SELF IN WHITMAN'S "SONG OF MYSELF"
AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF SRI AUROBINDO

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Many critics have noted similarities between Walt Whitman's poetry and Indian philosophy, particularly that in the Bhagavad-Gita. Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950), one of the “four great giants of modern Indian thought”\(^1\) along with Ghandi, Tagore, and Radhakrishnan, was profoundly influenced by the Gita. Whitman scholar Gay Wilson Allen has remarked that “Song of Myself” should have been called “Song of The Self.” The concept of self is central to Indian philosophy; Radhakrishnan tells us “in India, ‘Atmānam viddhi,’ know the self, sums up the law and the prophets. Within man is the spirit that is the centre of everything. Psychology and ethics are the basal sciences...”\(^2\)

This study will explore Walt Whitman’s “Song of Myself” through the concept of self and its various relationships, as defined in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo.

Walt Whitman (1819-1892) is the subject of a veritable mountain of material; his biographical data is well known. As Sri Aurobindo is generally unknown in the United States, a brief sketch of his life may be helpful.\(^3\) He was born Aravinda Ghose in Khulna (East Bengal, India) in 1872, the fourth child of a surgeon. He was steeped in Western educational traditions; from five to seven years of age he studied with Irish nuns in Darjeeling, then in London and Cambridge until the age of twenty-one. Graduating with honors from King’s College, Cambridge, he spoke English and French, read Greek, Italian, and Latin, but of Indian languages knew only a little Bengali. He was professor of English at Baroda College in India from 1893 to 1905, and while there achieved proficiency in Sanskrit, Marathi, Gujarati, and Bengali, wrote numerous poems and “developed a deep identification with Indian culture.”\(^4\) He became active in the Indian

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\(^3\) I am indebted to McDermott’s Introduction for Aurobindo’s biographical data.

\(^4\) Ibid., p. 6.
resistance and spent a year in jail while waiting to be tried for conspiracy, of which he was acquitted. During the confinement he “meditated on the Gita, felt the presence of Krishna and the inspiration of Vivekananda, and resolved to work for the renewed spiritualization of Indian culture.”

He soon expanded his concerns to all human history, and with his background of revolutionary politics and yogic discipline, he went to Pondicherry “to concentrate on the elevation of Indian consciousness through spiritual and psychic forces.”

At twenty-eight he married a girl about half his age; she died in 1918 after a long separation from him. He supported and worked for the Allies during the Second World War, and died in 1950 after suffering a kidney ailment.

His thirty volumes of systematic writing and letters include philosophy, political writings, poetry, drama, and literary criticism. He developed an original and minutely detailed philosophical system based on his own experiences and yogic practices as well as deep scholarship. Because of the experiential basis of his writings, his philosophy is vital, communicative, rich, and comprehensive. McDermott writes that “Sri Aurobindo’s is perhaps the only comprehensive philosophical system that issues from spiritual experience. While many of the great modern Indian spiritual personalities . . . have expressed their experience in philosophical terms, none has developed an original and critical philosophical system, including theories of knowledge, existence, the self, natural order, and the aim of life. On the other hand, a few Indian philosophers . . . have attempted to develop a comprehensive system, but none surpasses Sri Aurobindo’s range of topics, precision of argument, or richness of detail. More significantly, however, Sri Aurobindo’s philosophic system is unique in its autobiographical authenticity.”

Sri Aurobindo’s teaching begins with the idea that “behind the appearances of the universe there is the reality of a being and a consciousness, a self of all things, one and eternal. All beings are united in that one self and spirit but divided by a certain separa-

5McDermott, op. cit., p. 7.  6Ibid., p. 9.

7Ibid., pp. 12-13.
tivity of consciousness, an ignorance of their true self and reality in the mind, life, and body. It is possible by a certain psychological discipline to remove this veil of separative consciousness and become aware of the true Self, the divinity within us and all.8

This discipline he expressed in his system of Integral Yoga, a combination of practices from ancient yogic systems. Integral Yoga uses simultaneously the ways of knowledge, works, and devotion. Aurobindo's The Synthesis of Yoga maps the way of spiritual development from "the ignorance" through illumination, ascent from the surface life into cosmic consciousness, and a final state of "supramental" existence in which the spirit is brought down into all activities of the individual self.

"Song of Myself," as published in the ninth or "Deathbed" edition of Leaves of Grass, and Aurobindo's The Synthesis of Yoga are the major works used in this study.9 Both deal with cosmic consciousness and spiritual development; both are solidly in the mystical tradition. Their subject matter is that of mysticism: the nature of God, achievement of union with God, and obstacles to union.10 Along with mystics the world over, they cite experience as the means of union, and stress the quality of union and transcendence of the ego.11 Like most mystical writings, theirs is characterised by strong emotion.12 The two works differ in intent, however. Whitman's poem is a celebration of "being" on many different levels; its aim is not presentation of a logical and comprehensive philosophical system. Aurobindo's work is philosophical in mode, and outlines an entire system of spiritual development.

It is through many common themes of the two works that we shall attempt a fresh reading of "Song of Myself." Chapter 2 deals with Aurobindo's concept of self. It also

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8Mc Dermott, op. cit., p. 29.

9As a matter of convenience, "Song of Myself" will be referred to as "SOM" and The Synthesis of Yoga as "SY."


11Ibid., pp. 2-3. 12Ibid., p. 5.
contains sections on the self's relationship with Deity and the nature of Deity. Chapter 3 is devoted to the nature of the self in the Whitman poem. Self is explored through its many paradoxes, and its relationships with the world, other selves, and the Deity. Also included are Whitman's statements on good and evil, the nature of Deity, and the nature of worship.

Chapter 4 is a summation of basic concepts held in common by the two authors and traces the thread of spiritual development in "Song of Myself" to its culmination in the highest spiritual state described by Aurobindo.

In Chapter 4, two terms from Indian philosophy appear which may need definition: Prakriti and Purusha. Prakriti is "Nature . . . the Force that goes forth from the conscious Soul . . . the mechanically active Energy of the Sankhyas."13 Purusha is "An essential being supporting the play of Prakriti; Conscious Soul; the regarding and enjoying Conscious Being; soul; inner being; Being or Self as opposed to Prakriti which is becoming."14

14 Ibid., p. 24.
Chapter 2

AUROBINDO'S CONCEPT OF SELF

Self is described by Aurobindo in several different ways: as Brahman, or the Self of selves; as the human self which evolves from and in the universe; and as man who is “essentially a self (or spirit) associated with a body, a vital being, and a mind.”

What are the specific qualities of the self? It is an emanation of the Supreme unassociated with time or space; it is part of the unity and the multiplicity. The individual self is conditioned by Nature and works through her modes; it is quite real in essence and a necessary, vital part of cosmic activity and fulfilment. The self is not obvious to the senses; it is not the body, which is “a sensible form of the Infinite” (SY, p. 280). Energy, power, and life force are not the self; neither are mind and personality. These are constantly changing, and are only developing forms of consciousness, not basic consciousness itself (SY, p. 362).

The ego is apart from the real self; it is a layer added by social man, a result of man’s mental habits. The egoistic consciousness is characterised by an absorption in external appearances; through the workings of the ego, man has acquired a sense of limitation and separation (SY, p. 6). The ego leads us far afield with its assumptions, for it is not the cause of our world existence, but the result of it (SY, p. 421). Nevertheless, Aurobindo considered development of the ego in man a necessary evolutionary link, albeit one that must be exceeded in the ascent toward ultimate spiritual development.

The ego-connected experience of a separate self-existence is not only false, but is the very “root of all suffering, ignorance and evil” (SY, p. 652). Through liberation from the ego and from desire, man can attain spiritual freedom and a high level of conscious-ness itself (SY, p. 362).

Footnotes:
1 The page references cited from The Synthesis of Yoga are only single instances; each concept appears many times and is developed through the entire work.

ness; then the ego can find its self-fulfilment through surrender to the Divine (SY, p. 166). This liberation follows enlightenment and a radical change of consciousness which reveals the falsity of the ego's pretensions. The active sense of ego must first be discarded, and then oneness with the Transcendent must be realized (SY, p. 650). True individuality is attained when the ego falls away and the supreme part of our being takes its place (SY, p. 420).

Ego sense and desire, the two main binding fetters of the self, may be overcome in part through the offices of the witness self. The witness is an impartial observer, a function of the mind which can sever the individual's association and identification with the desire function of the mind (SY, p. 226). Through the witness function, the self watches the action of nature, sees its mechanical, continuous movement, and becomes aware of its involuntary qualities. This eventually weakens the habitual actions, the compulsively active mentality can be brought to stillness, and groundwork is laid for the self to become active master of the nature—first by allowing the Spirit to act on and through it, and then by entering into identity with the Spirit on a supramental level (SY, pp. 609-611).

Equality is an offshoot of the work of the witness self: "Hope and fear, joy and grief, liking and disliking, attraction and repulsion, content and discontent, gladness and depression, horror and wrath and fear and disgust and shame and the passions of love and hatred fall away from the liberated psychic being" (SY, p. 338). This spirit of equality gradually develops from its negative aspect of indifference to its positive form of love and delight (SY, p. 339).

How is the body related to the spirit? The body is "a mystic bridge between the spiritual and the physical being . . ." (SY, p. 507). Matter is "our foundation and the first condition of all our energies and realisations . . ." (SY, pp. 6-7). Often man has turned from the body with aversion or contempt because of the difficulties it presents in realisation of the Self. But integral Yoga regards the body as a necessary instrument for the work and realisation of the divine Self on earth. Mind, body, and spirit are intertwined in this divine order:
Spirit is the crown of universal existence; Matter is its basis; Mind is the link between the two. Spirit is that which is eternal; Mind and Matter are its workings. Spirit is that which is concealed and has to be revealed; mind and body are the means by which it seeks to reveal itself (SY, p. 24).

Self's Relationship with the Deity

The reason for man's terrestrial existence is his part in the progressive descent of the Spirit into matter. Man unconsciously strives toward this goal; it is the reason for universal discontent and unrest (SY, p. 50). The true Person in each of us seeks expression of the inner divine self, not separate gratification. As we learn how to allow the Divine to work through us, we also come to recognize that divine working in all other persons, creatures, and things (SY, p. 194). This recognition in turn reinforces the experience of the reality of the inner Self and aids in the removal of the illusory barrier between us and the Divine (SY, p. 99).

The world is real, and a partial manifestation of the Divine; it is a partial manifestation because it is still evolving. Good and evil are a part of this strata of evolution, and are distinct only on this level. As spiritual development takes place and the individual self truly knows the presence of divinity in all events and things, the distinction between good and evil disappears. The petty and vile are then disclosed as part of the divine schema, and opposites revealed as "two poles of One Being, connected by two simultaneous currents of energy negative and positive in relation to each other...their reunion the appointed means for the reconciliation of life's discords and for the discovery of the integral truth..." (SY, pp. 110-111).

Man's ordinary state is that of trouble and disorder because the faculties, the instruments of sensation, emotion, action, and enjoyment are dominant and act as the ruling force instead of tools or instruments of a higher power (SY, p. 33). When consciousness is raised, actions are no longer controlled by emotions and personal will; the motivation--but not necessarily the action--is changed.3 When all action is guided by supramental consciousness, evil is seen from a higher level as part of a divine good (SY, p. 181). Individuals delay the spiritual descent into matter when their Self is unrealised, but eventual

3The Essential Aurobindo, pp. 115-116.
cosmic fulfilment is nevertheless inevitable. On the other hand, cosmic fulfilment can be hastened by the spiritual strivings of individuals, and the highest realisation of the individual Self lies in participation in the world on the supramental level.

**Self and Nature of Deity**

Aurobindo’s concept of God is all-inclusive: it embraces the qualities of transcendence and immanence; atheism, monotheism, and polytheism; and unity and multiplicity. All are “true” yet all are partial, since the Deity is infinite and in totality beyond man’s mental comprehension. All things come from God and are representations of him.4

The integral Yoga aims at abolishing the tremendous gulf between man and a higher Power through spiritual union (SY, p. 528). While Aurobindo recognizes the validity of the worship of Krishna, Christ, Buddha, or any other religious representation, he finds the worship incomplete until the forms of Krishna, Christ, or Buddha are revealed in us. Otherwise, the Christ or other representation is only “a bridge between man’s unconverted state and the revelation of the Divine within him” (SY, pp. 16-17).

The Deity can be known only through direct apprehension, not via the intellect or senses; the mind’s logical and cognitive habits are useless in the attempt at unification. No written scripture, authority, religion, or philosophical system can be more than an aid, for each is only “a partial expression of the eternal Knowledge...” (SY, p. 3). Ethics and rules are “temporary constructions founded upon the needs of the ego in its transition from Matter to Spirit” (SY, p. 197). Only individual experience of the Godhead has meaning in the cosmic realm; therefore the devotee’s experience is more like that of a “path-finder hewing his way through a virgin forest” than that of a pilgrim (SY, p. 5).

For Aurobindo, life itself is worship, and intensification of man’s seeking after unity with God is a concentrated form of worship. Many are the ways that may be followed to this end, but Aurobindo believed that a combination of the paths of works, knowledge, and devotion would bring about the fullest realisation. Thus the body, mind, and emo-

tions can be used together and in accordance with their own natures in the process of spiritual growth (SY, p. 525).

Individual spiritual realisation is a high ideal in itself, but by no means the final end of integral Yoga; if so, the result would be nihilism and a final, complete withdrawal from the world. But since the world is real and has a purpose in its existence, just as man does, the devotee of the integral Yoga will not withdraw permanently. He remains in the world as an active participant so that the Divine may be realised through him and the spiritual descent into Matter may be completed (SY, p. 253).
Chapter 3

SELF IN WHITMAN’S “SONG OF MYSELF”

The paradoxical nature of the self is implicit throughout “Song of Myself.” First of all, the self is experienced and expressed on various levels. The “I” represents the persona; the individual personality (or earthly representation of a specific manifestation of Spirit); the soul, which is of universal essence; the ego; and the witness self that stands separate from the activity of the earthly manifestation of self.

In the opening lines of SOM, the “I” is used to signify the persona, and the self which is celebrated is the unchanging, universal Self: “I celebrate myself, and sing myself, /And what I assume you shall assume.” The shifting of viewpoint occurs throughout the poem, and the complex changes of level carry over into the ambiguity of terms mentioned by Guthrie in his Modern Poet Prophets: “... the real Object is identical with the real Subject, so that the terms ‘I’ and ‘It,’ ‘One’s Self’ and ‘God’ are convertible.”¹ The persona undergoes many changes of occupation and habitat, but the universal Self, or soul, does not change.²

The individual personality is expressed as a particular manifestation, with specific personal qualities, in a particular historical time. This “I” is speaking in Section 4:

Trippers and askers surround me,
People I meet, the effect upon me of my early life or the ward
and city I live in, or the nation,
The latest dates, discoveries, inventions, societies, authors old and
new,
My dinner, dress, associates, looks, compliments, dues,
The real or fancied indifference of some man or woman I love,
The sickness of one of my folks or of myself, or ill-doing or loss or
lack of money, or depressions or exaltations,
Battles, the horrors of fratricidal war, the fever of doubtful news,
the fitful events ... (66-72)


This personality receives the handful of grass from the child and reflects on its significance in Section 6; it takes part in the haying of Section 9. In Section 10, it hunts alone in the wilds and aids a runaway slave. In Section 24, it is "Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son." This aspect of the self, true to Whitman's notion of the "identified soul" or the doctrine of personalism, "emphasizes self-reliance, but not as a means of becoming individual, but as a means of realizing the divine personality within the individual soul, so that by developing its full potential the soul becomes closer to God or the pantheistic All."³

According to Ferdinand Freiligrath, Whitman's ego represents "part of America, part of the world, part of humanity, part of the universe."⁴ The expression of the individual ego thus takes on a universal character and lifts itself from the purely personal level. The self as ego takes another form in Sections 37 and 38 as well: it presents itself as an intrusion upon the domain of the soul or eternal Self. The "I" identifies itself with the evils and sufferings of humanity to such an extent that "Askers embody themselves in me and I am embodied in them, /I project my hat, sit shame-faced, and beg." Objectivity has been lost momentarily, but immediately is recovered in Section 38:

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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 bludgions and hammers!
That I could look with a separate look on my own crucifixion and bloody crowning. (959-965)
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The unchanging self or soul, a part of the Universal Essence, permeates the entire poem. In Section 4, the persona enumerates many worldly experiences, but declares:

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"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." Among the statements of the eternal Self are those in Section 7: "I am not an earth nor an adjunct of an earth, /I am the mate and companion of people, all just as immortal and fathomless as myself, /(They do not know how immortal, but I know.)"

Implicit in the catalogs of human experiences is the universal spirit in all manifestations of life. In Section 20 the persona sings:

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.
I know I am solid and sound,
I know I am deathless,
I know I am august,
I exist as I am, that is enough,
My foothold is tenon'd and mortis'd in granite,
I laugh at what you call dissolution,
And I know the amplitude of time. (401-421)

The witness self, or objective watcher, is another major element in the poem. The first unequivocal statement of the witness soul is in Section 4:

Apart from the pulling and hauling stands what I am,
Stands amused, complacent, compassionating, idle, unitary,
Looks down, is erect, or bends an arm on an impalpable certain rest,
Looking with side-curved head curious what will come next,
Both in and out of the game and watching and wondering at it.

Backward I see in my own days where I sweated through fog with linguists and contenders,
I have no mockings or arguments, I witness and wait. (75-81)

The witness self predominates in Section 8, watching the baby in the cradle, the youngster and the red-faced girl turning aside up the bushy hill, the suicide and the many activities and conditions which follow in the passage, but "I mind them or the show or resonance of them--I come and I depart." In Section 10, the self alternately participates and watches; in Sections 11-13, the witness self is again uppermost. Sections 15 and 16 enumerate various statements of the human condition as viewed by the witness. In
Section 22, the witness self brings forth a definitive statement about good and evil: “I am not the poet of goodness only, I do not decline to be the poet of wickedness also. /What blurt is this about virtue and about vice? /Evil propels me and reform of evil propels me, I stand indifferent.” Section 33’s long enumerative passage includes both witness self and participating individual self. The Goliad massacre and sea-fight tales in Sections 34-36 are narrated by the witness self.

A second paradox of the self is that it is both a part of deity and separate from it. Gay Wilson Allen says that Whitman worships the Divinity in each individual self.5 Smithline finds in Whitman that “the Deity is a name for a cosmic evolutionary process, or perhaps a great personality with human personalities existing within Him.”6 Section 48 presents a clear statement of this paradox:

And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one’s self is,
   And whoever walks a furlong without sympathy walks to his own 
   funeral drest in his shroud,
   And I or you pocketless of a dime may purchase the pick of the 
   earth,
   And to glance with an eye or show a bean in its pod confounds 
   the learning of all times,
   And there is no trade or employment but the young man following 
   it may become a hero,
   And there is no object so soft but it makes a hub for the wheel’d 
   universe,
   And I say to any man or woman, Let your soul stand cool and 
   composed before a million universes.

   And I say to mankind, Be not curious about God,
   For I who am curious about each am not curious about God,
   (No array of terms can say how much I am at peace about God 
   and about death.)

   I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not 
   in the least,
   Nor do I understand who there can be more wonderful than 
   myself.

6Smithline, op. cit., p. 165.
Why should I wish to see God better than this day?
I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four, and each
moment then,
In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own face in
the glass, ... (1271-1285)

The self of “Song of Myself” is paradoxical in other ways as well: it is both mutable
and immutable; it is both part of and separate from worldly existence; it is both individ­
ual and universal; it is both body and soul; it participates, yet also witnesses. Whitman’s
presentation of the self on various levels annihilates most of the paradoxes: the self
which is a particular manifestation in time is the self that is changeable, part of worldly
existence, individual, incarnate in a body, an active participant; the self that is soul is
immutable, separate from material existence, universal, a witness.

There is also paradox in the resolution of the problems of relationship of the indi­
vidual self to other individual selves, and of the individual self to the Eternal Self.
James E. Miller says that “the paradox is that the fulfillment of selfhood can come only
in response to other selves.” 7 Guthrie states the riddle as extricating the self out of the
self. 8 Professor Allen says in “Song of Myself,” as in other statements of mystical experi­
ence, the “subject seems to feel his self being absorbed into a larger or universal Self.
Paradoxically, the self shrinks to nothing at the same time it becomes omnipotent in its
union with a Higher Self.” 9

Paradoxes in Relationships of the Self

Nambiar believes that “Leaves of Grass attempts a resolution of the tensions
created by rival claims of matter and spirit, body and soul, individual and society.” 10
How does Whitman resolve these conflicts? Let us first examine the problem of the
body’s relationship with the soul.

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7James E. Miller, Jr., Start with the Sun: Studies in Cosmic Poetry (Lincoln: Univer­
8William Norman Guthrie, op. cit., p. 276.
10O. K. Nambiar, Walt Whitman and Yoga, p. 143.
To Whitman, body and soul are of equal importance. He acknowledges the "physicality of the soul, or the spirituality of the body." 11 He also believes that the body is a symbol of the soul and that "It is so much of the soul as we perceive through the senses." 12 In SOM the body is not only a symbol of the soul, but it is "the miraculous materialization of the soul." 13 In Section 21, the author says: "I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul." Section 24 contains the exalted rhapsody on the body and all its parts; it sings the oneness of body and soul:

Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or am touch'd from,
The scent of these arm-pits aroma finer than prayer,
This head more than churches, bibles, and all the creeds.

If I worship one thing more than another it shall be the spread of my own body, or any part of it,
Translucent mould of me it shall be you!

Sections 25-29 follow with a celebration of the bodily senses: the sense of touch is the means of discovery of a new identity and links the physical with the spiritual. 14 A statement of absolute equality of body and soul opens Section 48: "I have said that the soul is not more than the body, /And I have said that the body is not more than the soul, /And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is." The marriage of the body and soul is consummated in the imagery of Section 5, where sex becomes the means by which "the soul receives its identity and perpetually fulfills the cosmic plan." 15 Sex thus serves as a link between the physical and the spiritual, solves the riddle of duality, and illuminates the essential unity of body and soul.

If the self personified in a body is indeed as great as God, what is the relationship of the self to other selves in the world? With the opening lines of the poem, the

12 Guthrie, op. cit., p. 270.
13 Shapiro, In Defense of Ignorance, p. 198.
15 Smithline, op. cit., p. 141.
reader is given a very strong hint: "I celebrate myself, and sing myself, /And what I assume you shall assume, /For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you."

Because the individual self illustrates the Universal Self, and "because this Self is the same in all men and women, he celebrates all mankind."

Thus the "I" in Whitman is used to celebrate his likeness to others, not differences; and it expresses the unlimited and all-embracing qualities of the universal Self vicariously for all men.

Whitman's credo of spiritual democracy is based in part on his belief that true knowledge is gained through union with the Self (not through intellect), and therefore is possible for all persons. It is also based on "the divine worth of the individual and the equality of individuals brought together not through law, but by bonds of love." The opening of Section 19 celebrates the life-feast for all: "This is the meal equally set, this the meat for natural hunger, /It is for the wicked just the same as the righteous, I make appointments with all, /I will not have a single person slighted or left away." The same belief is underlined in Section 24: "By God! I will accept nothing which all cannot have their counterpart of on the same terms." The theme is extended in Sections 40 and 41.

Whitman stressed the value of personalism and individualism because he believed that "the purpose of the whole process of evolution is directed to each man and each woman" and that each person's life had "the awakening" as its destiny.

Whitman, like Emerson, exalts "the infinitude of the private man," but Whitman goes a step further: Only when he [man] merges or identifies himself through sympathy

16 Nambiar, op. cit., p. 130.


20 Smithline, op. cit., p. 160.

21 Nambiar, op. cit., p. 150.
and love with all men does he attain the mystic union of the soul, with God. Whitman's thought stresses equally the vertical relationship of the individual with God and the horizontal relationship of the individual with his fellow man."

The next group of paradoxes centers around the relationship of the individual self to the material world. Just what is the true reality—the material world, or the spiritual world? Does the merging of the individual self with the Universal Self require transcendence of the world? How is the problem of good and evil resolved?

The material world, like the body, is to Whitman an emanation of the spirit. As the soul receives identity by its body, so it receives identity through materials. Section 31 celebrates the spiritual essence and perfection in material things:

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars,  
And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and the  
egg of the wren,  
And the tree-toad is a chef-d’oeuvre for the highest,  
And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors of heaven,  
And the narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn all machinery,  
And the cow crunching with depress’d head surpasses any statue,  
And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels. (663-669)

In Section 21 the poet sings his love for the world-emanation in a flight of soaring ecstasy:

I am he that walks with the tender and growing night,  
I call to the earth and sea half-held by the night.

Press close bare-bosom’d night—press close magnetic nourishing night!  
Night of south winds—night of the large few stars!  
Still nodding night—mad naked summer night.

Smile O voluptuous cool-breath’d earth!  
Earth of the slumbering and liquid trees!  
Earth of departed sunset—earth of the mountains misty-topt!  
Earth of the vitreous pour of the full moon just tinged with blue!  
Earth of shine and dark mottling the tide of the river!  
Earth of the limpid gray of clouds brighter and clearer for my sake!  
Far-swooping elbow’d earth—rich apple-blossom’d earth!  
Smile, for your lover comes.

22Smithline, op. cit., p. 135. 23Guthrie, op. cit., p. 308.
Prodigal, you have given me love—therefore I to you give love!  
O unspeakable passionate love.

E. F. Carlisle, in his provocative essay "Walt Whitman: Drama of Identity," notes that the central action of SOM is dialog of the self with the world. He traces this movement in the structure: the self moves from a sense of isolation and unitary self to a sense of duality of self and not-self, then finally toward unity and "full mutuality as the self and the world merge or become one." Smithline tells us Whitman "asserted that the individual by identifying his soul with all things experienced the Divine Essence itself... [and] it is only by the interdependence of the Me and the Not-Me that the full realization of the individual is possible."

Because the material is an emanation of Spirit, all things share in the essence; there is no real division between the material and the spiritual. Thus Whitman does not reject the world, for "it is the path, the open road of the soul... Materialism is true and spiritualism is true. The human body, identity, personality are all divine miracles to be cherished and never abused."

Does Whitman's view encompass transcendence? A major theme in SOM is the celebration of participation in the world. In Section 18, he says:

Vivas to those who have fail'd!  
And to those whose war-vessels sank in the sea!  
And to those themselves who sank in the sea!  
And to all generals that lost engagements, and all overcome heroes!  
And the numberless unknown heroes equal to the greatest heroes known! (367-371)

Section 33 enumerates the many occupations and conditions of men; there the self as individual becomes a part of each human experience. Worldly experience communicates cosmic truth; therefore he strongly rejects asceticism. Sections 45 and 48 contain unflinching statements about this communication:

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O span of youth! ever-push'd elasticity!
O manhood, balanced, florid and full.

My lovers suffocate me,
Crowding my lips, thick in the pores of my skin,
Jostling me through streets and public halls, coming naked to me
at night,
Crying by day Ahoy! from the rocks of the river, swinging and
chirping over my head,
Calling my name from flower-beds, vines, tangled underbrush,
Lighting on every moment of my life,
Bussing my body with soft balsamic busses,
Noiselessly passing handfuls out of their hearts and giving them
to be mine.

Old age superbly rising! O welcome, ineffable grace of dying
days!

Every condition promulges not only itself, it promulges what grows
after and out of itself,
And the dark hush promulges as much as any.

I open my scuttle at night and see the far-sprinkled systems,
And I see multiplied as high as I can cipher edge but the rim
to the farther systems.

Wider and wider they spread, expanding, always expanding,
Outward and outward and forever outward. (45: 1170-1186)

Why should I wish to see God better than this day?
I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four, and each
moment then,
In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own face in
the glass,
I find letters from God dropt in the street, and every one is sign'd
by God's name,
And I leave them where they are, for I know that wheresoe'er I go,
Others will punctually come for ever and ever. (48: 1283-1288)

For Whitman, "every natural function is pure and good...[what we need] is not
repression but right stimulation."

Nevertheless, the poet does communicate certain types of transcendence. Good-
heart has noted in SOM the transcendence of the ego, and Carlisle writes of another

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27 Guthrie, op. cit., p. 292.
p. 157.
mode of transcendence:

"In Whitman ... transcendence does not primarily mean rising to a supernatural or mystic level. Instead, the self is immersed in physical reality, in history, in death or suffering, but at the same time it rises above them. The self accepts its situation in the world, but simultaneously tries to transcend that situation without denying or attempting to escape it. In the process, the self breaks through (not "out of") the empirical, historical world, with all its limits, by discovering, paradoxically, possibilities for transcendence in that world."29

Carlisle's type of transcendence is made possible by the witness self, the objective self which observes the action and participation of the individual self. This witness self makes its first appearance in Section 4:

Apart from the pulling and hauling stands what I am,
Stands amused, complacent, compassionating, idle, unitary,
Looks down, is erect, or bends an arm on an impalpable certain rest,
Looking with side-curved head curious what will come next,
Both in and out of the game and watching and wondering at it. (75-78)

The role of the witness self expands from this point in the poem; it is the major spokesman in Sections 8 through 16, 26, 33 through 35, and 37 through 44. In Sections 35 and 36, this self witnesses its own fight, participation, and victory in the spiritual battle of the sea-fight tale.

For Whitman, there is no problem about the self's remaining in the world. But what about the evils that bombard the individual self from all sides? What of the inequity, the injustice, and suffering? What of death?

These questions have proven troublesome to a number of Western critics. Sholom J. Kahn says that Whitman transvalued good and evil, and finds his treatment of evil and suffering to be "pathetic merely, rather than tragic." He notes a quality of melodramatic treatment which he says results from the poet's attempt to be "ethically neutral." In Kahn's view, Whitman lacks a sense of sin, although some guilt remains.30

29Carlisle, op. cit., p. 262.
Asselineau describes Whitman’s stance as that of “mystical amoralism,” and says Whitman finds no distinctions between sinners and the just. Also he discovers in Whitman “no fundamental difference between sinning in action and sinning in thought, and we have all sinned in thought. All men are equally guilty.”

Asselineau senses an ambivalence in the poet’s view of evil; he feels Whitman is troubled by the existence of evil at the same time his optimistic view finds evil to be perfect. The critic also says that Whitman describes evil as only temporary and accidental rather than an absolute reality, and asserts that there are no wicked, but only sick, people, a notion which prefigures modern psychoanalytical thinking (p. 54).

Smuts tells us that Whitman associated evil with the part of a thing and goodness with the whole. Edwin H. Miller says that Whitman’s “heaven or joy is relatedness, real or imaginary; hell or agony is its absence.” Karl Shapiro describes the poet’s philosophy in these terms: “If man is of Nature, and Nature is good, good will triumph. Evil is the failure of man to be as good as he can. For man to become all that is utterly possible is divine.”

Charles Hughes says that to Walt Whitman “evil is merely one strand in an overall pattern which is good and beautiful, and his inspiration elevates him to a position from which he can survey the total design.”

Smithline declares that since Whitman “glorifies each part and parcel of the universe, he cannot omit the abnormal or the morally degenerate . . .” Whitman’s view of evil is embodied in his notion of “prudence” [akin to Emerson’s “compensation”], which is “similar to the Hindu karma, a universal law of cause and effect. There is a con-

32 Ibid., pp. 52-54. 33 Smuts, op. cit., p. 190.
35 Karl Shapiro, In Defense of Ignorance, p. 197.
37 Smithline, op. cit., p. 145.
sequence to each of our acts, good or bad, in the eternal count.” Furthermore, “Whitman does not reject moral values; what he does reject is the hierarchy of moral values. Evil he accepts as a part of reality. What he strenuously opposed was the ignoring of evil, and the categorizing of evil . . .” (p. 146).

Denial of the goodness inherent in all objects of creation or experience-including evil-is blasphemy to the poet. “The notion that there is anything inherently evil or foul in the universe seems to him ‘to impugn Creation’ . . . Growth from good to better is quite sufficient to allow of the full exercise of the will. Evil thus becomes merely the name of a good that has been transcended.”

Guthrie outlines five different senses of evil expressed by Whitman. First, there is “the less good,” which is “essentially good, only relatively speaking not good.” The second category, the “not good,” is treated by Whitman as “non-existent.” Next is the “failure to develop from within,” which is equivalent to the lack of good. A fourth is “revolt against external laws,” which the poet finds “a temporary good”; and the fifth encompasses “pain, defeat, old age, death,” all of which are “opportunities for good” and are all actually good. The worst evil is the third category, “failure to develop from within, or ‘sloth of soul’” (p. 290).

The varied critical evaluations of Whitman’s view of good and evil are like the descriptions of an elephant given by the blind Indians after they came in contact, respectively, with a leg, the tail, a tusk, the trunk, an ear, and a side. But Whitman’s universe is a whole body, and like the elephant, will not divide into parts. As in the concept of self, many paradoxes in the poet’s treatment of good and evil are resolved by his statements on various levels. Thus, all the critical comments are “true”; as the poet himself says: “Do I contradict myself?/Very well then I contradict myself, / (I am large, I contain multitudes.)” (51:1324-26). His philosophical ideas will not submit to logical categories and classifications, for he is dealing with eternal essences and with primeval and subliminal reality. He is expressing the inexpressible: “I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable, / I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world” (52:132-33).

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38 Guthrie, op. cit., pp. 280-81.
Whitman is able to state contradiction after contradiction without violating the integrity of conception. In Section 3, the poet says:

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

There was never any more inception than there is now,
Nor any more youth or age than there is now,
And will never be any more perfection than there is now,
Nor any more heaven or hell than there is now. (39-43)

Showing the best and dividing it from the worst age vexes age,
Knowing the perfect fitness and equanimity of things, while they discuss I am silent, and go bathe and admire myself. (55-56).

Section 4 describes events of the world and the individual self's part in them; the witness self bridges the gap between participation of the individual self and separation of the Eternal Self.

Trippers and askers surround me,
People I meet, the effect upon me of my early life or the ward and city I live in, or the nation,
The latest dates, discoveries, inventions, societies, authors old and new,
My dinner, dress, associates, looks, compliments, dues,
The real or fancied indifference of some man or woman I love,
The sickness of one of my folks or of myself, or ill-doing or loss or lack of money, or depressions or exaltations,
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,
Looks down, is erect, or bends an arm on an impalpable certain rest,
Looking with side-curved head curious what will come next,
Both in and out of the game and watching and wondering at it.

Backward I see in my own days where I sweated through fog with linguists and contenders,
I have no mockings or arguments, I witness and wait.

The unqualified goodness of living and of dying is celebrated in Section 6, proceeding from the pervasive symbol of the grass, brought in the hands of the child, to the direct
I wish I could translate the hints about the dead young men and women,
And the hints about old men and mothers, and the offspring taken
soon out of their laps.

What do you think has become of the young and old men?
And what do you think has become of the women and children?

They are alive and well somewhere,
The smallest sprout shows there is really no death,
And if ever there was it led forward life, and does not wait at the
end to arrest it,
And ceas'd the moment life appear'd.
All goes onward and outward, nothing collapses,
And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier. (121-130)

His theme continues into Section 7:

Has any one supposed it lucky to be born?
I hasten to inform him or her it is just as lucky to die, and I
know it.

I pass death with the dying and birth with the new-wash'd babe,
and am not contain'd between my hat and boots,
And peruse manifold objects, no two alike and every one good,
The earth good and the stars good, and their adjuncts all good. (131-135)

Through the following sections, the individual self experiences worldly events, sorrows, and joys; the witness self maintains at the same time an objectivity and perspective of the role of these events in the eternal scheme; and the Eternal Self remains, still and separate, a part of all things and all events. With great compassion, the poet declares:

"Have you heard that it was good to gain the day? /I also say it is good to fall, battles
are lost in the same spirit in which they are won. /I beat and pound for the dead, /I
blow through my embouchures my loudest and gayest for them" (18:363-366). All--
the wicked and righteous, "The kept-woman, sponger, thief, are hereby invited, /The
heavy-lipp'd slave is invited, the venerealee is invited; /There shal
I be rio difference
between them and the
rest" (19:375-377).

The poet is definite in his appraisal of one evil in Section 20: "I do not snivel that
snivel the world over, /That months are vacuums and the ground but wallow and filth" (394-395). The poet as individual self sets forth his appreciation of animals and animal
nature, but turns at the same time to a scathing appraisal of human actions:

I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self-contain'd,
I stand and look at them long and long.

They do not sweat and whine about their condition,
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins,
They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God,
Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with the mania of owning things,
Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived thousands of years ago,
Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth.

So they show their relations to me and I accept them,
They bring me tokens of myself, they evince them plainly in their possession. (32:684-693)

In Section 33, the self as witness observes a magnificent variety of human endeavors and situations. To the witness self, "Agonies are one of my changes of garments" (33:844). Then the individual self identifies with the fireman, and the reader experiences a beautiful death with the persona:

I am the mash'd fireman with breast-bone broken,
Tumbling walls buried me in their debris,
Heat and smoke I inspired, I heard the yelling shouts of my comrades,
I heard the distant click of their picks and shovels,
They have clear'd the beams away, they tenderly lift me forth.

I lie in the night air in my red shirt, the pervading hush is for my sake,
Painless after all I lie exhausted but not so unhappy,
White and beautiful are the faces around me, the heads are bared of their fire-caps,
The kneeling crowd fades with the light of the torches. (33:847-855)

The individual self continues identifying with the wounded and suffering until the final lines of the section, when the witness self comes forward in the form of the "dying general": "Again gurgles the mouth of my dying general, he furiously waves with his hand, /He gasps through the clot Mind not me--mind--the entrenchments." In Sections 34, 35, and 36, the witness self frees the individual self from direct participation in the suffering of the Goliad massacre and the sea-fight. Then the individual self is again sucked into the vortex of suffering, away from the objectivity of the witness self, in
Section 37. After this buffeting, the individual self cries out: "Enough! enough! enough! / . . . 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" (38:959, 963-65). After invoking the aid of the witness self, the individual self recovers its equilibrium and connection with the Eternal Self: "Corpses rise, gashes heal, fastenings roll from me. / I troop forth replenish'd with supreme power, one of an average unending procession" (38:969-70). This newly-freed individual self, with witness self as guide and reminder of Eternal Self, becomes a new manifestation of the human species in Section 39, the noble savage, the person who, "Wherever he goes men and women accept and desire him, / They desire he should like them, touch them, speak to them, stay with them" (39:981-82). This new self, the transcendent manifestation, then grows most god-like: "Flaunt of the sunshine I need not your bask--lie over! / You light surfaces only, I force surfaces and depths also. / Earth! you seem to look for something at my hands, / Say, old top-knot, what do you want?" (40:987-990).

The individual self, the eternal traveller transformed through the office of the witness self, has a few parting comments on good and evil: "I ascend from the moon, I ascend from the night, / I perceive that the ghastly glimmer is noonday sunbeams reflected, / And debouch to the steady and central from the offspring great or small!" (49:1306-08). This self proclaims a universe of order: "Do you see O my brothers and sisters? / It is not chaos or death--it is form, union, plan--it is eternal life--it is Happiness" (50:1317-18). As for death, it is a continuation of life; in Section 49, death is in fact described in terms of birth:

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

To his work without flinching the accoucheur comes, I see the elder-hand pressing receiving supporting, I recline by the sills of the exquisite flexible doors, And mark the outlet, and mark the relief and escape.

And as to you Corpse I think you are good manure, but that does not offend me, I smell the white roses sweet-scented and growing,
I reach to the leafy lips, I reach to the polish'd breasts of melons.

And as to you Life I reckon you are the leavings of many deaths,
(No doubt I have died myself ten thousand times before.) (49:1289-98)

And when the self as persona, or the poet, prepares to depart, he says: "The past and present wilt--I have fill'd them, emptied them, /And proceed to fill my next fold of the future" (51:1319-20). The theme reaches a conclusion in Section 52:

The last scud of day holds back for me,
It flings my likeness after the rest and true as any on the shadow'd wilds,
It coaxes me to the vapor and the dusk.

I depart as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,
I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags.

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles. (52:1333-40)

Self and Nature of Deity

Whitman's concept of self and its relationship to Deity also is shrouded in paradox from the beginning of the poem to the very end. God is both transcendent and immanent for Whitman; with rapid shifts of level appear alternate views.

In Section 3, the poet celebrates the body as personification of deity: "Welcome is every organ and attribute of me, and of any man hearty and clean, /Not an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile, and none shall be less familiar than the rest" (3:57-58). In subsequent lines, the transcendent God immediately appears in the guise of the "hugging and loving bed-fellow" who leaves behind baskets "cover'd with white towels swelling the house with their plenty."

The transcendent God descends and becomes a part of the self in the mystical experience described in Section 5.39 The same transcendent Deity appears in the Section 6 discussion of the meaning and origin of the grass: "Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord, /A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropt, /Bearing the

owner’s name someway in the corners, that we may see and remark, and say whose?” (6: 102-4). In Section 7, the self realizes the immanence of God and swells to cosmic proportions, sounding very much like the Creator of Genesis: “And [I] peruse manifold objects, no two alike and every one good, /The earth good, and the stars good, and their adjuncts all good” (7:134-35). The self as immanent God expresses its immortality, and the transcendent deity stands back to include all of humanity in its plenitude:

Every kind for itself and its own, for me mine male and female,
For me those that have been boys and that love women,
For me the man that is proud and feels how it stings to be slighted,
For me the sweet-heart and the old maid, for me mothers and the
mothers of mothers,
For me lips that have smiled, eyes that have shed tears,
For me children and the begetters of children.

Undrape! you are not guilty to me, nor stale nor discarded,
I see through the broadcloth and gingham whether or no,
And am around, tenacious, acquisitive, tireless, and cannot be
shaken away. (7: 139-147)

In Section 10, the self becomes a benevolent and sustaining Transcendency, watching the world-play and personally caring for the runaway slave with utmost tenderness. The Transcendent watches the butcher-boy, blacksmiths, and the black driver in Sections 12 and 13; but the Negro himself possesses god-like traits: he “holds firmly the reins of his four horses,” stands steady and tall “pol’d on one leg on the string-piece . . . .” “His glance is calm and commanding” and he has “polish’d and perfect limbs” (13:225-228). A transcendent God declares: “I behold the picturesque giant and love him, and I do not stop there, / I go with the team also” (13:229-30), and once again descends to earth.

The poet lists numerous occupations and conditions of life in Section 15; he expresses both transcendence and immanence of God at the close of the section: “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” (15:327-29). The transcendent manifestation watches the world-play in Sections 18 and 19, encouraging all participants, victors and conquered, and inviting all to partake of the feast. At the outset of Section 20, the poet acknowledges the transcendent: “Who goes there?
hankering, gross, mystical, nude, /How is it I extract strength from the beef I eat? /What is a man anyhow? what am I? what are you?” (20:389-91). But almost immediately the immanent is expressed: “Why should I pray? why should I venerate and be ceremonious? /Having pried through the strata, analyzed to a hair, counsel’d with doctors and calculated close, /I find no sweeter fat than sticks to my own bones” (20:398-400). Immanence is the theme of the rest of the section.

Both transcendence and immanence are implied in the opening lines of Section 25: “Dazzling and tremendous how quick the sun-rise would kill me, /If I could not now and always send sun-rise out of me.” Immanence is the burden of the beginning of Section 31:

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars,  
And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and the egg of the wren,  
And the tree-toad is a chef-d’oeuvre for the highest,  
And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors of heaven,  
And the narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn all machinery,  
And the cow crunching with depress’d head surpasses any statue,  
And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels. (663-39)

After the celebration of the Presence in all things, the self becomes the creation and a cosmic force: “I find I incorporate gneiss, coal, long-threaded moss, fruits, grains, esculent roots, /And am stucco’d with quadrupeds and birds all over, /And have distanced what is behind me for good reasons, /But call any thing back again when I desire it” (31:670-73).

God is a transcendent manifestation in most of Section 33, a cosmic force standing off and observing the world-play; but with the appearance of the skipper at line 824, God descends to earth, and the self merges with this immanent representation of the Godhead.

How the skipper saw the crowded and rudderless wreck of the steam-ship, and Death chasing it up and down the storm,  
How he knuckled tight and gave not back an inch, and was faithful of days and faithful of nights,  
And chalk’d in large letters on a board, Be of good cheer, we will not desert you;  
How he follow’d with them and tack’d with them three days and would not give it up,  
How he saved the drifting company at last,  
How the lank loose-gown’d women look’d when boated from the side of their prepared graves,
How the silent old-faced infants and the lifted sick, and the sharp-lipp'd unshaved men;
All this I swallow, it tastes good, I like it well, it becomes mine,
I am the man, I suffer'd, I was there. (33:824-832)

The captain or Christ-figure appears again in Section 35; he possesses qualities of the transcendent God made flesh. After the midnight victory, when the scene is that of all-pervading death, the life-force disappears from the captain "on the quarter-deck coldly giving his orders through a countenance white as a sheet" (36:932). In Sections 37 and 38, the Christ-manifestation of God disappears, and the self replaces the Christ, suffering with and for all humanity. After the resurrection, the poet understands the reason behind the participation and suffering: God, or the Holy Spirit, becomes immanent in the self and in all selves for all time:

I remember now,
I resume the overstaid fraction,
The grave of rock multiplies what has been confided to it, or to any graves,
Corpses rise, gashes heal, fastenings roll from me.

I troop forth replenish'd with supreme power, one of an average unending procession,
Inland and sea-coast we go, and pass all boundary lines,
Our swift ordinances on their way over the whole earth,
The blossoms we wear in our hats the growth of thousands of years. (38:966-973)

In Section 39, following the realization of the meaning of the crucifixion and resurrection, appears the figure of the friendly and flowing savage. A new man arises from the ashes of the common wood, with "Behavior lawless as snow-flakes, words simple as grass, uncom'd head, laughter, and naivetè, /Slow-stepping feet, common features, common modes and emanations, / They descend in new forms from the tips of his fingers." He is a new link in the evolutionary chain, a bridge between the Transcendent and Immanent.

Through the remaining sections of SOM, the Immanent Diety in the form of the God-like man and the Transcendent God are fused; all distinctions and all divisions are healed. The concept of the One in Many and the Many in One has become more than an intellectual notion; it has been experienced as a primal, unequivocal truth through direct
emotional experience. In Section 40, the "I" is a cosmic force on earth. It possesses enormous gifts which it bestows freely on all: power to the impotent, nimbler and bigger babes to "women fit for conception," and sustaining breath to the hopeless and dying. Every man and every woman becomes a representation of the Christ-figure, the Immanent God, in Section 41: "By the mechanic's wife with her babe at her nipple interceding for every person born, /Three scythes at harvest whizzing in a row from three lusty angels with shirts bagg'd out at their waists, /The snag-tooth'd hostler with red hair redeeming sins past and to come" (41:1043-45). After recognizing the Immanence in all people, the poet sees the Deity in all things: "The bull and bug never worshipp'd half enough, /Dung and dirt more admirable than was dream'd" (41:1048-49). The theme of unity of the Transcendent and Immanent is expanded and celebrated until it reaches a final statement of its own paradox in Section 48: "I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not in the least, /Nor do I understand who there can be more wonderful than myself" (48:1281-82).

Self's Relationship with the Deity

How did Whitman view the relationship of the self and Deity? "Song of Myself," itself an extended credo and affirmation of the reality of both Seen and Unseen, contains several short personal credos:

Why should I pray? why should I venerate and be ceremonious?

Having pried through the strata, analyzed to a hair, counsel'd with doctors and calculated close,
I find no sweeter fat than sticks to my own bones.

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.

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.

I know I am deathless,
I know this orbit of mine cannot be swept by a carpenter's compass,
I know I shall not pass like a child's carlague cut with a burnt stick at night.
I know I am august,
I do not trouble my spirit to vindicate itself or be understood,
I see that the elementary laws never apologize,
(I reckon I behave no prouder than the level I plant my house by,
after all.)

I exist as I am, that is enough,
If no other in the world be aware I sit content,
And if each and all be aware I sit content.

One world is aware and by far the largest to me, and that is myself,
And whether I come to my own to-day or in ten thousand or ten million years,
I can cheerfully take it now, or with equal cheerfulness I can wait.

My foothold is tenon'd and mortis'd in granite,
I laugh at what you call dissolution,
And I know the amplitude of time. (20:398-421)

The beginning of Section 31 is a credo, as are Sections 24 and 30 in their entirety.

Walt Whitman believed that true knowledge is gained through union with the Self, or God, and not through the senses or intellect. Hence his democratic ideal of the availability of true knowledge to all persons.40 The poet agreed with Emerson's distrust of logic, argument, and proposition, and both "maintained that intuition was the only way to attain an understanding of reality."41 In Section 30 of SOM, Whitman states these views unequivocally:

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

Logic and sermons never convince,
The damp of the night drives deeper into my soul.

(Only what proves itself to every man and woman is so,
Only what nobody denies is so.) (648-656)


41 Smithline, op. cit., p. 130.
From the very start of SOM, Whitman insists upon intuitive knowing on the part of the reader:

Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems,
You shall possess the good of the earth and sun, (there are millions of suns left,)
You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the spectres in books,
You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,
You shall listen to all sides and filter them from your self. (2:33-37)

In Section 3, he contemplates the nature of knowing, saying: “To elaborate is no avail, learn’d and unlearn’d feel that it is so. / . . . Clear and sweet is my soul, and clear and sweet is all that is not my soul. / Lack one lacks both, and the unseen is proved by the seen, / Till that becomes unseen and receives proof in its turn” (3:47, 52-54). The final lines of Section 3 express the futility of trying to fit real knowledge, assimilated through mystical experience, into a logical framework:

I am satisfied—I see, dance, laugh, sing;
As the hugging and loving bed-fellow sleeps at my side through the night, and withdraws at the peep of the day with stealthy tread,
Leaving me baskets cover’d with white towels swelling the house with their plenty,
Shall I postpone my acceptation and realization and scream at my eyes,
That they turn from gazing after and down the road,
And forthwith cipher and show me to a cent,
Exactly the value of one and exactly the value of two, and which is ahead? (59-65)

True knowledge also is communicated through material things and worldly experience.42

Because the poet accepts for himself and others only knowledge gained through direct emotional experience and intuition, he denies the need for external authority. Smithline says that “Whitman would deny any code of conduct imposed upon the individual by the claim of divine revelation. No institution, no matter what it claims, can teach the individual how to live virtuously. . . . The soul, therefore, 'revolts from

42SOM 45; 46:1223-24; 47:1237 ff.; 48; 49.
every lesson but its own. . . [He rejected a morality] based on external authority, and asserted that the individual soul was the only basis for moral truth." Therefore "all established institutions, religions included, are destined to become outmoded, and to be replaced by new ones, in the course of evolution." All of "Song of Myself" vibrates with affirmation of the reality, power and rightness of intuitive knowing.

Creeds and schools in abeyance,
Retiring back a while sufficed at what they are, but never forgotten,
I harbor for good or bad, I permit to speak at every hazard,
Nature without check with original energy. (1:10-13)

Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge that pass all the argument of the earth,
And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,
And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,
And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the women my sisters and lovers,
And that a kelson of the creation is love,
And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the fields,
And brown ants in the little wells beneath them,
And mossy scabs of the worm fence, heap'd stones, elder, mullein and poke-weed. (5:91-98)

Oxen that rattle the yoke and chain or halt in the leafy shade, what is that you express in your eyes?
It seems to me more than all the print I have read in my life.

My tread scares the wood-drake and wood-duck on my distant and day-long ramble,
They rise together, they slowly circle around.

I believe in those wing'd purposes,
And acknowledge red, yellow, white, playing within me,
And consider green and violet and the tufted crown intentional,
And do not call the tortoise unworthy because she is not something else,
And the jay in the woods never studied the gamut, yet trills pretty well to me,
And the look of the bay mare shames silliness out of me. (13:234-244)

43Smithline, op. cit., p. 148.
44Ibid., p. 151.
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. (20:403-405)

Endless unfolding of words of ages!
And mine a word of the modern, the word En-Masse.

A word of the faith that never balks,
Here or henceforward it is all the same to me, I accept Time absolutely.

It alone is without flaw, it alone rounds and completes all,
That mystic baffling wonder alone completes all. (23:476-482)

Space and Time! now I see it is true, what I guess'd at,
What I guess'd when I loaf'd on the grass,
What I guess'd while I lay alone in my bed,
And again as I walk'd the beach under the paling stars of the morning. (33:710-13)

What is known I strip away,
I launch all men and women forward with me into the Unknown.
(44:1135-36)

Sections 14, 24, 25, 30, 41, 47, and 48 deal with the theme in their entirety.

If the Deity is known only through individual intuition, and the Deity is both transcendent and immanent, what form of worship, if any, does the poet accept? Gay Wilson Allen says of Whitman: "He worships not God, but the Divinity innate in each individual self, and thus in 'Song of Myself' he can even worship himself..." Smithline contributes a clarifying statement on the nature of this "self-worship": "... when Whitman says 'nothing, not even God is greater to one than oneself is,' he is not deifying his ego, but the Self, within, the cosmic Soul" (p. 141). James E. Miller, Jr., says that SOM's last two sections assert "the importance of reliance on self that is, in reality, obedience to the Transcendent in self. Consistency in transient ideas is irrelevant; consistency in faith to self is supreme." Guthrie finds in Whitman that "obedience to the Maker is being yourself. To be real is the best homage to reality." Furthermore,
"communion of the soul with God within is the very end and aim of life. Uttered worship is to uplift the soul, not to confer honor on its god" (p. 265). In fact, the words "sceptic" and "infidel" seem in Whitman to denote "a man who does not believe in his own better self" (p. 285).

SOM contains a number of statements about ideal worship. Section 32 describes both negative and positive forms of worship: in the poet's celebration of animal nature, Unlike dissatisfied human creatures, the placid and self-contained animals "show their relations to me and I accept them, /They bring me tokens of myself, they evince them plainly in their possession" (692-93). In Section 40, lines 994-1000, Whitman stresses a worship of giving, of devotion:

Behold, I do not give lectures or a little charity,  
When I give I give myself.

You there, impotent, loose in the knees,  
Open your scarf'd chops till I blow grit within you,  
Spread your palms and lift the flaps of your pockets,  
I am not to be denied, I compel, I have stores plenty and to spare,  
And any thing I have I bestow.

Sections 41 and 43 express his ideal of "every man his own priest." No religious practice or tradition is embraced as the only way; all forms of worship are received, incorporated, assimilated into a larger faith.

Participation is a form of worship for the poet:

You sea! I resign myself to you also--I guess what you mean,  
I behold from the beach your crooked inviting fingers,  
I believe you refuse to go back without feeling of me,  
We must have a turn together, I undress, hurry me out of sight of the land,  
Cushion me soft, rock me in billowy drowse,  
Dash me with amorous wet, I can repay you. (22:448-53)

This worship is the burden of all of Section 33, with its enumeration of countless activities and states enjoyed by people, plants, things. The sweeping extended metaphor transports the participant reader into the realm of both individual and cosmic experience; it sings an "Exultate" even through crucifixion, suffering and death.

The account of the Goliad massacre in Section 34 carries forward the description of life and participation in imagery of violence, death, and dying. But the burden of the
section is not horror at the cold-blooded murder of the four hundred and twelve young men or a sense of waste and futility in life; it is the celebration of participation as an exalted form of worship. The young soldiers were outnumbered nine to one, but took nine hundred lives before "they treated for an honorable capitulation, receiv’d writing and seal, gave up their arms and march’d back prisoners of war." The young men were splendid, alive, and at the height of their powers:

They were the glory of the race of rangers, Matchless with horse, rifle, song, supper, courtship, Large, turbulent, generous, handsome, proud, and affectionate, Bearded, sunburnt, drest in the free costume of hunters, Not a single one over thirty years of age. (880-884)

In dying, they were even more splendid; not a single one shrank from experience, even from dying a horrible death:

None obey’d the command to kneel, Some made a mad and helpless rush, some stood stark and straight, A few fell at once, shot in the temple or heart, the living and dead lay together, The maim’d and mangled dug in the dirt, the new-comers saw them there, Some half-kill’d attempted to crawl away, These were despatch’d with bayonets or batter’d with the blunts of muskets, A youth not seventeen years old seiz’d his assassin till two more came to release him, The three were all torn and cover’d with the boy’s blood. (887-894)

Participation is a main stream in succeeding sections of SOM. Through active association and identification with all manifestations of the One, the individual self is able to participate and transcend simultaneously. It becomes all things while maintaining its own identity. The end of worship for Whitman is not an uneasy truce with a power outside himself. It is knowing God in himself and in all fragments of the creation, a realization of unity with the Deity—a realization expressed through the individual as a willing instrument for divine work.
Chapter 4

CONCLUSION

The exploration of the concept of self in Aurobindo’s *The Synthesis of Yoga* and Whitman’s “Song of Myself” reveals much philosophical correspondence in the two works. The authors make strikingly similar statements about the nature of God and of the self’s relationships with God, other selves, and the material world. Both authors believe spiritual evolution inevitable:

I do not ask who you are, that is not important to me,
You can do nothing and be nothing but what I will infold you. (SOM, 40:1001-2)

There is no stoppage and never can be stoppage,
If I, you, and the worlds, and all beneath or upon their surfaces,
were this moment reduced back to a pallid float, it would not avail in the long run,
We would surely bring up again where we now stand,
And surely go as much farther, and then farther and farther. (SOM, 45:1190-93)

The Sadhaka who has all these aids [knowledge of the truths of realisation, action based on the knowledge, help of a guru, and the instrumentality of time] is sure of his goal. Even a fall will be for him only a means of rising and death a passage towards fulfilment. For once on his path, birth and death become only processes in the development of his being and the stages of his journey. (SY, p. 61)

Both express faith in the process of individual growth and in the efficacy of time:

I do not know what is untried and afterward,
But I know it will in its turn prove sufficient, and cannot fail.

Each who passes is consider’d, each who stops in consider’d, not a single one can it fail. (SOM, 43:1121-23)

My foothold is tenon’d and mortis’d in granite,
I laugh at what you call dissolution,
And I know the amplitude of time. (SOM, 20:419-21)

Time is the remaining aid needed for the effectivity of the process [of spiritual fulfilment]. Time presents itself to human effort as an enemy or a friend, as a resistance, a medium or an instrument. But always it is really the instrument of the soul. Time is a field of circumstances and forces meeting and working out a resultant progression whose course it measures. (SY, p. 61)

There is agreement on the reason for the creation. Aurobindo says that “all nature is an attempt at a progressive revelation of the concealed Truth, a more and more successful reproduction of the divine image” (SY, p. 24). Whitman: “All forces have been
steadily employ'd to complete and delight me, /Now on this spot I stand with my robust soul” (SOM, 44:1167-68). Because of this basic premise, they are in agreement about the importance of activity and participation in the world.

All Aurobindo’s major steps toward ultimate spiritual development may be found in “Song of Myself.” The importance of the witness function we have traced in some detail; this function makes possible the progressive surrender of the ego and the self’s identification with the One. This progression occurs in three major steps: first, the ego attempts to enter into contact with the Divine [enlightenment]; next, the lower nature prepares to receive the contact and the whole being is consecrated toward becoming a fit receptor for the Divine; and finally, there is a transformation and “utilisation of our transformed humanity as a divine centre in the world” (SY, pp. 41, 52). Underlying SOM is the basic premise of enlightenment; Section 2 expresses both the desire of the ego to enter into contact with the Divine and the attempt to prepare the lower nature for the contact:

The atmosphere is not a perfume, it has no taste of the distillation, 
it is odorless, 
It is for my mouth forever, I am in love with it, 
I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked, 
I am mad for it to be in contact with me. (SOM, 2:17-20)

Section 3 (the “hugging and loving bedfellow”) and Section 5 celebrate the gifts of enlightenment. The final transformation occurs progressively through the remainder of the poem.

Spiritual democracy is a constant in the poem; through the experience of spiritual democracy comes the release from ego-sense (SY, p. 238). Sectarianism implies egoistic attachment; for spiritual growth we must include all names and other forms of the Deity (SY, p. 59; SOM, 41 and 43).

Aurobindo notes in early stages of spiritual growth that the individual experiences a sense of inner and outer division; with development comes a perception of continuity. The separative sense is liberative, while the unitive aspect is dynamic and effective (SY, pp. 114-115). The sense of separateness is expressed early in SOM: “Apart from the pulling and hauling stands what I am, /... Both in and out of the game and watching
and wondering at it" (SOM, 4:75, 78). The mystical experience of Section 5 brings a sense of unity: "... that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the women my sisters and lovers." The certitude of the unitive experience grows through the remainder of the poem to include God, all mankind, all of creation. This growth is a sign of increasing liberated consciousness: "There is first a central change of the consciousness and a growing direct experience, vision, feeling of the Supreme and the cosmic existence, the Divine in itself and the Divine in all things . . ." (SY, p. 137).

After illumination is received, comes the state of equality with its transfiguring knowledge and bliss that can "make suffering and sorrow impossible and turn pain itself into divine pleasure" (SY, p. 120). Distinction between good and evil, transcendent and immanent, inner and outer, disappears; instead they all assume equal importance in an immense cosmic design. SOM Sections 33 and 35 express this equality in the accounts of the dying fireman and the old-time sea-fight.

After the midnight victory at the end of SOM Section 35, the self muses on the nature of evil and the emptiness of victory as the vessel sinks slowly with carnage on all sides. In Sections 36 and 37, the self experiences evil with all sufferers, and the Christ-figure rises as a symbol that must be overcome; the self perceives it is "on the verge of a usual mistake." Aurobindo finds the cross to be a symbol which must be surmounted, for it is "the sign of the Divine Descent barred and marred by the transversal line of a cosmic deformation which turns life into a state of suffering and misfortune"; it must be overcome by the spiritual ascent to Truth, and the bringing down of that Truth into the world (SY, p. 147). This spiritual ascent begins to occur in SOM with the appearance of the friendly and flowing savage (Section 39), which serves also as a bridge between the transcendent and immanent concepts of God. The self has begun to realise the unity of Brahman:

All things here are the one and indivisible eternal transcendent and cosmic Brahman that is in its seeming divided in things and creatures; in seeming only, for in truth it is always one and equal in all things and creatures and the division is only a phenomenon of the surface (SY, p. 88).

In Section 40 of SOM, the self is able to move from the observing status of the witness to that of an upholder or giver of sanction:
To any one dying, thither I speed and twist the knob of the door,
Turn the bed-clothes toward the foot of the bed,
Let the physician and the priest go home.

I seize the descending man and raise him with resistless will,
O despairer, here is my neck,
By God, you shall not go down! hang your whole weight upon me.

I dilate you with tremendous breath, I buoy you up,
Every room of the house do I fill with an arm'd force,
Lovers of me, bafflers of graves.

Sleep—I and they keep guard all night.
Not doubt, not decease shall dare to lay finger upon you,
I have embraced you, and henceforth possess you to myself,
And when you rise in the morning you will find what I tell you is so.
(SOM 40: 1008-20)

In this passage, the self has accepted the function of the Purusha, “its complete function as the knower, lord and enjoyer of Nature” (SY, p. 415). The witness self’s sense of being an upholder or an active giver of sanction in turn reinforces identification with “the active Brahman and his joy of cosmic being” (SY, p. 414). This active side of Brahman is the self’s conscious force in nature, or the function of Prakriti (SY, p. 416).

In SOM these two functions, the Purusha and the Prakriti, appear alternately with alternate expressions of the immanent and transcendent forms of Deity until Section 48. Then all duality—of Purusha and Prakriti and of the Transcendent and Immanent—is resolved:

I have said that the soul is not more than the body,
And I have said that the body is not more than the soul,

I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not in the least,
Nor do I understand who there can be more wonderful than myself. (SOM, 48:1269-70, 1281-82)

Dualism has disappeared with the self’s entry into the highest spiritual state: that of gnosis, or the supramental level. Aurobindo describes gnosis as supermind or the “free, spiritual or divine intelligence” (SY, p. 436). It exceeds the capacities of mind and intuition (SY, p. 453). It is “not only truth but truth-power . . . it is the divine knowledge one with the divine will in the force and delight of a spontaneous and luminous and inevitable self-fulfilment” (SY, p. 457). “The gnosis does not seek, it
possesses. Or if it has to enlighten, it does not even then seek; it reveals, it illumines” (SY, p. 463).

For while the reason proceeds from moment to moment of time and loses and acquires and again loses and again acquires, the gnosis dominates time in a one view and perpetual power and links past, present and future in their indivisible connections, in a single continuous map of knowledge, side by side ... The reason deals with constituents and processes and properties ... the gnosis sees the thing in itself first, penetrates to its original and eternal nature ... The reason dwells in the diversity and is its prisoner ... the gnosis dwells in the unity and knows by it all the nature of the diversities ... the gnostic sense does not recognise any real division; it does not treat things separately as if they were independent of their true and original oneness ... the gnosis is, sees and lives in the infinite ... [it] is not only light, it is force; it is creative knowledge, it is the self-effective truth of the divine Idea. (SY, pp. 464-65)

How does the state of gnosis affect the self?

The Supreme above, in him, around, everywhere and the soul dwelling in the Supreme and one with it ... a radiant activity of the divine knowledge, will and joy perfect in the natural action of the Prakriti,—this is the fundamental experience of the mental being transformed and fulfilled and sublimated in the perfection of the gnosis. (SY, p. 467)

Gnosis takes the mind’s will, desires, pleasures and pains, joys and griefs, and transforms them to their divine counterparts for participation in the divine plan (SY, pp. 474-75). All dualism therefore disappears in the gnostic state: the dual functions of consciousness (Purusha) and force (Prakriti) merge, and the witness function is absorbed in the delight of being, or Ananda. Then the “luminous governing power ... imposes its self-expressive force on all the action and makes true and radiant and authentic and inevitable every movement and impulse” (SY, pp. 480-81).

In SOM Section 49 death and life and good and evil have taken their place in the cosmic design:

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

And as to you Corpse I think you are good manure, but that does not offend me,
I smell the white roses sweet-scented and growing,
I reach to the leafy lips, I reach to the polish’d breasts of melons.

And as to you Life I reckon you are the leavings of many deaths,
(No doubt I have died myself ten thousand times before.)

......
I ascend from the moon, I ascend from the night,
I perceive that the ghastly glimmer is noonday sunbeams reflected,
And debouch to the steady and central from the offspring great or small.

The witness or Purusha has assumed its active sanction of Prakriti, and the dual faces of Brahman become part of a whole:

To his work without flinching the accoucheur comes,
I see the elder-hand pressing receiving supporting,
I recline by the sills of the exquisite flexible doors,
And mark the outlet, and mark the relief and escape. (SOM 49:1290-93)

The main differences in “Song of Myself” and The Synthesis of Yoga are in mode and intent. Because of the vast and complete philosophical system which Aurobindo builds, he presents minutely detailed arguments which interweave and enlarge through the end of the volume. The nature of the two works leads them to a different emphasis in some areas. Sex is for Whitman a pervasive symbol of life’s endless regeneration and growth; the body is the vehicle. Aurobindo considers the body and matter as a channel for the Divine, but emphasizes the need for the lower nature to be purified of egoism and desire to become a fit instrument. Aurobindo’s method includes the necessity for some self-denial until attachment disappears; then the self-denial loses its field and the soul consciously obeys the will of the Divine (SY, p. 318).

Both works have as their object unity with the Deity: Aurobindo presents a minutely detailed map for spiritual development, while Whitman presents us with a vision of spiritual development. Nambiar suggests that “Song of Myself” is an exercise in meditation: “The consciousness of the reader is ego-bound, not cosmic, and while the reader is following close on the heels of Whitman, he too finds his thoughts raised from the accustomed level of consciousness to another of vast amplitude. Reading Whitman becomes an exercise in meditation.”

Both Aurobindo and Whitman depart from the mainstreams of their traditions and find agreement on the new ground. Aurobindo differs from the Gita’s goal of cessation

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of birth into the world and stresses the bringing down of the spiritual into the physical world.\textsuperscript{2} Whitman's emphasis on the importance of participation shows complete agreement. Radhakrishnan says the main tendency of Western thought "is an opposition between man and God, where man resists the might of God, steals fire from him in the interests of humanity."\textsuperscript{3} Whitman departs from this Western tradition by emphasizing the harmony and mutual completion of man and God, a concept shared by Aurobindo.

\textsuperscript{2}McDermott, op. cit., p. 133.

\textsuperscript{3}\textit{Indian Philosophy}, v. 1, p. 41.
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SELF IN WHITMAN’S “SONG OF MYSELF”
AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF SRI AUROBINDO

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This paper deals with the structure and philosophic content of Walt Whitman’s “Song of Myself” viewed through the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo in The Synthesis of Yoga. The Aurobindo work describes an entire system of spiritual development which the author calls the integral Yoga. The concept of self is central to Whitman’s poem and Aurobindo’s volume; it is therefore explored in some depth.

A brief chapter on Aurobindo’s concept of self, the self’s relationship to the Deity, and the nature of Deity forms a background for an explication of “Song of Myself.” Whitman’s poem is approached through paradoxes of the self, the nature of Deity, and the self’s relationship with the Deity. The paradoxes include the nature of the self, which Whitman presents on various levels, and the fact that the self is a part of deity, yet separate from it. There are also paradoxes in the self’s relationships: body and soul, individual self and the material world, self and Deity.

A major strand in “Song of Myself” is the theme of participation. The self accepts all elements of the creation as emanations of the Spirit; to participate and interact with other expressions of the Deity is an exalted form of worship. Therefore the self remains in the world, and does not attempt to transcend worldly experience, but does attempt to transcend the ego through aid of the witness self. The witness self, an objective and observing function of the mind, is traced through the poem.

The self’s relationships with other selves and with the Deity raise questions of the concepts of good and evil and the poet’s views of inequity, injustice, suffering, and death. The contradictory critical evaluations of Whitman’s views on these subjects underline the paradoxical nature of the material and the poet’s treatment of it. By
following the appearance and function of the witness self in the poem, we may see how
the self is transformed until it views death and suffering as a part of the magnificent
variety of human endeavors and situations.

Paradox extends to the relationship of the self and the Deity; God is both tran-
scendent and immanent in the poem. The qualities of transcendence and immanence
alternate until Section 39, which follows the realization of the meaning of the cruci-
fixion and resurrection. In this section appears the friendly and flowing savage, or new
man who arises from the ashes of common wood; this figure acts as a bridge between
the transcendent and immanent. From this point the concepts are fused; there is no
distinction.

Whitman’s views on the nature and means of knowing are explored. The Deity is
known only through intuition; therefore ideal worship is individual. Participation as a
form of worship is the burden of the Goliad massacre in Section 33.

The concepts of self in “Song of Myself” and The Synthesis of Yoga reveal many
similarities. Corresponding views include the nature of God and of the self’s relation-
ships with God, other selves and the material world. The writers agree on the reason for
the creation, the inevitability of spiritual evolution, and the importance of participation
in the world.

All Aurobindo’s major steps toward ultimate spiritual development are found in
the poem. The self evolves through illumination and equality (which follows the trans-
scendence of ego) until it enters the highest spiritual state: gnosis. At Section 48, where
the transcendent and immanent are fused, all duality is resolved and the self has moved
to the supramental level.

The two works differ mainly in mode and intent; both depart from the main-
streams of their philosophical traditions.

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