

## Names in *Leaves of Grass*

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EVERYONE THAT KNOWS WHITMAN knows that he was fascinated with names. Indeed it has long been obvious that a distinctive device in *Leaves of Grass* is the use of names, particularly place names, although no one has as yet abstracted Whitman's theory from his extensive practice. Perhaps the reason for this neglect of a major aspect of Whitman's art is as much an *embarrasement des richesses* as anything else, for the concordance shows a use of names in startling excess of any other 'concordanced' poet. Here, too, I shirk the labor of classifying and categorizing the hundreds of names, and turn rather to new manuscript evidence that reveals much of Whitman's strong conviction and partly formed theory on the use of names.

For purposes of a larger study on Whitman's language, I have been permitted to examine the unpublished manuscript holdings of Mr. Charles Feinberg of Detroit. Of the many relevant items, three in particular seem to me to demand a new interpretation of Whitman's poetic growth, and all three are centrally concerned with names: the first of these is the notebook *Words*;<sup>1</sup> the second item is the manuscript of Whitman's *An American Primer*;<sup>2</sup> and the

<sup>1</sup> In the *Catalogue of an Exhibition held at the Detroit Public Library, Detroit, Michigan, 1955*, this item is No. 15 and is described in part as follows: "Words: Whitman's Notebook for an Intended American Dictionary. A Ms. and Clippings. (176 leaves 18½ cm. × 13 cm.) . . . Manuscript notes, clippings, words and phrases on grammar, language, etc. were saved by Walt Whitman in this book."

<sup>2</sup> Whitman's work known as *An American Primer* was printed by Horace Traubel from a collection of short notes on individual slips of paper made by Whitman from cut portions of the paper wrappers of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*. These are short notes and were not written at one time, but in the book they are printed in regular essay form. Traubel's method of presentation is unfortunate only to the extent that the reader cannot but be baffled by the jerky, unconnected, disparate style. With the 1855 Preface, the *Primer* is the most important single item for an understanding of Whitman's poetry. It has been unfortunately neglected because of the difficulty in reading it as an essay, a form Whitman never intended for it.

third, a gathering of notes called "The States and Their Resources."<sup>3</sup> All of these were written in the 1850's; a few entries clearly antedating the publication of the first *Leaves of Grass* in 1855, but most apparently jotted down between 1855 and the Boston edition of 1860. These were not the 'shaping' years, but more accurately the 'taking stock' years in which Whitman (already fixed in his poetic cast by the 1855 venture) was now examining the mass of material gathered by him as a would-be lecturer<sup>4</sup> for possible values as poetry.

In this examination Whitman was obviously guided more by poetic instinct than scientific awareness, and the consequences show an almost passionate perceptivity to the aesthetic value of names that is distinctive with him. In the collection of notes now entitled *An American Primer*, Whitman is, in fact, so intense in his concern with the need for names that grow out of American experience that it is difficult to see what motivated Traubel in ignoring Whitman's own title, "Names."<sup>5</sup> Certainly the notes themselves are clear indications of Whitman's uncanny perception of the value of names to his poetry. "All that immense volumes, and more than volumes can tell, are conveyed in the right name" and "the right name of a city, state, town, man, or woman, is a perpetual feast to the aesthetic and moral nature."<sup>6</sup> In this statement Whitman had

<sup>3</sup> This item is described in the Catalogue of the Feinberg Exhibition, p. 45: "The States and Their Resources; notes. A Ms. written mostly on versos of blank forms of the office of the Tax Collector of the City of Williamsburgh. (29 p. 21 1/2 x 12 cm. largest). Individual states listed by Whitman on separate slips of paper; each contains comments on the name, resources, population, geography, etc."

<sup>4</sup> It is my personal conviction that Whitman made the unpredictable leap from a conventional journalistic career to the poetry of *Leaves of Grass* by means of a thwarted desire to become the lyceum prophet-priest of democracy. In everything I have seen of the early material, he treats the information he gathers not for its use as poetry on the page but for its value in impassioned oratory. This is not the place to parade the evidence supporting this hypothesis, but it will be evident in what follows that Whitman writes for the ear as much as for the eye.

<sup>5</sup> The original outside cover has "Names" in Whitman's large, flowing, ornate script that he often used to spell out projected titles. Below, but in a smaller hand, he writes in a parenthesis, "Words, Language, Voices," presumably explanatory but subordinate titles. Whitman was never final in his title choices, and he next writes out "Words and Names," and then "Names and Words," to be followed on the verso of the title page and on each side of the second page with the title "Names" again. The title "An American Primer" does appear but not until entry No. 86 of the collection of 114 slips.

originally written "perpetual feast to the ear," and this first reaction would seem to be nearer to his real experience. Certainly when he asked himself the rhetorical question, "What is the fitness — what the strange charm — of aboriginal names?" he did so only to prepare for the half answer, "Monogahela: it rolls with venison richness upon the palate."<sup>7</sup>

Whitman knew, however, that not all men shared what might be called his auditory taste for names. In fact, "masses of men, unaware what they secretly like, lazily inquire what difference there is between one name and another." The "masses being always as keen, eligible as any, whether they know it or not," it is essential that "the few fine ears of the world decide for them also." This is one of the functions, almost the key function, of the poet, as Whitman perceived his office. Believing that "names are a test of the esthetic and of spirituality," he wished to share that "delicate subtle something there is in the right name, an undemonstrable nourishment that exhilarates the soul."<sup>8</sup>

Whitman never explicitly defines the "subtle something." He was no philosopher of language, no analytic psychologist, and presumably he accepted the truth of his intuitive grasp of the mystery of language with complete aplomb. I do not mean that he made no investigation of language,<sup>9</sup> but that his amateur researches were for purposes of exploitation of the mysteries of names, not for the solving of them. He makes a note to check the work of John Pickering, the author of an early book on Americanisms,<sup>10</sup> saves a news-

<sup>6</sup> *Primer*, 107. In this and succeeding quotations, I enumerate the notes by number in the arrangement in which Traubel left them; the slip on which this comment is made is the 107th. The paper would have been available to Whitman late in 1855 and in 1856 and the entry was certainly made at that time.

<sup>7</sup> *Primer*, 90.      <sup>8</sup> *Primer*, 106.

<sup>9</sup> Whitman had a far greater understanding of the philological aspects of language than is generally realized. The *Word* book was essentially a handy filing system for keeping all sorts of notes about language: slang words, French words with pronunciation hints and definitions, clippings on phonetic spelling and language history, structure, and evolution. Significant quotations from Max Müller, von Humboldt, Bunsen, his exhaustive analysis of Webster's Introduction, and his many magazine clippings on folk-lore are clear indications that Whitman was by no means as naive about language as the picture that he presents of himself in his own poetry.

<sup>10</sup> *Words*, 100. As with the *Primer*, entries are enumerated here in the order in which they appear in the *Word Ms.* book.

paper clipping in which the Secretary of the Navy lists the original Indian names of vessels which were being changed to names of states, rivers, cities, or towns,<sup>11</sup> and marks and underlines a column long article on "Origin of the Names of the States,"<sup>12</sup> all being presumably grist for his mill. Particularly interesting was his preservation of a two page report which gives brief summaries of papers read at a gathering of language scholars. This forerunner of the MLA conventions had held a panel discussion in which Professor Hugo Reid spoke on the advisability of a universal language. Professor Haldeman rejected this proposal, as did a Dr. McIlvaine. It was this latter protest that caught Whitman's attention, and he encircles the following:

Dr. McIlvaine thought that the language of a nation was the natural expression of its thought and life, and if nation were to adopt a new language it would ruin its development.<sup>13</sup>

From Whitman's attitude as remembered from the "Preface" of 1855 or from *Democratic Vistas*, it is clear that McIlvaine's comment would confirm his own belief that America needed its own language and that the native words were necessary to our national as well as our poetic growth. His reaction to the word *petition* is an example of this:

... impropriety of the word "petition" as used for memorials to Congress, Legislatures, Common Councils, etc. — It sprung up under the very state of society which America has arisen to destroy, and only belongs there.<sup>14</sup>

What applies to words applies even more stringently to names, and this patriotic zeal is, indeed, an important motive in many of his protests that I have found. Sometimes in the intensity of his umbrage at a particular word, he forgets that adjoining words are just as foreign. That he should forget that "Congress, Legislatures, Common Council" are borrowed in much the same way as "petition" is an understandable error. Another sample of this approach is the

<sup>11</sup> *Words*, 48.    <sup>12</sup> *Words*, 65.    <sup>13</sup> *Words*, 98.

<sup>14</sup> *Words*, 40. Another entry, no. 102, comments on this same noun, "Words remain in use, sometimes very inappropriately — as the word 'petition,' so generally applied to requests, papers, etc. sent to Congress, State Legislatures, and Common Councils, — the better word is 'Memorial' or 'Application' or 'Statement.'"

slip of paper which he directs to his collection of comments on names and on which he makes another improvement of civic terminology:

Names

for the U.S. Senate — the Small House or Branch of Congress  
for the Representatives — the Large House of Congress  
the two — the Houses of Congress or simply the Congress<sup>15</sup>

As might be surmised, Whitman carries his protest into all areas of language usage. He offers as "a suggestion in Names" that "the woman should preserve her own name, just as much after marriage as before" and adds "also all titles must be dropped — no Mr. or Mrs. or Miss any more."<sup>16</sup> Although Whitman must have been aware that these conventional salutations would continue, he regularly avoided their use in his own writing, correspondence, and conversation. The one exception to this was the use of *Mrs.* in addressing older women for whom he had filial respect, such as Mrs. Price, Mrs. Tyndale, and friends of his mother. The objection to titles was primarily because their use implied deference and subordination, and here as elsewhere his Quaker background corroborated his feeling for the democratized language.<sup>17</sup>

Something of this is found in the concern for first names. "These are very curious to trace out. — How came they? Whence these *Marys, Johns, Williams, and Elizabeths*?"<sup>18</sup> How far he did trace such names does not appear, but apparently he went far enough to be baffled by the complexity of the history and evolution of names. On a slip of scrap paper made by cutting up covers of the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, he enters hints for a lecture to which he gives the tentative title *A Suggestive Primer*. The material is worked over and revised so minutely that it ends up by becoming one of the germ-ideas for a poem. The final result is this interesting but complicated paragraph:

Words of names of persons, thus far, still  
return the old continents and races — return the  
past three thousand years — perhaps twenty thous-

<sup>15</sup> *Words*, 105.      <sup>16</sup> *Words*, 76 b.

<sup>17</sup> *Words*, 104. Another objection was that the titles were so pointless in this country as to be superfluous. In a reminder note to himself, he says: "*Tracing words to origins*: To get in the habit of tracing words to their root-meanings — as for instance in the phrase 'Rev. Mr. Conway' trace Reverend,' trace 'Mr.' — how inapplicable and superfluous so many words are."      <sup>18</sup> *Words*, 42.

and — return the Hebrew Bible, Greece, Rome, France, the Goths, the Celts, Scandinavia, Germany, England. — Still questions come: What flanges are practicable for names of persons that mean these States? . . . What is there that will conform to the genius of these States, and to all facts?

What escape, with perfect freedom, without affectation, from shoals of Johns, Peters, Davids, Marys?

Or on what happy principle, popular and fluent, could other words be prefixed or suffixed to these, to make them show who they are, what land they were born in, what government, which of these States, what genius, mark, blood, times, have coined them with strong-cut coinage?<sup>19</sup>

To anyone but Whitman, the weight of tradition and the fixture of the first name in western civilization would have been so great that these questions could hardly have come to mind. Even for Whitman, there were no real answers, but it would be to misconceive Whitman's conception of his own democratic mission to think that these were rhetorical questions only. From his own observations, and it will be remembered that the circle of his friends in these years was predominantly among workmen,<sup>20</sup> he could say, the "popular man's instinct, I notice, is continually trying to escape from Ephraims and Johns and Rolando's."<sup>21</sup>

What happened, of course, was that the inappropriate name fell before the nickname. This Whitman recognized and, indeed, approved of, but only as second best. The ideal situation would be to "give to infants the names of qualities — physical and mental attributes." Obviously such characteristics are something less than

<sup>19</sup> *Primer*, 62, 63.

<sup>20</sup> In another Ms. which Mr. Feinberg brought to my attention, a Whitman *Autograph Notebook*, written in 1857, the first thirty pages were used by Whitman to list names of friends, acquaintances, business associates, persons to be remembered for any reason at all. Of this remarkable list of 307 names, 268 of them seem to be drivers, ferry boat men, firemen, policemen, ship-builders, and workmen of various sorts. It was part of the role Whitman established for himself as the democratic poet that he was one of the roughs, dressed in coarse clothes, with open collar, slouch hat, trousers tucked into his boots, and whatever else went with the part. Critics have worried and pondered for years on the amount of pose and posturing in the role Whitman adopted, but it would seem inescapably true that his circle of friends was largely among workmen. <sup>21</sup> *Words*, 55.

glaring in babies, but Whitman is unperturbed, asserting blandly, "Do not name them, till they exhibit these markedly." When the time for naming arrives, the rule is: "Always select, of course, the most favorable phases of character — or of natural things — as Day, Hope, Oak, Rocky, (Trout), Fisherman, Sweet-breath."<sup>22</sup>

It is difficult to keep a straight face when reading such a comment, and I must admit that I include the name "Trout" even though Whitman draws a deletion line through it to show the lengths to which his theory might be carried. On the other hand, there is no doubt at all that Whitman is correct in terms of his premises, and once the amusement attendant upon the initial shock of the unexpected has passed, it would be difficult to find fault with what he says. But as Whitman knew, human reactions follow traditional patterns, parents would consult the family history instead of the democratic poet in choosing names, and if an inappropriate name should result, it would be subjected to the democratic shaping of the nick-name process.

Of course Whitman makes no such defense of his double approval of the poetically chosen name and the mass-sponsored nick-name, but both are parts of the democratic process as he perceived it. In lists of names he made of friends, he invariably uses the nick-name, doubtless because many of his friends might not even respond if called by their formal names. "In words of names, the mouth and ear of the people show antipathy to Misters, — handles — they love short, first names, abbreviated to their lips." He goes on to give examples: "Tom, Bill, (Walt), Jack — these are to enter into literature and be voted for on political tickets, for the great offices."<sup>23</sup> Again in this quotation I have left in a word through which Whitman has drawn a slant line for deletion. The word to be omitted was "Walt," which Traubel has done, doubtless because of the too obvious connection with the poet. The original inclusion by the poet is significant, however, for it shows that Whitman was unconsciously reminded of his desired relationship to the mass by the

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<sup>22</sup> *Words*, 55. It so happens that Whitman's favorite nieces, the daughters of Jeff (the favorite brother) and Mattie (the sister-in-law to whom he wrote more letters than to his other brothers), were named California (later changed to Jessie) and Mannahatta. Whether the names were chosen in deference to or in consultation with the poet is not answerable, but it would certainly seem that Whitman would not be upset by such names. <sup>23</sup> *Primer*, 70.

automatic repeating of his own name with Tom, Bill, and Jack. In practice this meant rejection of the earlier signature under which he had copyrighted the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, one of the few times he ever referred to himself as Walter Whitman. The poet he wanted to be was the poet who would be known by his nick-name; consequently, the book is thenceforth copyrighted by Walt Whitman. In fact he recognized and made a note of the fact that what was true for a general was also true for a poet: " 'Nicknames,' said Napoleon, 'are not to be despised — for it is largely by such names, people are swayed and governed.' ”<sup>24</sup>

But first-names and nick-names are only a part of the naming of persons, and Whitman's interest is in some ways much more engaged by the formal name. He has little to say about last names,<sup>25</sup> perhaps because of the variety and the absence of the personal element in them, but the name to symbolize some great figure of the past is of special interest to him. Of these, the most significant is that of Christ:

*Names* are magic. One word can pour such a flood  
through the soul. Today I will mention Christ's  
before all other names.<sup>26</sup>

But the veneration of Christ does not mean that other names are unimportant. "Grand words of names are still left," he assures himself, and asks.

<sup>24</sup> *Words*, 49.

<sup>25</sup> *Words*, 47. This is a blank insert page made of the green paper cover of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*. The page is used to hold two slightly overlapping newspaper clippings, which are pasted on the left hand margin. The outer one concerns last names, listing many of them to show how they developed in varying ways from trades, occupations, etc. The underneath clipping, interesting in a different way, is entitled "Provincialisms" and lists many regional expressions, slang phrases, etc.

<sup>26</sup> *Primer*, 58. This is another of the elaborately revised slips, each crossing out of a general word to be replaced by a concrete word bringing the lines nearer to the first draft of a poem. The return to the imaginative reflections, that probably led ultimately to the poem "To Him That was Crucified," is found on an adjoining slip, No. 60: "Out of Christ are divine words. — Out of this saviour — Some words are fresh-smelling lilies, roses to the soul, blooming without failure — the names of Christ — all words that have arisen from the life and death of Christ, the divine son who went about speaking perfect words — no patois — whose life was perfect, — the touch of whose hands and feet was miracles — who was crucified — his flesh laid in a shroud, in the grave..."



What is it that flows through me at the sight of the word Hermes, or Pythagoras, Socrates, or Cincinnatus, or Alfred of the olden time — or at the sight of the word Columbus, or Shakespeare, or Voltaire or Rousseau or Mirabeau — or at the sight of the word George Washington, or Jefferson, or R. W. Emerson<sup>27</sup>

The inclusion of Emerson as the only actual contemporary in the list must have been occasioned in part by Whitman's affection and gratitude to the author of the famous letter,<sup>28</sup> for of the many other lists to be found in Whitman manuscripts this is the only one to include a living person. It is not unusual, however, for Washington and Jefferson to be included, for Whitman stressed always the need for developing symbolic heroes of the American past, for creating national myths to replace the inherited stories of Europe. "I say we have here, now, greater ideas to embody than anything ever in Greece or Rome — or that are in the names of Jupiters, Jehovahs, Apollos, and their myths."<sup>29</sup>

What Whitman insisted upon, then, was that "America, too, shall be commemorated — shall stand rooted in the ground in names — and shall flow in the water in names and be diffused in time, in days, in months, in their names." That America was not so commemorated in place names, in lakes and rivers, was Whitman's sharpest criticism of contemporary practice, but even the proper names associated with time were also a continual irritant. "Now the days signify extinct gods and goddesses — the months half-unknown rites and emperors — and chronology with the rest is all foreign to America — all exiles and insults here."<sup>30</sup> The use of the conventional names for the months is found in the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, and

<sup>27</sup> *Primer*, 58, 59.

<sup>28</sup> The Emerson letter, in fact, is extremely important in fixing the date of the writing of the notes that make up *An American Primer*. Almost all of the notes were written on scratch paper made of the paper covers for the first edition as explained previously. Whitman must have been using this paper when the idea came to him to use Emerson's letter in the second edition of 1856 and to work out the design for the spine of the volume which quotes from the letter the famous phrase. "I greet you at the beginning of a great career." On the reverse of slip No.4 Whitman has made two sketches of what he wanted the spine of the 1856 edition to look like. Accordingly, the writing of *An American Primer* was either the last half of 1855 or the first half of 1856.

<sup>29</sup> *Primer*, 100.

<sup>30</sup> *Primer*, 102, 103.

presumably the insult of these names, if Whitman did see it that way, was not strong enough at that time to shape his word choice. But in the five years following, Whitman made the significant investigations and shaped the strong convictions that occasioned the revisions and new additions to *Leaves of Grass* until the work attained the form in which we now know it. An example of the specific protests for the names of the months: "America of course needs NEW NAMES for the Months, as for instance, how absurd our name of 'September' from the Roman – seventh month – the Roman year beginning in March."<sup>31</sup>

Although it is not possible to check the effect of these new convictions in the creating of new poems for the 1860 edition, it is fairly simple to trace the revisions of the 1855 edition now essential for poetry that would be truly American. In every instance the names of days of the week<sup>32</sup> and of the months have been changed.<sup>33</sup> The usual change is to put in the corresponding number, Whitman adopting this practice as a distinctive feature of his style thereafter. For a famous section in "Song of Myself" (stanza 19, vv. 11–12), Whitman now has:

Do you guess I have some intricate purpose?  
Well I have, for the Fourth-month showers have, and the  
mica on the side of a rock has.

These lines are clearly superior to the original 1855 version:

Do you guess I have some intricate purpose?  
Well I have . . . for the April rain has, and the mica  
on the side of a rock has.

Rhythmically, the long lift and the stress on the three new syllables is pleasing to the ear and is appropriate to the sense, and the

<sup>31</sup> *Words*, 65. Also, No. 43, "April, from the Latin verb *Aperio* – 'I open' (April was anciently 2nd month of the year)." and No. 53, "In These States, there must be new names for all the months of the year – they must be characteristic of America – the South, North, East, and West must be represented in them – What is the name January to us? – or March to us? – January commemorates Janus – and March commemorates Mars – the bloody god of war, for the sake of war!"

<sup>32</sup> *Sabbath* used in "Faces" in 1855 becomes *First-day* in 1860 and in all editions thereafter; similarly, *Saturday* (used twice) and *Sunday* (used three times) were changed to *Seventh-day* and *First-day* respectively.

<sup>33</sup> *March*, used in "There Was a Child Went Forth" in 1855, becomes *Third-month* in 1860 and all later editions; similarly *April* (used twice) becomes *Fourth-month* in 1860. There are similar changes for May, June, July, November, December.

necessary plural verb *have* is effective by repeating and echoing the *have* at the beginning of the line. The verb change even helps the singular *has* which completes the line, for now it seems an equally important added thought, not an afterthought as in 1855.

But this is not an essay in prosody, and one example must serve for all.<sup>34</sup> Of course it must be admitted that Whitman did not really find what he wanted, i. e., new names to take the place of the old world importations. He does reject the names he considers inappropriate, but in their place uses the Quaker device of which he may have been aware as a child but which was certainly not demanded by popular acclaim. It is well to remember, however, that the impetus for the change originated in his new found convictions about names and not in the continuation of a family religious custom.

In his protest against names of days and months, Whitman was equally opposed to conventional chronological reckoning. The universal custom of dating years by their relationship to the birth of Christ made any complete departure from this custom a trifle absurd. Whitman did make some investigation of other systems used in other civilizations, and he apparently thought it significant to record "A. U. C. year from the building of the city of Rome,"<sup>35</sup> and "lustrum (five years — ancient Rome)."<sup>36</sup> Perhaps this gave him corroboration for the one change in the use of dates that he made in the 1855 edition. In the poem, "Who Learns My Lesson Complete," Whitman had included "was born on the last day of May 1819" and in the line following "a man thirty-six years old in 1855." In 1860, conforming to his theory, he changed the wording of his birthday announcement to "was born on the last day of the Fifth Month, in

<sup>34</sup> Perhaps it should be pointed out that the change was not universally successful. In one of the catalogues in "Song of Myself" in 1855, Whitman has the line "Seasons pursuing each other, the indescribable crowd is gathered . . .

it is the Fourth of July . . . what salutes of cannon and small arms!"

The line is not especially remarkable in itself, but it is certainly not improved in the final version (Stanza 15, line 52), in which the reader must stop and do some mental arithmetic when his eye joggles at "fourth of the Seventh month" substitution. <sup>35</sup> *Words*, 13.

<sup>36</sup> *Words*, 17. Although *lustrum* is not used in the poetry, there is one somewhat odd usage in the series of newspaper feature articles on Brooklyn. In a reminiscent article on the innocent joys of a Brooklyn wintertime in 1825, Whitman concludes, "Upon the whole, we guess people, old and young, of six or seven lustrums gone, had just as good a time without our more modern excitements and amusements as we do now with them." *Uncollected Poetry and Prose*, II, 257.

the Year 43 of America," and he is now "thirty six years in the Year 79 of America". Few poets were as tenacious as Whitman in hanging on to a mannerism no matter how temporarily unpopular it might have become, but on these lines Whitman's good sense finally overcame his stubbornness, and in 1867 the phrases were dropped altogether. There are other uses of the new American calendar which begins with the year 1775, in fact the device is used as a subtitle in three of the poems in the 1860 edition, but it was not altogether successful and Whitman gradually minimized and finally ceased his futile crusade.

In one of Whitman's 'reminder' notes that he made for the lecture he was apparently planning on American Language, there is an interesting list that serves as a summary of his convictions about names:

- Needed in America – Nomenclature
- Appropriate names for the Months –  
(those now used perpetuate old myths)
- Appropriate names for the Days of the Week  
(those now used perpetuate Teutonic and Greek divinities)
- Appropriate names for Persons, American  
men, women, children (those)
- Appropriate names for American places, cities, Rivers, counties, etc.  
– the name county itself should be changed
- \*\*\*\*\*
- names of streets
- Numbering the streets, as a general thing,  
with a few irresistible exceptions, is very good <sup>37</sup>

The last item on this list has little bearing on the present discussion, and in fact seems to be entered by Whitman as an afterthought. I cannot help but be curious about the "few irresistible exceptions", one of which must certainly have been Broadway, but neither the poetry, the prose, nor the manuscripts throw any light on this minor mystery.

There is, however, no doubt about the place in Whitman's hierarchy of names of place names themselves, the one item "needed in America" that has not been examined. Names of all sorts were

<sup>37</sup> *Primer*, 97. The incompleteness of the entry is part of Whitman's habit of entering enough to remind him of the thought and hurrying on to get down a part of another fleeting thought.

always fascinating to Whitman, both as poet and citizen, and it would be difficult to imagine *Leaves of Grass* without the quite specialized use of place names that is characteristic of our first consciously 'native' poet. There is, indeed, little that can be added to the now general awareness of the poetic sensitivity with which Whitman used them,<sup>38</sup> and it is rather that use of names was a result of a real, if not fully worked out, theory that has been forgotten. Indeed, I am personally convinced that if *Leaves of Grass* had never appeared, the observations and statements on names would be worthy of serious attention in themselves.

In asking himself, "What is the curious rapport of names?" Whitman finds no immediate answer. The rapport is there; in fact "all men experience it — but no man ciphers it out." Although "there are people who say it is not important about names", that "one word is as good as another if the designation be understood," Whitman insists "that nothing is more important than names."<sup>39</sup> One might just as well ask "Is art important? Are forms?" as to question names, for "no country can have its own poems without it have its own names."<sup>40</sup> As the art of a country is a sign of its health, so are its names:

Names are the turning point of who shall be master.  
There is so much virtue in names that a nation  
which produces its own names, haughtily ad-  
heres to them, and subordinates others to them, leads  
all the rest of the nations of the earth. I also  
promulge that a nation which has not its own names,  
but begs them of other nations, has no identity,  
marches not in front but behind.<sup>41</sup>

The first task is to "get rid as soon as convenient of all the bad names — not only of counties, rivers, towns, — but of persons, men and women."<sup>42</sup> Whitman is much more successful in correcting inappropriate names for places than for persons. Doubtless geogra-

<sup>38</sup> Of the many studies that appeared in the centennial year of *Leaves of Grass*, one of the most informative was that of Allen and Davis, *Walt Whitman's Poems, Selections with Critical Aids*. This book would seem at first glance to be little more than a useful selection of Whitman's poetry, with critical guides for the student. The introduction is, however, the most perceptive comment available on the formation and functional performance of Whitman's characteristic style, and the book as a whole is much too important to be categorized as a student text book.

<sup>39</sup> *Primer*, 96.

<sup>40</sup> *Primer*, 98.

<sup>41</sup> *Primer*, 105.

<sup>42</sup> *Words*, 54.

phers, chambers of commerce, and tourist guides were as blind then as now to his appeal, but it is not too difficult to see the inadequacies when Whitman points them out. Most of his critical comments are directed to individual places, but there is one larger complaint: "California is sown thick with names of all the little and big saints — (Chase them away and substitute aboriginal names)."<sup>43</sup> In an extension of this comment to the whole region, he expands the curt statement into an illuminating paragraph which tells us quite as much about Whitman as it does about the Southwest:

California, Texan, New Mexican, and Arizonian names, all have the sense of the exstatic [*sic*] monk, the cloister, the ideas of miracles, and of devotees canonized after death. They are the results of the early missionaries and the element of piety in the old Spanish character. They have, in the same connection, a tinge of melancholy and of curious freedom from grossness and money-making. Such names stand strangely in California. What do such names know of democracies, of the gold hunt for the leads and the nugget, or of the religion that is scorn and negation?<sup>44</sup>

Names of places of whatever sort are clear indications of our complex origins, and it is extremely doubtful that Whitman would wish to make any wholesale changes in American place names. He makes remarkable use of them, as I hope to show in the concluding section of this study, but there is never the touch of asperity in his comments that is found elsewhere. In a note of constructive advice, which he entitles *Names of cities, islands, rivers, new settlements, etc.*, he writes:

These should assimilate in sentiment and sound to something organic in the place, or identical with it. It is far better to call a new inhabited island by the native word than by its first discoverer, or to call it New anything. Aboriginal names always tell finely; sometimes it is necessary to slightly Anglicise them. All classic names are objectionable. How much better Ohio, Oregon, Missouri, Milwaukee, etc. than New York, Ithaca, Naples, etc.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup> *Primer*, 89.      <sup>44</sup> *Primer*, 109.

<sup>45</sup> *Words*, 65. In connection with the names mentioned, Whitman in his poetry does use *Naples* once, but only for the Italian city; *Ithaca* does not appear at all; *New York* is used in the 1855 edition of "Song of Myself," and is changed in 1860 to "Manhattan Island," but the line is dropped thereafter. Certainly the change

Names of many cities have no integral relationship to the site, life, or meaning of the community: "Among the places that stand in need of fresh appropriate names are the great cities of St. Louis, New Orleans, St. Paul,"<sup>46</sup> the state capitol is unrelated to its name, for "Albany originally indicates the sense of a white color or of partial transparency,"<sup>47</sup> also, "in the interior of this State, the beautiful cities of Rome (Syracuse), it already has a perfectly sound and appropriate name, namely Salina,"<sup>48</sup> and, "among the names

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for the 1860 edition was in terms of Whitman's new convictions. There is interesting corroboration of this in Furness, *Walt Whitman's Workshop*, p. 61 (and the note to this passage on p. 223), in which notes for Whitman's projected "Mannahatta Lectures" are given: "Do you know whom you celebrate in the name of this haughty and populous city? — You celebrate the meanest and feeblest tyrant that ever press'd the English throne — the Duke of York, duly James the Second — the burner of women and torturer of men, for the least freedom in thought or words. Every time the hitherto name of this city is written with the pen or spoken with the mouth, it celebrates that man. — If it remains fastened to the city, when after times ask what the name perpetuates, they will have to be answered that it perpetuates the memory of that wretch whom his people chased away, but whose memory is preserved here in the grandest freest and most beautiful city of the world! — It celebrates one who attempted the basest violations of his word, of the colonial charter of this very city, and of human rights! A pretty name, this, to fasten on the proudest and most democratic city in the world!" Furness believes this attempt to change the name of New York and Whitman's correction of the names of the days and months is a consequence of his Quaker training. This is a mistake, although it is certainly true that the memory of the limited Quakerism in his childhood environment may have encouraged Whitman in some of these new ideas. <sup>46</sup> *Primer*, 99. <sup>47</sup> *Words*, 65.

<sup>48</sup> *Primer*, 99. This is a hastily scrawled entry, added to the comment on St. Louis, New Orleans, St. Paul above. Whitman puts in *already* twice and makes the infelicitous "name, namely," blunders rarely found in these notes. Apparently the note was made in haste, and Whitman was not sure at the time of writing whether it was Rome or Syracuse that would be more appropriately named Salina. It was Syracuse, as Whitman apparently found by looking up the matter. In Bucke's *Notes and Fragments*, p. 198, there are two newspaper clippings listed that were found in Whitman's scrap-books, one "The Salt Manufacture," the other, "Amount of Salt Made." Also, on p. 79, the information that Whitman got from these articles is given; the entry is a typical example of the process by which Whitman was gathering information for his lectures, — information that later became the foundation for many of his best known poems. Only the first part of the entry has bearing on the point here: "Salt Works, At Salina, 'Salt Point' now a portion of Syracuse, Onondaga Co., N.Y. (as Williamsburg is a part of Brooklyn) there are some salt springs. . . ." Whether Whitman realized that *Salina* was Latin and not a native word like Onondaga, I cannot tell.

to be revolutionised that of the City of Baltimore.”<sup>49</sup> What is true of many cities is equally true of counties, for “What is the name of King’s county or of Queens county to us? — or St. Lawrence county?”<sup>50</sup>

If this last question were answered logically by pointing out that St. Lawrence is so named because it borders on the St. Lawrence river, Whitman would hardly be satisfied for “the name of Niagara should be substituted for the St. Lawrence.”<sup>51</sup> The native names for rivers had special fascination for Whitman, as in fact did all Indian names:<sup>52</sup>

All aboriginal names sound good. I was asking for something savage and luxuriant, and behold here are the aboriginal names. I see how they are being preserved. They all fit, — they give the true length, breadth, depth! — Mississ’ppi! — the word winds with chutes — it rolls a stream three thousand miles long; Ohio fits this, the Connecticut is as true, Ottawa, Monongahela, all fit.<sup>53</sup>

And the names themselves are fitting for the poems of democratic America, which must be faithful to the land and its distinctive names or forego the purpose that calls them into being.

Walt Whitman, the poet of American democracy, is of course no new claim. Known as such almost from the beginning of his career, partly through his own self-advertising and through the proclamations of his English admirers, the problem is not that he made this boast but that he fulfilled it. It matters little that he needed Dowden’s assistance to find a name for what he was doing and had been doing long before that good Shakespearean scholar had even heard of him, but it matters a great deal to our understanding and evaluation of the poems to see the poetic process at work. But there are so

<sup>49</sup> *Primer*, 91.      <sup>50</sup> *Words*, 54.

<sup>51</sup> *Primer*, 98. In the poetry, the 1856 version of “By Blue Ontario’s Shore” has the name St. Lawrence in a series of names of rivers. In 1860, St. Lawrence becomes Niagara. In the “Song of Joys,” the 1860 edition, line 55, reads

“The voyage down the Niagara (the St. Lawrence) — the superb scenery — the steamers,”

which remained until 1881, when the Niagara was finally dropped.

<sup>52</sup> Whitman himself rarely used the word *Indian*, cf., *Words*, 67, “Of course the word ‘Indian’ does not apply to the American aborigines. — An Indian is a man or woman of the lower southern and eastern half of Asia. It confuses and vexes language to have such synonyms [*sic*] with contra-meaning.”      <sup>53</sup> *Primer*, 98.



many varied uses of names in *Leaves of Grass* that it would hardly be feasible to start with the poems and, with the help of the concordance, work back to the materials from which the poetry grew. It is possible, however, in the light of new manuscript evidence, to reverse this method. A collection of notes, "The States and Their Resources," provide the material, which Whitman had gathered and partly transmuted, and through an examination of them and the poems that grew out of them, an insight into the use of names in *Leaves of Grass* is possible.

Just when Whitman made these notes cannot be definitely established. The paper upon which they were made was available to Whitman in 1856 and was probably used by him in 1857 and 1858.<sup>54</sup> The source from which he obtained the information is not given, but it is safe to surmise that it was the 1850 Census or some comparable work.<sup>55</sup> It seems equally certain that Whitman was gathering data for a lecture on the States, for it will be noted that he selects representative institutions, industries, and products of the different states, picks out such notable physical features as can be caught in a few words, works out figures and phrases to suggest the character or spirit of the state or region. The pages are not numbered but are arranged in a general north to south pattern, starting with Maine and ending with Arkansas.

Whitman used nowhere near all the material he gathered, and I assume that he took that for which he had immediate poetic use and saved the rest for possible future needs. The lines that grew out of the census report are not of course the whole poem nor the secret

<sup>54</sup> Fredson Bowers, *Walt Whitman's Manuscripts, Leaves of Grass (1860), A Parallel Text*, Edited with Notes and Introduction. In this detailed study of all phases of Whitman's workmanship, Mr. Bowers works out the problem of the different kinds of paper used in the manuscripts of the late 1850's. On pp. XL-XLIII of the "Introduction," the dating of the Williamsburgh paper used in "The States and Their Resources" is given as the middle of February, 1857, although it is possible that an earlier date may be proved.

<sup>55</sup> In Bucke's *Notes and Fragments*, p. 148, Item 199, there is a "list of things recognized by my Lectures" in which Whitman writes: "Above all I recognize the localities and persons of my own land. The Kentuckian, the Tennessean, the Kanadian, the Californian, the Alabamian, the Virginian. The lumberer of Maine, the oysterman of Virginia, the corn gatherer of Tennessee. (Look in Census - or rather List, MS.)" I assume the parenthetical comment at the end means that Whitman has already examined the Census and made the list of notes that is called here "The States and Their Resources."

of its total meaning, but without them I find it difficult to think that the poems could be successful. The material is used directly in eleven poems, too many to be analyzed without losing sight of the points to be illustrated, so I have taken the three which are most dependent on "The States and Their Resources." These are now known as "Starting from Paumanok," "Our Old Feuillage," and "O Magnet South," and will be treated in the order of their appearance in the 1860 edition.

"Starting from Paumanok" was written expressly for the 1860 edition, in which it appeared under the title "Proto-Leaf." This edition had no Preface (as had both the 1855 and 1856 editions), and presumably this poem was to take its place for it supplants "Song of Myself" as the first poem in the book. The poem as it stands has no explicit thematic development but is, rather, a bardic announcement in which the seven traditional questions of the newspaper notice are answered; the *what* is America, its soul as seen in its physical manifestations. In this poem it is essential to Whitman's purpose that America be represented by its distinctive native features, the local customs, habits, and occupations of its citizens. Names will assist in suggesting or fixing associations if they represent American life and if they carry no 'Old World' reminders. Accordingly, the names used in this first poem of the new book are carefully chosen to complement the democratic themes to which Whitman dedicates himself.

The poem is modified slightly in later editions of *Leaves of Grass*, and I use here the 1860 version as being closer to the time when the notes were made. As a matter of fact there is an interesting tie-up between theory and practice in the opening lines which were later discarded. On one of the slips for the *American Primer*, Whitman made the following little note to himself: "I was asking for something *savage* and *luxuriant*, and behold here are the *ab-original names*."<sup>56</sup> I have italicised certain words in this statement to call attention to the similar pattern in the first five lines:

Free, fresh, *savage*,  
 Fluent, *luxuriant*, self-content, fond of persons and places,  
 Fond of fish-shape *Paumanok*, where I was born,  
 Fond of the sea — lusty-begotten and various,  
 Boy of the *Mannahatta*, the city of ships, my city, . . .

<sup>56</sup> *Primer*, 98.

Here, it seems to me, is a distinctive device in Whitman's use of names: the conscious use of the aboriginal names, not as in Longfellow to lend the exotic or otherwise romantic note of distance or remoteness, but to bring into current use (or, at least, into current awareness) names that are preferable to those employed by the indiscriminate popular press, by 'respectable' society, or by those who would keep alive our bonds with the Old World. Paumanok is better than Long Island<sup>57</sup> and Mannahatta preferable to Manhattan, which in turn is far better than New York, not for reasons of direction, or trade and commerce, or even history, but for the poetic value and patriotic fitness.

Whitman's use of and delight in the Indian or aboriginal name has been indicated in the discussion of his theories, but "Proto-Leaf" is especially emphatic on this, specifically in stanza 60:

The red aborigines!  
Leaving natural breaths, sounds of rain and winds, calls as of  
birds and animals in the woods, syllabled to us for names,  
Okonee, Koosa, Ottawa, Monongahela, Sauk, Natchez, Chatta-  
hooche, Kaqueta, Oronoco,  
Wabash, Miami, Saginaw, Chippewa, Oshkosh, Walla-Walla,  
Leaving such to the States, they melt, they depart, charging the  
water and the land with names.<sup>58</sup>

As the insertion of this stanza in a prefacing poem would indicate, Whitman had intended a larger poetic treatment of the American Indian. In another manuscript source to which Mr. Feinberg drew my attention, there is another of those strange reminder notes Whitman made to himself:

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<sup>57</sup> Whitman's proprietary interest in the native name Paumanok for Long Island is noticed throughout his poetry, but it should not be forgotten that he once made a fairly serious attempt to organize support for the resumption of the original name. Essay 13 in the series of articles on Brooklyniana is devoted to this cause. Cf., *Uncollected Poetry and Prose*, II, 274-278.

<sup>58</sup> These Indian names had, apparently, the same auditory satisfaction as many similar words which Whitman collected. An interesting example is *Words*, 105, a carefully preserved newspaper clipping which reads: "The Federal Capital [*sic*] is full of 'Ingins,' among whom are Wa-ga-sup-pa, the Iron Whip; Tish-ta-wa-goo, Charles Chief; Wash-kom-ma-na, Hard Walker; Shoo-cob-a, Heavy Cloud; Ish-ga-ne-kai-ba, Love Chief; Shang-gis-ka, White Horse; and Tah-tang-ga-na, Standing Buffalo - all braves of the Poncas tribe, and splendid-built fellows, standing six feet and upwards in their moccasins."

- poem of the (Indians) aborigines  
 – introducing every principal aboriginal trait, and name  
 – bring in (Indian) aboriginal traits in *poem of (American)*  
*Materials*<sup>59</sup>

What is characteristic of this first poem in the edition that followed his elaborate investigation of names is, then, the special preference for and even the fascination with the aboriginal name.

When he investigated the census report of the various states, he almost regularly copied down the place names of American Indian origin, particularly the names of rivers. It is important to observe, moreover, that there were times when, in copying names for possible later use, he could become so caught up in the rapport of the name that the psychological conditions for the creation of poetry could follow. A striking example of this is found in the manuscript notes for the state of New York, a page of which I quote in full to show something of the curious quality of Whitman's mind at that period of polar tension which I consider concurrent with the origin of much of his poetry: the passive, malleable, open, absorbing mind which envelops enormous quantities of unrelated, sometimes almost inconsequential, information, and then the sudden, active poetic response to some odd bit of that information that has served as an invigorating stimulus to clothe that information with the fitting words. Sometimes this tension can best be realized in the elaborate word changes and bafflingly complex revisions that can be grasped only by the examination of a manuscript itself, but the following will give a meager notion of what I have found and will also show how poetically exciting to Whitman the rapport in place names could be:

*The Empire State* (put this name, instead of New York)  
 the population, Wealth Commerce  
 Mts, the Mohegan Mts. (also the Katskills)  
 River – the Hudson

<sup>59</sup> In the *Autograph Notebook*, referred to in note 20 above, the material at the back of the notebook is mostly germ ideas for poems and trial lines for the 1860 edition. The entry on the poem of the (Indian) aborigines is No. 79, and in copying I have included Whitman's deletions in parentheses. This notebook has a number of entries which corroborate the findings of this study; for example, No. 48, "I must not fail to saturate my poems with *things substantial*, – American scenes, climates, names, places, words, permanent facts (include every important river and mountain) animals, trees, crops, grains, vegetables, flowers."

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“the wild-fowl and fish of Paumanok”

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“Mannahatta Bay”

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the falls of Niagara — the broad (river) stream and inland  
 sea pouring over the ledge and falling down a hundred and  
 sixty feet below (the amplitude (and) ease, and perfect  
 portions of the scenery).

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The railroads

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The Mannahatta (that’s it — *the* Mannanatta  
 — the mast-hemmed — the egg in the nest of the beautiful  
 bays — (the) my city — ma femme — O never forgotten by me<sup>60</sup>

The consequence of this was in part the opening lines of “Proto-Leaf” given above, but especially in the short, evocative poem “Mannahatta,” of which only the opening lines need be quoted here to show the connection:

I was asking for something specific and perfect for my city,  
 and behold! here is the aboriginal name!  
 Now I see what there is in a name, a word, liquid, sane, unruly,  
 musical, self-sufficient,  
 I see that the word of my city, is that word up there,  
 Because I see that word nested in nests or water-bays, superb,  
 with tall and wonderful spires,  
 Rich, hemmed thick all around with sailships and steamships...<sup>61</sup>

There are indications in the same manuscript notes that Whitman would have liked to extend the name Mannahatta to cover the whole state of New York and thus avoid in references to it mention of a

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<sup>60</sup> The twenty nine slips are not bound or gathered in any way, and there is no determined order. The entries are usually short, made up of phrases, abbreviations, and figures. Except for the present quotation, which is all that is on the second slip in the order Mr. Feinberg has arranged them, I will not identify references to “The States and Their Resources” further than what is provided in the body of this paper.

<sup>61</sup> I use here the wording of the 1860 edition, although it is substantially the same poem as in the Inclusive Edition. It should be noted that Whitman’s choice of a name for New York went through stages, the first being *New York* as seen in the 1855 version, the second being *Manhattan* as seen in the 1856 edition in “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” and the last *Mannahatta* in the 1860 edition. An interesting confirmation will be seen in the just edited “Whitman Notebook, 1855–1856,” prepared by Harold Blodgett, appearing in *Walt Whitman Newsletter*, II, 4 (Dec., 1956), in which the following reminder note is found (p. 38), “put ‘Manhattan’ for New York all through” the poem.

colonial relationship to the English court that had no affinity to American democracy. But here, as elsewhere, remarkable as the American Indian names might be, there were obvious limitations in extending their use. In examining the notes and in looking at the poems with an awareness of Whitman's penchant for native names, one cannot but be struck at the delight and zest with which Whitman parades the names of the states in the mid-west where Indian names are predominant. One can almost sense the wincing of the poet as he uses the names of Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, and Maryland.

It is essential that the democratic poet of the nation make mention of the original thirteen colonies, and so the names of the southern colonies are used in the poetry, but one can also sense the relief with which Whitman welcomes a device by which he can avoid using the conventional names for the northern states, some of whose names were quite as unpalatable as those in the south. For the northern states for which there were no aboriginal names to substitute for the English names, Whitman consciously shapes the poetic line so that he can use the nickname. As indicated above, he prefers "Empire State" to New York, and he so uses it in "Proto-Leaf." For the other northern states he prefers "Granite State" to New Hampshire, the "Narragansett Bay State" to Rhode Island, the "Sea-Side State" to New Jersey, and the "Keystone State" to Pennsylvania. All of these substitutes, except the last for Pennsylvania, are consciously put forward with a flourish in "Proto-Leaf." The inference would be, therefore, that if there was available no aboriginal name the democratic custom of thwarting the officially given misnomer by using the nickname should be accepted and followed.

"Our Old Feuillage" is an important poem in the 1860 edition, presented there without title but as number four of a new grouping called *Chants Democratic*. The word *feuillage* does not mean *foliage* only but, according to another word-list in Mr. Feinberg's collection, "a bunch or row of leaves."<sup>62</sup> The value of the word to Whitman was certainly in terms of this latter special meaning; the

<sup>62</sup> This definition is on the first of ten long lists mostly of French words and phrases, but including medical and nautical terminology as well. Whitman makes an amateur but not too unsuccessful attempt at a phonetic transcription: "(fool-ye-äzh)."

treatment of the separate states representing leaves in the row or bunch, which together represent the country. The association of *feuillage*, as a row of leaves, with the *leaves* of *Leaves of Grass*, and the *leaves* of *Calamus* was clearly intended by Whitman. Important in the 1860 version is the possessive pronoun *own* instead of the present word *old* as the modifier of *feuillage* in the opening lines. Although he seems to have modified his attitude later, in 1860 he presents characteristics of the states that are currently true to him, not echoes of tradition or reminders of the 'usable past.'

In this poem, too, regions both to the south and the north of the nation are treated (Cuba and Kanada), and there are states and areas described in the poem for which there is no comparable information in the MS collection of notes. It is impossible to determine precisely what took place, but evidently some of the manuscript pages are missing, or, in working out the poem, Whitman used much material from his general knowledge. The result is a poem made up almost entirely of names, particularly place names, with sufficient descriptive material about occupations, customs, and inhabitants to provide a clue to the symbolic value of the names to Whitman.

In the sixth line of the poem, Whitman writes:

Always the vast slope drained by the Southern Sea — inseparable  
with the slopes drained by the Eastern and Western Seas

The line would seem to be taken more or less directly from "The States and Their Resources" in which one of the notes that deals with the "plantation area" speaks of the "valley of the Mississippi" as "the slope to the Eastern Sea — that to the Western Sea — that to the great Gulf." In the same note, Whitman records "the diverse spread" of the plantation territory as "the three million of square miles." Presumably by the time the poem reached final form new territories were added, so that in the poem (line seven), the amount is now "the three and a half million of square miles." Further on in the poem, he writes (line eighteen):

Sunlight by day on the valley of the Susquehanna, and on the  
valleys of the Potomac and Rappahannock, and the valleys  
of the Roanoke and Delaware;

The names of the rivers and their valleys are again drawn from the collection of notes. Other typical examples are found in line

42 for the description of the Great Dismal Swamp of North Carolina, and in line 71 with the mention of eight rivers, of which six are described and noted in "The States and Their Resources" (the other two, Saskatchewan and Osage, apparently added by Whitman as he extended the scope of his poem beyond that taken in by the notes).

Of the three poems examined here, the use of the census material is much greater, percentage-wise, in the poem now entitled "O Magnet-South" but known as "Longings for Home" in 1860. It is a poem of twenty three irregular lines based on Whitman's conviction that the South represents a necessary part of American life. The starting idea for this poem is found in another group of unpublished notes in Mr. Feinberg's collection in which Whitman is writing about the kind of literature America needs.<sup>63</sup> He points out that, among the assorted tasks of the man who would be the American poet, he must "estimate too the abandon, egotism, and electric passion of the south — precious elements like the lightning that may kill, but the universe cannot live without it." Whitman's own sympathy with "the abandon, egotism, and electric passion" led him to so identify himself with that region that he speaks as a native son drawn back in memory to its beauty. He has prepared for the poem in "Proto-Leaf," and as in the previous poems he found material in his notes to be transmuted into poetic lines. The poem is short and the related lines of the notes are interesting as the raw material of the poem, so I present them together here: the lines of the poem are numbered and indented; the pertinent notes are lettered and presented in brackets below.

- 1) O Magnet-South! O glistening, perfumed South! My South!
- 2) O quick mettle, rich blood, impulse, and 'love! Good and evil!  
O all dear to me!
- [a] silvery land, sweet land, — wild generous land — land of luscious fruits]
- [b] Dear to me the — Always the South, the sunny land, sweet land, the silvery land, my land, the fiery land, quick-mettled land, luscious and generous land, rich-blooded land, land of impulse and of 'love]
- 3) O dear to me my birth-things — All moving things and the trees  
where I was born — the grains, plants, rivers;

<sup>63</sup> This extremely interesting collection of isolated and sometimes unrelated pages of prose comment is entitled "Literature of America — Thirteen MS Pages."



- 4) Dear to me my own sluggish rivers where they flow, distant, over flats of silvery sands, or through swamps,
- [c] Southern States. Animals, the alligator, the rattlesnake, and moccasin-snake – the Humming birds, the turkey buzzard. / the yellow-pine (producing tar and pitch turpentine), the live oak, the cypress, magnolia, orange, the graceful palmetto, lemon, fig. Staples – cotton, sugar, rice, and tobacco – fruits, oranges, lemons and figs – the sweet potato and the yam. / Rivers – Roanoke – length (100), Savannah (200), Altamaha (500), Alabama (500) (the sluggish rivers, flowing over sands or through swamps) – warm land, sunny land, the fiery land, the rich-blooded land, my land – land of impulse and of love]
- 5) Dear to me the Roanoke, the Savannah, the Altamahaw, the Pedee, the Tombigbee, the Santee, the Coosa, and the Sabine;
- [d] Georgia – Rivers, the Savannah (its north Eastern boundary) – the rafts on the rivers – the island studded coast – Nicojack Cave, with the huge mouth, and the flat floor land laved by water, and the high roof of limestone – the pine barrens / Alabama – Rivers, Tombigbee, Coosa – Staple, Cotton]
- [e] South Carolina – Rivers, the Great Pedee, the Santee, the Edisto – trees, the Palmetto (40 feet high – the “cabbage Palm”), the laurel, with large white blossoms – cotton, rice, hemp, indigo – the sand hills of the middle country, like agitated waves – the pleasant tablelands beyond]
- [f] Mississippi – Staple, Cotton / Louisiana – sugar cane – the coast – the levee of the Crescent City / Texas / cotton, sugar, maize, wheat, and wool. Rivers – the Sabine, nav. 300 miles – the Colorado – the Brazos – the rich soil and pleasant climate – the herds of buffaloes and wild horses on the prairies –]
- 6) O pensive, far away wandering, I return with my Soul to haunt their banks again,
- 7) Again in Florida I float on transparent lakes – I float on the Okeechobee – I cross the hummock land, or through pleasant openings, or dense forests,
- 8) I see the parrots in the woods – I see the papaw tree and the blossoming titi;
- [g] Florida – Rivers – Applachiola (flows S into G of M) – the springs – “transparent lakes” – the Okeechobee – the everglades – “the Wakulla Fountain, bubbling up pure and cold” – the trees, the palm, the live-oak, the papaw, titi with blossoms – the parrots in the woods – the hummock land – the yellow pine and live-oak of Florida]

- 9) Again, sailing in my coaster, on deck, I coast off Georgia — I coast up the Carolinas,
- 10) I see where the live-oak is growing — I see where the yellow-pine, the scented bay-tree, the lemon and orange, the cypress, the graceful palmetto; [cf., c above]
- 11) I pass rude sea-headlands and enter Pamlico Sound through an inlet, and dart my vision inland,
- [h) North Carolina — the coast with rude sea-headlands — the gold mines — the valuable forests — the mountains (the Bald Peak, the Smoky Peak, and the Pilot Peak) — Pamlico Sound (it must be something like the L. I. South Bay), It communicates with the sea by inlets — Okracoke inlet is the principal one — the forests of pitch pine (the tar, turpentine and lumber of this tree make one half of the exports of the State) — Soil, generally sandy]
- [i) Model — North Carolina, with rude sea-headlands —]
- 12) O the cotton plant! the growing fields of rice, sugar, hemp!
- 13) The cactus, guarded with thorns — the laurel tree with large white flowers, [cf., e above]
- 14) The range afar — the richness and barrenness — the old woods charged with mistletoe and trailing moss,
- 15) The piney odor and the gloom — the awful natural stillness, (Here in these dense swamps the free-booter carries his gun, and the fugitive slave has his concealed hut;)
- [j) The rich luxuriant forests, charged with misleto [*sic*] — the odor, density, gloom — the awful natural stillness —]
- 16) O the strange fascination of these half-known, half-impassable swamps, infested by reptiles, resounding with the bellow of the alligator, the sad noises of the night-owl and the wild-cat, and the whirr of the rattlesnake; [cf., c above]
- 17) The mocking-bird, the American mimic, singing all the forenoon — singing through the moon-lit night,
- 18) The humming-bird, the wild-turkey, the raccoon, the opossum
- [k) Virginia — the subterranean Caves — the sulphur springs, with their medicinal waters. Animals — deer, opossum, raccoon — the mocking bird, and the wild turkey. Minerals — Iron, coal, and limestone. the Capitol (Richmond, Va.) on Shockoe Hill (a picturesque, commanding hill — the building looking down, as it were, over the town and upon James river)]
- 19) A Tennessee corn-field — the tall, graceful, long-eared corn — slender, flapping, bright green, with tassels — with beautiful ears, each well-sheathed in its husk.

- [l] The maize fields of the earth — the tall, graceful long-leafed maize — slender, bright-green — with tassels — with beautiful ears, each folded in its husks — the beautiful maize!]  
20) An Arkansas prairie — a sleeping lake, or still bayou;
- [m] Arkansas — Rivers — the White River — the Arkansas river (1200m) — the beautiful valleys of the Arkansas and Washita — a great deal of this state is prairies — bottom lands, heavily timbered with — the otter, beaver, and raccoon — the sleeping lakes and stagnant bayous — the dead level  
in South generally — the orange, lemon, fig, peach, pomegranate, dates, pears, grapes, berries, — sweet potato, ginseng, blood-root, snake-root]  
21) O my heart! O tender and fierce pangs — I can stand them not — I will depart;  
22) O to be a Virginian, where I grew up! O to be a Carolinian!  
23) O longings irrepressible! O I will go back to old Tennessee, and never wander more!
- [n] Tennessee — the cattle and wool of Tennessee — Tobacco is a leading article — “Old Tennessee”, T is oldest of the Western States, settled first in 1754 In Kentucky, salt-works (quite extensive) — Kentucky — the rich garden in the centre —]

The lines from the notes almost seem like a gloss for the poem, and in many senses of that term they are, although of course written before the poem. Read with the lines which they support, they show Whitman at one level as a practical note-taker with considerable sagacity and wide curiosity, and on the other as a poet with the unusual gift of creating a “local habitation and a name” by the bluntly obvious device of using names. There are still blank periods in the Whitman chronology, it is true, but there is no evidence at all that Whitman ever was in the parts of the South that he speaks of here. He did know New Orleans, and he may have known something of the southern countryside on his trip to and from New Orleans, but even this is not what he is attempting to recreate in this poem. Rather than describing what he knew or remembered, he is consciously striving to give an immediate sense of intimate familiarity with a region he really doesn’t know at all. Something of this urgency to become all things that is almost a prime trait in Whitman is seen in the famous catalogues in “Song of Myself” and other poems in which he creates, by exact handling of trade terms, brand names, mechanical jargon, process de-

scription, the conviction that the poet is speaking from personal experiential knowledge. In a similar way, and for the same reasons, it was imperative to Whitman as poet that he be identified with all regions, and it is through the remarkable use of names that he is able to do so, especially in the present poem with a part of the country that he really never knew at all.

The conclusions from this investigation of new manuscript evidence of Whitman's concern with names have already been presented with the explanation of his theory and practice. In addition, it seems to me quite important that Whitman's real and acknowledged indebtedness to American names be re-affirmed in view of the current confusion and misdirection in some Whitman scholarship and criticism. So many centennial comments on *Leaves of Grass* have been caught up in the contagion of amateur psychiatry that a serious misrepresentation of Whitman's poetry may and perhaps already has resulted. I don't suppose there is really anything nefarious in reading Dylan Thomas's poetry for signs of d.t.'s, or in reading *Leaves of Grass* for testimony of neurotic imbalance, but in so doing there is real and present danger of ignoring or even dismissing those attributes of the poetry that have no diagnostic relevance. To anyone concerned with the use of names in American literature, Whitman is a source of endless speculation and delight, and it is pleasant to substantiate through the manuscript evidence in Mr. Feinberg's remarkable collection that *Leaves of Grass* is both a milestone and a monument in this fascinating field of language.

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