

---

Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects

Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects

---

1990

## "Song of Myself" and the Divided Subject

Valerie Philbrick Gill

*College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/etd>



Part of the [American Literature Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Gill, Valerie Philbrick, "'Song of Myself" and the Divided Subject" (1990). *Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects*. William & Mary. Paper 1539625607.

<https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-3dmx-t461>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@wm.edu](mailto:scholarworks@wm.edu).

"SONG OF MYSELF" AND THE DIVIDED SUBJECT

---

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English  
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

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

---

by

Valerie Gill

1990

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Valerie P. Gill  
Author

Approved, May 1990

Richard Lowry  
Richard Lowry

Walter Wenska  
Walter Wenska

Robert J. Scholnick  
Robert Scholnick

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explore the relationship between the speaker in Whitman's poem, "Song of Myself," and the self who is represented or "sung" within the context of the poem. Looking at the text, the question arises whether the work is a predication of the speaker that encompasses the full range of his experience, or whether the poem fails to address some aspect of the poet's subjective being. Specifically, this question arises when we read Whitman's various assertions of an identity that is "withheld" from language - assertions that appear even as Whitman engages in an extended reconstruction of himself.

The exploration of this relationship between the speaking and the spoken selves in "Song of Myself" proceeds with the proposal that the reader adopt an understanding of subjectivity that will take into account the fissure between the poet who objectifies himself in words and the poet who is thus represented. Such an understanding of subjectivity is proposed in lieu of the more conventional view that the human individual is accurately portrayed through the neutral medium of language. In particular, this alternative view of subjectivity is proposed in accordance with Jacques Lacan's theoretical formulations of selfhood and its involvement in language. Lacan's psychoanalytic vocabulary is employed in an effort to show how Whitman's poem conveys the not entirely representable presence of the language-using subject.

As a result of this study, "Song of Myself" comes to be seen as a performative work of literature whose significance transcends its predicative dimension. The work is transformed from a poem "about" the poet's self to a rehearsal of both the articulable and the inarticulable aspects of subjective being.

"SONG OF MYSELF" AND THE DIVIDED SUBJECT

A remarkable division operates throughout the text of "Song of Myself," problematizing what is likely to be our understanding of the speaker and the way in which his words relate to his subjective experience. From the opening line of the poem, "I celebrate myself, and sing myself," we are invited to perceive the work as an exuberant description of the poet, a subjecting of the subject to language that results in a topographical re-creation of the psyche. We think to ourselves: these words refer back to the poet, Walt Whitman. As we work our way from one section of the poem to the next, we begin to revise our expectations about the predicative scope of the poem, seeing that the identity of the speaker exceeds the discrete awareness of a particular poet and inhabits a diverse array of situations and personal relations. We find that the self of which this poem is the song ranges from "Farmer, mechanic, artist, gentleman, sailor, quaker," to "the hounded slave that flags in the race."<sup>1</sup> This permeability of the subject and everything "other" need not, however, change our way of thinking about the reflective power of language in relation to Walt Whitman. Apparently, we have merely to expand our conception of the speaker so that this poem (entitled "Walt Whitman" for eleven years prior to being renamed "Song of Myself") becomes the delineation of a "kosmos" rather than of a self-contained awareness.<sup>2</sup> The speaker remains an

object of poetic representation, but with his identity portrayed as multifarious and unrestricted by the individuality of experience.

The difficulty with our presupposition that "Song of Myself" captures and re-creates through language the very speaker in the poem (whether as a thirty-seven-year old man in perfect health, or the immortal "mate and companion of the people"<sup>2</sup>) becomes apparent when we read that, in effect, a dimension of that speaker's subjective experience resides on the periphery of his song, evading the restless and diverse representation of people and places that we come to think of as the poet's consciousness. We first encounter this division in subjectivity when we read section four of the poem, where Whitman posits the "Me myself" who stands "apart from the pulling and hauling" of his surroundings.

The sickness of one of my folks or of myself,  
           or ill-doing or loss or lack of money,  
           or depressions or exaltations,  
 Battles, the horrors of fratricidal war, the  
           fever of doubtful news, the fitful events;

These come to me days and nights and go from  
           me again,  
 But they are not the Me myself.

Apart from the pulling and hauling stands  
           what I am,  
 Stands amused, complacent, compassionating,  
           idle, unitary....

The reserved and idle "Me myself" stands aloof in the midst of the world's activity, witnessing and waiting instead of allowing himself to be caught up in "the fitful events" that

surround him. Such aloofness, we may notice, contrasts sharply with the self who is depicted in the preceding section of the poem. There we read, "I am satisfied - I see, dance, laugh, sing," - statements that portray the speaker as one who is engaged in the world around him and who derives fulfillment from his activities, rather than as the waiting and withdrawn "Me myself." How, we may ask, do we account for this disjunction in the self of Whitman's poem? Is there an understanding of subjectivity we should adopt in lieu of the conventional belief that the self is a unified being, capable of complete representation in language (or, metaphorically speaking, of complete participation in - rather than aloofness from - the lively tenor of its re-creation)?

The need for a model of subjectivity that, when we read "Song of Myself," allows us to appreciate the divided state of the speaker and his partial habitation on the edge of his own self-portrayal is reinforced in section 25 of the poem, where Whitman addresses speech in the abstract: "My final merit I refuse you, I refuse putting from me what I really am,/ Encompass worlds, but never try to encompass me...." What kind of a poem purports to be a song and a celebration of the poet's self, even as that self denies the embrace of language? Indeed, what kind of a subject undertakes a verbal fabrication of his identity (and devotes the better part of a lifetime to revising it), when ultimately his



identity lies beyond the scope of speech? Is the speaker in Whitman's poem (Whitman himself, we will presume) capable of being absorbed into the representation of his existence? And if not, does this non-absorption signify a defect in the poem? These questions and more beg to be addressed when we read these lines in section 25 of "Song of Myself." Moreover, such questions point to the need for an elucidation of the paradigmatic role of the subject in Whitman's poem - an elucidation that does not settle for a grasp of Whitman's self as merely inconsistent, but as theoretically integrated and capable, if not of resolving, then of stabilizing and preserving the contradictions in the text.

The following passage in section 15 epitomizes the disjunction we have identified in Whitman's poem thus far, showing us in a concentrated scenario the problematic dynamics of this literary self-re-creation.

The city sleeps and the country sleeps,  
 The living sleep for their time, the dead  
     sleep for their time,  
 The old husband sleeps by his wife and the young  
     husband sleeps by his wife,  
 And these tend inward to me, and I tend outward  
     to them,  
 And such as it is to be of these more or less  
     I am,  
 And of these one and all I weave the song of  
 myself.<sup>3</sup>

Apparently, we are to understand the poet's being as a complex and seamless web of experience, spanning the diverse

situations of the old and the young, the living and the dead. We are presented with the poet's psyche as a revelatory collapse of the distinction between self and other, as though the separation were an artificial categorization and blotting out of awareness. The very fact of our being presented with this view, however, creates a rift in the seamless continuity of experience that is depicted as the poet's self or as that of which he is - a rift in which is generated the tension between the self who is portrayed in words, and the subject who "weaves" the poem without laying claim to an identity that can be taken up into the fabric of the work. Initially, the first person emerges in these lines as a presence that is almost indistinguishable from the wide-ranging catalog of sleepers, with the reciprocal attraction of the speaker and the various figures he describes suggesting that the distinction between self and other is in fact illusory. The second line in which the "I" appears, however, qualifies the suggested unity of the poet and the sleepers with the words "more or less," thereby hinting at a progressive solidification of the subject apart from the variegated fabric that constitutes the song of his identity. The final line of this passage (a line that actually punctuates a very long list of characters and events) completes the separation of the first person and the stuff of which his being is ostensibly woven, creating a space in which an already

existing self can labor in the construction of his self. Again, we are brought back to the question of how and indeed whether the speaker in "Song of Myself" can be incorporated into his representation of himself. And, again, we must ask what view of subjectivity can account for the misalignment of the speaker and what is spoken, given that both are meant to designate the place of subjective being.

Gay Wilson Allen argues that the poet in "Song of Myself" can be identified on two levels. The pastiche of animate and inanimate entities that occupies much of the poem is, according to Allen, the "persona" that Whitman adopts in his endeavor "imaginatively and compassionately" to become whatever appears in his field of vision.<sup>4</sup> The suggested unity of the poet and various sleepers he enumerates, for example, constitutes a volatile and kaleidoscopic dimension of Whitman's presence in "Song of Myself," as does his representation of (and tending toward) a vast array of men and women in general. Allen writes,

...the poet (or his "persona") identifies himself with other people - sometimes even with inanimate things or abstractions - by such strong empathy that he finds himself to be, for the moment, that person or thing. Not only does he see all people in himself, but he imaginatively and compassionately becomes each of these in turn as they come into the focus of his sympathy....

As a consequence of this omnivorous identification, the "persona" of "Song of Myself" undergoes many metamorphoses  
 ....

In contrast to the volatile persona described here, Whitman's presence in "Song of Myself" also consists of an unchanging identity that underlies and anchors the subjective metamorphoses of the "compassionate" speaker. In other words, says Allen, the many incarnations of the poet contrast with a single, basic self, serving as mere "changes of garments" that do not alter the character or the experience of this fundamental identity.<sup>6</sup> This fundamental self, moreover, should be understood as Whitman the poet, the man who spent most of his adult life writing and re-writing Leaves of Grass. The author who molds his representation of himself and is occasionally inserted into the text of "Song of Myself" with a direct comment to the reader is the true identity beneath the changing, contradictory persona we encounter in the poem. The persona, on the other hand, is a created and derivative presence "whose visit with his reader must soon end with the last line of the poem,"<sup>7</sup> even as we forget whether we are listening to the invented voice of the persona or the originary voice of the poet.

Richard Chase interprets the subject in "Song of Myself" as indicative of "the paradox of 'identity.'"<sup>8</sup> In explaining what he means by "the paradox of 'identity'," Chase divides the subject into categories of social and individual or private experience. The poet, in other words, has a "political" and a "natural" dimension to his identity:

"on the one hand, he is integral in himself, unique, and separate; on the other hand, he is equal to, or even the same as, everyone else."<sup>9</sup> Whitman's poem is a celebration of the "dialectic opposition" between "the simple separate person" and the "vast cosmic democracy" of which every separate person is a component. The success of the poem, in fact, rides on the tension and the perpetual reinstatement of this opposition, as does the success of Whitman's poetry in general.<sup>10</sup> The paradox of a simultaneously private and political existence, moreover, accounts for the subjective duality that Allen explains with the terminological division between the poet and his persona. Chase maintains that the ability of Whitman's self "to assume the imprint of any 'identity' it wishes without regard to the barriers of space or time" propels the poem as an ongoing "transformation of the simple separate person into the democratic en-masse or community of comrades...."<sup>11</sup> The self that undergoes transformation is the individual, natural self, while the many faces it assumes belong to the world of "society and convention."<sup>12</sup> "The motif of 'Song of Myself' is the self taking on a bewildering variety of identities and with a truly virtuoso agility extricating itself from each one."<sup>13</sup> The identities adopted signify the range of experience that constitutes the body politic, while the being who does the actual adopting and self-extricating is the "What I am" or

the natural, private person who underlies collective codes and obligations.

In My Soul and I, David Cavitch argues that Whitman tries to incorporate everything "other" into his personality by writing poems like "Song of Myself." Because of his pervasive egomania, "Whitman could not trust analogous extensions of himself beyond his subjective circle. He needed...to draw everything into the immediate context of his personality."<sup>14</sup> Cavitch attributes such egomania to Whitman's youthful relationship with his mother when he felt dominated and "unstable in his sense of self," and to Whitman's consequent effort as a mature poet to move away from the tenuousness and the isolation of his individual perspective and attain "contrasting viewpoints (that) are ... harmoniously aligned." Cavitch also suggests that the catalogs of unconnected images and events portrayed as the poet's psyche in "Song of Myself" is a reflection of childhood experience generally, when "sensations (are) never simply internal events" but are "confused" with external surroundings.<sup>15</sup> Regardless of whether he sees Whitman's poetic incorporation of the world as a consequence of specific historical circumstances or as the reflection of a universal childhood mentality, Cavitch interprets the figure who weaves the poem and the many images of subjectivity depicted in the work as different aspects of a single "highly syncretized personality."<sup>16</sup> "Song of Myself" is

understood as a contrapuntal work in which the represented and the language-using selves complement and displace one another; any disjunction between the two is subsumed and reconciled by viewing the text as an extension of the poet. The figure who creates the text and the multi-faceted self who is created in the text are equally reducible to a conception of Whitman's psyche as omnivorous and fixated on an early stage of its development. Throughout the poem, the author's "personal sense is replaced by the fragments and the flux into which he himself is dissolved," thereby generating an "internal conversation" in the work that mirrors Whitman's own fluctuation between a personal sense and the nostalgia for his childhood experience of unity with the world.<sup>17</sup>

Each of these interpretations of the subject in "Song of Myself" acknowledges as worthy of consideration the distinction between the self who is represented in a collage of images and perspectives, and the "what I am" or the detached, equanimous presence who resists the flow of images. In the preceding critics' formulations, this distinction unfolds as the difference between the poet and his persona; the opposition between the private individual and the socialized, conventional self; and the device of an egomaniac - the figure who weaves the poem and employs the fiction of unity with all things (the represented self) in order to satisfy the demands of his own convoluted psyche.

Each of these interpretations, however, fails to take into account the problematic dimension of the speaking subject (Allen's poet and Chase's natural individual) and his refusal, in the context of a literary work that ostensibly celebrates subjective experience, to "put" from himself what he "really" is or to disclose his "final merit" to speech. We need to move beyond these critics' dualities and address the paradox of the subject who formulates his own being in words while simultaneously designating the point from which he speaks (or from which he "puts" himself) as inaccessible to language. We must formulate an understanding of subjectivity able to explain the gap between the representing and the represented selves in Whitman's poem, and we must ask what role language plays in the dynamics of this hiatus.

The interpretations of "Song of Myself" that we have examined here may, in essence, be understood as explications of only one aspect of a highly ambiguous poem, the significance of which is epitomized in its title. Allen, Chase and Cavitch all focus on Whitman's song of himself as though the work were strictly a song "about" the poet, a work whose function is primarily predicative and descriptive. The "of" in "Song of Myself," however, does not simply mean "about." Whitman's poem is a song by the self as well as a song about the self, meaning that the work pertains equally to the figure who is represented in the



poem, and to the figure who weaves the poem while eluding representation - like an anonymous author who, strangely enough, has a byline. It is important that we recognize "Song of Myself" as a work that captures the tension between the subject who is capable of being depicted and the subject from whom self-depiction originates. More precisely, we must acknowledge that the capturing of this tension is not itself just an act of representation, but a performance or a dramatization of subjective experience, both at the center and on the periphery of language. We must begin to think of words as objectifying a "reality" of "things" (if we can call them things at this stage) in such a way as to distance the self from the "true" self as an object of articulation. When we begin to think of words in this way, then Whitman's refusal to give his "real" self to speech can be seen simultaneously to repudiate and affirm the identificatory process (i.e., self-predication) through which the self is lost. Ostensibly, Whitman's refusal repudiates the power of self-representation. But the fact that this refusal takes place in language - and, indeed, in an extensive work of self-referentiality - indicates that the poet is enacting the inextricable and irreconcilable positions of the subject as an inarticulable being and a reified, representable being. Whitman's refusal to "put" from himself what he "really" is may in fact be ranked among what Shoshana Felman refers to as "statements (that) function not as simple

truths but as performative speech acts."<sup>18</sup> The refusal functions not only on the level of its explicit or alleged meaning, but draws into play the contextual and occasional significance of the song in which it occurs. Continuing along this line of argument, moreover, we find that the performative dimension of Whitman's refusal of his "final merit" to speech is intensified by the positioning of that rejection at the near-center of the poem. The appearance of this refusal in section 25 of "Song of Myself" illustrates as it were the disjunction between the spoken and the speaking selves and the concomitant impossibility of the "whole" self stepping into the spotlight of representation. When we read section 25 of Whitman's work, we are in effect reading the inability of the subject to occupy its own center stage.

If we wish to approach the problem of the divided subject in Whitman's text while taking into consideration the simultaneous linguistic embodiment and evasiveness of that subject, then we are sure to find that Jacques Lacan's theoretical formulations about subjectivity and language are useful to us as we move from one section of the poem to another and piece together a paradigm of experience. Lacan's writings are in fact quite relevant to the questions we have asked about "Song of Myself." This French psychoanalyst writes about the self as a reflexive being who is repeatedly displaced through its acts of identification

and reflection, thereby suggesting a perspective that pertains to the one we have assumed here in our initial questions about "Song of Myself." The subject of which Lacan writes is, strictly speaking, the subject of psychoanalytic investigation, or the analysand whose conscious and unconscious mind structures the dynamics of the talking session in which "the patient's Word" reigns supreme.<sup>19</sup> Lacan's researches in the psychoanalytic field, however, are germane to our investigation of the subject in Whitman's poem because of their more general ramifications for the relationship of the subject to language. From Lacan's writings we can derive a vocabulary that will help us to address the problem of Whitman's text precisely because Lacan's work demonstrates the divided nature of subjective experience and the centrality of discourse - not merely in the analyst's office - but in the world at large.<sup>20</sup>

Before we proceed with our examination of Lacan, we should acknowledge that much of his work consists of a re-reading of Freud. In fact, the aspect of Lacan's writing that concerns us most (that is, his investigations into the divided and displaced nature of subjectivity) can be traced directly to Freud's analytical researches. As Rosalind Coward and John Ellis note, Lacan's "refutation of (the) 'given' of the unity of the subject in traditional psychology... is based on a re-reading of Freud that

radically subverts the notion of the unified subject...."<sup>21</sup>  
The "given" of which Coward and Ellis speak is exactly the  
concept of subjectivity that characterizes both American  
psychology generally, and the literary researches of the  
Whitman critics we have identified.<sup>22</sup>

Freud lies at the heart of Lacan's departure from all  
theories of unified subjectivity primarily because Freud  
devotes much of his intellectual curiosity to the separation  
of consciousness and the unconscious, and to the status of  
each in relation to one another.<sup>23</sup> The topography of the  
unconscious is, in particular, set forth in Freud's work on  
dreams, where the dividedness of the subject is established  
with an elucidation of certain primary mechanisms in the  
psyche.

Freud himself claimed that his work on dreams  
contained the essential concepts of his  
discoveries concerning the unconscious. In the  
description of the elements of timelessness, lack  
of contradiction, condensation and displacement in  
dreams, Freud uncovered the mechanisms of the  
unconscious system.<sup>24</sup>

At the same time Freud articulates the primary processes of  
the unconscious, he also brings to light the controlling  
function and the distributing effect of consciousness.  
Conscious thought comes to be seen as the reining-in of  
psychic energy; ego emerges from a scenario of displacement  
and condensation signaling the possibility of such  
regulation.

Waking thought, judgement, reasoning, logic, all belong to the secondary processes (of the conscious mind). Unlike primary processes, where psychical energy flows freely by means of displacement and condensation, in the case of secondary processes, energy moves in a more controlled way. Satisfaction is delayed while the mind tries out different ways to satisfaction. This regulatory function is made possible by the construction of the ego. This regulatory function results from the process of the construction of the ego and its world of objects....<sup>25</sup>

Freud's re-working of the human individual into primary and secondary categories of psychic being prepares the way for Lacan's presentation of the subject as divided along the lines of its own linguistic capability. Lacan thrusts conscious and unconscious experience onto a horizon where the use of language structures the mind of the user (shapes it into consciousness), while the state of being that precedes the structuring effect of language (that is to say, the unconscious) is repressed and buried with the acquisition of speech, never to be known again except in a fictional or mythical re-creation of its features.<sup>26</sup> Thus Lacan reads Freud's mechanisms of the unconscious linguistically: condensation becomes metaphor, displacement metonymy. Because consciousness functions solely in language, because the unconscious designates an area of the psyche that precedes the use of words, we can never know the unconscious for what it "is;" its presence is registered

only by the effects of linguistic substitution and concealment. Thus Lacan is forced to assign a mythical or "made-up" status to his interpretation:

Lacan produces a mythical hypothesis of the child in its existence before it becomes a language-using member of society. This myth can only ever be mythical precisely because any knowledge that one has of the processes pre-existing language... are known only through language with its symbolic relations.<sup>28</sup>

The myth with which Lacan reconstructs the pre-linguistic psyche is a state in which the human being does not differentiate himself from other objects as a distinct entity. Instead, "the myth suggests a state dominated purely by the drives, that is, by pressures or forces towards certain objects."<sup>29</sup> Prior to his initiation into a system of signifiers, the individual experiences a "constant flux of instinctual energy across (his) body" in relation to the external world<sup>30</sup>, rather than a sense of himself as a substantive and self-contained being who interacts with other substantive objects. This pre-verbal state, in which the individual is like a "broken egg spreading without hindrance in all directions," comes to be known throughout Lacan's writings as the unconscious. Strictly speaking, however, "the unconscious is a concept forged on the trace of what operates to constitute the subject," - meaning that the unconscious "is" not the egg-like state from which the

discrete human being emerges, but a verbal fabrication of that state as we imagine it to be from across the irreparable divide of speech.<sup>31</sup>

The crossing of this great divide into a universe of signifiers and the accompanying formation of the reified self or the ego is, in fact, a divide unto itself. The passage from instinctual awareness to the conceptual ordering of oneself and everything other consists, in the first place, of a splitting apart in the subject. With his emergence from the unconscious,

the subject undergoes a separation or splitting in order to find a signifying place from which to represent itself, even if only by means of a 'stand-in' (or a sign). For in order to use language, it is necessary that the subject finds himself at the axis of the division signifier/signified, taking up a position in regards to meaning.<sup>32</sup>

This split in the subject is a harbinger of the life-long mediating effect of language; it marks a space within the self where the crystallization or hypostatization of the spoken first occurs. As Anika Rifflet-Lemaire writes, "Language in effect establishes mediate relationships as opposed to immediate relationships in which there is no distance between the self and things, between self and others."<sup>35</sup> Language, we may add, establishes these mediate relationships first through this initial paradigmatic split in the subject; it initiates a lasting division between a

repressed self whose identity is constituted through discourse. In other words, we find ourselves working with a "division of being revealed in psychoanalysis between the self, the innermost part of the psyche, and the subject of conscious discourse, behaviour and culture."<sup>34</sup>

The division between self and self that we have just examined is otherwise identified by Lacan as the construction of the ego.<sup>35</sup> The construction of the ego is characterized by two dominant "moments," both of which indicate the progressive solidification of the subject and his departure from instinctual flux. The first of these two moments in Lacan's history of the subject is the "mirror-phase," while the second of these moments is referred to as the "castration complex."<sup>36</sup> The construction of the ego as a distinct being with a socio-cultural dimension can be traced in the passing of these moments.

The idea of a mirror-phase in the development of the subject comes from Lacan's observation of "the infant's fascination with his mirror image." Lacan interprets this fascination as "a transformation which takes place in the subject when he assumes an image," and as that subject's first step toward an integrated view of himself.<sup>37</sup> The mirror-phase

is to be seen as the 'spatialization' necessary for a position in language by which the subject is able to communicate. For the mirror-phase is seen by Lacan to be the moment at which



the infant's first movement towards a unified sense of itself is set in motion. Prior to this, the infant is dominated by the constant flux of instinctual energy across its body.<sup>38</sup>

While the mirror-phase marks the dawning of the subject's awareness of himself as a holistic being, that phase is based on the subject's perception of his own image, not as the reflection of a stable and repeatedly identifiable presence, but rather as a duplication into which the consciousness of the subject collapses.<sup>39</sup> That is to say, subjectivity in its mirror-phase is not yet characterized by the conceptual positioning through which the self and everything other is arranged in a constellation of ontic stability. The visionary duality that characterizes the mirror-phase, moreover, infiltrates the relationship of the subject with his mother. The infant, at this stage, experiences a specular fascination with the mother in which his own sense of himself is constituted, in part, through the collapse of his identity into that maternal other.<sup>40</sup> The subject is as yet incapable of understanding himself and his mother as separate individuals. The mirror-phase, finally, should be understood as the first step in the socialization of the infant. For "the mirror-phase shows the production of the possibility of a unified subject,

a possibility which is necessary for establishing social communication: there has to be a subject in order for

there to be a subject of a proposition.<sup>41</sup>

If the mirror-phase is characterized by the collapsing or fluid duality of the subject's consciousness and that which he perceives, creating in effect a certain unity of the subject and the image, then the castration complex marks the point at which unity is frustrated and the difference between the subject and the image is established. The castration complex is the point at which "the imaginary unity of the mirror-phase and the fictional direction of the ego has to be broken by the fact of difference...."<sup>42</sup> As Freud first articulated it, the castration complex is the moment at which the (male) child realizes he cannot achieve identification or unity with the mother. (Here we are reminded of David Cavitch's interpretation of Whitman's egomania as, in part, a consequence of his relationship with his mother.) Ultimately, this complex is the child's realisation that the penis cannot be used as an expression of his desire for his mother."<sup>43</sup> The subject's fascination with his apparent counterpart is interrupted by the prohibition of incest, which forces a recognition of difference and separation where the subject was previously unable to distinguish between himself and the other confronting him.<sup>44</sup> This recognition of difference acts as a turning point in the development of the psyche. For this recognition has "a structural function operating as the

start of the establishment of a series of differences."<sup>45</sup> The moment thus completes - both in Freud's writings and in Lacan's - the subject's initiation into "the cultural order," where the differential quality of language is key to the regulating and restrictive nature of social existence. The prohibition of incest and its function of differentiation is in fact "the all-important condition for the inauguration of human culture," structuring as it does the marriage relations from which all other social institutions derive.<sup>46</sup>

In our reading of "Song of Myself," we will find that two categories of experience introduced by Lacan in conjunction with the mirror-phase and the castration complex are very useful for tracing the presentation of subjectivity in Whitman's poem. These categories or registers of experience do not refer solely to the specific historical circumstances of the mirror-phase and the castration complex, but instead indicate the way in which these so-called moments shape the subject and structure his existence as an adult.

The experiential category that is associated with the mirror-phase is the Imaginary, a register which, as Fredric Jameson points out, "derives from the experience of the image," and whose "spatial and visual connotations" we are meant to retain.<sup>47</sup> Rifflet-Lemaire explains that the essence of the Imaginary is the "dual relationship" or the

"reduplication in the mirror," with this duality being "an immediate opposition between consciousness and its other in which each term becomes its opposite and is lost in the play of reflections."<sup>48</sup> The Imaginary, as it persists in adult experience, is the sensation of flux that characterizes the collapse of clear-cut distinctions. Specifically, "the imaginary concerns the intuitive lived experience of the body," or "lived experiences which overlap, accumulate and overflow into infinite successions of sensorial, emotional and conceptual jugglings."<sup>49</sup> But the Imaginary also persists in adult experience, not just as the intuited play of reflections among conflated distinctions, but as the delusive insistence on symmetrical, oppositional patterns of thought that can be traced directly to the "logic" of mirror images.<sup>50</sup> Jameson, for example, argues that ethical judgements, with their dependence on the polar distinction between "good" and "bad," are essentially Imaginary constructs.<sup>51</sup> Likewise, as Shoshana Felman explains, the traditional concept of consciousness as an internal dialogue from which arises a stable identity can, in fact, be traced back to the symmetrical mechanics of the mirror-phase and the functioning of the Imaginary.<sup>52</sup>

Self-reflection, the traditional fundamental principle of consciousness and of conscious thought, is what Lacan traces back to "the mirror stage," to the symmetrical dual structure of the Imaginary. Self-reflection is always a mirror reflection, that is, the illusory

functioning of symmetrical reflexivity, of reasoning by the illusory principle of symmetry between self and self as well as between self and other; a symmetry that subsumes all difference within a delusion of a unified and homogenous individual identity.<sup>53</sup>

The category of experience that is associated with the castration complex is identified by Lacan as the Symbolic. The Symbolic, in effect, covers all of society's linguistic, socio-cultural and logico-mathematical codes of signification.<sup>54</sup> The Symbolic refers to language, and to all the other codes in society that depend on the subject's ability to recognize differences in more subtle conceptual arrangements than that of reflexivity. In other words, the Symbolic is the structure "through which human exchanges become possible and meaningful, in the accumulation of codes."<sup>55</sup> This category of experience is the order through which sociality appears in its profound identity with the differential, relational network of language.<sup>56</sup> In the experience of the individual, this register is the inter-human structure into which he is born, and through which he learns to identify himself<sup>57</sup> - whether as a creature of God, a member of the perfect race, or a being constituted across the spectrum of the Imaginary and the Symbolic. On a very particular scale, the Symbolic refers to the ability and the inclination of the poet to poeticize, as well as to the cultural artifact that he produces.

Before we proceed with our analysis of "Song of Myself" in light of what Lacan has to offer, we should examine our expectations about what Whitman's poem may exhibit if subjectivity is to be understood in terms of the Imaginary and the Symbolic. In particular, we should not assume that "Song of Myself" exhibits a readily definable or even unambiguous pattern of transition from the Imaginary to the Symbolic, and back again. As a delineation and a celebration of the self, the poem would fall short of its title if Whitman did not present himself as a complex and multivocal being - indeed, a contradictory being. For in contrast to the schematic outlines of the subjective orders produced by theory, the experience of these orders in time make them appear contradictory. ("Do I contradict myself?/ Very well then I contradict myself,/ (I am large, I contain multitudes.)") The subject (both in history and in Whitman's poem) is not determined by the Symbolic, the Imaginary or, for that matter, the unconscious, as isolated aspects of human existence; rather, "the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real (i.e., the unconscious) co-exist and intersect in the subject" simultaneously.<sup>58</sup> As for the "song" (which is itself constitutive of the subject), it poses a certain difficulty common to all texts,

a difficulty (that) derives from the way that Imaginary elements may enter the Symbolic as signs, signifiers, and symbols, and, conversely, from the way

that symbolic elements may be reduced to  
Imaginary functions.<sup>59</sup>

In light of the problem in "Song of Myself" that we articulated at the beginning of this paper (namely, the problem of the disjunction between the speaking and the spoken selves, and the meaning of a poem that can never fulfill its goal of self-predication), and in light of Lacan's ideas about the nature of subjectivity, it becomes apparent that we should read Whitman's poem as a performance (in the spirit of Shoshana Felman's "performative speech acts") of the following Lacanian propositions: "I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think," and "I am not wherever I am the plaything of my thought."<sup>60</sup> The "I" in Whitman's poem who thinks (and speaks) about himself and who works to represent himself in a variety of ways should, in other words, be understood as the self who refuses his "final merit" to speech, or who refuses to "put" from himself what he "really" is. This "I" is not where the poet situates himself in the poem in an array of forms and stances. The "I" who is the plaything of the poet's thought and speech, meanwhile, is the figure represented throughout the poem, whether as a "kosmos" or as a "comrade of raftsmen."

We will recall that Allen, Chase and Cavitch each identify an "I" in "Song of Myself" who ultimately resides outside the poem's depiction of a multifaceted subject.

Allen speaks of a poet who manipulates his persona, Chase of a private, natural individual who contrasts with the social self, and Cavitch of an individual who uses language to satisfy his egomania. When, however, we identify an "I" who is not where the poet situates himself in the poem, we are not - unlike these critics - identifying the "I" who maintains a real presence outside the language of the poem. On the contrary, we are proposing that the withheld self who generates the entire poem can be found only within the language of Whitman's text. Even while the hidden being who refuses his final merit to speech assumes the role of an absent, nonrepresentable subject, that hidden being assumes such a role in "Song of Myself" only through the representational capacity of language. The drama of Whitman's poem, in other words, lies precisely in this tension of language, where the weaving of the depicted "I" by the withheld "I" is itself a fabric exhibiting that very weave.

As we proceed with our interpretation of Whitman's poem, we find that the "I" who is the plaything of the poet's thought and speech is in fact a dramatization of the ego in the different stages of its construction. That is to say, the represented "I" moves back and forth between the Imaginary and Symbolic registers, finding a home in neither sphere. In turn, it becomes apparent that the withheld self - the "self" putatively "outside" the poem - corresponds to



Lacan's unconscious, or to that which Lacan frequently identifies as the Real. The withheld self, in other words, comes to signify (in a necessarily mythical gesture) the underside of the distinction, Imaginary/Symbolic, signifying that which is repressed by the acquisition of language. As a result, the character of "Song of Myself" as a whole is transformed. The poem rehearses the distinction addressed by Rifflet-Lemaire in the following passage:

(the) birth into language and the utilization of the symbol produce a disjunction between lived experience and the sign which replaces it. This disjunction will become greater over the years, language being above all the organ of communication and of reflection upon a lived experience which it is often not able to go beyond. Always seeking to 'rationalize,' to 'repress' the lived experience, reflection will eventually become profoundly divergent from that lived experience. In this sense, we can say with Lacan that the appearance of language is simultaneous with the primal repression which constitutes the unconscious.<sup>61</sup>

The "I" who is the plaything of the poet's thought - the sung self - will be best understood as a product of the organ of communication and reflection, which in turn guarantees the repression of the "real" self or the locus of "lived experience." Consequently, the entire poem will have to be seen as a mythical re-creation of this fissure in the psyche, mythical because it is a re-creation in language.

Earlier we observed that the "Me myself" in section four of Whitman's poem stands aloof from the world's activity, a separate and autonomous being. Now it is possible for us to read this "Me myself" as an indication (and necessarily a misrepresentation) of the unconscious; an unconscious born with the introduction of the subject to language and the concomitant formation of the reflexive principle of consciousness. The "Me myself" contrasts with the me who is caught up in "the fever of doubtful news" and swept by the tide of "fitful events," just as the unconscious contrasts with the public self who is caught up in the social and cultural symbolism of discourse. Likewise, that which the poet is ("what I am") stands "apart from the pulling and hauling" of the world's activity, situated "both in and out of the game and watching and wondering at it." The phrase "Me myself," however, may be read as more than an indication of the unconscious and its absence from the realm of public discourse. The phrase may also be understood to designate the duality of consciousness that accompanies the simultaneous birth and repression of the unconscious. By virtue of its reflexive structure, the phrase "Me myself" hints at the twofold nature of consciousness, and the dialogic positioning of the speaking subject in relation to himself. The dual aspect of the words "Me myself" in effect illustrates the illusion of

bipartite stability that characterizes the internal gravitational lock of the conscious self.

Another instance of this self-referential ambiguity can be found in line 75 of the poem, where Whitman speaks of himself as "what I am." The ability of the subject to confront "what" he is tells of a symmetrical division in being that is proper to consciousness, meaning that the subject has reified his own subjective experience enough to identify its "what-ness." Meanwhile, the space between the pronoun and the abstract hypostatization of the subject in his "what-ness" leads us to think of the space between the self who is the plaything of his thought and the "I" who eludes articulation. As a result of this hiatus, we are invited to re-examine our conception of the "I" in this phrase as belonging within the realm of Whitman's articulable identity, and to acknowledge the profound fluidity of this "I" as that which links "what" (the reification of the self) with "am" (the dimension of lived experience that is uncontained by notions of self and other).

In section five of "Song of Myself," Whitman embarks on a dramatization of the Imaginary. Here the poet establishes that illusory space in the subject between the "I" and its symmetrical counterpart, a space which (as we have seen) tends to collapse and reopen as its terms change places. Thus we read,

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.

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

I mind how once we lay such a transparent  
     summer morning,  
 How 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 bare-stript  
     heart,  
 And reach'd till you felt my beard, and reach'd  
     till you held my feet.

Any temptation to interpret these words a reflective of a rational encounter within the poet's mind, suggestive of consciousness, is dispelled by the erotic overtones in which this encounter is presented. Whitman is other to that which is other to him, not in a logical way, but in the sense of a sexual attraction that promises to fuse each being with the other. Accordingly, we should read this passage as a fleshly rendition (despite the poet's involvement with his soul) of the Imaginary phase of the psyche, hinting as it does at a (sensual) play of reflections.

The Imaginary sense that is established in section five of "Song of Myself" is reaffirmed in section eight, where the narrative emphasis at the beginning of the section is on "the experience of the image." Thus we read: "I lift the gauze and look a long time.... I peeringly view (the

youngster and the red-faced girl) from the top.... I witness the corpse with its dabbled hair, I note where the pistol has fallen." The explicit identification of the poet's perceptual relation to things then evolves into a brief catalog of visions, from the omnibus driver "with his interrogating thumb" to "the policeman with his star quickly working his passage to the centre of the crowd." The first person drops out of the picture as if more faithfully to represent the experience of an immediate confrontation with the physical world by diminishing the mediating effect of syntax.

After section eight of "Song of Myself," the Imaginary aspect of the poem occupies center stage in section 15 as we encounter a lengthy succession of images, only one of which includes a reference (a parenthetical reference, at that) to the poet in his discrete embodiment in the first person. As in section eight, the poet withdraws from the work as an explicit presence and provides us with a stream of unrelated visions, thereby generating a sense of immediacy that is unhindered by syntax and mechanical causality. We as readers become lost in the details of "malform'd limbs," turkey-shoots and piazza walks.

When we turn to section 20 of Whitman's poem, we come upon the following lines: "In all people I see myself, none more and not one a barley-corn less,/ And the good or bad I say of myself I say of them." In one respect, we can read

these lines as an extension of the simple reflexivity of consciousness, with consciousness being understood as a sustained gravitational lock between the self who speaks or thinks, and the "plaything" who is invented as a stand-in for the unconscious. We can read these lines as a vast projection of the reflexive relationship that the conscious individual holds with himself when he stands back and declares, "This is what I am." Simultaneously, however, we can read these same lines as a representation of the Imaginary, or of the fluid self-awareness that precedes our initiation into the Symbolic. For, as we have seen, the reflexivity of consciousness harks back to the Imaginary play of reflections in which the subject does indeed see himself in all people, that subject being incapable of distinguishing between himself and that with which he is confronted.

After asserting in section 20 that he says of others the good or bad he says of himself, Whitman continues, "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." How, we may ask, do we move from the previous identity of the subject who experiences things Imaginarily to the solid and sound identity that is articulated in this sentence? If we draw on Lacan's reading of Freud, we can account for the movement as a portrayal of the subject's entrance into the Symbolic,

or more broadly into a language (or writing) which splits the self into the ego and the unconscious. In other words, the ego emerges in the act of writing, the effort to find a signifying place from which the subject can represent himself. That the poet's solid and sound presence at the center of the converging universe is the ego is shown not only by the poet's alleged self-sameness and solidity at the center of the world's converging objects ("The ego is a projection in whose apparent unity the subject misrecognizes himself," write Coward and Ellis<sup>62</sup>), but also by the poet's experience of these converging objects as writing. The ego is that aspect of the subject divided by language that stands as a representation (a projection) of the undivided subject, it is the pronoun that gives unified representation of what is a divided state. Thus we can say that the poet, in this sentence, experiences the perpetually flowing things of the world only insofar as they are mediated through writing, just as the ego experiences the self insofar as it is represented or mediated within language. Indeed, the poet experiences all things only to the extent that they are mediated by language or, metaphorically speaking, to the extent that they are written, for the ego's acquaintance with the world is defined by its attachment to other signifiers.

This departure from the Imaginary is pursued in section 22 as Whitman questions the validity of the distinction

between good and evil, a distinction whose origin Fredric Jameson has already identified as Imaginary. Whitman here examines the dichotomous nature of the ethical and discovers that it is a falsification of his being.

I am not the poet of goodness only, I do not  
decline to be the poet of wickedness also.

What blurt is this about virtue and vice?  
Evil propels me and reform of evil propels me,  
I stand indifferent,  
My gait is no fault-finder's or rejector's gait,  
I moisten the roots of all that has grown.

As we will recall, Whitman refuses his "final merit" to speech in section 25 of the poem. Prior to this overt refusal of the poet to give himself to language, Whitman writes, "Speech is the twin of my vision, it is unequal to measure itself,/ It provokes me forever, it says sarcastically,/ Walt you contain enough, why don't you let it out then?" Given what we have learned about the Imaginary and the Symbolic, we can read the claim that speech is the twin of the poet's vision as an effort to identify and establish these two registers of subjectivity. Speech, in Whitman's lines, may be taken to refer to the Symbolic, while vision may be understood as the Imaginary, since, as Jameson has already explained, the "Imaginary... derives from the experience of the image - and of the imago - and we are meant to retain its spatial and visual connotations."<sup>63</sup> Even as Whitman strives to identify and



establish the two registers of subjectivity, however, we should not presume that the poet's goal is full entrance into the Symbolic - just as it is not a complete recapturing of Imaginary experience. The pairing of speech and vision in section 25 of "Song of Myself" should be understood as an exploration of the proximity and the tension between the Symbolic and the Imaginary - not as they are schematically delineated by theory, but as they overlap and support one another in every attempt to perform a self.

After we are confronted with this pairing of speech and vision, a fictitious voice hailing from the unconscious proceeds to tell speech that it "conceives too much of articulation," the true seed of identity being, ultimately, "folded" and "protected by frost" in a perpetual winter that will always inhibit the blossoming of the "true" subject. Whitman (mis)identifies himself as "underlying causes to balance them at last," just as we represent the nonrepresentable dimension of the unconscious in our theoretical explications of subjectivity. The poet announces to speech the inaccessibility of his "real" (Real) self to language, even while he is using language:

My final merit I refuse you, I refuse putting  
from me what I really am,  
Encompass worlds, but never try to encompass me,  
I crowd your sleekest and best by simply looking  
toward you.  
Writing and talk do not prove me,  
I carry the plenum of proof and every thing  
else in my face,

With the hush of my lips I wholly confound  
the skeptic.

Whitman's refusal of his "true" self to speech at the near-center of the poem (or his sketching of the unconscious) is followed by a return to the Imaginary. Section 26 begins with the words, "Now I will do nothing but listen,/ To accrue what I hear into this song, to let sounds contribute toward it," thereby suggesting a view of language ("this song") that is ancillary and passive in relation to the physical perception of the world. The poet proceeds to recount his experience of a wide array of phenomena, until the first person again fades from the poem in section 33, withdrawing with the words, "I am afoot with my vision." Once more, we become lost in a whirl of perceptions as Whitman describes "pale-green eggs in the dented sand" and "conical firs."

When the "I" reappears later in section 33, it is as an integral part of the activity being described. The poet does not stand outside the catalog of faces and events, structuring them from a grammatical distance, but appears to have attained his identity in the acausal pace of the Imaginary. Thus, for example, we read, "I am a free companion, I bivouac by invading watch-fires,/ I turn the bridegroom out of bed and stay with the bride myself,/ I tighten her all night to my thighs and lips." Even the Imaginary tone of these lines, however, does not preclude

our recognition that the "I" who tightens the bride to his thighs is also the "I" who is depicted and suspended through words in a passing act of silence and secrecy.

Finally, when we arrive at section 38 of the poem, we encounter a crisis that occurs on different levels simultaneously. We read as follows:

Enough! enough! enough!  
 Somehow I have been stunn'd. Stand back!  
 Give me a little time beyond my cuff'd head,  
           slumbers, dreams, gaping,  
 I discover myself on the verge of a usual mistake.

That I could forget the mockers and insults!  
 That I could forget the trickling tears and the  
           blows of the bludgeons and hammers!  
 That I could look with a separate look on my  
           own crucifixion and bloody crowning.

On one level, the "usual mistake" of which Whitman speaks is the belief that one can faithfully reconstruct, through the labor of language, the dimension of lived experience ("the trickling tears" and "the bludgeons"). The mistake, in this sense, is the assumption common to us all that we can address the entire spectrum of our existence with the detached and egoistic assessments of "a separate look." We may wonder, accordingly, if the poet's discovery of himself on the verge of this "usual mistake" signals a repudiation of his every effort to contain himself in words. On another level, the "usual mistake" of which Whitman speaks here can be read as the assumption, made throughout his extended act of self-authoring, that he can contain the split between

lived experience and its Symbolic reconstruction - even as he represents that split. The mistake, in other words, can also be understood as the endeavor to perform the self along the lines of an internal division that is destined to collapse in upon itself. Looking at the words, "I discover myself on the verge of a usual mistake," we can conclude that the act of self-discovery, with its inevitable recourse to a topography and arrangement of subjective experience, is by nature poised on the brink of error.

The fact that "Song of Myself" does not end with section 38 indicates, not that Whitman rejects his critical (and ambiguous) discovery of himself on the verge of a usual mistake, but that he accepts the "separate look" as an essential component of his being and is willing to proceed with his linguistic re-creation of lived experience - as well as to accept the ultimately linguistic nature of the distinction he employs in this re-creation, the distinction between Symbolic and Imaginary levels of experience. The fact that "Song of Myself" continues for fourteen more sections after this crisis illustrates that Whitman embraces the inevitable mythicity of his project, and recognizes that no human being has ever been able to address the repressed or unconscious aspect of his existence (or the conjunction of the unconscious and the conscious) without first casting the separate look of language in the direction of that inscrutable domain. "Song of Myself," as a result,

becomes a rehearsal of the human situation, which is the paradox of our simultaneous grasp of and alienation from all that we seek to know.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself", in Leaves of Grass: A Textual Variorum of the Printed Poems (New York: New York University Press, 1980), section 25. This is the so-called "death-bed" edition.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., section 7.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., section 15.

<sup>4</sup>Gay Wilson Allen, A Reader's Guide to Walt Whitman (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973), 24.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 135.

<sup>8</sup>Richard Chase, Walt Whitman Reconsidered (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1955), 64.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 64-65.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 88.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 67.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>David Cavitch, My Soul and I; The Inner Life of Walt Whitman (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 31.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 51-59.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 71.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 50.

<sup>18</sup>Shoshana Felman, Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight; Psychoanalysis in Contemporary Culture (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1987), 73.

<sup>19</sup>Jacques Lacan, Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), 63.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., xxv. As Lacan's translator and commentator Anthony Wilden observes, the French psychoanalyst departed from the orthodoxy of the prevailing schools in Paris when he introduced language as central to an understanding of the analysand.

...above all, Lacan has always been concerned with the question of the status of human discourse in analysis (inseparable from discourse in general), in opposition to tendencies to reduce analysis to a study of behavior, or to a medical therapy inclined to reduce the subject's psychical life to a series of symptoms to be interpreted by the (all-knowing) analyst in the way that a doctor interprets the

symptoms of physiological disease.

<sup>21</sup>Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, Language and Materialism; Developments in Semiology and the Theory of the Subject (London, Henley and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), 94-95.

<sup>22</sup>Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis, xxv.

<sup>23</sup>Language and Materialism, 94-95. Coward and Ellis here identify the locus of Freudian ingenuity when they write, "In Freud, consciousness is too 'frail a concept' for the unconscious to be seen simply as the negation of it." That is to say, Coward and Ellis touch on Freud's great insight that along with the givenness of the unity of the subject, the givenness of the pre-existent "reality" of consciousness ought to be questioned.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 98.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 100.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 101.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 109.

<sup>31</sup>Jacques Lacan, Ecrits: a selection (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1977), 830.

<sup>32</sup>Language and Materialism, 105.

<sup>33</sup>Anika Rifflet-Lemaire, Jacques Lacan (London, Henley and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 57.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 67.

<sup>35</sup>Language and Materialism, 105.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 109.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Jacques Lacan, 81.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 80. See also Language and Materialism, 110.

<sup>41</sup>Language and Materialism, 111.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 112.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 113.

<sup>44</sup>Jacques Lacan, 83.

<sup>45</sup>Language and Materialism, 113.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 113-114.

<sup>47</sup>Fredric Jameson, "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan: Marxism, Psychoanalytic Criticism and the Problem of the Subject" (Yale French Studies #55/56, 1977), 357.

<sup>48</sup>Jacques Lacan, 60.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 61.

<sup>50</sup>Language and Materialism, 110.

<sup>51</sup>"Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan," 369.

<sup>52</sup>The Imaginary origins of consciousness as self-awareness or as a symmetrical relationship between self and the self lose their hold on us when Lacan introduces the unconscious as a source of slippage in this bipartite structure. Lacan presents the unconscious as that aspect of

the subject that exists before the self can name the self, and that comes to be repressed and shoved beyond the perimeters of language as soon as the subject is able to refer to himself. The unconscious evades the taut conceptual gridlock of consciousness while inciting the conscious mind to pursue it further. In its absence, therefore, the unconscious ensures the perpetual displacement of conscious identity.

<sup>53</sup>Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight, 61.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 114.

<sup>55</sup>Language and Materialism, 115.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 114.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 115.

<sup>58</sup>Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis, 161.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 186.

<sup>60</sup>Ecrits: a selection, 166.

<sup>61</sup>Jacques Lacan, 53.

<sup>62</sup>Language and Materialism, 105.

<sup>63</sup>"Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan," 351.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allen, Gay Wilson. A Reader's Guide to Walt Whitman. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973.
- Belsey, Catherine. Critical Practice. London and New York: Methuen, 1980.
- Berman, Art. From the New Criticism to Deconstruction; the Reception of Structuralism and Post-Structuralism. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988.
- Black, Stephen. Whitman's Journeys into Chaos; a Psychoanalytic Study of the Poetic Process. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975.
- Carlisle, E. Fred. The Uncertain Self; Whitman's Drama of Identity. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1973.
- Cavitch, David. My Soul and I; the Inner Life of Walt Whitman. Boston: Beacon Press, 1985.
- Chase, Richard. Walt Whitman Reconsidered. New York: William Sloane Associates, 1955.
- Coward, Rosalind and John Ellis. Language and Materialism; Developments in Semiology and the Theory of the Subject. London and Boston: Routledge and Paul, 1977.
- Dowling, William C. Jameson, Althusser, Marx; an Introduction to The Political Unconscious. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984.
- Eagleton, Terry. Literary Theory; an Introduction. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983.
- Jameson, Fredric. The Political Unconscious; Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981.
- "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan: Marxism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, and the Problem of the Subject." Yale French Studies 55/56 (1977): 338-395.
- Kaplan, Justin. Walt Whitman; a life. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980.

Lacan, Jacques. Ecrits: a selection. (Translated from the French by Alan Sheridan.) New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1977.

- Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis. (Translated with notes and commentary by Anthony Wilden.) Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1981.

LaCapra, Dominick. Rethinking Intellectual History; texts, contexts, language. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983.

Rifflet-Lemaire, Anika. Jacques Lacan. (Translated from the French by David Macey.) London and Boston: Routledge and Paul, 1977.

Whitman, Walt. Leaves of Grass; A Textual Variorum of the Printed Poems. Edited by Sculley Bradley, Harold W. Blodgett, Arthur Golden and William White. New York: New York University Press, 1980.

Woodress, James (ed.). Critical Essays on Walt Whitman. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1983.

## VITA

Valerie Philbrick Gill

Born in Rockville, Connecticut, October 22, 1964.

Graduated from Tolland High School in Tolland, Connecticut, June 1982, B.A. in philosophy, Marlboro College, Marlboro, Vermont, 1986. Attended Trinity College, Oxford University, through a summer program sponsored by the English department of the University of Massachusetts, June-August 1985.

In August 1988, the author entered the College of William and Mary as a graduate student in the Department of English.