aux porteurs de cotons,  
 Ni traverser L'orgueil des drapeaux et des flammes,  
 Ni nager sous les yeux horribles des pontons. (97)

The recounting of the experiment in voyancy begins with an exuberant voyage into *l'inconnu*, but "Le Bateau ivre" ends with a sobering return to a world of cyclicalality: the vision of eternity gives way to a world of torturous flux. W. H. Frohock summarizes the problem presented by the end of the poem:

Had his early experience already taught him that the process of stimulating the flow of such images, brighter and truer than life so long as they lasted, also guaranteed their invincible transiency? (113); [...] Thus the artificial fugue which Rimbaud sketched in the "Lettre [sic] du voyant" and then described in the "Bateau ivre" turns out to contain an inherent fault: the escape is only momentary. [...] The image, lovely though it may be, will not remain, and without its brilliance everything will be even darker than before. (114)

Just as Whitman's desire for an eternal presence is complicated by the transiency of life at the end of "Song of Myself," Rimbaud questions the permanence of his "touch" with eternity, and his sneaking suspicion is that the poet cannot maintain commune with

the eternal and will always be thrown back into a world of flux, change, inconstancy, and lack of reconciliation. *Une Saison en enfer* picks up where "Le Bateau ivre" concludes, and the longer poem presents us with a poet fully conscious of his own limitations and the shortcomings of poetic language.

Gerard Manley Hopkins, whose major poetic output consists of verse written from 1875 to 1889, is further chronologically removed from Schlegel and the early 19th-century theorists. Yet his writings still grapple with the same tensions and ambitions of the early romantic poetics of Whitman and Rimbaud. In fact, Hopkins writes in a letter to his good friend Robert Bridges, "I always knew in my heart Walt Whitman's mind to be more like my own than any other man's living" (Phillips, 254); at the same time, however, the cleric expresses ambivalence about this attraction: "As he is a very great scoundrel this is not a pleasant confession. And this also makes me the more desirous to read him and the more determined that I will not" (254).

What are the contours of this simultaneous attraction and rejection? First, Hopkins' affinity for Whitman is most likely bred out of both poets' appreciation of the natural realm. We have already seen how Whitman's view of nature in "Song of Myself" imparted to



the poet both a sense of self wonder and a conceptualization of the physical realm as eternal. Hopkins' attitude, as revealed in his early journals and letters, is quite similar; he often wrote extremely detailed descriptive passages or sketched natural scenes that particularly impressed him. Out of his fascination with the physical universe arose the terms "instress" and "inscape," first used in notes the poet made on Parmenides in 1868. According to Catherine Phillips, inscape is the "characteristic shape of a thing or species," and instress is the "identifying impression a thing can communicate to a careful and receptive viewer"; it is the "'stress within,' the force which binds something or a person into a unit" (xx). A close examination of the natural realm can thus render an awareness of both distinction (inscape) and wholeness (instress).

Hopkins' appreciation of nature was augmented by his study of Duns Scotus, the medieval theologian who expounded on the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Immaculate Conception. Phillips explains Hopkins' attraction to Scotus in this way:

The idea in the *Oxford Commentary* that provoked Hopkins's outburst [of enthusiasm for Scotus] may well have been the defense of the reality of what man knows through his senses and perhaps, especially, a passage which A. B. Wolter translates, "By grasping just what things are of themselves, a person separates the essences from the many additional incidental features associated with them in

the sense image . . . . and sees what is true . . . . as a more universal truth." Such an idea has much in common with inscape. (xxiii)

The tension between distinctive features and true essences parallels Whitman's interest in the poet as discoverer of the "essences of things"; all of the elements of nature, distinct and diverse though they be, partake in the "universal truth" which is available to the self's perception and sensation.

In many ways, Hopkins' life-long religiosity and his ultimate conversion to Catholicism in 1866 helped him solidify his thoughts on the connection between a "universal truth" and the natural; the various beliefs in the Incarnation and Transubstantiation bespeak a close linkage between the spiritual and physical realms. However, his religious beliefs caused him to view that "scoundrel" Whitman with some ambivalence; the American poet's supposed homosexual tendencies were the subject of no small fascination and controversy in England at the time (see Jimmie Killingsworth's *Whitman's Poetry of the Body*, Chapter Five), and the soon-to-be Jesuit thought it best to distance himself from such a taboo subject.

Indeed, the poet's Christianity sometimes problematizes both his poetics and his romantic sensibilities. At times, Hopkins sees his poetry as indicative of the instress and presence of the divine into and throughout the natural realm, and he derives his own sense of

self from an identification with the divinity of Christ; at other times, however, he is more conscious of his distance as a physical being from an eternal divinity, much as Rimbaud is at the end of "Le Bateau ivre." His praise of nature is occasionally undercut by an impending consciousness of a sinful self in a post-Edenic world. Not surprisingly, as with Whitman and Rimbaud, the poet's awareness of such self and natural limitation revolves around the problematics of death and impermanence. But such considerations are more indicative of the later poetry (to be treated in the third chapter), and Hopkins' initial work and poetic ambitions bear much resemblance to the goals and aspirations of the early romantics: the self escapes isolation by becoming physically aware of an eternal divinity and by identifying with it. Of special interest to us in this light will be a sampling of the pre-1868 "juvenilia," the Preface to the planned but never published volume of poetry, and the 1875 masterpiece, "The Wreck of the Deutschland."

Hopkins' earliest verse, mostly devotional, is indicative of a serious-minded, religiously sensible, and thoroughly Victorian attitude toward life. He writes clearly within the tradition of English Christian verse, influenced by such poets as George Herbert and Christina Rossetti. The poem "Heaven-Haven" actually takes its title from Herbert's poem "The Size":

I have desired to go  
 Where springs not fail,  
 To fields where flies no sharp and sided hail  
 And a few lilies blow.

And I have asked to be  
 Where no storms come,  
 Where the green swell is in the havens dumb,  
 And out of the swing of the sea. (27)

Subtitled "(a nun takes the veil)," the poem speaks of a figure easily lifted out of several of Christina Rossetti's devotional pieces; a sensitive soul desires release from the flux of this world, but her view of paradise is romantically physical. Like our earlier theorists and poets, the realm of divinity and spirituality finds poignant and potent characterization as a haven of physical delight which is never ending; the fusion of the spiritual and physical renders us a heaven "Where springs not fail," a place of eternal satiation and the presence of the divine.

Another poem, however, "Nondum," marks the poet's distance from such an eternal realm:

God, though to Thee our psalm we raise  
 No answering voice comes from the skies;  
 To Thee the trembling sinner prays  
 But no forgiving voice replies;  
 Our prayer seems lost in desert ways,  
 Our hymn in the vast silence dies. (81)

In the present world, the sinner is more overcome with a sense of his own guilt than a receptivity to divine grace, and, for lack of the

"forgiving voice," the speaker's signification fades into insignificance, his prayers and hymns falling silent and ineffectual.

But the poet is not entirely deaf to the wonders spoken by the natural world:

We see the glories of the earth  
But not the hand that wrought them all:  
Night to a myriad worlds gives birth,  
Yet like a lighted empty hall  
Where stands no host at door or hearth  
Vacant creation's lamps appall. (82)

Although sensitive to the creation around him, the poet still feels removed from the "hand" that brought such "glories of the earth" into being. The important question for the poet is whether such feelings of removal and distance are indicative of creation's distance from the Godhead or the self's inability to perceive the divinity; the third stanza suggests an answer:

We guess; we clothe Thee, unseen King,  
With attributes we deem are meet;  
Each in his own imagining  
Sets up a shadow in Thy seat;  
Yet know not how our gifts to bring,  
Where seek Thee with unsandalled feet. (82)

The poet attests to the individual "imagining" of the divinity, reminiscent of Schlegel's definition of the imagination, but in this poem the imagination is somehow deficient. The poet desires to mediate the divinity, but his powers fail, rendering him essentially speechless in a poem about the perceived absence of God.

How can the poet overcome the "unbroken silence [which] broods while ages and while aeons run?" The Godhead must speak:

Oh! till Thou givest that sense beyond,  
To show Thee that Thou art, and near,  
Let patience with her chastening wand  
Dispel the doubt and dry the tear;  
And lead me child-like by the hand  
If still in darkness not in fear.

Speak! whisper to my watching heart  
One word -- as when a mother speaks  
Soft, when she sees her infant start,  
Till dimpled joy steals o'er its cheeks.  
Then, to behold Thee as Thou art,  
I'll wait till morn eternal breaks. (83)

The poet needs the "sense beyond" which will allow him to "behold Thee as Thou art" and to feel the divinity within; his earlier failure of signification and significance can be overcome if the relationship between man and God is rectified by the voice of the eternal Father. As with Rimbaud's "Soleil et la Chair," the problem is one of reaching and identifying the self with the Divinity.

The importance placed on speech, silence, and the divine voice cannot be overemphasized. Hopkins is intimately concerned with the problem of experiencing the presence of the divinity and with recognizing the various expressions of that divinity in the world around him. Expression, even of the divine and transcendent spirit of God, implicates the material, as signs, symbols, and words are physical objects; so Hopkins' poetics becomes one in which the

"poetic ideal" is a fusion of the supernatural in natural "signs." We should not hesitate to stress that for Hopkins the attainment of such an ideal would be the expression of the divinity, just as in Schlegel's equation; indeed, the poetic ideal parallels the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, the fusion of the spiritually transcendent with the physical body. Despite the distance from the divinity that the poet occasionally feels, as voiced in "Nondum," Hopkins establishes his poetic project as an exploration and expression of the Divinity, which would offer an awareness of the ultimate "Other" through which the self can gain identity. In his spiritual exercises, Hopkins often repeats that man was created to glorify God: "He meant the world to give him praise, reverence and service: *to give him glory . . .*" (290); "Man was created to praise, reverence and serve God Our Lord, and by so doing to save his soul" (281). Thus, the individual self attains realization in its awareness and reflection of the Godhead, and the poet, in his expression of such divinity, both partakes of the presence of the divinity and helps mediate it for all others.

Although Schlegel's early writings and Whitman's and Rimbaud's poetry do not express such fervent Christianity, Hopkins' poetics is allied with theirs in the romantic fusion of the natural and the supernatural and the view of the individual as potentially capable of

presencing the divinity. The commonalities become more striking in the poems Hopkins wrote in the mid to late 1870s after he had found his own poetic voice and established his view of the aim of poetry. While earlier juvenilia vacillates in Victorian doubt and guilt, the new poems, written after a reawakening of spirituality and his conversion to Catholicism, speak boldly -- and romantically -- of the physicality of the divinity, as in "God's Grandeur":

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.  
 It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;  
 It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil  
 Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?  
 Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;  
 And ail is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;  
 And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil  
 Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And, for all this, nature is never spent;  
 There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;  
 And though the last lights off the black West went  
 Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastwards, springs --  
 Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
 World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.  
 (128)

For Hopkins, the natural world presences the divinity, is "charged with the grandeur of God"; the spiritual, represented by the Holy Ghost, and the physical merge in a sensuousness which is "never spent." As with Whitman, Hopkins senses the eternalness of the physical realm, and the poem exists as a monument to this divinely inspired physicality. For a moment in the octave, the poet muses on



the human "smudge" which can potentially blur the presence of the divinity. But we are assured in the sextet that the problem does not lie with nature but with the individual perceiver; Hopkins does not prescribe the Rimbaudian "dereglement tous les sens," but clearly the poet is capable of seeing (as a seer) into the divine essence of nature.

As with Schlegel and the poetic innovators Whitman and Rimbaud, Hopkins feels that such a powerful poetics deserves "new forms"; and his "Author's Preface," intended to introduce the poems of Hopkins' new voice (such as "God's Grandeur"), speaks at length about "sprung rhythm," the poet's new rhythmic pattern which characterizes almost all of his mature poetry. Sprung rhythm's innovation is that it replaces the artificiality of iambic verse with a series of stresses which Hopkins maintains are "real and true to nature" (106); he comments on its history and importance thus:

Note on the nature and history of Sprung Rhythm -- Sprung Rhythm is the most natural of things. For (1) it is the rhythm of common speech and of written prose, when rhythm is perceived in them. (2) It is the rhythm of all but the most monotonously regular music, so that in the words of choruses and refrains and in songs written closely to music it arises. (3) It is found in nursery rhymes, weather saws, and so on; because, however these may have been once made in running rhythm, the terminations having dropped off by the change of language, the stresses come together and so the rhythm is sprung. (4) It arises in common verse when reversed or counterpointed, for the same reason. (108)

Clearly, for Hopkins, the importance of sprung rhythm is its close association with what is "natural"; it is the "native and natural rhythm of speech, the least forced, the most rhetorical and emphatic of all rhythms" (228). Using such "natural rhythms," the actual form of the poems moves closer to expressing the divinity within nature; if nature is "never spent" in its presencing of the Godhead, then the best tools to express the nature/divinity should also be as "natural" as possible, the materiality of the verse participating in the materiality of the divinity.

Thus, Hopkins' verse bears much resemblance to Whitman's natural free verse, although the English poet tends to rely on more formulaic patterns (e. g. the sonnet). Perhaps the prosaic musicality of "Pied Beauty" comes closest to Whitman's verse in both its appreciation of the eternal unity of natural diversity and in its attempt at natural expression:

Glory be to God for dappled things --  
 For skies of couple-colour as a brindèd cow;  
     For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;  
 Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;  
 Landscape plotted and pieced -- fold, fallow, and plough;  
     And áll trades, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spáre, strange;  
 Whatever is fickle, frecklèd (who knows how?)  
     With swift, slów; sweet, sóur; adázze, díim;  
 He fathers-forth whose beauty is pást change:  
     Práise him. (132-133)

As Virginia Ellis comments, "In both overall and specific movement also the poem dramatizes divine order around and within apparently random 'dapple.' Overall, the movement is from the keynote, the 'one,' down to the beauty and variety and changefulness of the many, and back to the unity and constancy of the Creator who is 'past change'" (162). Commenting on the poet's peculiar use of language and syntax, Michael Sprinkler notes, "It has often been observed that the characteristic heavy alliteration, assonance, and end rhymes in many of Hopkins' poems establish unexpected relationships among widely divergent things and qualities in nature" (61). The collision of "swift, slow; sweet, sour; dazzle, dim," creates a musicality and harmony out of opposites and potentially dissonant sounds. Ultimately, such musicality represents the multiplicity and variety of the natural realm is "instressed" with the unchanging eternalness of God, leading to his praise in the poem's final two stresses. The physical and spiritual realms are thus unified with any potentially damaging difference between singularity and plurality obliterated. Granted, Hopkins seems to suggest a hierarchy, since God "fathers-forth" the natural beauty, but the exuberant natural description so characteristic of Whitman still permeates the piece; as with the American poet, it is an appreciation of the natural splendors around Hopkins, expressed with such vibrancy and life

affirmation, which leads the poet to an awareness of the presence of an eternal realm, "whose beauty is past change."

These considerations of nature and God find a poignant and compelling relevance for the idea of the self in Hopkins' masterpiece, "The Wreck of the Deutschland." As prelude to a discussion of this piece, it will be helpful to review some of Hopkins' prose writings on the subject of the self. In 1880, five years after Hopkins completed "Deutschland," he wrote about the self,

when I consider my selfbeing, my consciousness and feeling of myself, that taste of myself, of I and me above and in all things, which is more distinctive than the taste of ale or alum, more distinctive than the smell of walnutleaf or camphor, and is incommunicable by any means to another man (as when I was a child I used to ask myself: What must it be to be someone else?) Nothing else in nature comes near this unspeakable stress of pitch, distinctiveness, and selving, this selfbeing of my own. (282)

The instress of the individual is the most powerful and distinctive perception of the poet, but Hopkins' explanation betrays the fear of isolation; the self is so distinctive that "nothing explains it or resembles it," and out of a fear of alienation from other selves, the poet asks, "What must it be to be someone else?"

In an 1879 letter to Bridges, Hopkins argues about the relation between the body and the soul, and his thoughts are in essence a counter argument to the fear of isolation:

For though even bodily beauty, even the beauty of blooming health, is from the soul, in the sense, as we Aristotelian Catholics say, that the soul is the form of the body, yet the soul may have no other beauty, so to speak, than that which it expresses in the symmetry of the body -- barring those blurs in the cast which w[oul]d not be found in the die or the mould. (240)

Hopkins essentially collapses the Cartesian split, a move paralleling his appreciation of the instress of God throughout the natural realm and reminiscent of Whitman's rejection of Cartesianism; just as the spirit of God can be known through nature, so the soul can be glimpsed through the body. Thus, the distinctiveness of the self, the instress of the soul, finds symmetrical expression in the body, which can have contact with other bodies -- and their symmetrical souls. As the distance of God finds erasure in his presence through Nature, so too can the individual self overcome isolation through bodily expression of human contact. Whitman argues in "Song of Myself" that a "touch" can quiver him into identity, and although Hopkins the Jesuit might take a more chaste view of what constitutes such a "touch," his emphasis is still strongly on physical presencing of the self; as Walter Ong states, "The self for Hopkins is not solipsistic or even disengaged from the world. Despite its inwardness, its privacy, its isolation [as expressed in the 1880 journal entry cited above], it appropriates and exists in the material world" (40-41).

For Hopkins the Christian, the most significant blending of the material and the spiritual comes in the physical presence of God through the Body of Christ. The incarnated Deity signifies a wholeness and harmony which overcomes the absence of God and individual spiritual isolation. J. Hillis Miller comments,

Beginning with a sense of his own isolation and idiosyncrasy, Hopkins turns outside himself to nature, to poetry, and to God. Gradually he integrates all things into one chorus of many voices all singing . . . the name of Christ. Poetry is the imitation and echo of this chorus. Even the poet, by virtue of his share in the common nature, is assimilated into the melody of creation. The inscapes of words, the inscapes of nature, the inscape of the self can be expressed at once as the presence of Christ . . . . The inspiration of poetry is always, in one way or another, the poet's affective response to the omnipresence of Christ. (323-24)

The "Wreck of the Deutschland" explores this conceptualization of the self and directly relates it to the presencing of God in the "material world." His poetic meditation on the embodying of the divine, in both the Incarnation and the storm which the poem describes, informs the poet's construction of his own self; more specifically, Hopkins identifies the relation between his grace-filled soul and his physical body as parallel to the expression of the divinity through the heroic nun depicted in the poem, as well as the incarnation of Christ.

The poem begins with a dedication to the nuns who were the original inspiration for the poem:

Dec. 6, 7 1875

to the happy memory of five Franciscan nuns,  
exiles by the Falck Laws, drowned between  
midnight and morning of December 7.

Despite this apparent declaration of the poem's subject matter (the five Franciscan nuns and their death), the first part of the poem is an exposition of selfhood. Demarcated by the poet as the first ten stanzas, part one opens with an exploration of the relationship between the poet's self and God:

Thou mastering me  
God! giver of breath and bread;  
World's strand, sway of the sea;  
Lord of living and dead;  
Thou hast bound bones and veins in me, fastened me flesh,  
And after it almost únmade, what with dread,  
Thy doing: and dost thou touch me afresh?  
Over again I feel thy finger and find thée. (110)

The poet's self is God-created, "fastened [in] flesh," and seemingly kept in a state of tension between wonder and dread. The self is "touch[ed] afresh" by God, quivered to identity, flesh and divinity finding contact even as such contact threatens to "unmake" the self.

The next three stanzas variously express the "terror" of the "stress" of divine grace as it touches the poet. Although he is "soft sift In an hourglass," he perceives the divinity suffusing everything around him:

I kiss my hand  
 To the stars, lovely-asunder  
 Starlight, wafting him out of it; and  
 Glow, glory in thunder;  
 Kiss my hand to the dappled-with-damson west:  
 Since, though he is under the world's splendour and wonder,  
 His mystery must be instressed, stressed;  
 For I greet him the days I meet him, and bless when I understand.  
 (111)

The mystery of God, instressed throughout the world, is all but palpable to the poet, especially in the workings of nature. Additionally, as revealed in the sixth stanza, such "stress" is eternal, "rid[ing] time like riding a river" (111). Thus, Hopkins repeats the romantic tropes of the presence of an eternal, supernaturally-fused natural realm.

The seventh and eight stanzas Christianize the poet's romanticism by offering Christ as the ultimate embodiment of the transcendent:

It dates from day  
 Of his going in Galilee;  
 Warm-laid grave of a womb-life grey;  
 Manger, maiden's knee;  
 The dense and the driven Passion, and frightful sweat;  
 Thence the discharge of it, there its swelling to be,  
 Though felt before, though in high flood yet --  
 What none would have known of it, only the heart, being hard at  
 bay,

Is out with it! Oh,  
 We lash with the best or worst  
 Word last! How a lush-kept plush-capped sloe  
 Will, mouthed to flesh-burst,  
 Gush! -- flush the man, the being with it, sour or sweet,



Brim, in a flash, full! -- Hither then, last or first,  
 To hero of Calvary, Christ's feet --  
 Never ask if meaning it, wanting it, warned of it -- men go.  
 (111-112)

Christ, almost bursting the flesh, is able to transcend the "Warm-laid grave of a womb-grey life," and his "dense and driven Passion" charges his physical existence till it is gushing, brimming, collapsing "sour and sweet"; the physical rises with Christ into the heroic actions of Calvary, the incarnated body, its death, and resurrection becoming the object of the poet's adoration and poetic expression.

Recalling the opening lines of the poem, when Hopkins addressed God as "Thou mastering me," the ninth and tenth stanzas place the self in subordination to the mastery of Christ, especially as it is revealed in the seventh and eight stanzas. Indeed, Christ's near "flesh-burst" physical exuberance of his Incarnation recalls the near "unmaking" of the poet as his flesh-fastened body is touched by the divinity; the suffusion and presence of God throughout the physical world and through the body of Christ becomes paradigmatic for the poet's understanding of his own self: God's grace sustains the poet as it suffuses his physical being, and thus the poet places himself, as a body and soul, in relation to the divine embodiment of the Godhead in Christ. The poet's being and self are directed at "meeting" and "blessing" (see stanza five) the "instressed"

physicality of God, just as the poet's own body is emblematic of such "stress." Speaking of Christ as the "common nature," Hillis Miller says, "Each created thing [including the self] is a version of Christ and derives its being from the way it expresses Christ's nature in a unique way. All things rhyme in Christ" (313). The uniqueness or peculiarity of the self is not an alienating feature if it can link itself to Christ as an expression of the divine.

The second part of the poem, which consists of the remaining twenty five stanzas, explores the significance of the shipwreck which resulted in the drowning of five Franciscan nuns. The relevance and importance of the event to the poet and his concept of the self become apparent in the section's very first stanza:

'Some find me a sword; some  
The flange and the rail; flame,  
Fang, or flood' goes Death on drum,  
And storms bugle his fame.  
But wé dréam we are rooted in earth -- Dust!  
Flesh falls within sight of us, we, though our flower the same,  
Wave with the meadow, forget that there must  
The sour scythe cringe, and the blear share come. (112)

The same flesh which earlier aided the poet in proclaiming God's glory is now a bitter reminder of the speaker's eventual physical demise. Indeed, the question seems to be, what is the role of death, the cessation of physical life, in a universe whose physicality is supposedly a sign of the presence of the divinity? The limitation

imposed by death seems to foil the limitlessness of the eternal God -- or at least the eternal God's expression in the natural realm.

To begin unraveling this problem, Hopkins relates in the next several stanzas the story of the *Deutschland*, a ship sailing from Bremen and carrying, among many others, five nuns forced to leave their homeland because of religious persecution. The verse highlights the seeming brutality of nature, the "widow-making unchilding unfathering deeps" (113), but in stanza seventeen, the poet's attention turns to one particular individual: "a lioness arose breasting the babble, A prophetess towered in the tumult, a virginal tongue told" (114).

Immediately, the poet breaks the story line and depicts his self writing the poem:

Ah, touched in your bower of bone  
Are you! turned for an exquisite smart,  
Have you! make words break from me here all alone,  
Do you! -- mother of being in me, heart.  
O unteachably after evil, but uttering truth,  
Why, tears! is it? tears; such a melting, a madrigal start!  
Never-eldering revel and river of youth,  
What can it be, this glee? the good you have there of your own?  
(114)

The poet questions his own response to the narrative he is relating, and the reader senses that Hopkins is trying to understand his attraction and feelings of sympathy to the characters he is writing about. From what he tells us, they have deeply moved him, but he

nevertheless questions why the "words break from me here all alone."

The connection between the poet and nun comes exuberantly expressed in the following stanza:

Sister, a sister calling  
A master, her master and mine! --  
And the inboard seas run swirling and hawling;  
The rash smart slogging brine  
Blinds her; but shé that weather sees óne thing, one;  
Has one fetching her: she rears herself to divine  
Ears, and the call of the tall nun  
To the men in the tops and the tackle rode over the storm's  
brawling. (114)

The poet and sister acknowledge the same "master," and Hopkins sympathizes with her call to the "divine . . . over the storm's brawling." A very un-Whitmanian (and un-Rimbaldian) split occurs as the divine is somewhat privileged over the chaos of the material world; especially in stanza twenty one, Hopkins draws a clear distinction between "Surf, snow, river, and earth [which] Gnashed" and "thou [who] art above, thou Orion of light" (115).

But in the following stanza the poet once again links the natural and supernatural and begins a more cogent appraisal of death; it should not surprise us that Christ figures prominently in his configurations:

Five! the finding and sake  
And cipher of suffering Christ.  
Mark, the mark is of man's make

And the word of it Sacrificed.  
 But he scores it in scarlet himself on his own bespoken,  
 Before-time-taken, dearest prized and priced --  
 Stigma, signal, cinquefoil token  
 For lettering of the lamb's fleece, ruddying of the rose-flake.  
 (115)

Christ, the incarnated divinity, resurfaces as emblematic of both the supernaturally-suffused natural realm and the answer to the problem of death. Indeed, Christ's death, represented by the five wounds of the stigmata (also recalling the five nuns on the Deutschland), becomes further physical demonstration of his Faith and Divinity. The sting of death is thus tempered if it can become yet more material expression of the Godhead.

Again, the poet interjects his own presence into the poem as he relates the nun's recognition of Christ at her own death:

Away in the loveable west,  
 On a pastoral forehead of Wales,  
 I was under a roof here, I was at rest,  
 And they the prey of the gales;  
 She to the black-about air, to the breaker, the thickly  
 Falling flakes, to the throng that catches and quails  
 Was calling 'O Christ, Christ, come quickly':  
 The cross to her she calls Christ to her, christens her wild-worst  
 Best. (116)

Just as the poet's thoughts on death conjured up a consideration of Christ in stanza twenty two, so too does the nun's approaching death lead her to Christ. All three -- poet, sister, and Christ -- are tied together, mutually calling each other forth. Indeed, such linkages help define the situation of the self, calling the self out of its

isolation as that self recognizes its dependence on Christ and his physical transcendence in the face of physical demise.

In the next several stanzas, Hopkins considers these interrelations as he meditates on the meaning of the nun's last words: "The majesty! What did she mean?" (116). He suggests that she might have been asking for ease in her death or perhaps directly relating/identifying with Christ, but he rejects both ideas. His realization of what she meant, according to him, comes in stanzas twenty eight and twenty nine:

But how shall I . . . make me room there:  
Reach me a . . . Fancy, come faster --  
Strike you the sight of it? look at it loom there,  
Thing that she . . . There then! the Master,  
*Ipse*, the only one, Christ, King, Head:  
He was to cure the extremity where he had cast her;  
Do, deal, lord it with living and dead;  
Let him ride, her pride, in his triumph, despatch and have done  
with his doom there.

Ah! there was a heart right!  
There was single eye!  
Read the unshapeable shock night  
And knew the who and the why;  
Wording it how but by him that present and past,  
Heaven and earth are word of, worded by? --  
The Simon Peter of a soul! to the blast  
Tárpéian-fast, but a blown beacon of light. (117)

The inarticulateness of the twenty eighth stanza gives way to the proclamation that Christ "was to cure the extremity where he had cast her." As Catherine Phillips suggests, the nun "realized that

Christ is present in nature. She perceived that the storm occurred for a divine purpose" (340). For the believer, "Heaven and earth are worded by" Christ, who remains in control of the physical realm despite the threat of death, thus allowing the nun to utter her Word; as the last lines of stanza thirty comment, "But here [in the nun's last words] was heart-throe, birth of a brain, Word, that heard and kept thee and uttered thee outright" (117). Recalling that Christ is *logos*, these lines suggest a belief in the power of words to presence the divinity, not unlike the presencing of the divine in the natural realm. Indeed, words are the point of commonality between poet, nun, and Christ: Christ is the eternal, fully present, fully embodied Word; the nun utters the Word in death, linking her to the transcendent immortality of the Deity; and the poet records and relates the Word, noting how it binds the poet and the nun as he tells her tale and further binds both of them to Christ.

In fact, it seems that Hopkins' principle desire is to relate his self to the situation and characters he writes about, and Jeffrey Loomis characterizes the poem as "zealous to announce . . . the Logos" (73). The first line of stanza twenty eight speaks to this point as it asks, "But how shall I . . . make me room there" (117). The poet wants to place himself in relation to the nun and Christ, thus emphasizing the presence of the divinity within himself, just as the

eternal Word suffuses sister, world, and Christ. Such identification grows stronger as the poem draws to a close:

I admire thee, master of the tides,  
Of the Yore-flood, of the year's fall;  
The recurb and the recovery of the gulf's sides,  
The girth of it and the wharf of it and the wall;  
Stanching, quenching ocean of a motionable mind;  
Ground of being, and granite of it: past all  
Grásp Gód, thróned behind  
Death with a sovereignty that heeds but hides, bodes but abides.  
(118)

Much like Whitman, Hopkins identifies the underlying eternity of the natural realm, an eternity which can transform Death, and he admires this eternity, suggesting that God, the "Ground of Being," can be grasped.

His vision of the intersuffusion of divinity and nature overcoming death and fortifying a conception of the self reaches its climax in the poem's two concluding stanzas:

Now burn, new born to the world,  
Double-naturèd name,  
The heaven-flung, heart-fleshed, maiden-furled  
Miracle-in-Mary-of-flame,  
Mid-numbered he in three of the thunder-throne!  
Not a dooms-day dazzle in his coming nor dark as he came;  
King, but royally reclaiming his own;  
A released shówer, let flásh to the shíre, not a líghtning of fíre  
hard-húrlèd.

Dame, at our door  
Drówned, and among óur shóals,  
Remember us in the roads, the heaven-haven of the reward:  
Our Kíng back, Oh, upon Énglish sóuls!  
Let him easter in us, be a dayspring to dimness of us, be a



crimson-cressed east,  
 More brightening her, rare-dear Britain, as his reign rolls,  
 Pride, rose, prince, hero of us, high-priest,  
 Our heart's charity's hearth's fire, our thoughts' chivalry's  
 throng's Lord. (118-119)

The "heaven-flung, heart-fleshed" maiden is reclaimed by Christ, achieving unity with the divinity, and the poet hopes to identify with Christ through her. If the Hopkinsian self is sustained through the grace of the divinity, as the beginning of the poem suggests, then Hopkins attempts to reify that grace and self suspension through the enlightened example of the sister and her identification with Christ. Although Hopkins does not espouse the total, radical identification of Rimbaud's "Je est un autre," he nonetheless relies on bringing himself into close proximity with the presence of Christ and the nun as necessary for the maintenance of his selfhood. In a conceptualization of the self as spiritual soul instressing physical body, then the incarnated Christ and the sister calling on Christ become the paradigms of selfhood for the poet to associate and identify his own self with.

Thus, Hopkins, Rimbaud, and Whitman all seek an awareness of the presence of the divine, eternal "Other" through which their selfhood is maintained or realized. This "Other" is essentially immortal, collapsing boundaries between "I" and "you" and harmonizing the difference between the eternal spiritual realm and a mortal

physicality. The self can obtain consciousness of and identification with a divine presence through the senses, and language can link the individual to an eternal communion; words, like the physical field of the body or nature, can communicate the self to others, making the self palpably present.

However, as with Whitman and Rimbaud, Hopkins' equality of the natural and supernatural is not unproblematical for a construction of the self. Throughout the "Wreck of the Deutschland," Hopkins deals with death as a problem for divine physicality, and his resolution is admirable as well as poetically beautiful. But even in the last stanza of the poem, Hopkins comments on the "dimness of us"; the suffusion of God throughout the natural realm is not unclouded, and later poems of all three poets reveal a growing preoccupation with this dimness.

### **Chapter Three: The Threat of Absence**

In the preceding chapter, we discussed Whitman's, Rimbaud's, and Hopkins' romantic construction of the self; attempting to save the individual from subjectivity and isolation, each poet established a relationship between "self" and "other" through a transcendent physicality which allowed the inner self (or soul) to obtain intersubjectivity and contact with a divine or "eternal unknown." Through the equation or close association of the (inner) spiritual with the (outer) physical, the poets helped the self to escape subjectivity, to assist self-definition through physical contact with others, and to ease the fear of the self's extinction with the cessation of physical life.

As we turn to the later verse of these three poets, we discover a gradual slippage in the poets' certainty that their ideals will hold. Specifically, each poet comes to a crisis which shakes his faith in the ability of the self to escape isolation, and the poetry of the mature poets reflects a growing tension, uneasiness, and suspicion of death, indicative of an increasing ambivalence about the romantic

project. Of especial interest and consideration vis-à-vis these developments will be Whitman's civil war poetry, Rimbaud's *Une saison en enfer*, and Hopkins' "Terrible Sonnets."

Whitman's construction of the self, so powerfully expressed in "Song of Myself," continues into the corpus of *Leaves of Grass*, which the poet added to and amended from 1856 to his death in 1892. The poems written in the 1860s, shortly after the initial editions of *Leaves of Grass* appeared, expound on and affirm the poet's original optimism in the self's ability to partake in (if not actually initiate) a universal harmony and obtain a divinely eternal spiritual and physical transcendence.

Whitman's verse proclaims the equality of the body and soul, maintaining the power of physical touch to establish identity, to rescue the inner self from isolation and to touch eternity. To affirm this conception of the self, the poet declares the eternalness of the physical body, the process of touch continuing to presence the self forever: "How can the real body ever die and be buried?" ("Starting from Paumanok," 183).

For the poet, physical contact is literally maintained across and through the poetic corpus; he tells us in "Song of the Rolling Earth,"

Human bodies are words, myriads of words,  
In the best poems re-appears the body, man's or woman's,  
well-shaped, natural, gay,

Every part able, active, receptive, without shame or the need  
of shame.) (363)

The poem reproduces the body, continuing the physical presence of the poet and proclaiming his ability to contact the reader, that "other" whom the poet may never meet but who is nonetheless of extreme significance in maintaining his identity:

Whoever you are, now I place my hand upon you, that you  
be my poem,  
I whisper with my lips close to your ear,  
I have loved many women and men, but I love none better  
than you. (375)

Through words, the poet can physically touch another -- with his self, the poetry, and the other all becoming one harmonious poem of love and mutual presence. If the self can maintain this continuous identity and contact, it will never be isolated and will never die.

Indeed, Whitman's desire is for such contact to be eternal, constantly affirming the self and snatching it from total isolation and self-absorption. With the emphasis on touch, concepts of sexuality become intermingled with the poetic project; for Whitman, "the Poet begets" ("Song of the Answerer," 317), and most poems in "Children of Adam," the section following "Song of Myself," proclaim that "sex contains all, bodies, souls, Meanings, proofs . . . [etc.]" (258). The poet becomes a father, begetting others who carry and continue his physical presence within themselves, thus insuring that his presence is eternal since the children beget

their own children who beget yet other children ad infinitum. The poem partakes in this eternal physicality since it too is a child of the Poet, and Whitman declares, "I shall look for loving crops from the birth, life, death, immortality, I plant so lovingly now" (260); the planting of the poem, the poet's seed, literally begets immortality, as the poet projects his self, his presence, through his future readership into eternity.

One of Whitman's most famous poems, "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," beautifully encapsulates and problematizes these ideas in a poem about the eternalness of the poetic project. The poem narrates a poet's awakening to the voice of another -- in particular, a bird singing a plaintive song. The poet, struck by the birdsong, listens and incorporates the song into himself:

I, with bare feet, a child, the wind wafting my hair,  
Listen'd long and long.

Listen'd to keep, to sing, now translating the notes,  
Following you my brother. (390)

The poet establishes connection with the bird, affirming their relationship as brother singers. In a striking passage, the speaker declares his desire to perpetuate for eternity the song he has heard:

Demon or bird! (said the boy's soul,  
Is it indeed toward your mate you sing? or is it really to me?  
For I, that was a child, my tongue's use sleeping, now I  
have heard you,

Now in a moment I know what I am for, I awake,  
And already a thousand singers, a thousand songs, clearer,  
louder and more sorrowful than yours,  
A thousand warbling echoes have started to life within me,  
never to die.

O you singer solitary, singing by yourself, projecting me,  
O solitary me listening, never more shall I cease  
perpetuating you,  
Never more shall I escape, never more the reverberations,  
Never more the cries of unsatisfied love be absent from me,  
Never again leave me to be the peaceful child I was before  
what there in the night,  
By the sea under the yellow and sagging moon,  
The messenger there arous'd, the fire, the sweet hell within,  
The unknown want, the destiny of me.

(392-393)

The isolation of the solitary singer is broken by the poet who will himself project the bird's song into eternity: "A thousand warbling echoes have started to life within me, never to die." The poem will thus establish an eternal communion, saving the solitary singer from alienation and oblivion.

Indeed, the call of the poet's "destiny" is actually sparked by a cry to be saved from such isolation. The birdsong, which the speaker incorporates and perpetuates, is essentially a song of absence; the bird sings *"uselessly, uselessly all the night"*:

*O past! O happy life! O songs of joy!  
In the air, in the woods, over fields,  
Loved! loved! loved! loved! loved!  
But my mate no more, no more with me!  
We two together no more.*

(392)

The loss of the bird's mate, presumably dead, provokes the song of isolation, an isolation which the poet will hopefully redeem by making it part of a *communal* eternity.

Ironically, the poetic encoding of the birdsong leads the poet to proclaim an eternity, albeit shared, of isolation: the poem will forever presence an absence. The ending of the poem emphasizes this paradox:

A word then, (for I will conquer it,  
The word final, superior to all,  
Subtle, sent up -- what is it? -- I listen;  
Are you whispering it, and have been all the time, you sea-  
waves?  
Is that it from your liquid rims and wet sands?

Whereto answering, the sea,  
Delaying not, hurrying not,  
Whisper'd me through the night, and very plainly before  
daybreak,  
Lisp'd to me the low and delicious word death,  
And again death, death, death, death,  
Hissing melodious, neither like the bird nor like my arous'd  
child's heart,  
But edging near as privately for me rustling at my feet,  
Creeping thence steadily up to my ears and laving me softly  
all over,  
Death, death, death, death, death. (393)

The poetic project, "never to die," finds its "word final, superior to all" in the concept of death -- of absence. The poet says it is the "word of the sweetest song and all songs," transforming the "loved, loved, loved, loved" into "death, death, death, death, death." But the reader is somewhat mystified by this seeming glorification



of death. If the poet is the progenitor of eternal communion through an immortal physicality, then what are we to make of this haunting adoration of death, of seeming physical absence?

Death isolates the bird by taking its mate and portends individual isolation through the loss of bodily contact, thus becoming a problematic for Whitman's poetics. We have already seen how it complicates the end of "Song of Myself," and later poems demonstrate how Whitman grapples again and again with the cessation of the individual's physical existence. According to Jimmie Killingsworth, Whitman had created "in the early poems . . . a sympathy that had once promised an every-renewing 'procreant' connection with the world, [which] now seemed to him demonic, a force leading ultimately to death, to his obliteration as a controlling author" (173). Of special concern is the conception of the self: if identity is established and maintained through "touch," then the physical cessation of touch must be recuperated somehow if selfhood is to embrace eternity and to escape the isolation which death seems to threaten.

The poems in "Drum Taps" forcefully articulate the problem the poet faces. The dream of harmony and life-affirming unity set forth in the 1855 Preface and poeticized in "Song of Myself" assumes nightmarish dimensions in the political fracturing and carnage of

the Civil War. "Drum Taps," written mostly in 1865, records the poet's often despairing response to the breakdown of the American Democracy he earlier praised: "We may be terror and carnage, and are so now, Not now are we any one of these spacious and haughty States, (nor any five, nor ten) ("Song of the Banner at Daybreak," 424). The poetry reflects this dissolution, with death becoming the focus of the poet's song: "Demons and death then I sing, Put in all, aye all will I, sword-shaped pennant for war" (425).

Whitman's world becomes one of increasing chaos and confusion, as the previous harmony he delighted in slips away: "Yet a mournful wail and low sob I fancied I hear through the dark, In a lull of the deafening confusion" ("Rise O Days from Your Fathomless Deep," (428); the jubilant "Song of Myself" becomes a sob among a "deafening confusion," and the poet cannot seem to rectify or make beautiful the noise of death surrounding him. "The Centenarian's Story" highlights this fall into confusion and the especial horror of death. The centenarian claims, "As I talk I remember all, I remember the Declaration" (431); but the glorious days of unity represented by the Declaration are over, having been replaced by civil strife and death:

It sickens me yet, that slaughter!  
I saw the moisture gather in drops on the face of the General.  
I saw how he wrung his hands in anguish. (433)

The poetic poignancy and significance of the Civil War is potent in the verses in which Whitman describes his participation in the war as a wound dresser. In "Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night," the poet narrates how he tended to a dying soldier with a "Vigil of silence, love and death, vigil for you my son and my soldier" (439); the importance of the experience for Whitman finds expression in the poem's concluding lines:

And there and then and bathed by the rising sun, my son in  
his grave, in his rude-dug grave I deposited,  
Ending my vigil strange with that, vigil of night and battle-  
field dim,  
Vigil for boy of responding kisses, (never again on earth  
responding,)  
Vigil for comrade swiftly slain, vigil I never forget, how as  
day brighten'd,  
I rose from the chill ground and folded my soldier well in  
his blanket,  
And buried him where he fell. (439)

The death of the boy strikes the poet since it portends a loss of physical contact; the soldier, "never again on earth responding," leaves the poet bereft of physical touch and communion, and the harmony of contact expressed in "Song of Myself" dissolves into the boy's grave.

A few pages later, the poem "A Sight in Camp in the Daybreak Gray and Dim" continues to accentuate the poet's loss:

Young man I think I know you -- I think this face is the face  
of the Christ himself,  
Dead and divine and brother of all, and here again he lies. (441)

The "you" Whitman was so confident of in "Song of Myself" is qualified as he tells us "I think I know you"; perhaps relating the soldier to Christ can help the poet reclaim a sense of universal brotherhood, but the poem ends not with a physical resurrection but with a reminder of the boy's death: ". . . and here again he lies."

"The Wound-Dresser" beautifully depicts the plight of the poet and his fears of the death which surrounds him:

An old man bending I come among new faces,  
 Years looking backward resuming in answer to children,  
 Come tell us old man, as from young men and maidens that  
     love me,  
 (Arous'd and angry, I'd thought to beat the alarum, and urge  
     relentless war,  
 But soon my fingers fail'd me, my face droop'd and I  
     resign'd myself,  
 To sit by the wounded and soothe them, or silently watch  
     the dead). (442-443)

The alarum the poet would sound against the horror he sees turns into the silence of resignation. Death overwhelms the poet's call to life and the jubilant song is hushed.

The poet's silence comes from his renewed fear of isolation. The soldier boys, whom Whitman loves so much, slowly die, leaving the poet devoid of the contact which "quivers him to identity." He tries to remain hopeful:

I am faithful, I do not give out,  
 The fractur'd thigh, the knee, the wound in the abdomen,  
 These and more I dress with impassive hand, (yet deep in  
     my breast a fire, a burning flame). (445)

His faithfulness and sense of purpose emanate from his physical contact with the soldiers as he dresses their wounds, but the parenthetical comment points to a part of the poet which is isolated, an isolation graphically highlighted by the parentheses. The "burning flame" (of anger? of pity?) is deep in his breast, seemingly removed from the contact of "I" and "you" which the poet once delighted in.

The poem's final stanza further emphasizes the alienation of the self:

Thus in silence in dreams' projections,  
 Returning, resuming, I thread my way through the hospitals,  
 The hurt and wounded I pacify with soothing hand,  
 I sit by the restless all the dark night, some are so young,  
 Some suffer so much, I recall the experience sweet and sad,  
 (Many a soldier's loving arms about this neck have cross'd  
     and rested,  
 Many a soldier's kiss dwells on these bearded lips). (445)

His contact with the soldiers is posited now in a world of dreams, further removed from the realm of physical contact. Again, the concluding remarks expressing the joy of contact within the loving brotherhood are placed in parentheses. Even the dwelling of the kisses on his lips is a reminder that the givers of those kisses are dead; hopefully, the kisses will remain, sustaining the soldiers' presence to the poet, but they -- the kisses and the soldiers -- already seem ethereal, removed. The poet "recall[s] the experience,"

but his memories are "sweet and sad" since the soldiers can no longer participate in the all-important union of self and other. We see in these poems the pain of memory and the growing self-absorption of dreams as the poet fails to maintain physical contact.

For a moment, the poet cries out for a sign of life amidst all of the incessant reminders of death and carnage:

Give me the splendid silent sun with all his beams full-dazzling,  
Give me juicy autumnal fruit ripe and red from the orchard,  
Give me a field where the unmow'd grass grows,  
Give me an arbor, give me the trellis'd grape,  
Give me fresh corn and wheat, give me serene-moving  
animals teaching content. ("Give me the Splendid Silent Sun," 446)

The joys of the natural realm return, but the harmony and universal contact and presence which the natural once signified for the poet are missing:

Give me to warble spontaneous songs recluse by myself, for  
my own ears only,  
Give me solitude, give my Nature, give me again O Nature  
your primal sanities! (446)

Whitman desires solitude, perhaps a respite from the horrors of death, but his communion with Nature no longer involves his awareness of an empathetic connection with all others; instead, his self retreats away from the painful loss of contact he experiences in the war. Whitman recognizes the change in his stance:

(O I see what I sought to escape, confronting, reversing my  
cries,  
I see my own soul trampling down what it ask'd for). (446)

Nonetheless, Whitman cannot remain isolated for too long, and towards the end of "Drum Taps" he recognizes that he must come to terms with Death, which he directly approaches in an appropriately titled poem, "Reconciliation":

Word over all, beautiful as the sky,  
Beautiful that war and all its deeds of carnage must in time  
be utterly lost,  
That the hands of the sisters Death and Night incessantly  
softly wash again, and ever again, this soil'd world;  
For my enemy is dead, a man divine as myself is dead,  
I look where he lies white-faced and still in the coffin -- I  
draw near,  
Bend down and touch lightly with my lips the white face in  
the coffin. (453)

The poet still hopes to enact the "Word" which will cleanse the world of "its deeds of carnage"; perhaps Death itself can help wash "this soil'd world," but the poet still hopes for a physical reconciliation to overcome his fears. The scene with the enemy in the coffin resonates with Whitman's concerns about separation on several levels. First, the enemy is by nature removed from the poet's self, at odds with that self and indicative of the disharmony of war. Second, the enemy is dead and is thus further removed from the poet's self since that "other" cannot obtain physical contact with the poet's self. The kiss which Whitman offers signifies his desire

to reconcile the enemy with himself -- to bring his self and the alienated other back into contact and communion; furthermore, the lips which kiss "the white face in the coffin" are also those of a singer, and perhaps Whitman hopes his song will be rejuvenated by the renewed physical contact.

Indeed, the kiss is repeated in one of the very last songs of "Drum Taps," "Spirit Whose Word is Done":

Spirit of hours I knew, all hectic red one day, but pale as  
death next day,  
Touch my mouth ere you depart, press my lips close,  
Leave me your pulses of rage -- bequeath them to me -- fill  
me with currents convulsive,  
Let them scorch and blister out of my chants when you are  
gone,  
Let them identify you to the future in these songs. (456)

As in "Song of Myself," the poet wants to beget to the future the experiences he has undergone, to keep alive and preserve the memory of the kisses on his bearded lips; hopefully, the poem will become the permanent, immortal record of his participation in the war. Again, as in earlier, more optimistic poems, the emphasis is on projecting the self physically into the future, maintaining contact and identity, the very word the poet uses in the last line. But the civil war has altered the poetics: Whitman tells us, "I know my words are weapons full of danger, full of death" (454). The words which earlier gave life or helped maintain the touch of identity are



now "full of death," of absence, and the poet's project assumes an ambivalence foreign to "Song of Myself":

Dear camerado! I confess I have urged you onward with me,  
and still urge you, without the least idea what is our  
destination,  
Or whether we shall be victorious, or utterly quell'd and  
defeated. (454)

The "eternally becoming" romantic ideal has been transformed into an aimless wandering where "victory" is doubted; death has sapped the poetic journeyer of his confidence and life-affirming joy, and Killingsworth notes a decisive shift in "Drum Taps" from an "erotic physicality" to a "preoccupation with death" (xviii). The poet still hopes the comrade -- the "other" -- will join him on the journey, but their path (the path of the self and other) is increasingly marked by separation, isolation, and death.

Whitman hopes to find some poetic and life-affirming recuperation in his beautiful ode "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," written in 1865-6, shortly after the war. Reminiscent of Milton's "Lycidas" and other great elegies, the poem allows Whitman to confront his grief at the death of President Lincoln and to attempt to reconcile himself to the problem of death. In fact, Lincoln's death is emblematic of the entire Civil War experience and the poet's overwhelming confrontation with death; towards the end of the poem, the war makes its appearance:

I saw battle-corpses, myriads of them,  
 And the white skeletons of young men, I saw them,  
 I saw the debris and debris of all the slain soldiers of the war,  
 But I saw they were not as was thought,  
 They themselves were fully at rest, they suffer'd not,  
 The living remain'd and suffer'd, the mother suffer'd,  
 And the wife and the child and the musing comrade suffer'd,  
 And the armies that remain'd suffer'd. (466)

Whitman seems willing to put his bad memories to rest, just as the soldiers are at rest and no longer suffering, and he uses the elegy to assist him in confronting the problematic of death.

The opening stanza sets the poem in motion, establishing the piece's principle concerns:

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd,  
 And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the  
 night,  
 I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with every-returning spring.  
 Ever-returning spring, trinity sure to me you bring,  
 Lilac blooming perennial and drooping star in the west,  
 And thought of him I love. (459)

The poet's memories of the other he loves will help him to maintain contact with that other, and the physical reminders of the natural world will augment his memory, helping the poet to obtain some kind of physical contact. Note how Whitman characterizes the spring as "ever-returning" and the lilac as "blooming perennial"; he reminds himself of the physical permanence so confidently proclaimed in "Song of Myself." Death may come, but the spring's return is eternal, allowing the poet to renew the reciprocal presence of self to other.

And the charm of the carol rapt me,  
As I held as if by their hands my comrades in the night,  
And the voice of my spirit tallied the song of the bird.  
(464)

*Over the tree-tops I float thee a song,  
Over the rising and sinking waves, over the myriad fields and  
the prairies wide,  
Over the dense-pack'd cities all and the teeming wharves and  
ways,  
I float this carol with joy, with joy to thee O death.  
(464-65)*

Death has fully become a part of the poet's/bird's song; especially in the last stanza, which speaks of the "myriad fields," the "dense-pack'd cities," the "teeming wharves and ways," and the other reminders of life, the poet's song is a carol of death.

Since death cannot be overcome, it must be incorporated into Whitman's cosmology, but he hopes towards the end of the poem to soften Death's sting:

Passing the visions, passing the night,  
 Passing, unloosing the hold of my comrades' hands,  
 Passing the song of the hermit bird and the tallying song of  
     my soul,  
 Victorious song, death's outlet song, yet varying ever-  
     altering song,  
 As low and wailing, yet clear the notes, rising and falling,  
     flooding the night,  
 Sadly sinking and fainting, as warning and warning, and yet  
     again bursting with joy,  
 Covering the earth and filling the spread of the heaven,  
 As that powerful psalm in the night I heard from recesses,  
 Passing, I leave thee lilac with heart-shaped leaves,  
 I leave thee there in the door-yard, blooming, returning with  
     spring. (466)

The song of death may be victorious, claiming the dearly-loved President and the poet's many comrades, but the persistent reminder of the lilac, "blooming, returning with spring," signifies the ultimate permanent presence of the physical realm -- even in the face of a ubiquitous cessation of physical life.

In the last stanza, Whitman "cease[s] from my song of thee [Death]," and he returns us to the poem's opening stanza:

Comrades mine and I in the midst, and their memory ever  
 to keep, for the dead I loved so well,  
 For the sweetest, wisest soul of all my days and lands -- and  
 this for his dear sake,  
 Lilac and star and bird twined with the chant of my soul,  
 There in the fragrant pines and the cedars dusk and dim. (467)

The lilac, star, and bird return, becoming wrapped up in the chant of the poet's soul; they are the reminders of life which help keep the memory of the dead ever present. Thus, the poet's self, even in accepting and incorporating death in his song, will not remain isolated but can obtain some level of the communion which he feels is so significant to his identity.

But at what price?

The "chant of [his] soul" is now mostly memory, a most insubstantial idiom. The gross physicality of "Song of Myself" has been greatly tempered -- reduced by the appearance of Death. The touch which sustained the poet's identity slips away from him, and he must escape self isolation with less and less substantial means -- through memory and hope in an ever-returning spring.

This slippage in identity finds a profoundly personal expression in the poems of the "Calamus" section of *Leaves of Grass*. In these highly sexually-charged poems, the poet explores his sexuality, the ultimate expression of the "touch" he uses to establish his identity. But he discovers that, like death, his sexual expression (though

highly physical) is hardly an unproblematic way of reaching the "other" and escaping isolation. Killingsworth comments that "a darkness enters and enriches the psychological drama. The fear of death, of rejection, of unfulfilled desire, and the lack of reciprocity on the part of the lover/reader is suggested" (121).

As with the poems of "Drum Taps" and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," the "Calamus" poems are concerned with death and the attempt to overcome or recuperate any consequences death might have to the physical body. The poem "Scented Herbage of My Breast" reiterates this aim vis-à-vis its relation to poetry:

Scented herbage of my breast,  
Leaves from you I glean, I write, to be perused best  
afterwards,  
Tomb-leaves, body-leaves growing up above me above death,  
Perennial roots, tall leaves, O the winter shall not freeze your  
delicate leaves,  
Every year shall you bloom again, out from where you  
retired you shall emerge again;  
O I do not know whether many passing by will discover you  
or inhale your faint odor, but I believe a few will. (268)

The leaves of grass are the poems which the poet bequeaths to the world, ever returning like the spring in the elegy to Lincoln. Their "perennial roots" transcend death and allow others -- even if only "a few" -- to make contact with the poet, presencing him forever through the verse. The poet meditates on the inevitability of death, but he declares, "Through me shall the words be said to make death

exhilarating"; the poet's words, which he claims shall live after him, will transform death into life-affirmation.

What do the poems consist of? The poet asks the reader that question in the poem "What Think You I Take My Pen in Hand?" Neither the majestic battle-ship nor the splendors of the past day (or night, for that matter) propel his poetry --

But merely of two simple men I saw to-day on the pier in the  
midst of the crowd, parting the parting of dear friends,  
The one to remain hung on the other's neck and passionately  
kiss'd him,  
While the one to depart tightly prest the one to remain in  
his arms. (284-285)

As in "Song of Myself," the poem celebrates the union of self and other, especially as it manifests itself physically; the two men pictured in this poem cling to one another, dispelling individual isolation in a physical confirmation of their love. There is a threatening departure, but even death shall not separate the two because the poem will continue to presence their identity to one another for ever.

Whitman believes -- or wants to believe -- strongly in this physical affirmation of identity, and he addresses the "other" in "Whoever You are Holding Me Now in Hand":

Or if you will, thrusting me beneath your clothing,  
Where I may feel the throbs of you heart or rest upon  
your hip,  
Carry me when you go forth over land or sea;

For thus merely touching you is enough, is best,  
 And thus touching you would I silently sleep and be carried  
 eternally. (271)

The other, who could even be the reader holding a copy of *Leaves of Grass* in his hand, touches the poet and, in Whitman's universe, thus identifies the poet eternally. The book will continue to presence his identity (as it presences the union of self and other in the previous poem) as long as the physical touch of self/text and other/reader is maintained.

But the very next stanza reveals some of the poet's ambivalence about the ability of the text to presence:

But these leaves conning you con at peril,  
 For these leaves and me you will not understand,  
 They will elude you at first and still more afterward, I will  
     certainly elude you,  
 Even while you should think you had unquestionably caught  
     me, behold!  
 Already you see I have escaped from you. (271)

An admitted slippage can occur in the physical contact, and Whitman maintains, "For all is useless without that which you may guess at many times and not hit that which I hinted at" (271). The ambiguity of "that," as well as the tortured syntax of the line, confuses instead of clarifies the poet's presence. Some critics see in this hinting a veiled reference to Whitman's desire for homosexual liberation, but whatever the intention, the poet's language does not clearly presence his meaning; if anything, it eclipses his identity.



This ambiguity intensifies in "Of the Terrible Doubt of Appearances":

Of the terrible doubt of appearances,  
 Of the uncertainty after all, that we may be deluded,  
 That may-be reliance and hope are but speculations after all,  
 That may-be identity beyond the grave is a beautiful fable  
     only,  
 May-be the things I perceive, the animals, plants, men, hills,  
     shining and flowing waters,  
 The skies of day and night, colors, densities, forms, may-be  
     these are (as doubtless they are) only apparitions, and  
     the real something has yet to be known. (274)

Kant, whom Whitman mentions along with Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel in the poem following, "The Base of All Metaphysics," makes a bizarre appearance as the poet questions the power of phenomenal experience to presence noumenal identity. Even the ability to maintain contact "beyond the grave" is called into doubt, and the poet's world slips from identity, union, and presence into speculation, uncertainty, and apparition.

He soon tries to reassure himself by affirming the presence of his loved ones:

To me these and the like of these are curiously answer'd by  
     my lovers, my dear friends,  
 When he whom I love travels with me or sits a long while  
     holding me by the hand,  
 When the subtle air, the impalpable, the sense that words  
     and reason hold not surround us and pervade us,  
 Then I am charged with untold and untellable wisdom, I am  
     silent, I require nothing further,  
 I cannot answer the question of appearances or that of  
     identity beyond the grave,

But I walk or sit indifferent, I am satisfied,  
 He ahold of my hand has completely satisfied me. (274-75)

The reader gets the impression, however, that such comfort is not completely satisfactory; the physical presence of the lover, "holding me by the hand," is not carried beyond the immediacy of the moment, and the power of words to maintain/sustain this contact and identity seem to fail. Words are emptied of their sense, and the "wisdom" of his love is "untellable"; Whitman makes a major move away from physical transcendence toward a conception of the "impalpable" -- a move which will never allow the poet to recuperate or regain the joyous physical exuberance of "Song of Myself."

This turn is not without its poignant beauty, expressed with great pathos in "Sometimes With One I Love":

Sometimes with one I love I fill myself with rage for fear I  
 effuse unreturn'd love,  
 But now I think there is no unreturn'd love, the pay is  
 certain one way or another,  
 (I loved a certain person ardently and my love was not  
 return'd,  
 Yet out of that I have written these songs). (285)

Sometimes the other fails to return the self's love, and the self becomes full of the rage and fear of isolation. The parentheses appear, commenting on the speaker's isolation when his "love was not return'd"; the poem records this, but note that it is a recording of an absence. The poetic language is now a trace of unfulfilled

desire, of the absent other; the former celebration of "I" and "you" turns into an elegy of an isolated "I."

The last poem of the "Calamus" section, "Full of Life Now," directly addresses the reader and attempts to return us to some of the poet's earlier optimism and belief in the power of the words and poetic language to identify and presence the self:

When you read these I that was visible am become invisible,  
Now it is you, compact, visible, realizing my poems,  
    seeking me,  
Fancying how happy you were if I could be with you and  
    become your comrade;  
Be it as if I were with you. (Be not too certain but I am  
    now with you.) (287)

The confirmation of the poet's presence to us is muted by the use of subjunctives. Before, the poet asserted himself into our presence, but now he wishes that we might want to see him -- but, as he admits, he is "become invisible"; as one critic comments, "while voice may attest to the presence of the speaker, it does not of course produce that presence" (Nathanson, 14). Even the concluding comment proclaiming presence appears in the foreboding parentheses; perhaps the poet, like the reader, is "not too certain" he is now with us.

As the poems of "Drum Taps" and "Calamus" reveal, Whitman increasingly feared the power of death and doubted the ability of "touch" to sustain his physical identity. The ideal of physical

transcendence gives way to a notion of the self as "impalpable," and Whitman's body/soul identity breaks down -- a collapse particularly evident in three later poems: "Passage to India," "The Sleepers," and "To Think of Time."

"Passage to India" contains sections expressing the optimistic fusion of body and spirit which characterizes the earlier, romantic poems:

Finally shall come the poet worthy that name,  
The true son of God shall come singing his songs.

Then not your deeds only O voyagers, O scientists and  
inventors, shall be justified,  
All these hearts as of fretted children shall be sooth'd,  
All affection shall be fully responded to, the secret shall be  
told,  
All these separations and gaps shall be taken up and hook'd  
and link'd together,  
The whole earth, this cold, impassive, voiceless earth, shall  
be completely justified,  
Trinitas divine shall be gloriously accomplish'd and  
compacted by the true son of God, the poet,  
(He shall indeed pass the straits and conquer the mountains,  
He shall double the cape of Good Hope to some purpose,)  
Nature and Man shall be disjoin'd and diffused no more,  
The true son of God shall absolutely fuse them.

(534-35)

But the union of the spiritual and physical realms is delayed until a future point, and the physical realm is depicted here as "cold, impassive, [and] voiceless." The realm of eternal presence has yet to be realized.

The consequences of this delayed realization affect Whitman's conception of the self:

Swiftly I shrivel at the thought of God,  
At Nature and its wonders, Time and Space and Death,  
But that I, turning, call to thee O soul, thou actual Me,  
And lo, thou gently masterest the orbs,  
Thou matest Time, smilest content at Death,  
And fillest, swellest full the vastnesses of Space. (538)

The poet who once urged us not to be curious about God now "shrivels" before him, and the self -- the "actual Me" -- is equated with the soul. Granted, that soul may be able to master "Time and Space and Death," but the physicality of selfhood seems gone: the harmony/union of body and soul, so crucial to an understanding of the self in "Song of Myself," becomes simply a soul, and even the universe is depicted as a materially-lacking "vastness of Space."

Nathanson comments that "It is a truism of Whitman criticism, and a useful one, that after 1860 the poet of the body gradually gives way to the poet of the soul" (477), and the last stanza of "Passage to India" emphasizes the essentially disembodied nature of Whitman's new concept of the self:

Sail forth -- steer for the deep waters only,  
Reckless O soul, exploring, I with thee, and thou with me,  
For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go,  
And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all .

O my brave soul!  
O farther farther sail!

O daring joy, but safe! are they not all the seas of God?  
 O farther, farther, farther sail! (539-40)

The poet makes no mention of the body, and the reader gets the impression that the self is the purely imagining soul, set to sail in the "seas of God." Also curiously absent is the earlier emphasis on the "other"; all of the pronouns of the stanza are self-referential: "I with thee, and thou with me . . . ourselves and all." The identifying unity of *je* and *autre* finds itself replaced by a movement from "I" to "me," portending little movement outside of the "vastness" of interior selfhood. Indeed, Whitman has substituted the fathomlessness of self for the earlier fathomlessness of the universe created out of self *and* other.

The isolation of this interior self finds expression in "The Sleepers," a more metaphysical version of "Passage to India." As the poet's self visits a host of "others" in his dreamscape, he watches a "beautiful gigantic swimmer" drown and a ship crash and sink; the poet is helpless as he gazes on the destruction:

I turn but do not extricate myself,  
 Confused, a past-reading, another, but with darkness yet.  
 [...]
 I cannot aid with my wringing fingers,  
 I can but rush to the surf and let it drench me and freeze  
 upon me. (546)

Having come through the disappointments of touch in "Calamus" and the doubts of death in "Drum Taps," the poet can only watch the

And I have dreamed that the satisfaction is not so much  
changed

(Cowley's 1855 edition, 103)

And I have dream'd that the purpose and essence of the  
known life, the transient,  
Is to form and decide identity for the unknown life, the  
permanent. (556)

The earlier emphasis on the body and soul as all important becomes a meditation on transiency and a conception of identity as essentially "unknown" in this life. The early concreteness of the first passage gives way to ethereal notions of "essence" in the second, signaling a reduction in the concept of the self as an essentially physical being.

An entire stanza drops out of the 1891 text:

I shall go with the rest,  
 We cannot be stopped at a given point . . . that is no  
 satisfaction;  
 To show us a good thing or a few good things for a space of  
 time -- that is no satisfaction;  
 We must have the indestructible breed of the best, regardless  
 of time. (Cowley, 103)

The earlier version expresses the need for physical permanence "regardless of time" in order for the self to have "satisfaction," but the older Whitman's less material concept of the soul perhaps prompted him to exclude this passage from the final version of *Leaves of Grass*.

The concern with death, articulated in the following two stanzas, is relatively unchanged:

If all came but to ashes or dung,  
 If maggots and rats ended us, then Alarum! for we are  
 betray'd,  
 Then indeed suspicion of death.

Do you suspect death? if I were to suspect death I should  
 die now,



Do you think I could walk pleasantly and well-suited toward  
annihilation? (556)

The poet insists that death must not mean the annihilation of the self, and as at the end of "Song of Myself," Whitman desires reassurance that death will not undo his selfhood. But two small changes in wording in the last two stanzas mark a profound shift in Whitman's confidence; the text in the 1855 edition appears as follows:

I swear I see now that every thing has an eternal soul!  
The tress have, rooted in the ground . . . the weeds of the sea  
have . . . the animals.

I swear I think there is nothing but immortality!  
That the exquisite scheme is for it, and the nebulous float is  
for it, and the cohering is for it,  
And all preparation is for it . . . and identity is for it . . . and  
life and death are for it. (Cowley, 104)

The phrase "I swear I see" in the first line becomes "I swear I think" by 1881, revealing a distinct loss of certainty about the self's immortality. Furthermore, the line "and life and death are for it" becomes "and life and materials are altogether for it"; the substitution of the word "materials" for "death" can be read in many ways, but it appears that Whitman wants to exclude death (and its threats) in his concept of life, replacing it by the more comforting "materials" which "altogether" help maintain his view of selfhood. Regardless of his intention, the fact that "death" is the only word he changes in this stanza reveals his preoccupation with it.

Additionally, the increasing lack of surety is underscored by the absence of any reference to "you" -- the other. The formerly all-important connection with the "other" has dissolved into a nebulous selfhood, which the poet no longer *sees* as eternal, but *thinks* (one wants to read, *hopes*) is lasting.

Like Whitman, Rimbaud sought the creation of an "objective" poetry which would presence both the self's interiority and an eternal "inconnu," allowing the "je" to merge with the "autre" in a new equation and conception of identity. But *Une saison en enfer* reveals that the French poet shared Whitman's frustrations and disappointments as well. Indeed, much like Whitman, Rimbaud's difficulties revolve around language, physical dissolution, and sexuality, problematics which prevent the self from escaping isolation and establishing a new identity with and through the "other."

The very first sentence of *Une saison* sets the tone for the entire poem:

Jadis, si je me souviens bien, ma vie était un festin où  
s'ouvraient tous les coeurs, où tous les vins coulaient. (123)

If Whitman's poetry represents the poet slowly coming to consciousness of the difficulties of the romantic project, then

Rimbaud's poem is a self-conscious account of the end of the romantic feast. The poem is less the discovery of the problematics of romanticism, as it is with Whitman, than it is the statement after the fact of the loss of romantic idealism:

Un soir, j'ai assis la Beauté sur me genoux. -- Et je l'ai trouvée  
amère. -- Et je l'ai injuriée. (123)

Rimbaud characterizes his earlier, idealistic outlook and life as a feast, especially a feast of delight to both the inner, spiritual self (les coeurs) and the outer, physical, sensual self (les vins). The time was one of openness, the heart open, sporting with the flowing wine. But such a youthful realm immediately gives way to sober realizations; the devil appears, accusing the poet " "Tu resteras hyène . . . " (124). The poet's task now is to relate the story of the feast's end, to retrace his steps and discover his "loss of innocence"; speaking to Satan, the emblem of that lost innocence and the hideous self-consciousness such loss entails, the poet says,

. . . et en attendant les quelques petites lâchetés en retard,  
vous qui aimez dans l'écrivain l'absence des facultés  
descriptives ou instructives, je vous détache ces quelques  
hideux feuillets de mon carnet de damné. (124)

We shall receive no moralizing or instruction, but a few pages in which the poet shall reveal his failure to accomplish his romantic goals.

The poem, divided into eight sections after a brief introduction, methodically analyzes the poet's journey from romantic idealist to highly self-conscious skeptic. The first section, "Mauvais Sang," sets up the tensions which dominate the remainder of the piece: the failure to obtain identity, the crisis of language, the fear of absence, isolation, and death. As the title suggests, the poet feels that his crisis of faith is somehow physical as well, and he begins this section by cursing his Gallic ancestors:

J'ai de mes ancêtres gaulois l'oeil bleu blanc, la cervelle étroite, et la maladresse dans la lutte. Je trouve mon habillement aussi barbare que le leur. Mais je ne beurre pas ma chevelure.

Les Gaulois étaint les écorcheurs de bêtes, les brûleurs d'herbes les plus ineptes de leur temps.

D'eux j'ai: l'idolâtrie et l'amour du sacrilège; -- oh! tous les vices, colère, luxure, -- magnifique, la luxure; -- surtout mensonge et paresse. (124)

The Gauls are crude, animalistic, and bestial. We remember that Rimbaud's earlier poems often included elements of grotesque physicality, but here the beastliness of the Gauls disgusts him.

The end result is that the poet feels he is of a "race inférieur":

Si j'avais des antécédents à un point quelconque de l'histoire de France!

Mais, non, rien.

Il m'est bien évident que j'ai toujours été race inférieure. Je ne puis comprendre la révolte. Ma race ne se souleva jamias que pour piller: tels les loups à la bête qu'ils n'ont pas tuée. (125)

This self-critique, which is surely also a criticism of the French bourgeois, reveals the poet's feelings of isolation and alienation, feelings which come from his very physical being. In *The Limits of Narrative*, Nathaniel Wing comments that the "narrator [of *Une Saison*] seeks a place for the self within the enclosure of a history and its metaphysics" (82); he desires an "authentic past and a language capable of containing and reproducing its truth . . . a pure, logocentric self-presence . . ." (84, 87). But the poet now feels that his quest for origins, for wholeness, harmony, truth, and self-presence -- for the "Other" which would give him identity -- has somehow failed. The repeated references to blood and race suggest a complication with the physical. Indeed, the poet who once mingled the spiritual and physical so easily, now seems overcome by the inferiority of his physical "race" -- and he feels alienated, cast to the side of belonging to the progressive race he so longed for.

The "Lettres du voyant" spoke passionately of the creation of a new race, a new identity, a new language, but the inability to attain this new state has frustrated the poet, with the heavy-hand of the past pressing down on him with all of its weight:

Je ne me souviens pas plus loin que cette terre-ci et le christianisme. Je n'en finirais pas de me revoir dans ce passé. Mais toujours seul; sans famille; même, quelle langue

parlais-je? Je ne me vois jamais dans les conseils du Christ;  
ni dans les conseils des Seigneurs, -- représentants du Christ.  
(125)

The new world eluding him, he cannot escape the past -- a past to which he feels he does not belong. We witnessed his concurrent rejection of Christianity and the establishment of his new vision in "Soleil et chair," but the failure to realize his new ideals has left him alienated from the lingering Christianity he sought to replace: "Mais toujours seul."

Sarcastically, Rimbaud recounts his ideals of progress:

La science, la nouvelle noblesse! Le progrès, Le monde marche!  
Pourquoi ne tournerait-il pas? (126)

The dream of marching into the future turns in on itself, giving in to an inescapable circularity: "Je suis de race inférieure de toute éternité" (126). This awareness of non-transcendence has implications for his poetics:

Maintenant je suis maudit, j'ai horreur de la patrie. Le  
meilleur, c'est un sommeil bien ivre, sur la grève. (127)

His alienation makes him seek escape in drunkenness, the hallucinatory "Bateau ivre" turning from a journey into the eternal unknown into a drunken, beached unconsciousness.

The poet's isolation is expressed as an alienation from God, from others, and ultimately from himself. Speaking of the divinity he says,

-- Ah! je suis tellement délaissé que j'offre à n'importe quelle divine image des élans vers la perfection.

O mon abnegation, ô ma charité merveilleuse! icibas, pourtant!

*De profundis Domine*, suis-je bête! (127)

The impulses toward perfection only highlight how far the poet is from obtaining the ideal state he longed for. The remove from the divinity parallels his distance from others as well: "Mais l'orgie et la camaraderie des femmes m'étaient interdites. Pas même un compagnon" (128). The cities turn on the failed poet, casting him out, considering him an outlaw. He curses his persecutors, but his sense of personal alienation is acute: "Oui, j'ai les yeux fermés à votre lumière. Je suis une bête, un nègre" (128). Finally, the poet cannot even be sure of who he himself is, and he asks, "Connais-je encore la nature? me connais-je? -- *Plus de mots*" (129).

A drastic change has occurred in the poet's outlook. The earlier poems and letters are full of vision and optimism, proclaiming the reunion of physical and spiritual realities and the merging of self and other in new identity. These lines, however, express only the poet's alienation and his failure to obtain his ideal. In a curious passage, which one is tempted to read as sarcastic, Rimbaud offers us his new resolution:

La raison m'est née. Le monde est bon. Je bénirai la vie.  
J'aimerai mes frères. Ce ne sont plus des promesses d'enfance.

Ni l'espoir d'échapper à la vieillesse et à la mort. Dieu fait ma force, et je loue Dieu. (130)

Surely the sturdy anti-Christianity of the poet speaks to us within the tongue-in-cheek tone of the passage, but the former desire to escape death which gives way to a more spiritual understanding of life is reminiscent of Whitman. We traced the American poet's journey through the Civil War, his confrontation with the problem of physical demise, and the move in his poetry away from body/soul equality toward a less physical spirituality; now we see Rimbaud foreshadowing the same move in his own poetry -- even more consciously than Whitman. The physical and the spiritual separate themselves, refusing to merge, problematizing the writer's early poetics.

Not obtaining the identity he hoped for, the poet flirts with suicide, but he is afraid of death:

Comme je deviens vieille fille, à manquer du courage d'aimer la mort! (130)

Not able to face death, he must go on: "Assez! voici la punition -- *En marche!*" (131). The romantic march toward progress becomes a bizarre punishment, with the poem itself its record. If anything, the poem arises out of the point between life and death; disgusted with living yet unable to die, he writes of the hellishness of life -- a living death, if you will.



Having introduced us in "Mauvais Sang" to his radically altered view of existence, Rimbaud now undertakes a more penetrating analysis of what went wrong with his ambitious undertaking. "Nuit de l'enfer" offers his first critique, primarily involving the use of drugs and the program of "dérèglement de *tous les sens*." The poet sarcastically comments on his drug use at the very beginning of the section:

J'ai avalé une fameuse gorgée de poison. -- Trois fois béni soit le conseil qui m'est arrivé! -- Les entrailles me brûlent. La violence du venin tord mes membres, me rend difforme, me terrasse. Je meurs de soif, j'étouffe, je ne puis crier. C'est l'enfer, l'éternelle peine! Voyez comme le feu se relève! Je brûle comme il faut. Va, démon! (131)

The poison suffocates him, to the point where he falls silent in spasms of anguish. The wonderful visions he was to write about succumb to an unspeakable horror. He desired to poeticize about "des millions de créatures charmantes, un suave concert spirituel, le force et la paix" (132), to make the spiritual accessible through the senses; but the voicing of his noble ambitions gives way to silent screams of anguish and disillusionment.

The poet berates himself and mocks his ambitions in a devastating harangue:

Des erreurs qu'on me souffle, magies, parfums, faux, musiques puériles. -- Et dire que je tiens la vérité, que je vois la justice: j'ai un jugement sain et arrêté, je suis prêt pour la perfection . . . Orgueil. -- La peau de ma tête se dessèche.

Pitié! Seigneur, j'ai peur. J'ai soif, si soif! Ah! l'enfance, l'herbe, la pluie, le lac sur les pierres, *le clair de lune quand le clocher sonnait douze* . . . le diable est au clocher, à cette heure. Marie! Sainte-Vierge! . . . -- Horreur de ma bêtise. (132)

He had once hoped to achieve "la perfection," but his hallucinatory vision leaves him thirsty and unfulfilled. The devil and Mary collide in a testament to his stupidity, and he comes to fear the drugs he hoped would save him.

To help us understand his failure, Rimbaud offers a sample hallucination, depicting it the way he must have experienced it in its initial glory and eventual horror:

Ah çà! l'horloge de la vie s'est arrêtée tout à l'heure. Je ne suis plus au monde. -- La théologie est sérieuse, l'enfer est certainement *en bas* -- et le ciel en haut. -- Extase, cauchemar, sommeil dans un nid de flammes. (132-133)

Leaving the world behind, the altered consciousness seemingly escapes the confines of the isolated self and begins to re-perceive "reality" under the influence of the drugs. Much like Whitman in "Song of Myself," Rimbaud walks with both Satan and Jesus, and he feels confident in his ability to reconcile the irreconcilable, to unveil the hidden:

Je vais dévoiler tous les mystères: mystères religieux ou naturels, mort, naissance, avenir, passé, cosmogonie, néant. Je suis maître en fantasmagories. (133)

The sacred and the fleshly, the spiritual and the physical shall be united as all mystery passes away under the auspices of his

phantasmagoric vision; as predicted in the "Lettres du voyant," the poet shall arrive at "l'inconnu," a harmoniously full, integrated reality.

Intoxicated with his vision, the poet declares that it is not simply self-redemptive, but also provides healing for others:

Fiez-vous donc à moi, la foi soulage, guide, guérit. Tous, venez, -- même les petits enfants, -- que je vous console, qu'on répande pour vous son cœur, -- le cœur merveilleux! -- Pauvres hommes, travailleurs! Je ne demande pas de prières; avec votre confiance seulement, je serai heureux (133).

The Christ-like tone implies a willingness to sacrifice the self for the other, and Rimbaud's vision moves closer to his collapse of differentiation between *je* and *autre*.

But the gloriousness of the vision turns sour as the poet becomes conscious of his own dissolution. He self-reflexively asks, " -- Et pensons à moi." As with Whitman, Rimbaud begins to wonder about his own demise:

Décidément, nous sommes hors du monde. Plus aucun son. Mon tact a disparu. Ah! mon château, ma Saxe, mon bois de saules. Les soirs, les matins, les nuits, les jours . . . Suis-je las!

[. . .]

Je meurs de lassitude. C'est le tombeau, je m'en vais aux vers, honte de l'horreur! Satan, farceur, tu veux me dissoudre, avec tes charmes. Je réclame. Je réclame! un coup de fourche, une goutte de feu. (133, 134)

The loss of self in the merging of *je* and *autre* cannot dispel his fears of physical decay. The hallucination, though momentarily

intoxicating, eats away at his body, threatening to end the very heightened physical sensations they initially induce. The alteration of consciousness -- the "dérèglement des tous les sens" -- also threatens the poet with loss of contact: "Mon tact a disparu." The merging of the physical and spiritual in a realm of heightened consciousness dissipates as the poet's own body deteriorates, succumbing to the numbing influences of the drugs. Peschel comments, "Always [Rimbaud] is aware of the transitory nature of his ecstasy, for even during his most rapturous states, the pathological meaning of intoxication, denoting poisoning, never seems far from his mind" (79). For slightly different reasons, Whitman feared the same loss of contact, the decay of the body, and the transitory and ultimate end of the identifying touch. W. H. Frohock summarizes the outcome of Rimbaud's experimentations:

The attempt to induce hallucinations resulted in nothing more than induced hallucinations. The "sacred disorder of his mind" had given the world nothing that was not paltry. The project of tapping the irrational sources of poetry turned out to have been an immense, nearly fatal, self-deception. (219)

At the end of the section, Rimbaud seems to beg God for mercy and declares, "Je suis caché et je ne le suis pas" (134). The contradiction reveals the impasse to which the poet has come. He has not realized his vision, and he is thrown back into a sense of isolation (his hiddenness) which is now all the more apparent (not

hidden) because he has attempted to reach the unknown and failed. Wallace Fowlie explains this statement thus: "[T]he poet in hell is exposed to his desolation. His sin has not killed him nor changed him. He is still intact, and his suffering is his sense of aloneness" (92). The desire and attempt to escape from his isolation into a world of unity and reconciliation only throws him back into an even more acute awareness of that isolation.

The first section of "Délires" underscores this isolation as it recounts the failure of the relationships between a "Vierge Folle" and "l'époux infernal." Ostensibly an account of Rimbaud and Verlaine's love affair, this section highlights the inability of the *je* and *autre* -- the self and other -- to maintain contact, each ultimately thrown back into his own sense of alienation. Much like Whitman's self in the erotic poems of "Calamus," the self strongly desires to affirm its identity through contact, especially physical touch; but such contact cannot be maintained for any extended period of time: *Je* is not always *autre*, and identity dissolves as the formula breaks down.

"Délires I," dramatically told from Verlaine's (the "Foolish Virgin's") point of view, first portrays the "love-at-first-sight" which brought the two poets together:

Je suis esclave de l'Époux infernal, celui qui a perdu les vierges folles.

[...]

-- Lui était presque un enfant . . . Ses délicatesses mystérieuses m'avaient séduite. J'ai oublié tout mon devoir humain pour le suivre. Quelle vie! La vraie vie est absent. Nous ne sommes pas au monde. Je vais où il va, il le faut. Et souvent il s'emporte contre moi, *moi, la pauvre âme*. Le Démon! -- C'est un Démon, vous savez, *ce n'est pas un homme*. (135)

Historically, Rimbaud sought an audience with the older, established poet, but the bond which grew between them clearly enticed both to pursue a new kind of relationship -- and an entirely new means of relating.

Indeed, Rimbaud aimed at nothing less than the reinvention of love:

Il dit: "Je n'aime pas les femmes. L'amour est à réinventer, on le sait. Elles ne peuvent plus que vouloir une position assurée. La position gagnée, coeur et beauté sont mis de côté: il ne reste que froid dédain, l'aliment du mariage, aujourd'hui. Ou bien je vois des femmes, avec les signes du bonheur, dont moi, j'aurais pu faire de bonnes camardes, dévorées tout d'abord par des brutes sensibles comme des bûchers . . . . (135)

Bourgeois security (e. .g. marriage) of relationship is not enough; the poet wants the fullness and entirety of one individual to meld with another, and women having failed him in the past, he seeks the harmonious merging of his self into another, fuller self with Verlaine.

But problems arise immediately. Verlaine characterizes Rimbaud's hallucinatory experiments as having "l'air du crime!"

(136). Futilely, the older poet keeps trying to relate to the young, inspired genius he has fallen in love with:

Je voyais tout le décor dont, en esprit, il s'entourait;  
vêtements, draps, meubles: je lui prêtais des armes, une autre  
figure. Je voyais tout ce qui le touchait, comme il aurait voulu  
le créer pour lui. Quand il me semblait avoir l'esprit inerte, je  
le suivais, moi, dans des actions étranges et compliquées, loin,  
bonnes ou mauvaises: j'étais sûre de ne jamais entrer dans son  
monde. À côté de son cher corps endormi, que d'heures des  
nuits j'ai veillé, cherchant pourquoi il voulait tant s'évader de  
la réalité. Jamais homme n'eut pareil voeu. Je reconnaissais,  
-- sans craindre pour lui, -- qu'il pouvait être un sérieux  
danger dans la société. -- Il a peut-être des secrets pour  
*changer la vie?*

Non, il ne fait qu'en chercher, me répliquais-je. Enfin sa  
charité est ensorcelée, et j'en suis la prisonnière. (136-137)

Verlaine cannot enter the world of the mad, young poet. Note the torturous syntax of the first line: "Je voyais tout le décor dont, en esprit, il s'entourait"; the inability of Rimbaud himself to recreate the world distances both the poet from his vision and Verlaine from the poet. The "secrets pour changer la vie" remain hidden, becoming an alienating force between the poets. The older poet's attempts to connect with Rimbaud fail -- all the more because Rimbaud himself has failed:

Tristement dépitée, je lui dis quelquefois: "Je te comprends."  
Il haussait les épaules. (137)

As Peschel remarks, "Both mistress and lover are aware that the Epoux infernal's magical and supernatural powers are merely dreams

and not realities" (82); the two poets' disillusionment ultimately draws them apart.

Yet, Verlaine remembers moments of pleasure:

Avec ses baisers et ses étreintes amies, c'était bien un ciel,  
un sombre ciel, où j'entrais, et où j'aurais voulu être laissée,  
pauvre, sourde, muette, aveugle. Déjà j'en prenais l'habitude.  
(137)

Their physical communion, however, becomes habitual, numbing like the drugs described in "Nuit l'Enfer"; "While these lovers find moments of tenderness and partial comprehension of their union, they are basically isolated from each other, as well as from the outside world" (Peschel, 82). Ultimately, Rimbaud longs for a change, horrifying Verlaine:

Tout de suite je me pressentais, lui parti, en proie au vertige,  
précipitée dans l'ombre la plus affreuse: la mort. (137)

The two cannot maintain the ideal unity and equality of *je* and *autre*, each individual ultimately reverting to his own isolation.

Verlaine admits defeat: "J'ignore son idéal" (138). His inability to know Rimbaud -- to sustain the equation, "*Je est un autre*" -- leaves him in the depths of hell: "*Je suis au plus profond de l'abîme, et je ne sais plus prier*" (138). Like Rimbaud, he speaks to us "*de profundis*," but his voice cannot obtain the redemptive power of prayer. Communication -- with both the other and the divinity -- fails as he sinks into isolation, his brief moment of happiness only



underscoring the alienation he now feels. Self has not escaped self with the aid of other; as in the poems toward the end of "Calamus," this poem exists as a record of a love unfulfilled:

(I loved a certain person ardently and my love was not  
return'd,  
Yet out of that I have written these songs). (285)

This move from the power of poetry to present presence (e. g. the presence of the *je* and *autre* to each other) to the use of poetry to signify an absence receives its fullest treatment in "Délires II -- Alchimie du Verbe." Indeed, the failure to escape the confines of the self is a failure to communicate -- to use poetic language to concretize the self and make it palpable to others. Rimbaud depicts the inability of language to objectify the self as a failure in which language itself dissolves -- much as we have seen the physical body dissolve and dissipate in the hallucinatory nightmares of earlier sections.

The section opens with a backwards glance at the young poet's earlier ambitions, and we encounter concepts and phrases reiterated from the "lettres du voyant" and the poem "Voyelles":

Depuis longtemps je me vantaïs de posséder tous les  
paysages possibles, et trouvais dérisoires les célébrités de la  
peinture et de la poésie moderne.

[...]

J'inventai la couleur des voyelles! -- A noir, E blanc, I rouge,  
O bleu, U vert. -- Je réglai la forme et le mouvement de chaque  
consonne, et, avec des rythmes instinctifs, je me flattai

d'inventer un verbe poétique accessible, un jour ou l'autre, à tous les sens. Je réservais la traduction.

Ce fut d'abord une étude. J'écrivais des silences, des nuits, je notais l'inexprimable. Je fixais des vertiges. (139-40)

The poet dreams of the creation of a language "accessible . . . à tous les sens" and of expressing the inexpressible, and he repeats the association of vowels and colors we first encountered in "Voyelles." But note that he lists the vowels differently; in the earlier poem, he wrote A,E,I,U,O, emphasizing the ability of poetry to contain the Alpha and the Omega; but now he writes the vowels as A,E,I,O,U, the emphasis on totality disrupted and overturned. Indeed, W. H. Frohock maintains that "Alchimie du verbe" is a critique of the poet's romantic ambitions: "It has been taken as a faithful report of what he had been trying to do ever since the letter to Demeny. This is reasonable so long as the report is recognized as retrospective, and as an explanation of what he had meant in the letter itself. He is certainly saying that, looking back upon it, his enterprise was a great mistake" (218-219).

The poet's difficulty is revealed in the first poem he quotes from his own earlier works, which depicts the failure of the self to obtain the ideal set for it. The first stanza demonstrates a delight in sensual surroundings and asks how the poet can participate in their physicality:

Loin des oiseaux, des troupeaux, des villageoises,  
 Que buvais-je, à genoux dans cette bruyère  
 Entourée de tendres bois de noisetiers,  
 Dans un brouillard d'après-midi tiède et vert? (140)

But the following stanzas answer the poet harshly:

Que pouvais-je boire dans cette jeune Oise,  
 -- Ormeaux sans voix, gazon sans fleurs, ciel couvert! --  
 Boire à ces gourdes jaunes, loin de ma case  
 Chérie? Quelque liqueur d'or qui fait suer.

Je faisais une louche enseigne d'auberge.  
 -- Un orage vint chasser le ciel. Au soir  
 L'eau des bois se perdait sur les sables vierges,  
 Le vent de Dieu jetait des glaçons aux mares. (140)

The physical realm seems increasingly removed from the poet, the sacred breath of God and the physical world meeting in icy harshness. The poet's conclusion, expressed in a single line at the end of the poem, portends his dilemma: "Pleurant, je voyais de l'or, -- et ne pas boire" (140). The poet sees his golden ideal, but he cannot incorporate it into himself. The union of the physical and spiritual in a language of the senses (but for the soul as well) eludes the poet, and the poem concludes with an emphasis on the distance between the self and the vibrant realm he desires.

Hoping to enhance his experience of the physical realm and to collapse the seeming gap between his interior consciousness and an ultimate "reality," the poet turns again to hallucination, described in a passage reminiscent of "Nuit de l'enfer":

Je m'habituai à l'hallucination simple: je voyais  
 très franchement une mosquée à la place d'une usine, une école  
 de tambours faite par des anges, des calèches sur les routes  
 du ciel, un salon au fond d'un lac; les monstres, les mystères;  
 un titre de vaudeville dressait des épouvantes devant moi.

Puis j'expliquai mes sophismes magiques avec  
 l'hallucination des mots! (141)

He revels in the "désordre de mon esprit," but the problem of the  
 self's physical dissolution surfaces again:

J'aimai le désert, les vergers brûlés, les boutiques fanées, les  
 boissons tiédies. Je me traînais dans les ruelles puantes et,  
 les yeux fermés, je m'offrais au soleil, dieu de feu.

[...]

Oh! le moucheron enivré à la pissotière de l'auberge, amoureux  
 de la bourrache, et que dissout un rayon! (142, 143)

The senses, especially under the influence of drugs, can be deceived,  
 and the self, which once had high ideals of transcendence, can  
 humbly find itself "amoureux de la bourrache." Indeed, this passage  
 contrasts nicely with a few lines from "Song of Myself":

Dazzling and tremendous how quick the sunrise would kill me,  
 If I could not now and always send sunrise out of me. (Cowley's  
 edition, 23)

Whitman's verse speaks of an eternal connection between self and a  
 powerful physicality, but Rimbaud's vision has become an obsession  
 with dissolution and a realization of the inability of the poet to  
 overcome the eventual physical decay to which his body is subject.

Part of the difficulty the poet faces lies within the nature of  
 language itself. The desire to presence the eternal can only find

expression in paradoxical language: the poet gives us an example in the following stanza:

Elle est retrouvée!  
 Quoi? l'éternité.  
 C'est la mer mêlée  
 Au soleil. (144)

The recovering of eternity involves the impossible mixing of sun and sea, creating an aporia of thought which language does not demystify but rather heightens. The metaphor emphasizes how far the self is from obtaining a realm of harmonious and totalizing eternity.

In light of this discovery, the remainder of "Alchimie" presents the poet as increasingly disillusioned with his creative faculties and the power of his imagination:

À chaque être, plusieurs *autres* vies me semblaient dues. Ce monsieur ne sait ce qu'il fait: il est un ange. cette famille est une nichée de chiens. Devant plusieurs hommes, je causai tout haut avec un moment d'une de leurs autres vies. -- Ainsi, j'ai aimé un porc. (145)

The hallucinating imagination does not help the physical self to transcend but returns the poet to the commonplace and mundane.

Threats of physical dissipation and death surface again:

Ma santé fut menacée. La terreur venait. Je tombais dans des sommeils de plusieurs jours, et, levé, je continuais les rêves les plus tristes. J'étais mûr pour le trépas, et par une route de dangers ma faiblesse me menait aux confins du monde et de la Cimmérie, patrie de l'ombre et des tourbillons.  
 (145)

The images are increasingly of confinement and darkness, and the self -- even with the once lauded powers of the imagination -- cannot obtain transcendence. For Wing, "The cryptic conclusion to 'Alchimie' implies that hallucination is rejected because it is a means of inspiration gone awry. Dionysian delirium fails to reveal the truth" (60).

The poet seems to moralize in the section's concluding verse:

O saisons, ô châteaux!

L'heure de sa fuite, hélas!  
Sera l'heure du trépas.

O saisons, ô châteaux! (146)

The poet characterizes the flight of the imagination as deadly, and the word "saison" reminds us that ours is not a world of transcendence but circularity and cyclicity. The poet cannot overcome physical dissolution, and poetic language can only point to the distance of the self from an imagined realm of eternal physicality.

In "Nuit de l'enfer" and the two parts of "Delires," we read the poet's exposition of the failure of his romantic project. The ideal of a language harmonizing the self with the physical universe and collapsing the boundaries between self and other gives way to ever-increasing feelings of sickness and isolation. As Wing says,

"[H]armony between the self and the world and . . . a 'new language,' as set forth in the 'voyant' letters, is presented here as perverted by the real madness which was its unforeseen consequence" (60). Physical transcendence and eternity elude the poet, and attempts to concretize the self or enhance physical perception only remind the poet of his body's decay; such physical deterioration problematizes the communication of self through the senses -- a problematic which sexual love and the metaphoric capacity of language tend to enhance by highlighting the distance of self from other and self from eternity. The remaining sections of *Une saison* briefly discuss the poet's attempt to reconcile himself to the failure of his project, and, as in Whitman's verse, they reveal a curious shift in emphasis away from the physical towards the spiritual.

"L'Impossible" pronounces the young poet's project as "stupid" -- "quelle sottise c'était" -- and characterizes Rimbaud's early ambitions as a search for the "Orient." The poet contrasts Occidental and Oriental thinking and ideals, clearly associating his personal failure with the problems of the Western world:

M'étant retrouvé deux sous de raison -- ca passe vite! -- je vois que mes malaises viennent de ne m'être pas figuré assez tôt que nous sommes à l'Occident. Les marais occidentaux! Non que je croie la lumière altérée, la forme exténuée, le mouvement égaré . . . Bon! voici que mon esprit veut absolument se charger de tous les développements cruels qu'a subis l'esprit depuis la fin de l'Orient. . . Il en veut, mon esprit! (147)

The emphasis on the superiority of the Orient may come as a surprise, much like Whitman's decidedly unexpected shift from a concentration on America to a fascination with the East in "Passage to India." But Rimbaud clarifies himself, revealing his new understanding:

Les gens d'Eglise diront: C'est compris. Mais vous voulez  
parler de l'Éden. rien pour vous dans l'histoire des peuples  
orientaux. -- C'est vrai; c'est à l'Éden que je songeais!  
Qu'est-ce que c'est pour mon rêve, cette pureté des races  
antiques! (148)

Whether it is the Orient or Eden (or Whitman's India), the poet realizes he has been yearning for a realm of spiritual and physical transcendence, a place of unity between God and created being. The "purity of the ancient races" -- quite like that of Schiller's ancient Greeks -- lies in their appreciation of the divinity as presenced through the natural realm -- an appreciation associated with ancient Oriental philosophy and Adam and Eve's walking with God in the Garden of Eden. This realm is one of unity, harmony, and a clear understanding of the self in relation to a divine eternity; God is palpable, sensible, and available -- not hidden and obscured -- and the self enjoys communion (both spiritual and physical) with its creator.

For Rimbaud, the modern world has lost contact with such communion and is consequently one of isolation, deception, and loss:



N'est-ce pas parce que nous cultivons la brume! Nous mangeons la fièvre avec nos légumes aqueux. Et l'ivrognerie! et le tabac! et l'ignorance! et les dévouements! -- Tout cela est-il assez loin de la pensée de la sagesse de l'Orient, la patrie primitive? Pourquoi un monde moderne, si de pareils poisons s'inventent!  
(148)

The "monde moderne" is blurred with drunkenness, cut off from communion with the natural world, despairing of reobtaining its origins.

Rimbaud, recognizing the impossibility of the task to reconnect his world with the realm of totality, offers himself a warning: "Mon esprit, prends garde. Pas de partis de salut violents" (148). Like Whitman, he must leave behind his vision of spiritual and physical reunion, and his emphasis turns, if despairingly, toward a new realization:

O pureté! pureté!  
C'est cette minute d'éveil qui m'a donné la vision de la pureté!  
-- Par l'esprit on va à Dieu!  
Déchirante infortune! (149)

The godhead is not accessible through the senses -- only through the spirit.

The consequences for the conception of the self strike the poet immediately in the next section, "L'Éclair." In a brief moment of hostility, anger, and despair, the poet lashes out against death:

Non! Non! à présent je me révolte contre la mort! Le travail paraît trop léger à mon orgueil: ma trahison au monde serait

un supplice trop court. Au dernier moment, j'attaquerais à droite, à gauche . . . (150)

He has heard the call of science -- "Rien n'est vanité: à la science, et en avant!" (149) -- and has attempted to demonstrate the transcendency of the physical world and its potential through science to usher in a new age of harmony, totality, and understanding. But the poet's self -- having become over the course of the poem acutely aware of its eventual physical demise -- declares the progress too slow:

Qu'y puis-je? Je connais le travail; et la science est trop lente. (149)

Death will dispel the notion of physical transcendence for the individual, and the self will not enjoy a palpable, edenic connection and association with the natural world. Only the spirit remains ("Déchirante infortune!") -- the self isolated within a dying body, unable to break out of the decaying, deceiving flesh which distances the self from other selves and eternity. Speaking of Whitman, Thomas Byers' comments can equally apply to Rimbaud's "Fable of alienation, wherein the great punishment is the casting out of humanity from the natural wholeness that is paradise; the emotional consequences are pain, loss, guilt, and nostalgia for origins" (3).

The struggle to realize how his project has failed leaves the poet weak, and the next section, "Matin," finds the poet awakening with the realization and understanding he has gained from his night in hell:

Du même désert, à la même nuit, toujours mes yeux las se  
réveillent à l'étoile d'argent, toujours, sans que s'émeuvent les  
Rois de la vie, les trois mages, le coeur, l'âme, l'esprit.  
(150)

The heart, soul, and mind -- the non-physical, interiority of the individual -- awakes again and again to find itself removed from the eternity of the stars. He asks if his situation will ever change:

Quand irons-nous, par delà les grèves et les monts, saluer la  
naissance du travail nouveau, la sagesse nouvelle, la fuite des  
tyrans et des démons, la fin de la superstition, adorer -- les  
premiers! -- Noël sur la terre! (150)

Although Rimbaud is probably not espousing a turn to Christianity ("la superstition"), he does hope for a day of incarnation -- of the suffusion of the physical world with the divine and eternal. But note that the question does not end with a question-mark; the question is posed as a statement, suggesting that life is a question to which an answer (though longed for) is not expected. Like the self, the answer is hidden.

"Adieu," the poem's last section, emphasizes the acceptance of this lack of transcendence. The self continually awakes to the

unanswered question and recognizes it is in a realm of seasonal circularity -- not in a realm of totality, immediacy, and eternity:

L'automne déjà! -- Mais pourquoi regretter un éternel soleil, si nous sommes engagés à la découverte de la clarté divine, -- loin des gens qui meurent sur les saisons. (151)

The poet expresses a complete separation between the "eternal soleil" and the "clarté divine"; the emphasis on the spirit lacks physical associations. The poet had searched for an eternal sun, a never-ending physical presence, but seasons change. In *Exploding Poetry*, Poulet describes at length the ultimate move in Rimbaud's poetry from wholeness and harmony to transitoriness and decay:

[A]t the moment things reveal themselves we discover that they have begun an ineluctable process of disintegration. Such is the effect -- perhaps invisible, but surely disconcerting -- of this poetry; an effect not so much final as terminal. The multiplication of elements composing it tends to transform itself into its opposite: that is, into a division. The components of the scene we witness, as they increase in number, dissociate themselves instead of continuing to amalgamate. The more things and shapes we find in the text, the more, assuredly, the globe containing them swells; but also, the less they hold together. (137)

Such inability reminds the poet of the mortality of his physicality:

Je me revois la peau rongée par la boue et la peste, des vers plein les cheveux et les aisselles et encore de plus gros vers dans le coeur, étendu parmi les inconnus sans âge, sans sentiment . . . J'aurais pu y mourir . . . L'affreuse évocation! J'exècre la misère. (151)

Towards the end of this section, the poet summarily recalls the hope he had placed in his imagination:

-- Quelquefois je vois au ciel des plages sans fin couvertes de blanches nations en joie. Un grand vaisseau d'or, au-dessus de moi, agite ses pavillons multi-couleurs sous les brises du matin. J'ai créé toutes les fêtes, tous les triomphes, tous les drames. J'ai essayé d'inventer de nouvelles fleurs, de nouveaux astres, de nouvelles chairs, de nouvelles langues. J'ai cru acquérir des pouvoirs surnaturels. Eh bien! je dois enterrer mon imagination et mes souvenirs! Une belle gloire d'artiste et de conteur emportée!

Moi! moi qui me suis dit mage ou ange, dispensé de toute morale, je suis rendu au sol, avec un devoir à chercher, et la réalité rugueuse à étreindre! Paysan! (151-52)

The attainment of the supernatural has eluded the poet, his powers of imagination failing to link him with the divine. He returns to the soil, his dreams proving illusions.

The failure of poetic and imaginative language to make palpable the inner motions and movings of the soul also leaves the poet without the other he longed to be united with: "Mais pas une main amie! et où puiser le secours?" (152). Language cannot overcome death, and the self -- desiring to communicate, desiring communion -- feels alienated and alone, its failure to obtain supernatural harmony with nature paralleling its failure to obtain harmony with other natural beings.

But the poet wants the poem to end on a slightly more positive note:

Que parlais-je de main amie! Un bel avantage, c'est que je puis rire des vieilles amours mensongères, et frapper de honte ces

couples menteurs, -- j'ai vu l'enfer des femmes là-bas; -- et il me sera loisible *de posséder la vérité dans une âme et un corps*. (152)

The possession of truth in one "âme" and one "corps" is put off until another day, granted, as in Whitman's verse, a delayed transcendence. Until then, his poetry consists primarily in the ability to laugh -- to give utterance to a pained recognition of the failure of his project and the end of his dreams. The laugh, bordering on a meaningless screech, communicates the absence of "la vérité"; it fills the void in the gap between soul and body -- a void which becomes the focus of some of Rimbaud's last "Illuminations."

Hopkins' poetry traces the same turn from optimism in presence to despair in absence. The Jesuit's attempt to identify himself with a resurrected, bodily-perfected Divinity falters, and like both Whitman and Rimbaud before him, he begins to doubt his ability to presence the Divine. The Hopkinsian self becomes increasingly alienated and unable to find expression; the sinful *je* feels more and more distanced from its divine *autre*, a distance which the self measures in the decay and dissipation of its own body.

It is helpful to keep in mind Hopkins' early romantic idealism, especially as it is expressed in poems such as "God's Grandeur" and

"Pied Beauty." In the early poems, the physical world continually gives presence to a spiritual divinity, proclaiming the glory and power of its creator as God instresses his creation. Even at the level of the individual, Hopkins postulates a direct link between an internal "spirit" and its exterior expression, as in "As Kingfishers catch fire":

As Kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;  
 As tumbled over rim in roundy wells  
 Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's  
 Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;  
 Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:  
     Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;  
     Selves--goes its self; *myself* it speaks and spells,  
 Crying *What I do is me: for that I came.* (129)

The self -- the "being indoors each one dwells" -- is "dealt out," continually expressing itself, "fling[ing] out broad its name." Such expression creates a community of presence, the self becoming selves. Furthermore, Hopkins ties this self-expression to the presence of the deity throughout the created realm:

I say more: the just man justices;  
 Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces;  
 Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is--  
 Christ. For Christ plays in ten thousand places,  
 Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his  
     To the Father through the features of men's faces. (129)

The spiritual grace of God becomes "Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes," physically palpable in the body of Christ -- which is both the

actual body of Christ himself and the body of believers who identify with him.

But such physical expression is not unproblematical. Lauding the beauty of spring, the poet asks,

What is all this juice and all this joy?  
A strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning  
In Eden garden . . . . ("Spring," 131)

However, this recognition of Edenic harmony between the physical creation and its divine creator, that same Eden of which Rimbaud had been thinking, immediately prompts the poet to pray:

[ . . . ] Have, get before it cloy,  
  
Before it cloud, Christ, lord, and sour with sinning,  
Innocent mind and mayday in girl and boy,  
Most, O maid's child, thy choice and worthy thy winning.  
(131)

The "juice and joy" of nature can be spoiled with sinning, a concern which another poem, "The Sea and the Skylark," expresses as well; after listening to the sounds of the nearby ocean and a skylark, the poet can only wonder at the "frail" condition of mankind:

How these two shame this shallow and frail town!  
How ring right out our sordid turbid time,  
Being pure! We, life's pride and cared-for crown,  
  
Have lost that cheer and charm of earth's past prime:  
Our make and making break, are breaking, down  
To man's last dust, drain fast towards man's  
first slime. (131)



It is as though any trace of the divine had been sucked out of humanity, leaving the remaining flesh "sordid," "dust," and "slime." Just as with Rimbaud, the poet bemoans the passing of "earth's past prime," which, as stated in "Spring," bore the "strains of the earth's sweet being in the beginning In Eden garden." But Eden is gone, and Hopkins seems to vacillate between catching traces of the divine in creation and despairing of finding any of that divinity within himself.

Comparing the exposition of material in "Spring" and "The Sea and the Skylark" to that in "God's Grandeur" -- all three of which are sonnets -- we note a telling change in the poet's vision and idealism. The slightly earlier poem, "God's Grandeur," presents us in the opening octet with the problem of the "blear" and "smear" of man on God's creation, but it comforts us in the sestet with the assurance that "nature is never spent." "Spring" and "Skylark," however, reverse the standard problem/solution structure of the sonnet, first presenting us with the divine beauty of nature in the octets and then leaving us with the "problem" of sordid humanity in the sestets. The later poems, especially "Skylark," end with unresolved problematics, highlighting the distance between man and eternity. As Jeffrey Loomis points out, the emphasis in Hopkins' poetry steadily shifts from an "incarnational theology" to a "study of a passionate human

As a dare-gale skylark scanted in a dull cage,  
Man's mounting spirit in his bone-house, mean house,  
dwells--  
That bird beyond the remembering his free fells;  
This in drudgery, day-labouring-out life's age.

The internal self -- "Man's mounting spirit" -- is caged in its "bone-house," barely remembering its former (Edenic?) freedom. At times the spirit is capable of song, both spirit and bone-house, soul and body, rendering the "sweetest, sweetest spells." But more often than not, such expression falls back into the self's "cells" and "barriers." The communal activity of song gives way to isolated "bursts of fear and rage"; the freedom of self becomes entrapped and alienated -- a *caged* skylark.

Hopkins' conception of such isolation of the self is tied to a growing dichotomy between body and soul:

Man's spirit will be flesh-bound, when found at best,  
But úncúmbereð: meadow-dówn is nótréssed  
For a ráinbow fóoting it nor hé for his bónes rísen. (133)

The spirit is "flesh-bound," the flesh somehow preventing the true self from gaining freedom and expression. Flesh acts as a barrier between the spirit and its communion with others and with the Divinity, but the last lines of the poem offer some hope with the images of the rainbow and the "bones risen"; renewal and resurrection are a possibility, and the poet does not want to lose the hope of possessing (in Rimbaud's words) "la vérité dans une âme et un corps."

For Hopkins then, the "spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak," the soul yearning for reconciliation with God, but the body marking the distance between self and divinity -- acting as a barrier between man and God. The joy the poet felt at the physical presencing of God in the natural does not extend to the same extent to human flesh, and the "dimness of us" the poet worries about at the end of "Deutschland" becomes one of his principle concerns. Hopkins wants to identify with Christ, the incarnated Deity, the physically-perfected-spiritual being, but the poet is "flesh-bound," his own flesh failing to presence the Divinity as Christ's can. As he

says in "The Windhover," a poem of great beauty about his admiration for Christ, the poet's "heart [is] in hiding," the self hidden and removed.

What exactly is the difficulty with the flesh? Why is it such a barrier to expression and communion? As with Whitman and Rimbaud, Hopkins comes to have grave reservations about the body as he becomes increasingly conscious of its tendency to dissipation -- a decay which in turn prompts him to question the stability of his internal self and to doubt his ability to escape the confines of the flesh. Earlier the poet could enjoy communion with God and others through the fleshly senses, but a growing awareness of the ultimate demise of those senses bemuddles that communion. For instance, in "The Bugler's First Communion," a poem initially about the joy of sharing the Eucharist and the communion such sharing promotes, the Jesuit priest becomes obsessed by his thoughts of the passing beauty of the bugler to whom he serves communion; the poet-priest cannot insure the spiritual and physical innocence he sees and can only pray that the child will not "rankle and roam" (148).

These meditations come to a poignant summation in "Spring and Fall: to a Young Child":

Margaret, are you grieving  
Over Goldengrove unleaving?  
Leaves, like the things of man, you

With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?  
 Ah! as the heart grows older  
 It will come to such sights colder  
 By and by, nor spare a sigh  
 Though worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie;  
 And yet you *will* weep and know why.  
 Now no matter, child, the name:  
 Sorrow's springs are the same.  
 Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed  
 What héart héard of, ghóst guéssed:  
 It is the blight man was born for,  
 It is Margaret you mourn for. (152)

The inherent mortality of man, a fate literally born within us, gives rise to the grief of the poem. The verse expresses no sense of transcendence or divine infusion of the natural realm. Even the unexpressed thought that Goldengrove will bloom again cannot mitigate the poet's pain as he, as will eventually Margaret, becomes conscious of his unavoidable and permanent death. The ghost, the spirit, realizes its body is doomed to die, and the heart grieves that any chance of physical communion (at least in this life) is constantly overshadowed by the foreboding cessation of physical sensation.

For the poet, such consciousness problematizes poetic expression. The poem speaks of grieving that dissipates into a sigh; ultimately, the "name" will not matter, and what the heart hears may go unexpressed. The praise of the early poems has become at best the mourning of these more elegiac verses, and the self's ability to

communicate, to express itself, becomes pained and difficult. With the waning ability to presence God physically or to contact the divine, the expression of that presence turns from fullness to absence. Before, language helped express the physicality of the Deity; now it is less and less material -- more sighs and moans -- as materiality decays.

The six sonnets which comprise the so-called "Terrible Sonnets of Desolation" are a profoundly moving testimony to the poet's attempt to come to terms with his own sense of dissipation. His body distances him from God and bears within itself (in its death) the potential loss of physical communion with God in this life. The Jesuit priest wants to believe in the Real Presence of the Divinity -- the touch which would quiver *him* to identity -- but he doubts, and the self slowly loses contact, becoming increasingly isolated. As with Whitman and Rimbaud, the changing conception of the self alters the poet's view of poetry. Michael Sprinkler comments that "As Hopkins' poetic career unfolded after 'The Wreck of the Deutschland,' the melancholy recognition that poetry is and can only be writing came to dominate his thoughts more and more, finally to the exclusion of poetry itself" (76). Hopkins once used poetry to express the instress of God throughout the world; but as he becomes less certain of the divine stress, the poems lose their power to

express or presence the Divinity, becoming mere writing and not divine presencing.

One level of isolation which Hopkins explores is his distance and difference, both physical and religious, from his family and friends. "To seem the stranger," written when the poet was assigned to a post in Ireland, expresses this very physical remove:

To seem the stranger lies my lot, my life  
Among strangers. Father and mother dear,  
Brothers and sisters are in Christ not near  
And he my peace/my parting, sword and strife.

England, whose honour O all my heart woos, wife  
To my creating thought, would neither hear  
Me, were I pleading, plead nor do I; I wéar-  
Y of idle a being but by where wars are rife.

(166)

His Anglican family does not share his religious (Catholic) beliefs, adding further to his distance from them, a distance enhanced by his whole country's rejection of his beloved Catholicism. Thus, he claims in the sestet,

I am in Ireland now; now I am at a thírd  
Remove . . . .(166)

His isolation increases. For a moment, he reminds himself of his Christian calling to love others, but he also expresses doubts about the expression of that love:

[ . . . ] Not but in all removes I can  
Kind love both give and get. Only what word

Wisest my heart breeds dark heaven's baffling ban  
 Bars or hell's spell thwarts. This to hoard unheard,  
 Heard unheeded, leaves me a lonely began. (166)

The heart has bred a Word, a communication for others to share, but something -- either heaven or hell -- prevents the poet from expressing it, leaving it "hoard[ed] unheard, heard unheeded." The inability of the internal self to communicate "leaves me a lonely began," the action of the concluding verb form stopped in its tracks; indeed, the oxymoron of concluding the poem with the verb/noun "began" demonstrates the impasse to which the poet has come, the action of the verb solidifying into immobility. Similarly, the poet feels immobile, trapped in his interior isolation, his heart unable to dispel its feelings of distance and remove.

In "I wake and feel," the self's distance from others becomes the distance between self and God and self and body. In the octet, the poet describes restless nights of existential questioning:

I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day.  
 What hours, O what black hours we have spent  
 This night! what sights you, heart, saw; ways you went!  
 And more must, in yet longer light's delay.

With witness I speak this. But where I say  
 Hours I mean years, mean life. And my lament  
 Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent  
 To dearest him that lives alas! away. (166)

Hopkins feels his entire life has become a cry that no one hears, at most a "dead letter," a communication either unable to be sent or



never received. According the Sprinkler, this phrase reveals "the painful truth that the presence of speech eludes the poet, leaving him with only the dead letter of his writing" (76). The moans and sighs of "Spring" have further deteriorated into a writing without significance; his writing has lost the natural power associated with speech which Hopkins hoped to incorporate into his verse through the use of sprung rhythm. Indeed, the predominant use of iambs instead of sprung rhythms highlights the shift from a verse of the presence of speech to a verse of stylized, removed, and even alienating rhythms. The "dearest him that lives alas! away," the great Other with whom the poet had sought to identify in "Wreck of the Deutschland," is somehow unobtainable, unreachable -- his distance amplifying the meaninglessness of the poet's cry to him -- and, by extension, the meaninglessness of the poet's life. His unheard cry gains in poignancy when we consider that Hopkins sent these sonnets to very few people, perhaps only to his close friend and fellow poet/critic Robert Bridges, to whom Hopkins showed most of his work for criticism.

The poet explains in the sestet of "I wake and feel" what might cause the distance between the self and the longed-for divine friend:

I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree  
 Bitter would have me taste: my taste was me;  
 Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the curse.

Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours. I see  
 The lost are like this, and their scourge to be  
 As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse. (166)

The poet's very body -- his "Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed" -- separates him from the "dearest him" and also divides his self against himself, his own flesh becoming "gall and heartburn" to him. The bitterness of his flesh comes from "God's most deep decree," which could be anything from the banishment of mankind from the Garden of Eden, the punishment of death for sin, or, as Catherine Phillips postulates, the poet's feeling that God did not want him to publish, thus rendering his letters (poems) dead. But even the "selfyeast of spirit" seems sour, adding no life to the "dull dough." The poet's only comfort, meager at best, is that he is not one of the lost (unchristian), who are worse, thus implying that his condition (though saved) is certainly still bad.

Again, thoughts of the body, the "blood brimmed curse," disturb the poet, perhaps suggesting his inability to accept the physical deterioration of the body. For a poet who took such delight in the instress of God throughout the physical realm, the decay of self must surely be a rude shock, severely altering (as it does) his entire poetic expression. But Hopkins' concerns gradually extend in these sonnets to his internal self -- his mind and soul -- as well. The imagination ultimately baffled and tricked both Whitman and

Rimbaud, especially as the French poet sought to enhance sensual perception by altering his consciousness. Hopkins' consciousness becomes problematic too; as he fails to obtain physical expression or communion, his world becomes densely interior, and the self becomes even more isolated from physical expression. Virginia Ellis explains that these late poems emphasize the "dialogue of the mind with itself, and with itself alone" (239); the interconnection and intersuffusion with the divine is gone, leaving the poet with only his own unconnected self.

Explaining this unconnected isolation in "No Worst," the poet asks,

Comforter, where, where is your comforting?  
 Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?  
 My cries heave, herds-long; huddle in a main, a chief-  
 Woe, world-sorrow; on an áge-old ánvil wínce and síng--  
 (167)

The poet appeals to the Holy Spirit (the Comforter) and the Holy Virgin, two figures prominent in the earlier poems; in "God's Grandeur," the Spirit sustained the presence of God throughout the created realm, and the Blessed Virgin Mary is a type of the harmonious intersection between God and man that Hopkins celebrates in "Wreck of the Deutschland." In "No Worst," however, he calls to them, wondering at their *absence*. The sonnet bemoans the removal of the divine from his life, a removal which he exaggerates by hyperbolically calling the poem an "age-old anvil."

The distance of the divine calls forth a meditation on the poet's mind:

O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall  
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap  
May who ne'er hung there . . . . (167)

Without the presence of the divine in his life, the poet is thrown back on the terrors of his own imagination. Earlier he experienced the instress of the spirit of God; now, failing to perceive the divinity, he feels trapped in his interior self, an endless abyss of nothingness. Ironically, the poem ends with the poet suggesting that death might end such isolation and pain:

[ . . . ] Nor does long our small  
Durance deal with that steep or deep. Here! creep,  
Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all  
Life death does end and each day dies with sleep. (167)

Death in "Wreck of the Deutschland" is a passage to eternal communion with God -- even a signifier of the saving presence of God to frail flesh. Here, however, death is merely a way to cease the self's sense of interior isolation -- by eclipsing alienation with oblivion.

Failing to experience the physical presence of God and feeling trapped within his own mind, the poet begins to suspect the beauty which once so inspired him. He asks in the next sonnet, "To what serves mortal Beauty?" Admitting that physical beauty can have its

benefits, he recounts the story of Pope Gregory, who initiated the Christianization of England upon seeing a group of beautiful English slave-boys; their beauty inspired the Pope, and Hopkins suggests that beauty can serve to remind us of God, as it once linked him to the divine in the earlier poems. But the sonnet's closing lines are cautious:

What do then? how meet beauty? Merely meet it; own,  
Home at heart, heaven's sweet gift; then leave, let that alone.  
Yea, wish that though, wish all, God's better beauty, grace.  
(167)

The poet clearly privileges the spiritual trait of grace over physical beauty, further dichotomizing the difference between flesh and spirit. Like Whitman, Hopkins no longer attempts to collapse the two, but insists on a hierarchy of the seemingly impalpable divine over the created being.

The breakdown of the fusion of the spiritual and the physical, coupled with the feelings of distance from the divine, spell further trouble for the poet's conceptualization of the self. "Carrion Comfort" attempts to offer a glimmer of hope by suggesting the poet's current feelings of alienation are a divine chastisement:

Why? That my chaff might fly; my grain lie, sheer and clear.  
Nay in all that toil, that coil, since (seems) I kissed the rod,  
Hand rather, my heart lo! lapped strength, stole joy, would  
laugh, cheer. (168)

In "Wreck of the Deutschland," Hopkins sought self definition through identification with Christ, a defining of the self's *je vis-à-vis* the divine *autre*. But in this sonnet, the poet cannot determine which one -- self or God -- to take comfort in. The poet seems torn between his own desires and wants and those which a divinity would impose upon him. Thus, he feels in a struggle with God for the possession of his very identity, and it is evident that his self and the Godhead are not merging in mutual self-identification. Ultimately, the concluding "(my God!) my God" echoes Christ's "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me," suggesting that the poet is still struggling with his feelings of alienation from God; note the use of parentheses, a Whitmanian device which highlights the separation and distance of the divinity.

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his current suffering, "To do without, take tosses, obey" (170). Echoing the hierarchy of the spirit over the body, Hopkins advocates a hierarchy of the creator over the created, God over self. Identification with Christ is less a jubilant marriage of self and other (as it is depicted in "Deutschland") than it is the recognition of the self's subservience to the divinity:

We hear our hearts grate on themselves: it kill  
To bruise them dearer. Yet the rebellious wills  
Of us wé do bid God bend to him even so. (170)

Even in this resignation, the self seems unclear, divided against itself, hearts "grating" on themselves. Clarification of the self fails the poet, highlighted by the ambiguity of the last line: is God to bend the rebellious wills to him(self) or (perhaps a subconscious wish) is God himself to bend to the him of the rebellious will?

The inability to clearly define the self -- even in its subservient relation to God -- recalls the distance between God and Self:

And where is he who more and more distills  
Delicious kindness?--He is patient. Patience fills  
His crisp combs, and that comes those ways we know. (170)

Hopkins proposes a wait for the full, crisp honeycombs of the divinity, suggesting that such fullness shall "come those ways we know." However, the obscurity of the last phrase occludes such knowledge of how to obtain fullness, and we are left more with a language of an absent God than a full presence.

The final sonnet of desolation, "My own heart," is the poet's self-reflexive prayer both to cease the search for comfort and to end the suffering he has experienced:

My own heart let me more have pity on; let  
 Me live to my sad self hereafter kind,  
 Charitable; not live this tormented mind  
 With this tormented mind tormenting yet.

...I cast for comfort I can no more get  
 By groping round my comfortless than blind  
 Eyes in their dark can day or thirst can find  
 Thirst's all-in-all in all a world of wet. (170)

The interior self cannot bring itself comfort; the mind is ceaselessly tormenting itself, unable to escape its blindness and isolation. The self's groping for God has left the poet thirsty still, so now he proposes a new stance:

Soul, self, come, poor Jackself, I do advise  
 You, jaded, lét be; call off thoughts awhile  
 Elsewhere; leave comfort root-room; let joy size

At God knows when to God knows what; whose smile  
 'S not wrung, see you; unforseentimes rather -- as skies  
 Betweenpie mountains -- lights a lovely mile. (170)

The self, unable to define itself (note the different names Hopkins uses for it, fishing for the right word), suggests an absenting of itself so that God may fill its void. But the absenting self is only paralleled by the inability to know how or what or when (or if?) God shall fill the self's void. The absence of God, expressed so movingly in the other sonnets, meets the absence of the self, and the poet's



hope is that the distant deity shall eventually fill the void the poet's life has become.

The last lines of the poem speak of that God,

. . . whose smile  
'S not wrung, see you; unforeseentimes rather -- as skies  
Betweenpie mountains -- light a lovely mile.

The relative clarity of the sonnet gives way to the tortured syntax and confusing semantics in this description of the "presence" of God. The poet leaves us with a reminder of the distance of the eternal divinity in a poem about the ultimate absence of selfhood; and, like Whitman and Rimbaud before him, the Jesuit's poetics turns from a celebration of presence to a meditation on absence.

## **Chapter Four: The Poetics of In-Betweenness**

In the preceding two chapters we have discussed the move in the works of Whitman, Rimbaud, and Hopkins from a poetics of divine presence to a poetics of tension between body and soul as the self is threatened by physical dissolution. The collapsing of boundaries between the flesh and an internal soul or spirit raises several problematics for the poets as they try to rationalize the difference between a supposedly eternal spiritual realm and an all too obviously mortal, physical realm.

The poets' initial romantic expectation had been to demonstrate an equality between the unseen motions of an ideal divinity and the palpable field of the body; physical touch was to give noumenal cognizance of the universal soul, linking the self to an eternal realm. Such a view would dismiss both Kantian subjectivity and Cartesian duality and establish a vision of the self as a coequal soul and body. Language, itself a material medium, would help establish interrelatedness and interconnection between physical sign and inner/eternal meaningfulness.

But the various problematics of the body -- sickness, dissolution, hallucination, and ultimate death -- tended to emphasize the frailty of any connection between an eternal realm and the world of flesh in constant flux. The attempt to presence physically the divinity within the self gives way to feelings of entrapment and isolation in a body which can only give the mind fleeting, phenomenal, and sometimes deceptive images of a greater, eternal universe. The self cannot establish any noumenal connection with eternity and cannot even connect in any lasting way with other selves; soul does not meet soul via the body, and the self recognizes its separateness both from other selves and from the eternal divinity. Even the use of language as a physical medium to establish connection between an "I" and a "you" falters as metaphors and words themselves can obscure and confuse instead of clarify and presence; the medium of communication and connection can separate -- just as the body separates selves. Such obscurity leads the poets to articulate images more of alienation and absence than of potency and presence.

Ultimately, Whitman, Rimbaud, and Hopkins work through the physical and poetical crises which dispel their romantic ambitions, and their late poetry reflects a renegotiation of the boundaries between the physical and the spiritual, the signifier and the

signified, the self and (holy) other. In general, the poets cease equating body and soul and come to a different appreciation of the physical vis-à-vis an "eternal soul or spirit." The visions are much transformed, and the language used to articulate their new awareness of the body both reflects and shapes the development of their ideas. In particular, the poets come to see the self -- in its relation to both the body and language -- as in-between full presence and complete absence. The eternal ideal/divinity which the self desires is not fully revealed but neither is it totally eclipsed; the self exists in a transitory or intermediary state -- with the ideal divinity and the ideal self both partially obscured and partially open.

The poets achieve such a stance by accepting their inability to obtain the full presence of the divinity because of the problematics of the body and language, and the self of the late poetry becomes in large part the self of separation -- a self which accepts itself as separated and removed and which accepts the role of language and the body as separator. The poets' language(s) become more and more distant and occluding. Experimenting with the obscuring power of words, the poets revel in their language, learning to think of and articulate the divine other not as totally open and accessible but as essentially -- at least to some extent -- hidden. Thus, their poetry

"presences" partial occlusion -- an absence -- or an acceptance of the "mystery" of life -- and death. They ultimately realize that being a human self is part and parcel of being a separated self -- aware of alienation and accepting (even if in wonder) the hidden mysteries of life and death.

The concluding sections of *Leaves of Grass* -- "Whispers of Heavenly Death," "From Noon to Starry Night," "Songs of Parting," and the two annexes, "Sands at Seventy" and "Good-Bye My Fancy" -- demonstrate the American poet's renegotiation of his view of the body and his acceptance of the desired eternal identity as at least partially obscured and occluded. In the poem "Thoughts," last revised as late as 1881 and included in "Songs of Parting," Whitman declares that his poetry has had as one of its primary concerns "The vehement struggle so fierce for unity in one's-self" (600), and it is far from inappropriate to suggest that the "unity" Whitman speaks of is the unity between body and soul which dominated the poems of many earlier sections of *Leaves of Grass*. But "Thoughts" also speaks of the "temporary use of materials for identity's sake" (601); in the articulation of the self, it is clear that the physical is no longer coequal with the soul or spirit, as "material" mediums are only "temporary."

Indeed, many of the poems in "Whispers of Heavenly Death" speak of putting aside the material and accepting death or the absencing of the physical. Death had been a serious problematic for the poet as he encountered it throughout the Civil War; it continually threatened to separate the "I" and the "you," the lover and the loved-one, leaving the self abandoned and isolated, questioning its connection to an eternal realm. But now Whitman seems to have come to terms with death; he is willing to accept it as an undeniable aspect of existence, and he even accords it a privileged place over life itself:

I do not think Life provides for all and for Time and Space,  
but I believe Heavenly Death provides for all.  
(563)

Expanding on ideas first expressed in poems such as "Passage to India," Whitman suggests that the self is essentially spiritual and that "The corpse you will leave will be but excrementitious" (565). The poet had hoped the living body could eternally presence the self, but his experience has altered his vision:

O I see now that life cannot exhibit all to me, as the day  
cannot,  
I see that I am to wait for what will be exhibited by death.  
(566)

The earlier immediacy and fullness of presence gives way to an acceptance of what death may hide; the self cannot be complete in this life as long as death occludes what potentially lies beyond it, and the poet expresses himself as being in a state of transition between the partial exhibition of life and the fuller exhibition of death.

Whitman's stance in "Song of Myself" has been entirely inverted; even the poetic style reflects the change in ideas as the poems move from epic expansiveness and inclusiveness to a verse more compact and condensed. The short poem "Pensive and Faltering" expresses in an economically spare form the poet's rejection of his earlier theories:

Pensive and faltering,  
The words *the Dead* I write,  
For living are the Dead,  
(Haply the only living, only real,  
And I the apparition, I the spectre.) (568)

The self is primarily an internal entity, pensive and thinking, the mystery of the Dead more real than the apparition of selfhood. Bodily presence has faltered, and Whitman points to death as the ultimate revealer of identity.

Clearly, we have entered a very paradoxical realm. The poet speaks of the absencing of physical life (in death) as the "exhibition"

or revelation of true and universal identity. The physical concreteness espoused in the early poetry finds itself replaced by a belief in the hidden powers of the unknown to establish identity and reveal the true self. It is within this play between the hidden and the revealed, however, that Whitman finds his human self; in "A Riddle Song," he unambiguously states the essential ambiguity of the human condition:

That which eludes this verse and any verse,  
Unheard by sharpest ear, unform'd in clearest eye or  
cunningest mind,  
Nor lore nor fame, nor happiness nor wealth,  
And yet the pulse of every heart and life throughout the  
world incessantly,  
Which you and I and all pursuing ever ever miss,  
Open but still a secret, the real of the real, an illusion,  
Costless, vouchsafed to each, yet never man the owner,  
Which poets vainly seek to put in rhyme, historians in prose,  
Which sculptor never chisel'd yet, nor painter painted,  
Which vocalist never sung, nor orator nor actor ever utter'd,  
Invoking here and now I challenge for my song. (587)

The poet maintains that his poem is to "challenge" and "invoke" that which "you and I and all pursuing ever ever miss." The self is aware that *something* is hidden and is in a constant state of reaching out to grasp the ungraspable; consequently, the "hidden" is "Open but still a secret" and "the real of the real, [but yet] an illusion." There is no full presence, but our awareness of the hidden, the awareness of the fact that something is hidden, dispels the notion of complete absence.



Granted, such discourse tends to the obscure, but the importance of the hidden to the late Whitman arises directly out of the failure of his earlier poetry to maintain a connection between the self and a fully present, eternal realm of harmony and perfection. As expressed in the war poetry, the decay and death of the body highlights the inability of the self to obtain full presence to others, much less an eternal realm. Death and the mystery of what lies beyond it separates and occludes; the human self cannot obtain full connection and interrelation and must accept separation as an essential (if painful) part of the human experience. As Whitman himself admits, "my real self has yet to come forth" (589). The very physicality which furnishes our existence (and which Whitman once delighted in) also occludes an ideal expression of that selfhood, so the late Whitmanian concept of the self vis-à-vis the body is one of in-betweenness -- where the self's relation to the ideal is obscured by the physical and only death can seemingly free the self into full "exhibition."

This new stance is complex because Whitman does not dismiss the physical. Granted, the soul and the spiritual are prioritized as Whitman refers to the soul as the "real real," but his admission of the problematics of the physical do not entail a complete disregard for the body and the material universe. The body and soul may not be

coequal, revealing and identifying one another as they do in "Song of Myself," but the physical realm remains important to the poet, as emphasized in one of the last poems in *Leaves of Grass*, "When the Full Grown Poet Came":

When the full-grown poet came,  
 Out spake pleased Nature (the round impassive glove, with  
     all its shows of day and night,) saying, *He is mine*;  
 But out spake too the Soul of man, proud, jealous and  
     unreconciled, *Nay, he is mine alone*;  
 -- Then the full-grown poet stood between the two, and  
     took each by the hand;  
 And to-day and ever so stands, as blender, uniter, tightly  
     holding hands,  
 Which he will never release until he reconciles the two,  
 And wholly and joyously blends them. (648)

The former immediacy of body and soul, unified in the self of the poet, is replaced by a struggle between the physical and the spiritual -- with the poet literally occupying the space between the two. The "blending" of "Nature" and "Soul" is not a forgone conclusion, as it is in "Song of Myself," but the poet stands "between the two," hoping to reconcile them eventually. Like Rimbaud, Whitman hopes to possess truth one day in "une âme et un corps," fully admitting that he does not do so at this time. This is the poetry of in-betweenness, of the move from immediate presence to delayed transcendence and a conception of a universal harmony as only partially and not fully realized.

Such a view alters Whitman's conception of the nature and function of poetic language itself. Perhaps it is just as accurate to say that the poet's growing doubts about the power of language to presence both the divine and his self to others prompted his view of the split between "Nature" and the "Soul." Regardless of which is first, the renegotiation of the identity between body and soul parallels a similar shift in the relationship between the poet's use of poetic language and how he perceives of himself and the eternal identity he desires. In the earlier poetry, the poet's physical "touch" gave access to his soul, just as his words, his poems, revealed the actual poet: the materiality of language would physically presence the poet through his poems for all of eternity, linking him to an immortal and universal realm of harmony and interrelation. With the breakdown in the equality between body and soul, however, comes a seemingly concurrent breakdown in the connection between the poet and his verse. In the late poems, poetic language is no longer the presence of the poet but is now the trace or remembrance of his former physical existence. The last poem in the section "From Noon to Starry Night," "A Clear Midnight," reveals the shift in Whitman's view of poetry:

This is thy hour O Soul, thy free flight into the wordless,  
Away from books, away from art, the day erased,

the lesson done,  
 Thee fully forth emerging silent, gazing, pondering the  
 themes thou lovest best,  
 Night, sleep, death and the stars. (596)

Words, like the body, are no longer needed for the soul to emerge "fully." The poet no longer tells us that he is with us now, present as we read; instead, this little poem records his flight away from us into death and the stars.

Whitman's language, especially the words he uses to describe his poems, reveals that he no longer considers the poems of *Leaves of Grass* to be his continuing presence to others; for example, note these concluding lines from "My Legacy" in "Songs of Parting":

Yet certain remembrances of the war for you, and after you,  
 And little souvenirs of camps and soldiers, with my love,  
 I bind together and bequeath in this bundle of songs. (605)

The songs are now only "remembrances" and "souvenirs" of his love for others. It is especially telling that this admission of the reduction in the power of poetry from full presence to trace or remembrance occurs in a poem addressed to soldiers of the Civil War; even as late as 1872, the year of this poem's first composition, the poet still equates the separation and death he experienced in the war with a lessening of the powers of poetry.

Paul Bové maintains that this reworking of the poet's view toward poetry represents a major shift in American poetics; specifically, it is a move "away from the barren logocentric

tradition of metaphysics to a more temporal poetics of discovery" (179). Certainly, Whitman's emphasis now is no longer on the presence of the Word, and his new attitude toward life and death is characterized more by a growing sense of wonder at the unknown.

One of Whitman's most powerful and important poems about this new view and its relationship to his poetics, "So Long," concludes "Songs of Parting," and thus concludes the main body of *Leaves of Grass* with only the annexes coming after. The poem is a retrospective look at what the poet has tried to accomplish in his work, and Whitman "announces" that he has variously sung of "the body and the soul," "of life and death," of "adhesiveness," and of the war. Ultimately, the poet says that the aim of all his life has been a preparation for death:

Afterward a melodious echo, passionately bent for, (death  
making me really undying,)
   
The best of me then when no longer visible, for toward that
   
I have been incessantly preparing. (611)

As Rimbaud does in *Une Saison en enfer*, Whitman looks back and realizes that his primary obsession, even in "Song of Myself," has not been with the vitality and strength of life, but with the looming specter and mysteriousness of death. No longer equating sensation with self-presence, Whitman suggests that the "best of me," his true identity, may occur when he is "no longer visible," and the poems he

leaves behind will be but a "melodious echo" of his life. The poet cannot overcome death, and his physical sensations are subject to cessation; so the poet reaches out to embrace the unknown, disembodied realm of death, hoping that death will give him what he really desires -- to be "undying," eternal.

For a moment, he addresses the reader and seems to reaffirm the power of his poetry to connect with future generations:

Camerado, this is no book,  
Who touches this touches a man,  
(Is it night? are we here together alone?)  
It is I you hold and who hold you,  
I spring from the pages into your arms -- decease calls me  
forth. (611)

Whitman declares that the touch of the book is the touch of a man, but note the parenthetical questioning immediately following: "(Is it night? are we here together alone?)." The poet is unsure of his presence, his self bracketed off from the reader. The poem is more a question of presence, less a surety of connection, and the poet stands once again in between full presence (which he questions) and complete absence (which he insists is not possible).

The concluding stanza emphasizes Whitman's determination to move from a physical into a purely spiritual world:

Dear friend whoever you are take this kiss,  
I give it especially to you, do not forget me,  
I feel like one who has done work for the day to retire awhile,  
I receive now again of my many translations, from my

avataras 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. (611-12)

The poet is unsure of whom he addresses, not insisting, as he once did, that he knows all those who read his poetry. Entering into death and the "unknown," he accepts the separation of self from other, of "I" from "you," that he once found so painfully intolerable. He is not even sure if he will return, and the poem ends with the poet drifting away and the reader isolated from the poet by the boundary of death. The interconnection and interrelation of the 1855 poems has come to an end; the vision has changed.

Perhaps a summation of this final phase of Whitman's poetic development can be found in the last line of *Leaves of Grass*: "Good-bye -- and hail! my Fancy!" (655). The poet bids farewell to his hopes of establishing a connection with a realm of presence through the material world, but he also waits on the threshold of a new adventure in the realm of death. Again, the poet finds himself in between two spheres or conceptualizations of experience. But it is curious that he addresses his "Fancy"; it was the powers of the "fancy" or the imagination -- especially a romantic conception of the imagination to fuse realms and link us to the divinity -- which ignited Whitman's project in the 1850s. The adjusted view and

position vis-à-vis the "Fancy" at the end of *Leaves of Grass* -- even if it does not bring us full circle -- at least reminds us of where we have come from.

Curiously, Rimbaud's last poetic works, found in the *Illuminations*, trace the same shift in view and vision we found in the American poet. After the ordeal portrayed in *Une Saison*, the poet's position toward his ideals, his self, and his poetry could never be the same, and Rimbaud articulates a move from desiring full presence to accepting absence and envisioning the self as in a transitory state between nothingness and realization. As in *Une Saison*, this renegotiation occurs in relation to both the body and language.

The only difficulty with using the *Illuminations* is that scholars are not certain which poems were actually written after *Une Saison*; Rimbaud may have merely recopied some of the poems after the longer poem was published in 1873. Furthermore, Verlaine collected and printed the verses which comprise the *Illuminations*, so we are not even sure if Rimbaud intended his prose poems to be published as a set -- if at all. Paul Schmidt has attempted to order the poems chronologically, and, drawing from those he places after *Une Saison*, we shall treat several of the poems as a move away from the poetry



of crisis found in *Une Saison* and a move toward a new understanding of the relationship between self, body, poetic language, and a desired ideal. Periodically, the poet recalls his youthful romantic ideals, but his emphasis now is not on elegizing lost illusions; he releases his dreams and sees himself illuminated in a new -- if somewhat dimmed -- light.

Perhaps it is best to begin with a short poem to demonstrate the different poetics Rimbaud employs in the *Illuminations*. "Départ" is an economically spare poem, much like the poems in Whitman's "Annexes" at the end of *Leaves of Grass*:

Assez vu. La vision s'est renocontrée à tous les airs.  
 Assez eu. Rumeurs des villes, le soir, et au soleil, et  
 toujours.  
 Assez connu. Les arrêts de la vie. --O Rumeurs et Visions!  
 Départ dans l'affection et le bruit neufs! (165)

The poem is almost purely imagistic. As Nathaniel Wing says of the *Illuminations*, "There is no laborious examination of the protagonist's psyche" (58); instead, Rimbaud pieces together a series of pictures which communicate more through suggestion than the introspection of *Une Saison*. What is striking about the poem is the similarity of the attitude expressed to that encountered in Whitman's late verse. The "vision" and the "rumeurs" have led the poet to "Les arrêts de la vie." The sensations of this world have not provided him with a transcendent experience, and he stands at an

impasse between the uproar always around him and the vision he just as strongly perceives -- much as Whitman stands between the irreconcilable "Nature" and "Soul," holding each by the hand. The only alternative seems to be to depart -- just as Whitman takes his leave in "So Long" into a (hopefully) new realm of heightened experience. The substitution in the last line of the nouns "l'affection" and "le bruit neufs" for "visions" and "rumeurs" suggests that the poet hopes for an altered awareness after he has departed, since it has become clear that he will not obtain such an awareness at this stage in his life.

As with Whitman, the emphasis now is on a delayed transcendence, a recognition of the inability to realize an ideal in this life. The poet who analyzed his idealistic project in *Une Saison*, found it lacking, and realized he could not possess truth in one soul and body in this life, now composes poems which illuminate the absence of the transcendent presence; the hope for the arrival of a new age gives way to departure from the impasses of the poet's life and visions. Like Whitman, Rimbaud consequently must (1) accept that the "unknown" which he once desired will remain hidden, (2) renounce his claim to presence it, and (3) realize his new self awareness as being in between the absence of the ideal and its longed-for presence.

Both "Après le déluge" and "Vagabonds" emphasize this essential "hidden-ness" of the poet's ideal. "Après le déluge," the first prose poem of the set, largely consists of a series of images in which the poet describes the rebuilding of the world and society "aussitôt que l'idée du Déluge se fut rassise" (155). The pictures of men, animals, villages, and cafes accumulate steadily, suggesting both the grime and glory of human civilization.

The turning point of the poem occurs in the third to last stanza-paragraph:

Depuis lors, la Lune entendit les chacals piaulant par les  
déserts de thym -- et les églogues en sabots grognant dans le  
verger. Puis, dans la futaie violette, bourgeonnante, Eucharis  
me dit que c'était le printemps. (156)

As in "Départ," Rimbaud gives us a juxtaposition of seeming contrarities: "les chacals piaulant" and "les églogues dans le verger." Then he is reminded that it is once again "printemps." Immediately the poet calls for the deluge to destroy the world again:

Sourds, étang; -- Écume, roule sur pont et par-dessus les  
bois; -- draps noirs et orgues, -- éclairs et tonnerre, --  
montez  
et roulez; -- Eaux et tristesses, montez et relevez les Déluges.  
(156)

Rimbaud overturns the romantic cliché of joy and comfort at the return of spring and the renewal of life after a period of decay and death; instead, the coming of spring reminds him of how he is

caught in a seemingly endless cycle of life and death, never transcendent, always at an impasse between "les églogues" and "les chacals piaulant," the "vision" and the "rumeurs." Even a Eucharistic celebration, suggested by the name Eucharis, is unsatisfying because it represents a sacrifice that must be repeated over and over again in a non-transcendent cycle.

The last stanza suggests the nature of the poet's frustration:

Car depuis qu'ils se sont dissipés, -- oh! les pierres précieuses  
s'enfouissant, et les fleurs ouvertes! -- c'est un ennui! et la  
Reine, la Sorcière qui allume sa braise dans le pot de terre, ne  
voudra jamais nous raconter ce qu'elle sait, et que nous  
ignorons. (156)

The poet bemoans a lost world, and the knowledge which might everlastingly renew his experience and the world is perhaps forever to remain a secret. All of the images detailed in the first nine stanzas of the poem are cut off from the hidden and transcendent knowledge of "la Sorcière." As with Whitman, the secret for binding the Natural realm with a transcendent power is beyond reach; the two remain irreconcilable, and the poem exists only as a testament to their irreconcilability, unable to merge the "rumeurs" of sensual images to a transcendent "vision."

"Vagabonds" articulates the same inability to reconcile a fleshly realm with a transcendent one, and in some ways resembles *Une*

*Saison* the most closely of all the *Illuminations*, especially in its concluding stanza:

J'avais en effet, en toute sincérité d'esprit, pris l'engagement  
de le rendre à son état primitif de fils du soleil, -- et nous  
errions, nourris du vin des cavernes et du biscuit de la route,  
moi presse de trouver le lieu et la formule. (174)

In returning to the state of being a "fils du soleil," the poet desires for himself and his companion a transcendent merging of the earthly and the supernatural, an experience "nourris du vin," heightening the sensations. But the poet admits that he has great difficulty finding the hidden "formule" to accomplish such an ideal. To this extent, this poem is an encapsulated summary of *Une Saison*, but note that the agonized tones of frustration and despair are strangely absent. Granted, the poet begins his poem by referring to his companion as a "Pitoyable frère," someone the poet has seemingly misled; but by the third stanza, Rimbaud refers to his experiments as "distraction vaguement hygienique," nothing more than mere trifles. The final stanza is ultimately cool and detached, not reliving the psychic agony of failure but merely attesting to the absence of an unachieved ideal. This highly compacted verse does not incarnate the presence of the poet's desired ideal; rather, it simply and calmly points to its absence even as it is desired.

Additionally, the images of the "vin des cavernes" and the "biscuit de la route" may allude to the sacramental bread and wine of the Catholic Mass; with such images, Rimbaud may be affirming sacrificial death. Further, the conflation of the Eucharistic images with the notion of the poet going on a journey is highly reminiscent of the viaticum, the administration of the sacraments to those, in the sense of the original Latin, who are literally preparing for a journey. All of these imagistic associations essentially portray death as a new journey, a view also articulated by Whitman in his late poetry.

Such a seeming embracing of death leads us to another predominant aspect of the *Illuminations*: the stance of renunciation. Just as Whitman relinquishes his hold on his ideal, so too does Rimbaud, and a poem such as "Solde" emphasizes the poet's determination to move both himself and his poetics away from the frustrated (and frustrating) attempt to incarnate his ideal. To underscore the poet's renunciation, "Solde" is essentially a list of things the speaker wants to clear out, and his list is duly all inclusive, even encompassing "ce que le temps ni la science n'ont pas a reconnaitre" (184). The following two stanzas suggest that both body and soul are up for sale:



poetics of hallucination, the rejection of the futile hopes of attaining a harmony between mind, body, and the "splendeurs invisibles." In another powerful poem, "Vies," the poet states even more directly and emphatically,

Mon devoir m'est remis. Il ne faut même plus songer à cela. Je suis réeleement d'outre-tombe, et pas de commissions. (164)

The renunciation is complete, and even the threat of death is now harmless since he no longer races against time to enact his ideal; he is beyond the ever-recurring seasons. As with the other poems of *Illuminations*, Rimbaud does not analyze his loss as much as he creates verse directly out of it. "Solde" is not an elegy of lost illusions; it is almost a celebration of what the poet no longer has or seems to want.

Only the last stanza of "Solde" prevents the poem from embracing complete absence:

À vendre les Corps, les voix, l'immense opulence inquestionable, ce qu'on ne vendra jamais. Les vendeurs ne sont pas à bout de solde! Les voyageurs n'ont pas à rendre leur commission de si tot! (184)

"Les Corps" and "les voix" return from the preceding stanzas, and the poet puts them up for sale again, but he recognizes almost simultaneously that they will never be sold. The clearance sale is far from over and a commission of the sales will not be coming for a while. Thus, the poem ends with the poet giving up his hopes of



presencing his ideal, but not quite able to accept their total absence either.

At one point in "Vies," the poet asks, "Qu'est mon néant, auprès de la stupeur qui vous attend?" (163). Rimbaud privileges and seems to praise the absence which his disillusionment has left him with, an absence which is the very inspiration of many of the *Illuminations*. But two significant poems, "Jeunesse" and "Génie," both probably written after *Une Saison*, suggest that the poet situates his poetic self in between presence and absence -- in ways quite similar to Whitman. The poem "Génie" suggests that the poet's ideals, as soundly as they have been shaken, are not entirely forgotten, but, like Whitman's, they have been relocated to a realm not fully available to the poet. The poem opens with an idealistic portrait of the "Génie":

Il est l'affection et le présent puisqu'il a fait la maison ouverte à l'hiver écumeux et à la rumeur de l'été, lui qui a purifié les boissons et les aliments, lui qui est le charme des lieux fuyants et le délice surhumain des stations. Il est l'affection et l'avenir, la force et l'amour que nous, debout dans les rages et les ennuis nous voyons passer dans le ciel de tempête et les drapeaux d'extase. (194)

As in his earlier verse, Rimbaud conceives of his ideal as a mixing, a bringing together of winter and summer, drink and food, the human and the super-human. "La force et l'amour" harmoniously combine in the Génie, who is an eternal, fully realized self:

Il est l'amour, mesure parfaite et réinventée, raison merveilleuse et imprévue, et l'éternité: machine aimée des qualités fatales. Nous avons tous eu l'épouvante de sa concession et de la nôtre: ô jouissance de notre santé, élan de nos facultés, affection égoïste et passion pour lui, lui qui nous aime pour sa vie infinie . . . . (194)

The Génie is perfected love, transported into a pure and purifying realm, whose reason is "merveilleuse" yet "imprevue." For all of the poet's praise of the Génie, it is clear that the poet can only watch as the Génie passes, while we stand by with "les rages et les ennuis." In fact, the intrusion of the Génie into the human realm seems to have dire consequences, as intimated in the second stanza: "Nous avons tous eu l'épouvante de sa concession."

The ideal world with its fully realized selfhood and identity is at a distance, yet Rimbaud wants to assure us that we are in at least partial, if not full, contact with it:

Il ne s'en ira pas, il ne redescendra pas d'un ciel, il n'accomplira pas la rédemption des colères de femmes et des gaîtés des hommes et de tout ce péché: car c'est fait, lui étant, et étant aimé. (195)

The ideal is situated between arrival and departure: on one hand, the ideal will not be realized, failing to bring the world into harmony; but, on the other hand, the ideal is accomplished because of the power of love. The poem articulates a paradoxical position between the full redemptive presence of the Génie and his total, damning

absence; the poet's awareness of the ideal lies in between realization and its complete negation.

The next several lines consist primarily of joyous exclamations of praise as the poet lauds the Genie's "terrible celerite de la perfection des formes et de l'action,"

O fécondité de l'esprit et immensité de l'univers!  
 Son corps! le dégagement rêvé, le brisement de la grâce  
 croisée de violence nouvelle!  
 Sa vue, sa vue! tous les agenouillages anciens et les peines  
*relevés* à sa suite.  
 Son jour! l'abolition de toutes souffrances sonores et  
 mouvantes dans la musique plus intense.  
 Son pas! les migrations plus énormes que les anciennes  
 invasions! (195)

But the almost Whitmanian chant ends with a return to the sorrows of the world:

O monde! et le chant clair des malheurs nouveaux! (195)

The full presence of the Génie is not quite realized, failing to dispel human misery.

The final stanza ends the poem on a note remarkably similar to that which ends Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*.

Il nous a connus tous et nous a tous aimés. Sachons, cette nuit  
 d'hiver, de cap en cap, du pôle tumultueux au château, de la  
 foule à la plage, de regards en regards, forces et sentiments  
 las, le héler et le voir, et le renvoyer, et sous les marées et au  
 haut des déserts de neige, suivre ses vues, ses souffles, son  
 corps, son jour. (195)

Rimbaud bids both hail and farewell, farewell and hail to his ideal, recognizing his desire to approach it but also realizing that it must still be sought -- and consequently remain unobtainable for the present. Rimbaud, like Whitman, postulates a delayed transcendence, but his tone is not elegiac as it is in *Une Saison*. Earlier, the French poet's realization of the collapse of his ideal was deeply disturbing:

C'est cette minute d'éveil qui m'a donné la vision de la  
pureté! -- Par l'esprit on va à Dieu!  
Déchirante infortune! (149)

But now the failure to presence the ideal immediately is no longer a horrible disaster; in the "déserts de neige" of our present life, the poem almost joyfully resolves to continue following "ses vues, ses souffles, son corps, son jour." A shift in emphasis has occurred from presence to possibility, and the poetic self becomes determined more by the potential (even if removed) of obtaining an ideal rather than by its immediate presence. As Peschel states, the poet "perceives and creates a special beauty in searching for epiphanies, suffering in the search, and struggling against imminent destruction, both as a poet and as a person" (91). The struggle now counts more than the attainment, and Rimbaud is willing, like Whitman, to wait to possess truth in one soul and one body.

"Jeunesse" summarizes all of these ideas and movements in a four-part poem. In the first section, "Dimanche," the poet puts aside, as in "Solde," his ideals and recognizes the "inévitabile descente du ciel"; unfortunately, he is left with plagues, misery, "l'invresse et les blessures" (186). The following sonnet of part two consists of the poet's realization that his "calculus" and his "impatiences -- ne sont plus que votre danse et votre voix" (187); the passionate poet has not changed the world, having left behind only poems which are remembrances of his attempt. The third section, "Vingt ans," briefly expands on this subject in much the same way that *Une Saison* bemoans the poet's lost, illusory power and curses "l'égoïsme infini de l'adolescence" (187).

But the final untitled section of the poem demonstrates the direction Rimbaud has been moving in after *Une Saison*:

Tu en es encore à la tentation d'Antoine. L'ébat du zèle écourté, les tics d'orgueil puéril, l'affaiblissement et l'effroi. Mais tu te mettras à ce travail: toutes les possibilités harmoniques et architecturales s'émouvront autour de ton siège Des êtres parfaits, imprévus, s'offriront à tes expériences. Dans tes environs affluera rêveusement la curiosité d'anciennes foules et de luxes oisifs. Ta mémoire et tes sens ne seront que la nourriture de ton impulsion créatrice. Quant au monde, quand tu sortiras, que sera-t-il devenu? En tout cas, rien des apparences actuelles. (187)

Despite the failure, the poet still works, embracing "possibilités" in the absence of full presence. "Des êtres parfaits" turn into

"experiences," and the poetic self comes to occupy its place in between perfection and total dismay, between full presence of being and its absence. Thus, like Whitman, even death can no longer daunt the poet too much; even if he cannot usher in a new world of divine presence and harmony, then at least the world will be "rien des apparences actuelles" once he has left it. The power of poetry may be diminished, but it is not negated.

In the same way that Whitman and Rimbaud renegotiate their poetic stance and sense of self after their respective crises, so too does Hopkins reconsider and reshape his conception of poetry and the self's identity with a divine "other." In the second chapter, we discussed Hopkins' conviction of the divine presence suffusing the natural world; but after his crisis of separation due to the transitory nature of the physical world, his view of the two realms could never again be the same. The relationship between the spiritual and the physical is estranged and, as in Whitman's verse, becomes highly complex if not even occasionally paradoxical. Written after his poetic crisis, Hopkins' late poems vary widely in form and content as Hopkins approaches a stance of in-betweenness comparable to that we have uncovered in the American and French poets.

Two poems written shortly after the Sonnets of Desolation (1885), "Harry Ploughman" (1887) and "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" (1886), represent Hopkins' attempt to reevaluate and reconstruct his conception of the spiritual and the physical as well as their impact on his conception of selfhood. "Harry Ploughman" is a curious poem in this respect in that it consists almost exclusively of purely physical description; the following lines are typical:

Hard as hurdle arms, with a broth of goldish flue  
Breathed round; the rack of ribs; the scooped flank; lank  
Rope-over thigh; knee-nave; and barrelled shank --  
    Head and foot, shouldér and shank --  
By a grey eye's heed steered well, one crew, fall to;  
Stand at stress. Each limb's barrowy brawn, his thew  
That onewhere curded, onewhere sucked or sank --  
    Soared ór sank --  
Though as a beechbole firm, finds his, as at a rollcall, rank  
And features, in flesh, what deed he each must do --  
    His sinew-service where do. (177)

In a letter to Robert Bridges, Hopkins explained that this poem, ostensibly a sonnet, is a "direct picture of a ploughman, without afterthought"; the poet desired that the ploughman be a "vivid figure before the mind's eye; if he is not that the sonnet fails" (382). This emphasis on physical description seems a strange departure for the poet who had once been so intent on finding the instress of the divine throughout the inscapes of the natural world -- even more so for the same poet whose own physicality became such a burden in the Terrible Sonnets. But we can detect in the phrase "what deed he

each must do" (line 10) a certain stoic fatalism or resigned acceptance of physicality no matter how disturbing or transitory it may be. What is ultimately compelling about the poem is the total divorce of any connection between the overtly fleshly description and a redemptive spirituality; the divine is curiously absent. But the description is not consequently simpler and less complicated; indeed, Hopkins' language becomes increasingly dense and obscure, the sonnet almost cluttered with odd words and phrases in the remainder of the poem such as "windlaced," "wind-lilylocks-laced," "churlsgrace," and "amansstrength." Such obtuseness has puzzled and daunted many readers, suggesting that Hopkins' view of the physical world, even in a supposedly objective poem, is not without its ambiguities and ambivalences.

"Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" contains even denser language and a more complex examination of the relationship between the physical and the divine. Once again a sonnet, the first half paints a very disturbing picture of the bleakness of life:

Earnest, earthless, equal, attuneable, | vaulty, voluminous, . . .  
 stupendous  
 Evening strains to be time's vast, | womb-of-all, home-of-all,  
 hearse-of-all night.  
 Her fond yellow hornlight wound to the west, | her wild hollow  
 hoarlight hung to the height  
 Waste; her earliest stars, earlstars, | stars principal, overbend  
 us,  
 Fíre-féaturing héaven. For éarth | her béing has unbóund; her



dápple is at énd, as-  
 Tray or a swarm, all throughther, in throngs; | self ín self stéepèd  
 and páshed -- quíte  
 Disremembering, dismembering | all now. heart, you round me  
 right  
 With: Our évening is óver us; óur night | whélms, whélms, and  
 will énd us.  
 Only the beakleaved boughs dragonish | damask the tool-smooth  
 bleak light; black,  
 Ever so black on it. (175)

According to Catherine Phillips, the title alludes to the "opening verse of the 'Dies irae' in the Catholic Mass for the Dead: 'Day of Wrath, that day when the world is consumed to ash as David and the Sibyl testify'" (350), the Sibyl being a foreboding reference of destruction from the *Aeneid*. The physical realm seems in total chaos, bent on self-destruction; the "womb-of-all" is in actuality the "hearse-of-all," and the very fabric of being has become "unbound." Even the "dapple is at end," the "pied beauty" of the poet's earlier verse having become a "wild hollow hoarlight." Reminiscent of the Sonnets of Desolation, the chaos of the physical realm distorts the poet's conception of self: his "self [is] in self steeped and pashed -- quite Disremembering, dismembering"; the self fears both an internal ("disremembering") and an external ("dismembering") distortion and destruction with the downfall of the physical world.

The remainder of the sonnet suggests what has transpired to alter so radically the poet's once glorious view of nature:

. . . Our tale, O our oracle!, | Lét life, wáned, ah lét life wínd  
 Off hér once skéined stained véined varíety | upon, áll on twó  
 spools; párt, pen, páck  
 Now her áll in twó flocks, twó folds -- bláck, white; | ríght,  
 wrong; réckon but, réck but, mínd  
 But thése two; wáre of a wórld where bút these | twó tell, éach  
 off the óther; of a ráck  
 Where, selfwrung, selfstrung, sheathe- and shelterless, | thóughts  
 agáinst thoughts ín groans grínd. (175)

At one point the poet had celebrated variety, multiplicity, and the divine unity which bound all things together; now he can only see the world in terms of opposites: black/white, right/wrong. The legacy of the Terrible Sonnets is a clear-cut distinction between the removed and distant presence of the divine and the desolate absence of life which the poet now perceives. With his grotesque description, Hopkins is more reminiscent of Rimbaud than Whitman, but all three poets recognize in these late poems the absence of the divine or ideal presence. Consequently, the self for Hopkins becomes "selfwrung, selfstrung" and the poem ends as the self's "thoughts against thoughts in groans grind"; the self cannot obtain transcendence but turns self-reflexively in on itself, leaving behind a poem whose very language borders on meaningless groans and grunts.

We have thus seen how the three poets recognize their inability to achieve transcendence, to merge the noumenal essence and presence of an ideal divinity with an invigorated, life-affirming

physicality; both Whitman and Rimbaud wrote poems which elegize this loss and then turned their attention to verse which accepts the self as essentially trapped in a transitory physical state while the realm of spiritual and physical transcendence remains at a distance. Whitmanian and Rimbaldian physicality is characterized by insubstantiality and impermanence; true reality lies beyond the grasp of the physical. Ultimately, both poets are able to keep their poetry from expressing only despair at their lost illusions, and the strength of their late poetry lies in the hope that a delayed transcendence may be possible. In these late poems, the self lies in a state of in-betweenness, hoping for an eventual transcendence into the full presence of the ideal with a hope that dispels the fear of the complete absence of such an ideal. Does Hopkins achieve a similar stance in his late poetry?

"(Ashboughs)," titled by Robert Bridges, suggests that he does. The two poems we have examined thus far paradoxically reveal, on one hand, an abiding interest in the physical, and, on the other, a total denial of the power of the physical to obtain any kind of redemption. In "(Ashboughs)" Hopkins begins negotiating a reconciliation -- if not a balancing -- between these polar views. The first half of the poem describes the hold that nature still exerts over the poet:

Not of all my eyes see, wándering on the world,  
 Is anything a milk to the mind só, so sighs déep  
 Poetry to it, as a tree whose boughs break in the sky.  
 Say it is áshboughs: whether on a December day and furred  
 Fast or they in clammyish láshtender combs creep  
 Apart wide and new-nestled at heaven most high. (177-78)

The sight of the tress in winter is a "milk to the mind," nourishing the poet's poetic soul, perhaps even providing the inspiration for this poem. The darkness of the natural world in "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" is somewhat tempered by this sign of life. But it is tempered because the tree reaches for heaven:

They touch heaven, tabour on it; how their talons sweep  
 The smouldering enormous winter welkin! May  
 Mells blue and snowwhite through them, a fringe and fray  
 Of greenery: it is old earth's groping towards the steep  
 Heaven whom she child's us by. (178)

Heaven is both the literal sky the tree grows toward and the divine presence by which all things are maintained, a clear allusion to the beliefs espoused in the early verse. The difference between this poem and a piece such as "God's Grandeur" is that the divine does not suffuse the natural world the way it does in the early verses' play between instress and inscape; in "(Ashboughs)" the divine life is removed, and the trees must grope for it, only faintly feeling its presence. At the very end of the poem, Hopkins includes himself in the "groping towards the steep Heaven whom she child's us by," suggesting that he views himself as a part of the natural world, as

This stance of in-betweenness gains force in Hopkins' remaining poems, and, as with Whitman and Rimbaud, it allows him to refigure his relationship with his body, its imminent death, and his view of poetry and the new role of the poet. One of Hopkins' densest poems, "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection," articulates the new position to which the poet has come. First, the poem offers a much tempered appreciation of nature, similar to that in "(Ashboughs)":

Cloud-puffball, torn tufts, tossed pillows | flaunt forth, then  
chevy on an air --  
Built thoroughfare: heaven-roysterers, in gay-gangs | they throng,  
they glitter in marches.  
Down roughcast, down dazzling whitewash, | wherever an elm  
arches,  
Shivelights and shadowtackle in long | lashes lace, lance, and pair.  
Delightfully the bright wind boisterous | ropes, wrestles, beats  
earth bare  
Of yestertempest's creases; in pool and rutpeel parches  
Squandering ooze to squeezed | dough, crust, dust; stanches,  
starches  
Squadroned masks and manmarks | treadmire toil there  
Footfretted in it. Million-fuelèd, | nature's bonfire burns on.  
(180-81)

The "delight" in nature returns but not with the fervid praise of poems such as "God's Grandeur" and "Pied Beauty." Just as Rimbaud's and Whitman's views of their ideals suffered change through crisis, so too does Hopkins' once ideal view of nature alter; nature is now a somewhat violent, tempestuous force, which "wrestles, beats earth bare" and "stanches, starches" as "nature's bonfire burns on" in a continuous Heraclitean flux. The brief allusion to the divine in the phrase "heaven-roysterers" turns into the the "Down roughcast, down dazzling whitewash"; the "freckled" and variant brilliance of the spirit-inspired world is now "ooze . . . dough, crust, and dust." Even the poem's sprung rhythm, which once accented and called attention to the multiple delights of nature, is now harder and more likely to trip the reader than augment our appreciation. For instance, the frolicking, joyful line in "Pied Beauty" links opposites in rhythmic harmony: "swift, slów; sweet, sóur; adázze, díim." But a line in the later poem -- "Cloud-puffball, torn tufts, tossed pillows | flaunt forth" -- is awkward, disjunctive, and characterized more by tearing and tossing than by harmony and unity.

Perhaps the poet's enthusiasm for nature is tempered and altered by death, the subject of the next section of the poem:

But quench her bonniest, dearest | to her, her clearest-selved  
 spark  
 Man, how fast his firedint, | his mark on mind, is gone!

Both are in a unfathomable, all is in an enormous dark  
Drowned. O pity and indig | nation! Manshape, that shone  
Sheer off, disseveral, a star, | death blots black out; nor mark  
Is any of him at all so stark  
But vastness blurs and time | beats level. (181)

As in the Sonnets of Desolation and a poem such as "Spring and Fall," the threat of death, of alienation and separation, alters the entire mood of the poem; the "bonniness" of nature, especially her "clearest-selved spark Man," is subject to the "black[ing] out" of death. The "clearest-selved spark" becomes "disseveral," the self blurred and ultimately obliterated. Hopkins, like the other two poets, fears this death and its vast starkness.

But the remainder of the poem announces a new resolution:

... Enough! the Resurrection,  
A heart's-clarion! Away grief's gasping, | joyless days,  
dejection.  
Across my foundering deck shone  
A beacon, an eternal beam. Flesh fade, and mortal trash  
Fall to the residuary worm; | world's wildfire, leave but ash:  
In a flash, at a trumpet crash,  
I am all at once what Christ is, | since he was what I am, and  
This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, | patch, matchwood, immortal  
diamond  
Is immortal diamond. (181)

To overcome the fear of death, the isolation of the self and the potential loss of contact with the divinity, the poet places his hope in the Resurrection, but note that it is initially a primarily spiritual resurrection. The "flesh fade[s], and mortal trash fall[s] to the residuary worm"; all that remains of the body is "ash," and, like

Whitman and Rimbaud before him, Hopkins' renegotiation of his ideals concentrates more and more on the spirit and less and less on the body. Granted, the very idea of "resurrection" and the imagery of the "immortal diamond" in the last two lines of the poem suggest a physical as well as spiritual recuperation, but it is clear that such will occur at a later date, "at a trumpet crash" announcing Christ's second coming. The immediacy of the identity between body and spirit/soul, an ideal once shared by all three poets, has given way to a delayed transcendence, a future resurrection of body and soul which will give the poet his identity with the Divine. We can note the shift in view by comparing this poem to the end of "The Wreck of the Deutschland." In the earlier poem, the poet gained identity and connection with the Divine by meditating on the sisters and Christ as well as by physically sensing the divine presence in the natural world around him. Now, such identity is removed, set at a distant point in the future. Like Whitman, Hopkins strives and yearns toward that point, his hope testifying to the fact that the poet does not enjoy the full presence of such divinity but also pointing to his belief that such a presence will not always be absent from him; thus, he stands in-between, with Whitman and Rimbaud, waiting to possess truth one day in one body and one soul. At that point he will be "all at once what Christ is," his self identified with the Divine,



joined, connected and freed from the separation of Death and the various difficulties of the physical.

Until that point, the poet must accept his current position of in-betweenness, and, much like Rimbaud, Hopkins turns his poetry into an expression of that in-betweenness. The sonnet "Thou Art Indeed Just, Lord" is a prayer, and, like "Génie," it acknowledges the ideal (of the divinity) while noting the self's distance from it:

Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend  
With thee; but, sir, so what I plead is just.  
Why do sinners' ways prosper? and why must  
Disappointment all I endeavour end? (183)

The presence of the divine is just, but the poem traces the poet's distance from such justice, commenting on the absence of the divine around him. The poet characterizes his situation in greater detail in the following stanzas:

Wert thou my enemy, O thou my friend,  
How wouldst thou worse, I wonder, than thou dost  
Defeat, thwart me? Oh, the sots and thralls of lust  
Do in spare hours more thrive than I that spend,

Sir, life upon thy cause. See, banks and brakes  
Now, leavèd how thick! laced they are again  
With fretty chervil, look, and fresh wind shakes

Them; birds build -- but not I build. (183)

In his in-between state, the poet senses the presence of God at the same time that he senses his distance from such divinity. He questions the opposition of being a friend or an enemy of the divine,

of being in close connection and harmony with God or being removed and absent from his presence. But the poet's position seems characterized by both polarities and by neither at the same time, their opposition breaking down in the poet's feelings of in-betweenness.

Ultimately, the poet feels powerless:

. . . no, but strain,  
Time's eunuch, and not breed one work that wakes.  
Mine, O thou lord of life, send my roots rain. (183)

The poet is somehow inadequate to give presence within himself to the divine, trapped as he is in the non-transcending cycles of time; hence, in this spiritual and physical impotence, he cannot presence the divine in his "work" -- his poetry. At the same time, however, the poet prevents the poem from expressing a complete absence of meaningfulness by praying for inspiration, for the presence of the divine. Although Hopkins' poetry no longer points directly to God's presence (as does "God's Grandeur"), this poem nonetheless attests to a divine presence as it situates the self as removed, in need of, and only potentially capable of receiving such a presence.

Images of poetic impotence and hope coalesce powerfully in Hopkins' last poem, "To R. B. [Robert Bridges]." In a sonnet essentially about writing poetry, Hopkins offers us in the opening quatrains a portrait of the ideal production of ideal poetry:

The fine delight that fathers thought; the strong  
 Spur, live and lancing like the blowpipe flame,  
 Breathes once and, quenched faster than it came,  
 Leaves yet the mind a mother of immortal song.

Nine months she then, nay years, nine years she long  
 Within her wears, bears, cares and combs the same:  
 The widow of an insight lost she lives, with aim  
 Now known and hand at work now never wrong. (184)

The inspiration -- or, more literally, the insemination -- for a poem occurs in a seemingly impalpable moment which gestates and develops into a poetic presence. In Hopkins' early poetry, for instance, the inspiring instress of the presence of God turned into the concrete, physical images of the poet's work, which praised the immortality of the divine in what the poet believed was his "immortal song." Thus, in the ideal realm of poetic creation, a close correspondence exists between the inspiring presence (even if its initial forcefulness is lost) and its sustained, palpable presence in the inspired, physical work of art.

But, as the poet reveals in the concluding sestet, his problem lies in an inability to find such inspiration:

Sweet fire the sire of muse, my soul needs this;  
 I want the one rapture of any inspiration.  
 O then if in my lagging lines you miss

The roll, the rise, the carol, the creation,  
 My winter world, that scarcely breathes that bliss  
 Now, yields you, with some sighs, our explanation. (184)

Once again, the poet feels removed from the divine source, and he admits that the "roll, the rise, the carol, the creation" which inspired earlier verse is now missing; the divine presence which "fathers-forth" throughout the material world is now distant, leaving the poet feeling impotent. But the beauty -- and hope -- of the poem is that out of the absence of inspiration comes a sonnet. The poem's very existence articulates the poet's sense of in-betweenness: although the poem does not come from the full presence of divine inspiration, it nonetheless dispels the threat of complete absence by its beautiful (and inspired!) "explanation." In this way, the poem echoes both Whitman's and Rimbaud's late verse. Like Whitman, Hopkins admits an inability to presence the divine, but both poets still place their hope in turning a "winter world" of death and seeming desolation into a meaningful experience. Even in the Whitmanian embracing of death and the Hopkinsian embracing of the absence of inspiration, a "presence" can be found; in accepting physical absence, Whitman hopes to identify with the "universal," and in accepting inspirational absence, Hopkins' poem presences itself as significant and beautiful. As in "Solde," the impetus of the poem is absence, but it is an absence which implies a corresponding presence.

What Virginia Ellis says of Hopkins at the end of her text on the British poet can equally apply to Whitman and Rimbaud:

[M]ost of the great writers of the nineteenth century, and Hopkins in particular, acknowledged a "reserve of truth beyond what the mind reaches and still feels to be behind," and language for them could reach toward expression of that truth but could not necessarily contain or define it, certainly not determine it. They did not circumscribe the world by finite limits, nor locate the ultimate in the finite, and there remained for them as for Pascal "infinite spaces" that might both terrify the mind by their silence and summon it to new voyagings. (303)

All three poets' work testifies to their painful discovery that materiality -- whether of the body or of language -- cannot contain and express the divine ideal. The physical world has limitations, such as bodily infirmities and the cessation of sensation in death, which prevent it from being equated or identical with a supposedly eternal spiritual realm. The desire to bring the phenomenal self into a noumenal awareness of the divine by making the divine palpably present falters; but the poets still hope for a transcendence which will bring them into that presence and dispel their feelings of isolation, alienation, and absence. The romantic project and the powers of the imagination may have failed to embody and incarnate such a presence, but the continued writing of poetry attests to a hope which no threat of absence can silence.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusion**

According to George Steiner, "In the main, western art, music, and literature have . . . spoken immediately either to the presence or absence of the god" (22). No summation could be more apt to the verse of the three nineteenth-century poets we have examined. Although Whitman, Rimbaud, and Hopkins may envision and figure their "god" in different ways, it is more than evident that the perceived presence or absence of that eternal "Other" is of great consequence to their sense of self as poets.

But as I suggest in the fourth chapter, the poets in question do not remain entrapped by the polarity of presence and absence, variously waffling between these two poles. Instead, their most mature work seeks to express the aporetic crisis constituted by the simultaneous presence and absence of the "other" which gives each poet his sense of identity. Eternity and totalization thus give way to potential and possibility.

Schlegel periodically characterized his poetic ideal as "eternally becoming," and while Whitman, Rimbaud, and Hopkins might have

agreed that they and their poetics are in a state of becoming, I think they each hoped for a final fixity -- even as they recognized their current remove from such a state. This negotiation, spanning the entire nineteenth century, remains a crucial part of our poetic and artistic legacy, especially as the three poets discussed here continue to exert a profound influence on contemporary poetry and theory. The full effect of their prevailing presence remains to be examined; and as we bid them "Farewell" in this study, so too in the future study of poetry must we bid them "Hail!"

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## Vita

Born in New Orleans in 1967, Jonathan Alexander received his university education at Louisiana State University, graduating *summa cum laude* with a B.A. in English Literature in 1989 and with an M.A. in Comparative Literature in 1991. His scholarly pursuits have variously consisted in editing both academic and creative writing journals and in organizing poetry readings and a national conference on Christianity and Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Art and Culture. Mr. Alexander has lectured widely on nineteenth-century poetry, his chief academic interest, and has published articles on Christina Rossetti, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and other literary figures. Additionally, Mr. Alexander is a professional pianist, recording artist, and composer; his arrangements of nineteenth-century American hymns have been published, and his songs for voice, with texts by Walt Whitman, Christina Rossetti, and Oscar Wilde, have been performed throughout the South.

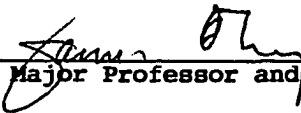
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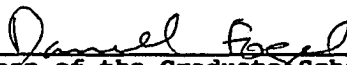
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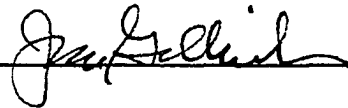
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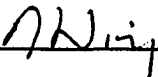
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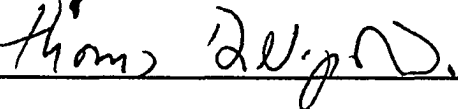
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