Complaints from the Spotted Hawk: Flights and Feathers in Whitman's 1855 Leaves of Grass

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> The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me . . . . he complains of my gab and my loitering.
>
> I too am not a bit tamed . . . . I too am untranslatable,
> I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.
> —Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself" (1855)
>
> [T]o speak in literature with the perfect rectitude and insousiance of the movements of animals . . . is the flawless triumph of art. —Whitman, Preface (1855)[1]

The final movement of Whitman's "Song of Myself" begins with a "spotted hawk" swooping—and complaining of the poet-persona's delay and verbosity. The bird is imagined saying, "Get on with," as it were; but on Whitman's way to ultimately positing some atomist immortality—"Look for me under your bootsoles"—he must pause to identify himself with this raptor, becoming a near-avian entity who is also untamed and "untranslatable," blessed as he is with a "barbaric yawp" as part of his own vocal repertoire. Here is an early instance of a characteristic gesture in Whitman's poetics, this identification with a bird, through which the poet feels himself empowered to transcend the semiotics of human discourse, to better express the ambiguities inherent in his obsessive themes of life and death, of spirit and matter, of time and eternity. The scope of this essay disallows me from treating in any detail Whitman's later "bird" poems: as of yet—in 1855—we have no mourning widower mockingbirds, no threnodic thrushes, no "Dalliance of Eagles"; but the reader of Whitman will easily recall how Whitman's perennial engagements with death and life (and sexuality) are seemingly resolved in these poems by way of the image—and sometimes via the very *voice*—of a bird. And yet, even by 1855, Whitman's "song" receives a good deal of its strength from the strong-winged flights and vocal effusions of another—avian—order of beings.

The close ties between Whitman's poetics and Whitman's animalistic "Nature" may have been obvious to many of his contemporaries, such as the naturalist John Burroughs; however, Whitman scholarship in recent years has tended to laud instead his "fluid" empathy with other—often

oppressed—*human* social groups, to the relative denigration of his "kosmic" identification with the environment itself, and with other species. At last, Burroughs' complaint in 1867 rings all the louder in today's critical milieu:

> If it appears that I am devoting my pages to the exclusive consideration of literature from the point of view of Nature and the spirit of Nature, it is not because I am unaware of other and very important standards and points of view. But these others, at the present day, need no urging, nor even a statement from me. Their claims are not only acknowledged—they tyrannize out of all proportion.[2]

This is even more true today, in this environmental-wreck-of-an-era in which Nature per se—the real "leaves of grass"—may be deemed the ultimate abject Other.

Actually, the last quarter century *has* been replete with tributes to Whitman's eco-consciousness, epitomized early on by William Rueckert's thesis that the "Song of Myself" offers a "complete ecological vision."[3] However, besides the question of whether Whitman's ecological sense is as sound as many of these scholars assert, the vast preponderance of such ecocritical readings centers upon such generalities as the "land," the ecosystem, or "Nature" itself; only sporadically have such endeavors ventured into a concerted discussion of the specific alter-species inhabitants of our hallowed "Mother Earth." And so the "complaint" of the "spotted hawk" might also be of another—nature. From the standpoint of *zoöcriticism*, as I would dub my own other-animals critical emphasis, I must wonder, for instance, if Whitman ever actually gets beyond his own anthropocentric poetics and point of view in his adoption of another animal's "barbaric yawp," of a language that transcends the discourses of human culture. In sum, is the "homo-" in Whitman Studies not just indicative of his eroticism, but of his species? Perhaps a misanthrope like me should be the last person allowed to comment upon Whitman, who is, one might easily argue, the ultimate humanist. He is, finally, that person who would most embrace all *people*, in his more general embracement of the world, the "kosmos," itself.[4] But it is this characteristic Whitmanic conflation of the human and the non-human that begs one to ask: what is this "Nature" in Whitman, and how does it actually accord with his all-encompassing *nature*? More specifically, and zoöcritically, what are the animal-ethical ramifications of the poet's use of the "spotted hawk," and feathered flight, and "untranslatable" avian voices as central tropes of his poetic discourse?

Finally, Whitman's hawks and mockingbirds have a co-plaintiff, no doubt, in the "barbaric" Native American, who is commonly conflated with the bird and who is *used* in a similar fashion, in the discourse of the "wild" to which Whitman so often appeals. And so, not only may Whitman's poetics too easily and homocentrically assume the stance of other species, but there is also the facile conflation in his corpus of the Native with "Nature," a human othering that can be readily correlated with his co-optative representations of the avian. Thus I would examine Whitman's all-too-ready pose as both Indian and bird—two "birds of a feather," at last.

I. "Long Dumb Voices": Whitman's Languages of Nature

> Through me many long dumb voices
> . . . . . .
> Of the trivial and flat and foolish and despised,
> Of fog in the air and beetles rolling balls of dung. —Whitman, "Song of Myself"
>
> Heretofore, we have had Nature talked of and discussed; these poems approximate to a direct utterance of Nature herself. —John Burroughs[5]

David S. Reynolds explains the "many long dumb voices" passage via the context of Whitman's immersion in the popular metaphysics of his day, as connotative of a "communion with spirits." But one also cannot help reading these "voices" as those of "Nature" per se, of other species, in fact. Considering his representation of the "spotted hawk," et al., in the most positive light, Whitman's claim in "Song of the Answerer" that "Every existence has its idiom" and "tongue" must be acknowledged, as a potential *speaking for* other species. Whitman is the translator of all "tongues," after all, in his poet-role of cosmic "joiner."[6] Burroughs is most effusive about the original Leaves because it exceeds all previous nature writing in this ability to "translate Nature into another language."[7] Ambitious, indeed, it is for a poet to invoke the "truth of the earth!," to bid it "Sound your voice!" The standard critical line here points to some Emersonian-Romantic Ur-language, that "natural" tongue predating human discourse, "a more primal language, one implicit in nature's workings."[8] The Whitman of 1855 begs most for such a reading in his own attempt to "read" all the "converging objects of the universe": "All [such objects] are written to me, and I must get what the writing means."[9] Indeed, if Whitman could not interpret the

"whisperings" of the "stars" and "suns" and "grass," his own language would be for naught: "if you [voices of nature] do not say anything how can I say anything?"

Significantly, Whitman *hears* such whispers—as he hears the hawk's barbaric yawp—and this becomes the key, I think, to what can be most positively retrieved from Whitman's corpus, in a trans-species sense. The best thing he can do, really, is to listen:

> I think I will do nothing for a long time but listen,
> And accrue what I hear into myself . . . . and let sounds contribute toward me.
>
> I hear the bravuras of birds . . . .
> . . . . . .
> I hear all sounds as they are tuned to their uses . . . .[10]

As translator-at-large of all "winged purposes," he can certainly understand the call of the goose, then:

> The wild gander leads his flock through the cool night,
> Ya-honk! he says, and sounds it down to me like an invitation;
> The pert may suppose it meaningless, but I listen closer,
> I find its purpose and place up there toward the November sky.

It may be even more "pert" to "suppose" the gander's meaning, however; and Whitman's tendency towards anthropomorphism will play a major role in this essay. But the poet is to be applauded for those moments when he refuses to impose homocentric interpretations upon animal alterity, and to even question the ultimate efficacy of human discourse in speaking for nature at all. Both the "Song of Myself" and "A Song for Occupations" of 1855 admit that his poems are but tentative "words of a questioning," complicit in a discursive ideology and aesthetics that provide but poor signifiers for their signifieds. In this interplay of discourse and nature, the map is never the territory: The "printed and bound book" may portray the "panorama of the sea . . . . but the sea itself?" Most poignantly, it is another species whose intrinsic being should remain inviolate, who has no need for anthropocentric appropriation:

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

The grand irony here is that Whitman is the incorrigible user of words, admitting that speech "provokes me forever"; and yet he would contend all the same, in the spirit of the quotations above, that "Writing and talking do not prove me," and he must remind the reader (and himself) that, in fact, "you

conceive too much of articulation."[11] In sum, according to this "version" of Whitman, the representation of nature in discourse is a doomed venture, and the reality of other life forms, etc., "eludes discussion and print, / It is not to be put in a book . . . . it is not in this book." Rather, it consists of those mere buds and birds around us: "It is hinted by nearest and commonest and readiest . . . . ." One can never be reminded too often that, at his best, Whitman is the poet of *this place*, of *this time*, who is always in his "place," just as "the moth and the fisheggs are in their place." If there is a veritable ultimate "good" in Whitman's ethical bearings, it is this propriety of place and moment, of the here and now.[12] It is this humble ontological intuition, one might argue, that in part allows Whitman his appreciation of the "trivial and flat and foolish and despised": "The greatest poet," the great poet himself proclaims, "hardly knows pettiness or triviality. If he breathes into any thing that was before thought small it dilates with the grandeur and life of the universe." Indeed, I would claim that Whitman's perception of the "kosmos"—the ecosystem *in toto*—as ultimately amoral is at the root of many of his more astonishing "ethical" utterances. In his "perusal" of manifold objects," he finds "no two alike," but "every one good, / The earth good, and the stars good, and their adjuncts all good."[13]

Regarding other species in particular, the poet often expresses an eco-ethical egalitarianism that is rarely heard of in Western literature until the late 20th century. John Cowper Powys expresses this typical gesture as follows: "No one like Walt Whitman can convey to us the magical ugliness of certain aspects of Nature—the bleak stunted, God-forsaken[!] things."[14] Furthermore, Whitman's utterance, "Every kind for itself and its own," might well serve as a motto for contemporary Deep Ecology, as an acknowledgement of each species' unique self-worth. As one who "resist[s] anything better than my own diversity," Whitman does indeed find a close kinship with other animals—especially those avian beings of "winged purposes":

> My tread scares the wood-drake and wood-duck on my distant and daylong ramble,
> They rise together, they slowly circle around.
> . . . . I believe in those winged purposes,
> And acknowledge the red yellow and white playing within me,
> And consider the green and violet and the tufted crown intentional;
> And do not call the tortoise unworthy because she is not something else. . . .

After a list of more animals that includes the "chickadee" and "turkeyhen," the poet concludes, "I see in them and myself the same old law."[15] One is slightly unnerved by this final appeal to evolutionary

theory, and reminded that elsewhere Whitman, as we shall see, is all too ready to appropriate both other "more primitive" species and other "more primitive" human races as but preludes to that pinnacle of evolution that is the Euro-American *homo sapiens*, Walt Whitman; but one is still awed by the same poet's faith that

> [. . .] a leaf of grass is no less than the journeywork 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'ouvre for the highest,
> . . . . . .
> And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels . . . .

And the amateur ornithologist in me is certainly impressed by such lines as "the mockingbird in the swamp never studied the gamut, yet trills pretty well to me." As M. Jimmie Killingsworth aptly expresses it, such passages exemplify the "capacity of the sensitive person to be transformed in the face of undeniable otherness, both human and natural," a democratic leveling that goes beyond the solely human.[16]

Yes, Whitman, "like most modern ecologists[,]. . . celebrated ecological diversity." But it is still difficult to accept the view that Whitman wholeheartedly embraced a thoroughgoing eco-egalitarianism, that his "sense of ecology was . . . significantly different from other 19th century notions of progressive evolution," in conceiving "evolution in non-hierarchal ways."[17] In fact, what is clear, as I hope to demonstrate, is that he was much more interested in his own *persona* as egalitarian and leveler. If such dictums as "They are but parts . . . . any thing is but a part" ring true as praiseworthy eco-statements, Whitman himself is the "joiner" at last, and all such "parts" are "united" in the poet. And so the grand universal healing "sleep" of "The Sleepers" is a paradox, finally, in its promise of both diversity and union: "The diverse shall be no less diverse, but they shall flow and unite . . . . they unite now"[18]—a (re)union of all that takes place at last, one might surmise, in the Imaginary that is the poet's own impulse towards psychic integration.

II. "What Appear'd to Me": Whitman as Amateur Ornithologist

> (Though they [Whitman's field notes] describe what I saw—what appear'd to me—I dare say the expert ornithologist, botanist or entomologist will detect more than one slip in them.) —Whitman, Specimen Days

> Thus, in a deliberately placed parenthesis, Whitman ends his sloppy little field note [above] with a stab at scientific exactitude and with a cheerful plea for the creative powers of ignorance. —Cristoph Irmscher[19]

Even before his acquaintance with the birder John Burroughs, Whitman was apparently much more cognizant of particular bird species than, say, William Cullen Bryant, famous for his paean "To a "Waterfowl" of rather indeterminate DNA. "Burroughs did not actually introduce Whitman to birds. The poet had been observing birds since his boyhood on a Long Island farm; during one spring migration he listed forty birds he had seen."[20] One need only peruse his list of birds in the 1855 Preface to find an early "catalogue" not only characteristic of his later poetic style, but also evidence of a ready vocabulary for various bird species themselves. For here the continent-spanning American "bard" not only "incarnates" the general "geography and natural life" of the New World, but specifically its ornithology—the "flights and songs and screams that answer those of the wildpigeon and highhold and orchard-oriole and coot and surf-duck and redshouldered-hawk[21] and fish-hawk and white-ibis and indian-hen and cat-owl and water-pheasant and qua-bird and pied-sheldrake and blackbird and mockingbird and buzzard and condor and night-heron and eagle." With the variety of habitats connoted here via songbirds, seabirds, and raptors, he does indeed "span" the continent. In "Song of Myself," when Whitman is "afoot with" his "vision," that vision—it *may* be argued—is still firmly grounded in place, in habitat, evidenced in the lengthy sequence of adverb clauses beginning with "Where," each often of a naturalistic description of a specific mammal or bird in a particular environment. Some of these avian descriptions simply concern appearance: "Where the hummingbird shimmers . . . . where the neck of the longlived swan is curving and winding. . . ." Others are behavior notes, as in the bobwhite's defensive manoeuvres, the heron's feeding habits, and even the specifics of nidification ("where the heat hatches pale-green eggs in the dented sand"). But his most noteworthy bird images in this extended passage appeal to the ear. Besides the plain "whistling" of the bobwhite, however, the calls of the mockingbird and gull are rendered more striking via a thorough anthropomorphism: the former "sounds his delicious gurgles, and cackles and screams and weeps"—a rather manic "bard" himself, it would appear; while the latter "scoots by the slappy shore and laughs her near-human laugh"[22]—a happy soul in the throes, perhaps, of hebephrenia.

And yet Whitman has been praised for his relative avoidance of anthropomorphism in his avian representations, most eloquently in Lawrence Buell's championing of "Out of the Cradle":

> The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest. By this criterion, the boy's empathy for the bird's loss of its mate in Walt Whitman's "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" stands out by contrast to the comparative self-absorption of Percy Bysshe Shelley's persona in "To a Skylark" and John Keats' in "Ode to a Nightingale." "Cradle" is more concerned with the composition of a specific place, and Whitman's symbolic bird is endowed with a habitat, a history, a story of its own.

However, Leonard Lutwack's study in literary ornithology questions the very veracity of the "specific place": "The description is ornithologically sound, although sighting a pair of breeding mockingbirds in Long Island would have been a very special event, since that species rarely nested north of Maryland" at the time (1859). In ornithological terms, moreover, "[a]s to a bird feeling the loss of a mate, the anthropomorphic weight of Whitman's rendering of the bird's song is eased somewhat by the fact that pair-bonded birds do" evince a "mourning" behavior, a persistent "calling and searching"; however, it is hardly a "period of months," as in Whitman's poem.[23]

And yet it is nonetheless easy to see why his naturalist descriptions have been so frequently praised for their exactitude. Diane Kepner's statement that "his language of science and nature is always extraordinarily precise and not just mystical metaphor"[24] is a vast over-generalization, to be sure: a "weeping" mockingbird, for instance, hardly qualifies as serious natural science. But even the Native American scholar Joseph Bruchac points to the "catalogues of plants and animals and birds" in the 1855 Preface and "Song of Myself" with enthusiasm: "it would be very difficult for anyone to find another poet of the nineteenth century—or indeed of much of the first half of the twentieth—who has such an intimacy with nature to be able to name so many things with such precision."[25] This is the poet whom Burroughs praises by way of contrast to Wordsworth and company, who are portrayed as purveyors of little more than Nature-as-Hallmark-sentiment. Thanks to these earlier Romantics,

> The word Nature, now, to most readers, suggests only some . . . pretty scene that appeals to the sentiments. None of this is in Walt Whitman. . . . [H]e corrects this false, artificial Nature, and shows me the real article. . . . Admirable as many of these [British Romantic] poets are in some respects, they are but visiting-card callers upon Nature, going to her for tropes and figures only. In the products of the lesser fry of them I recognize merely a small toying with Nature—a kind of sentimental flirtation with birds and butterflies.[26]

One is immediately reminded, however, of Whitman's later photographic pose with a fake butterfly on his finger—and left wondering how much his own "spotted hawk," and weeping mockingbirds, and dallying eagles are themselves homocentric "flirtations."

But, whether Whitman himself penned the slam above on Wordsworth or not, it is clear that he considered his own poetics a breakthrough in naturalism, a more thorough examination and representation of "Nature" per se. As the epigraphs to this section indicate, Whitman had something of a love/hate relationship with the natural science of his day. And while he would at last distance himself from any thoroughgoing positivist objectivism, his converse infatuation with science was instrumental in his concern for descriptive realism and appreciation for the natural world. Ironically, in language remarkably similar to Wordsworth's own proclamations in his 1800 Preface of a marriage (or at least truce) between the natural sciences and imaginative literature,[27] Whitman's Preface of 1855 declares that "[e]xact science and its practical movements are no checks on the greatest poet but always his encouragement and support." Scientists are, in sum, the "lawgivers of poets," and their knowledge "underlies the structure of every perfect poem."[28]

Yet Whitman was often adamantly obscurantist in his own literary naturalism; in sum, he was an intentionally "sloppy" birder: "Many birds," Whitman admits, "I cannot name; but I do not very particularly seek information."[29] The price of such an aesthetic liberation is the very exactitude so praised by many scholars. M. Jimmie Killingsworth nicely encapsulates Whitman's dilemma as follows: "Witness the poet's impulse toward giving the specific names of trees, birds, and weeds, making lists and counting species, a practice likely influenced by his naturalist friend John Burroughs"; however: "His lists lack the cold rigor of scientific analysis . . . they hardly . . . suggest the urgency[!] of master birders with their 'life lists.'" But of course, Whitman's ultimate *use* for birds is of another feather, at last; and if Burroughs' call was to "liberate the birds from the scientists,"[30] Whitman's ultimate goal was to liberate himself from science, and to liberate the birds for—himself.

III. "Of Spotted Hawks & Spotted Eagles": Whitman Meets Black Elk

> And as I looked ahead, the people changed into elks and bison and all four-footed beings and even into fowls, all walking in a sacred manner on the good red road together. And I myself was a spotted eagle soaring over them. —Nicholas Black Elk

> [I]n a number of places in his work, Whitman hankers to be more like the animals. The evidence is that he achieved this to an unusual degree. —Howard Nelson[31]

Joseph Kastner has the description of the accusing "spotted hawk" specifically in mind in his own denigration of Whitman's ornithological skills: "Whitman had his faults as a birder. He was not always properly behaved. . . . And he was, Burroughs said, 'none too accurate.'"[32] But when one's main modus operandi is the "hankering" to *identify* with the object of observation—be it another species or another race—close attention to details only gets in the way. American cultural history, indeed, is replete with examples here, from the nostalgic noble savage to the U.S.'s noble national bird, who is apparently both proudly patriotic and menacingly warlike at once. And Whitman's own corpus might be read as a series of footnotes to his claim that "A man is only interested in any thing when he identifies with it. . . ."[33]

The hawk's *raison d'être* in "Song of Myself" is to allow Whitman's all-othering Self to declare, "I too am not a bit tamed . . . . I too am untranslatable, / I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world." To translate the "untranslatable": I, too, am as untamed as a wild bird or savage; I, too, am as untranslatable as a wild bird or savage; in fact, now I have no need for them, since I have incorporated their inarticulate "barbaric yawp" into my own poetics. Scholars have long praised this assimilative propensity in Whitman—while simultaneously ignoring themselves the object of identification. For Margaret F. Edwards, the hawk *is* the "untamed" poet: "It is the animal within the poet, the primitive part of him akin to the hawk, which he deems the magical source of poetry in himself."[34] Robert C. Sickels is equally enthusiastic about the results of Whitman's appropriative abilities; with the hawk's appearance, "[n]o longer is the narrator merely an observer of the hawk, as he had been of the spear of grass at the poem's outset. . . . The narrator joyously joins the hawk, 'shouting his barbaric yawp,'" thereby "symbolizing the reconciliation of the seemingly opposite natural and man-made worlds."[35] This is grand alchemy, indeed. I imagine instead a much greater communication gap here, one in which the "falcon cannot hear the falconer," as it were, the hawk soaring further away as the poet becomes more and more convinced of his (own) meaning.

The only other hawk mentioned in the 1855 Leaves may be relevant here. "Faces," Whitman's poetic venture into physiognomy, includes a "castrated face," which is compared to "A wild hawk . . his

wings clipped by the clipper . . . ."[36] Fittingly, the hawk *is* a mere metaphor here, for a human type in the throes of psychic repression; and, in contrast to the "untamed" buteo of "Song of Myself," it is quite a bit—*tamed*. I would suggest, finally, that all the birds—indeed, all the other species—in Whitman's poems are likewise "tamed," ironically by a human discourse that would transcend human discourse.

And yet the hawk's "voice of nature" does spur Whitman on towards a coda that has been rightfully praised for its naturalism and materialism, suggestive of an ecosystem of atoms in eternal motion and flux,[37] an "immortality" of the forever-here-and-now that includes the poet's own corporeality: "I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love, / If you want me again look for me under your bootsoles." As appropriate close to the initial thesis of "Song of Myself" that "every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you," one is even tempted to see such a regenerative interchange of atoms as an Ur-version of Aldo Leopold's wonderful tracing of the biospheric journey of "atom X" through various "biota" to the sea.[38] In sum, isn't this scientific materialism at its finest?

Two lines prior to Whitman's bequeathal to "dirt" and bare matter, however, his soul must soar, for just a moment: "I depart as air"[39] is a hedging of his bet, if you will, a more traditionally spiritualist impulse in the opposite direction, a flight towards the ethereal, and a gesture immediately suggested by the air-born bird. It is as if the hawk's message of the "earth" and the mundane is negated by the same bird's iconographic suggestions of the "heavens," via the Western dualism of spirit and matter that Whitman's vaunted monism never completely escapes.

I turn now, in contrast, to the Lakota "Song of Myself" of Nicholas Black Elk, who, in Black Elk Speaks, is "afoot" on his own Great Vision, who in said vision not only sees a "spotted eagle," but then *becomes* it. This identification is a far different gesture, issuing as it does from a worldview whose rapport with the avian is not based upon poetic "use value" but upon a familial relationship: "The life of an Indian is just like the wings of the air," Black Elk says. Furthermore, "[o]ur tepees were round like the nests of birds," which were set "in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours."[40] Black Elk's own magnum opus is rather the "Song of My People" (*oyate*), not of the Self. Native scholar Paula Gunn Allen thus opposes the Lakota concept of *mitakuye oyasin* ("we are all related") to "Walt Whitman's Kosmic myself-at-the-center stuff, the unauthorized and natural world up against the copyrighted *logos*. . . . It's the old egocentric final word of patriarchal Power, compared with a bunch of women

gossiping."[41] There is the understanding in the Lakota worldview that other species are *oyate*, too—as in Black Elk's invocation of the "eagle nation"[42]—in stark contrast to the Western "final word" of homocentrism.

And yet the literary relationship between Whitman and Native American literatures is a venerable one; he is indeed the prime 19th-century exemplum of the psychological need of Anglo-American writers to discover for themselves "the unity the Native peoples have always felt with the land." Whitman's own success in this regard is debatable, however much his persona includes a later penchant to "go Indian" and spend "half the time naked or half-naked," to become "all tanned & red."[43] Yes, this "red-Indian" persona will become a "crucial part of his ongoing poetic project," as Ed Folsom tells us. However—just as the hawk becomes some introjected "primitive within"—Whitman's use of the "savage" is ultimately a way "to see the savage within himself," a redefinition whereby "the 'savage' came to be not the brutal native out there, but the wild vitality within the soul."[44]

While I will eventually treat more closely the potentially "shamanistic" claims for Whitman's poetics in regards to his use of birds in flight, I would peremptorily conclude that studies by Michael Castro, James Nolan, and Kenneth Lincoln may be rather gourd-rattling overstatements of Whitman's indigenous influences and "roots."[45] But it is also true that Native poets themselves have been generally positive in their comments on Whitman's naturism, as in Bruchac's claim that Whitman's influence on Native writers like himself has something very much to do with nature and animals, praising "the old grey poet" who "felt he could turn and / live with the animals. . . ." He even finds a common ground for Whitman and another Lakota medicine man: what "Sitting Bull said long ago" about our relationship with "Mother Earth"—well, "Walt Whitman knew that, too."[46]

But did he, really? Was he open to the real possibility that other species have an integral, independent worth, and their own "language" and "visions," leading at last to an inter-species relationship based on greater equality and reciprocity? Whitman's "spotted hawk" is, I think, a feathered nagger and yawper still smugly within the confines of human language and culture, and a Western symbology of birds in flight as souls, and of birds of prey as keen, far-sighted visionaries. Black Elk's Lakota "spotted eagle" certainly connotes the "heavens," too, as the being closest to *wakan tanka*,[47] but the "spiritual" associations that the Western reader brings to bear points to the very problem in Whitman

I will later discuss, the propensity to use "winged flight" for spirituality and the soul, to see the bird at last as some *symbol* of transcendence. In contrast, the eagles and other birds in Black Elk and are also *actual* birds, and whatever the "spiritual" quality that they are imbued with by Black Elk/Neihardt, their status as one of the veritable "wings of the air" remains paramount.

Just as importantly for my argument, the avian's very act of speaking is, in the Lakota view, beyond the metaphorical, the assimilative "wild yawp": that birds *do* literally talk to humans is a dominant theme of both traditional and contemporary Native American literature. But to conceive of such an untoward cross-species interaction requires a radical shift of cultural paradigms. It is to put oneself in a worldview in which one's culture's "holy bards" might well derive some of their more apocalyptic intuitions from speaking birds. For example, when Black Elk felt a sense of impending trouble, the need to prepare for war with the *wasicu*, he "could understand the birds when they sang, and they were always saying, 'It is time! It is time!'" In this human-avian dialogue, the "spotted eagle" is the central intermediary of his initial vision quest and subsequent visions; and the bird's message very much includes a theme of species interrelationship. For instance, when the "Fifth Grandfather" of Black Elk's initiatory vision turns into a "spotted eagle hovering," the eagle says, "'all the wings of the air shall come to you, and they and the winds and the stars shall be like relatives"; and later in the vision, as we have seen, Black Elk himself becomes a "spotted eagle soaring over" the people and animals of his vision. Most crucially, this vision fosters a lifelong interspecies ethics for this man, which includes an understandable reticence in the slaying of these "wings of the air."[48]

The most uncanny interaction between Black Elk and the spotted eagle is a visual one, that moment early in the Great Vision when the Third Grandfather hands Black Elk a peace pipe with "an eagle outstretched upon the stem; and this eagle seemed alive, for it poised there fluttering, and its eyes looked at" him—a return of the "gaze," as it were, a mirror recognition of two consciousnesses.[49] Indeed, what strikes one most throughout Black Elk's various interactions with the avian in Black Elk Speaks is how much the birds are as much agents of consciousness and volition as the Lakota *wicasa wakan* is himself. And it is Black Elk's cultural attitude of openness and "let-it-be"-ness towards the sheer alterity of other species that is much different, I think, than that of Whitman. The former represents a much

more thorough and continuous *dialogic* relationship; the latter, for all of Whitman's fine moments, forever returns to a monologic re-assertion of the individual ego, however "kosmic" its intentions.[50]

One wonders, then, what Whitman would have thought of Black Elk's "Song of We-Are-All-Related." He may likely have sensed a kindred spirit, but he would also have soon resorted, likely, to a primitivization of the Lakota seer, much as he did with the spotted hawk. Both "primitives," the Indian and the bird, are important to Whitman, above all, for their *use* value in his appropriative—even "colonizing"—all-encompassment. Thus Whitman's various incomplete gestures at egalitarianism leveling are further problematized by an inability to completely understand not only the Other of species, but the Other of race. Whitman's discourse of the "wild," indeed, includes his wandering "Far from the settlements studying the print of animals' feet, or the moccasin print"; and the two are paired for good reason. Native Americans are veritable "animals" themselves, and thus the fit prey of Manifest Destiny and Biblical rule by fiat: they are "close to nature, and like natural objects such as trees and animals subject to . . . removal in the face of the progressive march westward."[51] Yes, the bardic "I" of "Song of Myself" considers himself a "Comrade . . . of every hue and trade and rank"—including the "wandering savage";[52] but this inclusion is most self-assured when the "savage" has "wandered" a good distance farther away—into the far West, or better, into extinction and oblivion.[53]

And despite all his gestures towards eco-egalitarianism and racial equality, it is also the civilized and Euro-American human who is all, who has climbed the evolutionary ladder by his own hubris-ridden bootstraps:

> My feet strike an apex of the apices of the stairs,
> On every step bunches of ages, and larger bunches between the steps,
> All below duly traveled—and still I mount and mount.[54]

As poetic ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, it is clear that the human species is the Ptolemaic center of earthly life forms, and that "lower" species are mere rungs in the ladder to be ascended, and transcended. Even John Burroughs, so empathetic towards other animals in general, falls into line with this hierarchal version of Darwinism, characteristically combined with an Hegelian progression towards Absolute Spirit and a traditional Christian moralism: "Man is the crowning product of God, of Nature, because in him all that preceded, and all that exists in objective Nature is resumed. . . . [I]n him what was elsewhere

unconscious becomes conscious; what was physical becomes moral."[55] The spotted hawk might remonstrate that "Nature" is in no need of a superfluous "God," and that the "physical" is ultimately the most "moral," in a truly ecological sense.

Black Elk might have made a similar complaint, against Whitman's might-makes-right claims, in the 1855 Preface, that the U.S. "must indeed own the riches" of this "new" land; that the "American poets are to enclose old and new[,] for America is the race of races"; and that, to the Euro-American poet, "the other continents arrive as contributions." And as one who deemed the Black Hills as the center of the universe, the Lakota prophet would also have cringed at Whitman's prophetic praise of "gold-digging" as part of Manifest Destiny's "endless gestation of new states." Black Elk and his spotted eagle were waiting, but their feathers were none too ready to suffer such ideological "enclosure." For Whitman, though, the "tribes of red aborigines" and the "unsurveyed[!] interior" and the "wild animals" were all fair game for the advance of Western Civilization.[56]

"The nigger like the Indian will be eliminated," Whitman says to Traubel in his later years: "it is the law of races, history, what not."[57] In such a Social Darwinist agenda, it is the (Euro-)"American" who is "fittest for his days," as apt New World climax of the Hegelian state and individual. If there is a biological and evolutionary "Urge and urge and urge, / Always the procreant urge of the world," that urge ultimately results in a hierarchal ladder, culminating in a civilized humankind, and great poets such as Whitman, who distances himself, finally, from whatever vitalism that the "original" Indian, or bird, entails, in the very act of acknowledging it:

> I find I incorporate gneiss and coal and long-threaded moss and fruits and grains and esculent roots,
> And am stucco'd with quadrupeds and birds all over,
> And have distanced what is behind me for good reasons,
> And call any thing close again when I desire it.[58]

I hope to have shown that Whitman is "stucco'd . . . all over" with the Native American, too, who is only called "close" when it suits Whitman's "desire." And so the Indian and the bird are similarly othered and distanced in Whitman's Leaves of Grass, of 1855 or otherwise. At last, he is no "spotted hawk" on visionary wings; one might more cynically dub him a European Starling, an Old World interloper of a bird, imitating both indigenous songbirds and the industrial sounds of the Old World in the New.

A final question, then, given this close association of avian and indigene: why didn't Whitman conjure—and "speak for"—a human Native American in the coda of "Song of Myself"? Why not some grizzled old Indian medicine man with the same "barbaric yawp" and emblematic reminder of the "circle of life"? Was the hawk a more comfortable, less guilty displacement, a palimpsest shadow, for a "yawp" that was rapidly disappearing from a continent of westward-bound pioneers and locomotives? Or, conversely, was the hawk an even bolder gesture towards an acknowledgement of a more sheerly unattainable alterity, as another species whose discourse is truly untranslatable? Either way, the hawk's accusation remains a crucial aporia in any closure that one might posit regarding the finale of the "Song of Myself."

IV. "Flights of the Eagle": Whitman's Avian Soul

> If you have looked on him [the poet] who has achieved it [the simplicity of nature] you have looked on one of the masters of the artists of all nations and times. You shall not contemplate the flight of the graygull over the bay . . . with any more satisfaction than you shall contemplate him. —Whitman, Preface
>
> I see my soul reflected in nature . . . . —Whitman, "I Sing the Body Electric"[59]

John Burroughs recognized, even embraced, the typical Whitmanic conflation of poet and bird in his 1876 essay "The Flight of the Eagle," reinforcing Whitman's own identification with the diurnal raptor. Whitman's art, in Burroughs' view, is not that of some pretty songbird, but the "poetry of the strong wing and the daring flight." Moreover, this is a verse of "aboriginal power"—as Whitman, the voice of Nature, is rendered again as bird and Indian simultaneously.[60] But as for Burroughs' appeal to *flight*, herein the problem lay, for the future of Whitman Studies. The "Dalliance of Eagles," in Harold Aspiz's view, for instance, thus becomes "one of several instances in Leaves of Grass in which the flights of mighty birds into the rarefied atmosphere represent the poet's excursions into the realm of philosophical idealism." And, "[i]n a similar way, the celebrated closing lines of 'Song of Myself' assert" the poet's "identification with high-flying birds whose utterances of nature's primeval secrets sound like a 'barbaric yawp' only to uninitiated ears."[61] What particular primeval initiation ritual Mr. Aspiz is privy to is beyond me, but it may well have something to do, I would claim, with the "Indian."

Indeed, the flight of the "spotted hawk" is easily deemed a "shamanistic" one, following those scholars who, as I have contended, are too earnest in searching out Whitman's indigenous roots. "Like the shaman," James Nolan argues, Whitman was a "a medium for the voices of tribe and nature," reflective of the "shamanic . . . American Indian roots in Whitman's persona." Nolan's attempt to render Whitman as "Native" includes the claim that "[o]ften Whitman's flights are accompanied by the 'spirit helper' of a bird." [62] And yet the roles of the notable avians in, say, "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" hardly seem that of "spirit-helper." But the poet *isn't* really understanding the mockingbird, or Hermit Thrush, any more than he is truly interpreting the spotted hawk's "yawp" as a specific discursive message of complaint. Setting aside the quibble that shamanism is actually a specific northeast Asian phenomenon, one need only look back to Black Elk's "possession" *by* the eagle to perceive a great distance between Whitman's avian uses and prototypical Native American avian mergers. Again, it boils down to the degree (or quality) of identification, and the notable fact that the latter identification—that is, Black Elk's "shamanism"—is *not* initiated by the ego.

It is Whitman's ego, indeed, that disallows such a cross-species *rapprochement*; as with Indians, other species are there for the poet to incorporate the "wild" into himself, and to escape the bounds of what he rightly saw as a civilization all-too-civilized. In contrast, then, the animals:

> 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 industrious over the whole earth.

The implied human behaviors are all *bêtes-noires* of the younger Whitman, no doubt (who may have forgotten about the hoarding "mania of owning things" evident among some crows and jays). But as for the animals—"They bring me tokens of myself," he says immediately after, in a characteristic ("owning") gesture of introjection, of psychic possession: "I do not know where they got those tokens, / I must have passed that way untold times ago and negligently dropt them, / Myself moving forward then and now and forever. . . ." Such "tokens" are the human poet's by right, as center of the cosmos and apex of evolution. The famous passage just quoted is preceded by a more blatant co-optation, a series of lines beginning "In vain": for it is indeed vanity for the "buzzard [who] houses herself with the sky" or the

"razorbilled auk [who] sails far north to Labrador" to escape such a poetic—uh—aim; and the latter, moreover, must fear the poet's very nest-robbing, as he "ascend[s] to the nest in the fissure of the cliff." The reference to "tokens" is immediately followed by the stunning passage of a "gigantic beauty of a stallion, fresh and responsive to my caresses. . . ." But even this close gallop of man and horse is a momentary, incomplete union and ultimate hubris: "I but use you a moment and then I resign you stallion . . . . / and do not need your paces, and outgallop them, / And myself as I stand or sit pass faster than you."

And so I would approach even Whitman's more apparently innocuous uses of "Nature" with some suspicion, including such as lines as "Tenderly will I use you curling grass . . . ."[63] I have already discussed the spotted hawk's flight as soul-like, and suggestive to the poet that he himself "depart as air"; and it is no great leap, as we shall see, to view many of the speculative effusions arising from the grass as more redolent, at last, of an ethereal soul than organic matter. As I have suggested, Whitman scholarship has traditionally tended to applaud this movement towards the spiritual in Whitman, a view fostered, ironically, by no one more than the naturalist Burroughs. His main trope in such praise is, not surprisingly, that of flight. Versus some gross materialism, Whitman "never fails to *ascend* into spiritual meanings." And if the main poetic "principles" are "Life, Love, and the Immortal Identity of the Soul"—well, then, "he finally ascends with them, *soaring high* and cleaving the heavens."[64]

But such a binary of spirit and matter, of the ethereal and the real, is the aporia that haunts Whitman's corpus, as whatever positive materialist/naturist championing that Whitman performs is deflated by an idealism of the "soul," and any laudable place-centered here-and-now is denied by an über-ego that is at last the transcendental Subject of German Idealism. One can turn to the Dakota scholar Vine Deloria, Jr. here, and his critique of the Western dualism that permeates Whitman via a Native monistic (or radically "polytheist") worldview in which such schisms are obviated. The Western metaphysical/physical binary of an ideal "other world" in contrast to *this* one has created the Western ego who resides in "isolation," and is thereby alienated from this natural realm, the environment itself; a close correlative of all this is the "split" between *homo sapiens* and the rest of the world[65]—the "soaring above" of homocentrism, at last, as disembodied spirit and eternal soul.

The apparently archetypal connection of bird flight with the soul needs no elaboration from me, nor the ubiquitous use of the bird by the Romantics in general as a symbol for transcendence. "Why birds," Philip Jay Lewitt has asked: "Why," for Shelley, Keats, and Whitman, "should a hidden bird be such a potent symbol" of "our potential to transcend, to go beyond . . . [and] to go beyond the beyond?"[66] But Lewitt is in favor of such mystical flights, and I would ask the question from another angle. Why should birds, indeed, *serve* ironically as emblems for another species to "go beyond the beyond," when they themselves have no need to do so? The irony here includes the possibility that so much of human spirituality may well be based on our co-evolution with birds, from theological notions of winged angels to literary tropes for the "soul."

As so it is in Whitman. He is a veritable winged being, at last, when he "skirt[s] the sierras," his "palms"—or wings—"cover[ing] continents." Yes, he is "afoot"—or rather, a-flight—with his "vision," but this is not Black Elk's culturally sanctioned shamanic eagle-flight above his people, finally *for* his people. It is rather a flight of and for the isolated "self" or "soul." A bit later in "Song of Myself," Whitman cuts to the chase: "I fly the flight of the fluid and swallowing soul," and in such a winged—and engulfing—"course" across continents, he "flings out" his "fancies" towards all, a projective exercise of the psyche similar to his "incorporation" of the entire evolutionary ladder and his egocentric "use" of the horse, and grass, and all. Again, one can fruitfully compare this mystic journey to Black Elk's later trance-"flight" back from his body in France to his Lakota homeland; he "spans continents," too, even noting passing over New York City on his way to South Dakota.[67] But this is a flight to a specific place—Pine Ridge Reservation—with a collective purpose, involving finally the plight and fate of the Lakota *oyate*.

Indeed, Black Elk never would have uttered the statement, "I know perfectly well my own egotism," but Whitman trumpets such boasts to the world, assuming that we assume with him that such all-encompassing egoism is actually both some completely democratic leveling and some complete mystic union with the "All." But then there is the literally earth-shattering view, expressed already in the 1855 Preface, that "[o]nly the soul is of itself . . . ." What is truly disturbing about such an idealism is its attitude towards the rest of the ecosystem:

> The land and sea, the animals fishes and birds . . . are not small themes . . . but folks expect of the poet to indicate more than the beauty and dignity which always attach to *dumb real objects* . . . . they expect him to indicate the path between reality and their souls.

In the 1855 "To Think of Time," Whitman exclaims, "How beautiful and perfect are the animals! How perfect is my soul!"—and by this point, there is no doubt which of the two he will eventually deem more "perfect." Indeed, this poem gives a "soul" to everything, and so it has even been praised as a paean to some panpsychic egalitarianism: "I swear I see now that every thing has an eternal soul! / The trees have, rooted in the ground . . . . [and] the animals."[68] Lawrence Buell lauds these lines as an affirmation that other species are "just as real as we are," and have "just as much right as you or I do to be taken as the center of the universe around which everything else shall revolve."[69] This is all excellent; my only quibble is with a 19th-century discourse that needs to find this oh-so-human "soul" in other creatures that have no need of it—a grander version of the notion of a "Pet Heaven," as it were.

Conversely, Whitman's opening manoeuvres in "Song of Myself" regarding the "grass" have recently been given various ingenious materialist-atomist readings, as if the poet had been, above all, the precursor of quantum mechanics. Note, however, that the grass's human observer is the ideal disembodied Self referred to above, who "Stands amused, complacent, compassionating, idle, unitary"—at last, some Aristotelian "unmoved mover" apart from it all. Most to the point here is the "What is the grass?" passage. Symptomatically, the adult cannot really "answer the child," cannot really deal with the sheer mundanity of existence. He must immediately psychologize it—"it must be the flag of my disposition"—and ultimately define it in terms of tropes of the soul and spiritualism—as "the handkerchief of the Lord," as some "uniform hieroglyphic"[70] more resonant of Transcendentalism than of corporeal reality.

M. Jimmie Killingsworth summarizes Whitman's—or my—dilemma nicely: "It is easy to grow frustrated with all the soul talk in Whitman and decide that when he uses the word 'soul,' he does so for rhetorical purposes, to intensify what is primarily a materialist understanding of his world."[71] Both Killingsworth, I think, and I could only wish it were this easy. But whatever is happening in Whitman happens within a cultural dualism of spirit and matter, and the two are never merged, only "confused." The common critical perception that the "Song of Myself" is a balancing-act attempt at "the

philosophical reconciliation of materialism to idealism"[72] may well be true, but its realization was doomed from the start, I would argue, by the very Western discourse in which Whitman is involved. In his own discussion of this controversy in Whitman Studies between "nature and the body" and "religion and the soul," David S. Reynolds warns us that the scholar's "[e]xclusive emphasis on either . . . misses his determined intermingling of the two realms," a "cross-fertilization between matter and spirit."[73] My own take on the matter (no pun intended) has been that this "cross-fertilization" is actually a cross-*corruption*, an endless denigration of the actual hawk, of bodies in general, by an ideology of "soul" and "spirit" that would soar on borrowed wings. . . .

Finally, since it seems that no current commentary on our poet can end without some mention of sex, one might note here the common reading of Whitman's special "communion"—or intercourse—with his "soul" *and* with "Nature" as both displacements of sexuality—and turn to another of his birds. While the bird in general is more stereotypically associated with the spiritual, not the copulative, we do have the venerable Western ideas of lusty sparrows, and of "cock" roosters and robins; and then we have Whitman's feathering the "worship" of his own genitalia with the avian images of a "timorous pond-snipe, [and a] nest of guarded duplicate eggs." Yes, to paraphrase Lawrence Buell, it *is* good to have some ornithological knowledge in the study of literature, if only to be able to picture that long-beaked but private bird, the snipe, in this particular context.[74]

I have offered this brief wayward excursion into Whitman's special intercourse with Nature, then, as a supplement to my general thesis that, whatever "Nature" is in Whitman, it is always more about the observer than the observed, and that observer is very much preoccupied with both his spiritual and libidinal urges. And so the "spotted hawk" becomes not only idealized (even superego-ized) spirit-in-flight, but also emblem of the "wild" and raw and physical—sheer untamed id at last, like his tribal brothers, the Native Americans. Whatever the "spotted hawk" is in the "Song" that is of "Myself"—it is not a bird.

V. Conclusion: "A New Order"

> This is what you shall do: Love the earth and sun and the animals . . . . argue not concerning God . . . . [and] read these leaves in the open air every season of every year of your life . . . . . —Whitman, Preface

> A word of reality . . . . . materialism first and last imbueing.
> —Whitman, "Song of Myself"[75]

In dealing almost exclusively with the 1855 Preface and poems, I have spoken of Whitman's corpus and philosophy in an admittedly synchronic fashion, as if the man who wrote the first draft on the "spotted hawk" was the same who described "The Dalliance of Eagles." Another standard critical perception is that—as in Wordsworth—Whitman's initial stance was a fairly radical materialism, or—theologically speaking—a philosophy of "immanence,"[76] and that he eventually aged into a more thoroughgoing surveyor and purveyor of the "soul"—what Reynolds notes as the "characteristic movement in his poetry from the scientific to the spiritual."[77] I would conclude, then, with an attempt at recuperating my own version of a truly "ecological" Whitman.

It is certainly easy enough to fabricate one's own Whitman via choice cuts from the 1855 Leaves. One could read the following from the Preface as not just a call for a chauvinistic rejection of European artificiality and "fancy," but as a rejection of such "fancies" as Western metaphysics: "Great genius and the people of these states must never be demeaned to romances. As soon as histories are properly told there is no more need of romances"—or *souls*? The "true" Whitman of 1855, moreover, would toss all such fluff out the window: "The whole theory of the special and supernatural . . . departs as a dream. . . ." And what fan of Wallace Stevens or Edward Abbey wouldn't applaud the following prophetic anthem: "A new order shall arise and . . . every man shall be his own priest." People will then "find their inspiration in real objects today . . . ." Passages such as this beg one to agree with Piasecki's optimistic faith that, truly, "Whitman's work represents . . . a step from romanticism to realism, and the replacement of previous beliefs with scientism,"[78] but such a viewpoint is at last, as I have argued at length, impossible to defend completely.

Perhaps Killingsworth's provocative delineation of three different "views of nature" will aid this finale. These are "nature as spirit (the dominant view among mystics and many activists), nature as an object of study (the dominant view in science), and nature as resource (the dominant view of business and industry)."[79] One perceives all three in Whitman, for even the third is very evident in his paeans to technology and colonial expansion. The first, "nature as spirit," is the view that I have most lamented, in the Good Gray Poet, as inimical to any possibility of trading in "romance" for (natural) "history" itself.

But though I have also dealt with Whitman's scientific—even ornithological—interest in nature, I find myself an enthusiastic advocate of none of these three views. There must be at least a fourth approach, then, that embraces the materialism and "immanence" of science, but refuses to see other species and so-called inorganic forms as mere "objects of study"—that is, some synthesis of Edward Abbey and Black Elk that sees the here-and-now of a hawk as invested with enough "spirit" and mythos and *wakan* in itself, an attitude that finds it sufficient to live out one's days as an organization of atoms, happy to give back one's dust for the support of others' "bootsoles." And that is the Whitman that I want to read.

Notes

1. Walt Whitman, Poetry and Prose (henceforth P&P), ed. Justin Kaplan (New York: Library of America, 1982), 87, 13. All subsequent quotations from Whitman's Preface or poems are from the 1855 Leaves of Grass therein (1-145), unless otherwise indicated.

2. John Burroughs, Notes on Walt Whitman, As Poet and Person, 2nd ed. (New York: J. S. Redfield, 1871 [1867]), 48. The long-debated extent of Whitman's own editorial interventions into Burroughs' text need not trouble my main point here, however tempting it is to find in such passages indications of Whitman's attempts to re-focus or displace the controversies of sexuality, etc., upon the ostensibly safer discourse of "Nature."

3. William J. Rueckert, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" [1978], in The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1996), 118. The "greening" of Whitman Studies per se can be said to have begun in earnest in the 1970's and 1980's, often as glowing compliments to Whitman's eco-consciousness, as in Cecelia Tichi's New World, New Earth: Environmental Reform in American Literature from the Puritans through Whitman (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979); Bruce Piasecki's "Whitman and Ecology" (West Hills Review 2 [1980]: 46-53), and "'Conquest of the Globe': Walt Whitman's Concept of Nature" (Calamus 2 [1983]: 26-44); and Jeff Poniewaz's "Whitman and Thoreau and the Industrial Revolution" (Mickle Street Review 7 [1985]: 30-46). But the wondrous "Ecological Gloria" in Whitman that Tichi and Piasecki perceive—e.g., the poet's "essential vitalism and earthiness" connote "something that sounds like a gloria, feels like the first steps in a new frontier" (Piasecki, "Whitman and Ecology" 52)—hardly strikes one as ecological in a modern sense, and Poniewaz's claim that "the whole *Leaves of Grass* is mystically ecological" (44) founders, as I will argue, on its very "mysticism."

4. In contrast to Thoreau, as Jeff Poniewaz has argued, Whitman "loved the human world" more than non-human Nature, "and so his gregarious temperament . . . tipped his scales in favor of the urban real," and to a "blind faith in 'Progress'" ("Whitman and Thoreau" 39). Imperialist politics aside, even Burroughs admits, after so much praise for Whitman's "Nature," that "no modern book of poems says so little about Nature, or contains so few compliments to her. Its subject, from beginning to end, is MAN, and whatever pertains to or grows out of him" (Notes on Walt Whitman 41).

5. Walt Whitman, P&P 50; John Burroughs, Notes on Walt Whitman 41.

6. David S. Reynolds, Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography [New York: Knopf, 1995], 277; Walt Whitman, P&P 130.

7. John Burroughs, Notes on Walt Whitman 56.

8. Walt Whitman, P&P 144; Joe Amato, "No Wasted Words: Whitman's Original Energy" (Nineteenth Century Studies 12 [1998]), 43.

9. Walt Whitman, P&P 45-46.

10. Walt Whitman, P&P 86, 53.

11. Walt Whitman, P&P 38, 76, 37, 53. This is the continuing contradiction in Whitman that Daniel J. Philippon finds in the much later Specimen Days, where, unfortunately, the man of so many words "finds nature to be both 'inimitable' (unable to be described) and wordless (unable to be interpreted)" ("'I only seek to put you in rapport': Message and Method in Walt Whitman's Specimen Days," in Reading the Earth: New Directions to the Study of Literature and Environment, ed. Michael P. Branch, et al. [Moscow: U of Idaho P, 1998], 181).

12. Walt Whitman, P&P 91, 43. And again: "Happiness not in another place, but this place . . not for another hour, but this hour . . ." (98).

13. Walt Whitman, P&P 10, 32.

14. Qtd. in Angus Fletcher, A New Theory for American Poetry: Democracy, the Environment, and the Future of Imagination (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2004), 159. Not that Powys' own word choices don't imply an ongoing othering of the "ugly" and "God-forsaken"!

15. Walt Whitman, P&P 33, 43, 37-38.

16. Walt Whitman, P&P 57, 61; M. Jimmie Killingsworth, Walt Whitman & the Earth: A Study in Ecopoetics (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2004), 119.

17. Bruce Piasecki, "Whitman and Ecology" 50. Killingsworth similarly claims that "Whitman bucked the [19th-century scientific] trend of making clear separations between human beings and nonhuman nature" (Walt Whitman & the Earth 49).

18. Walt Whitman, P&P 81, 115.

19. Walt Whitman, P&P 929; Cristoph Irmscher, The Poetics of Natural History, from John Bartram to William James (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1999), 234.

20. Joseph Kastner, A World of Watchers (New York: Knopf, 1986), 172.

21. The Red-Shouldered Hawk of eastern North America may well be the species of "spotted hawk" fame, although the more common Red-Tailed Hawk is as safe a bet. Both buteos have a similar "raucous" down-slurred call, and the broken-stripe wing pattern and mottled breast of either might be described as "spotted."

22. Walt Whitman, P&P 7, 60-61.

23. Lawrence Buell, The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995), 7; Leonard Lutwack, Birds in Literature (Gainesville: UP of Florida, 1994), 67, 68. Joseph Kastner also speaks of this poem as the result of "one of those ever-remembered childhood encounters." But at last—to introduce an angle I will eventually pursue in earnest—"Whitman was concerned with being poetical rather than ornithological. For all his

specific details, Whitman *used birds as vehicles* for his deeper and subtler feelings, as symbols of thoughts almost inexpressible" (172, 173; emphasis mine).

24. Diane Kepner, "From Spears to Leaves: Walt Whitman's Theory of Nature in 'Song of Myself'" (American Literature 51.2 [May 1979]: 180. Likewise Eric Wilson: "Whitman's mode of seeing . . . blends the rigors of positivistic science with the play of poetry. . . . Whitman always holds hard to the palpable, to the fact of the scientist" (Romantic Turbulence: Chaos, Ecology, and American Space [New York: St. Martin's, 2000], 133).

25. Joseph Bruchac, "To Love the Earth: Some Thoughts on Walt Whitman," in Walt Whitman: The Measure of His Song, ed. Jim Perlman, Ed Folsom, and Dan Campion (Duluth: Holy Cow! Press, 1998), 367. This "intimacy" with Nature is nearly a Native one, according to Bruchac: "He sees the natural world as no other American of European descent had ever seen it" (366). Moreover, "[t]here is much in Whitman which reminds me of the American Indian way of looking at the world, of being in the world and not just observing it" (368). Some of the more extreme statements regarding Whitman's "Native" affiliation are rather amazing. Bruchac, for instance, finds the incantatory "celebration" that is "Song of Myself" to be analogous to the Navajo Night Chant ("To Love the Earth" 368-369). According to Angus Fletcher, Whitman's use of present participles is so analogous to Hopi grammatical constructions that "Whitman is a born Hopi" (A New Theory for American Poetry 159-160). Other scholars of Native American literature have been nearly as effusive. Norma Wilson, for instance, has claimed that "Whitman's Leaves of Grass was the first truly visionary written expression in American Literature. Never before had an Ameropean . . . approximated so closely the Native Americans' conception of the spiritual and commonplace as one" ("Heartbeat: Within the Visionary Tradition" [Mickle Street Review 7 (1985)], 14). James Nolan contends, furthermore, that Whitman was "the first non-Indian American to practice" a "poetics" issuing from the "land" itself (Poet-Chief: The Native American Poetics of Walt Whitman and Pablo Neruda [Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1994], 59), to the point that the "influences of Whitman and of American Indian poetry seem to blend" together, "as if they sprang from an almost identical poetics" (2).

26. John Burroughs, Notes on Walt Whitman 46, 47.

27. William Wordsworth, "Preface to the Second Edition," in Poetical Works, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, rev. ed. Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1936), 734-741; see especially 737-738.

28. Walt Whitman, P&P 15. Indeed, Whitman's allegiance to natural science in general deserves reiteration. Burroughs, for one, was "deeply impressed by his assimilation of contemporary science." And while there are many obvious objections to Burroughs' belief that Whitman was "the first poet to turn decisively from myth to exact science" (Perry D. Westbrook, John Burroughs [New York: Twayne, 1974], 35), the poet's public-lecture education certainly included a thorough introduction to the scientific *Zeitgeist* of the day, as evidenced in his various references to a geological and biological knowledge of the distant past, and its influence upon the present and future. The poet who would later say, "I believe in Darwinianism and evolution from A to izzard" (qtd. in David S. Reynolds, Walt Whitman's America 246), was already writing in 1855 of the evolutionary "law of promotion and transformation [that] cannot be eluded" (Walt Whitman, P&P 104). But, while evolutionary theory is in many ways laudable from an ecocentric point of view, it actually led Whitman, as we shall see, to some less than laudable views of the human indigenous and of other species.

29. Walt Whitman, P&P 928-929.

30. M. Jimmie Killingsworth, Walt Whitman & the Earth 167; qtd. in Edward J. Renehan, Jr., John Burroughs: An American Naturalist (Post Mills: Chelsea Green, 1992), 77.

31. Nicholas Black Elk and John G. Neihardt, Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux (Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press, 2000 [1932]), 28-29; Howard Nelson, Introduction, in

Earth My Likeness: The Nature Poems of Walt Whitman, ed. Howard Nelson (Ferrisburg: Heron Dance Press, 2001), 6-7.

32. Joseph Kastner, A World of Watchers 174.

33. Walt Whitman, Notebooks and Unpublished Manuscripts, ed. Edward F. Grier (New York: New York UP, 1984; 6 vols.), 1.57.

34. Walt Whitman, P&P 87; Margaret F. Edwards, "'In Its Place': Whitman's Vision of Man in Nature" (Calamus 12 [June 1976]), 13.

35. Robert C. Sickels, "Whitman's Song of Myself" (Explicator 59.1 [Fall 2000]), 20, 21.

36. Walt Whitman, P&P 125.

37. For readings of Whitman in accord with the findings of modern scientific materialism, see, for instance, Diane Kepner, "From Spears to Leaves" 179-204; Bruce Piasecki, "Whitman and Ecology" 47, 51; David S. Reynolds, Walt Whitman's America 236, 240; Joe Amato, "No Wasted Words" 44-45; Eric Wilson, Romantic Turbulence (e.g., xxi-xxii, 118-119, 124-125, 135-136); and Angus Fletcher's A New Theory for American Poetry. All laudable turns from Whitman's "soul" to Whitman's "body," though at times the poet here becomes more a disciple of Lucretius—or quantum mechanics—than he himself realized.

38. Walt Whitman, P&P 88, 27; Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac (New York: Oxford UP, 1966 [1949]), 111-114.

39. Walt Whitman, P&P 88.

[40]. Nicholas Black Elk, The Sixth Grandfather: Black Elk's Teachings Given to John G. Neihardt, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1984), 317; Nicholas Black Elk and John G. Neihardt, Black Elk Speaks 150-151.

41. Qtd. in Kenneth Lincoln, Sing with the Heart of a Bear: Fusions of Native and American Poetry, 1890-1999 (Berkeley: U of California P, 2000), 122.

42. Nicholas Black Elk and John G. Neihardt, Black Elk Speaks 128.

43. Norma Wilson, The Nature of Native American Poetry (Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 2001), 3; Walt Whitman, The Correspondence, ed. Edwin Haviland Miller (New York: New York UP, 1961-1977; 6 vols.), 3.98-99.

44. Ed Folsom, "Whitman and American Indians," in Walt Whitman's Native Representations (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), 69, 61, 62.

45. Castro, Michael, Interpreting the Indian: Twentieth-Century Poets and the Native American (Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1983); James Nolan, Poet-Chief; Kenneth Lincoln, Sing with the Heart of a Bear. See Ed Folsom's "Whitman and American Indians" (especially 62-77) for a more circumspect view of Whitman's relationship with the Native American imago.

46. Walt Whitman, P&P 58; Joseph Bruchac, "Canticle," in Near the Mountains (Fredonia: White Pine Press, 1987), 63]; "Walking," in No Borders (Duluth: Holy Cow Press!, 1999), 88. See Ed Folsom, "Whitman and American Indians" 66-69 for a more thorough summary of the appreciation of Whitman's "Indian-ness" by contemporary Native authors.

47. I must acknowledge that Black Elk also associated "lofty" thought with the eagle: the connection between the ceremonial eagle feather and *wakan tanka* "means that our [Lakota] thoughts should rise high as the eagles do" (Nicholas Black Elk and John G. Neihardt, Black Elk Speaks xxvi). However, Black Elk's notion had likely already been "infected" by Western idealist and monotheistic conceptions, at this point, and one must also recall that this is all filtered through Neihardt's very Romantic lens.

48. Nicholas Black Elk and John G. Neihardt, Black Elk Speaks 121, 23, 28-29. For the "spotted eagle" as visionary intermediary, see 27-34, 37-39, 46-47, 204, 246. An incident soon after Black Elk's initial vision reveals the "animal rights" ramifications therein: "There was a bush and a little bird sitting in it; but just as I was going to shoot, I felt queer again [in memory of his vision], and remembered that I was to be like a relative with the birds" (39). See also 140-142, 152 for "bird helpers" in Black Elk's later *wicasa wakan* activities.

49. Nicholas Black Elk and John G. Neihardt, Black Elk Speaks 22.

50. This brief Bakhtinian moment can be supplemented by Gerald Vizenor's seminal distinction between animal "similes" and "metaphors," which can most quickly be explained as the difference between Whitman's use of the "spotted hawk" and Black Elk's attitude towards the "spotted eagle." Indeed, the animals of Western literature are almost always "simile animals"—including I would claim, Whitman's "spotted hawk"—that is, straightforward anthropomorphic projections, mere "caricatures in literature," symptomatic of "speciesism and comparable to manifest manners and the monotheistic separation of animals and humans" ("Literary Animals," in Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence [Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1998], 133, 136.

51. Walt Whitman, P&P 62; M. Jimmie Killingsworth, Walt Whitman & the Earth 87. Fittingly, too, as Killingsworth notes, "The 'wild ravines' and the 'dusky Sioux' [of "From Far Dakota's Cañyons"] become 'the fatal environment' in one of only two uses of the key word *environment* in all of Whitman's poetry. . . . The ascendant race is threatened by the earth and the dusky savage, identified in the environmental mythology as forces threatening civilization, both less than fully human" (65).

52. Walt Whitman, P&P 43.

53. In line with my comments here, Mohawk poet Maurice Kenny has sounded the greatest note of protest against the general (and often Native) idolization of Whitman as "Native," in his essay on "Whitman's Indifference to Indians": Whitman's scanty mention of Native Americans in his poetry, the "shockingly insensitive" nature of some of his prose descriptions of them, and his hagiographic treatments of Custer—all lead Kenny to lament "that the American Indian did not prove a fit subject for Whitman's powerful poetics" (Backward to Forward: Prose Pieces [Fredonia: White Pine, 1997], 98, 101-103, 106-108, 109).

54. Walt Whitman, P&P 79.

55. John Burroughs, Notes on Walt Whitman 67-68.

56. Walt Whitman, P&P 5-8.

57. Qtd. in Reynolds, Walt Whitman's America 472. For similar racist sentiments in Whitman, see also 124, 171-173, 471, 473, 500. As Ed Folsom expresses it, Whitman's "Indians were doomed to extinction; if they were degraded and primitive, they would die out by the Darwinian law of the survival of the fittest" ("Whitman and American Indians" 92).

58. Walt Whitman, P&P 5, 28, 57.

59. Walt Whitman, P&P 13-14, 121.

60. John Burroughs, "The Flight of the Eagle," in Birds and Poets, with Other Papers (Boston: Houghton, 1903 [1877]), 186, 187.

61. Harold Aspiz, "Whitman's Eagles" (Mickle Street Review 7 [1985]), 84.

62. James Nolan, Poet-Chief 154, 197, 200. For more readings of Whitman as "shaman," see also Leonard Lutwack, Birds in Literature 71; M. Jimmie Killingsworth, Walt Whitman & the Earth 127, 114.

63. Walt Whitman, P&P 58, 57-58, 58-59, 31.

64. John Burroughs, "The Flight of the Eagle" 234 (emphasis mine); Notes on Walt Whitman 48-49.

65. Vine Deloria, Jr., For This Land: Writings on Religion in America, ed. James Treat (New York: Routledge, 1999), 147, 153, 137, 151, 152, 159-160, 148, 158.

66. Philip Jay Lewitt, "Hidden Voices: Bird-Watching in Shelley, Keats, & Whitman" (Kyushu American Literature 28 [1987]), 61.

67. Walt Whitman, P&P 59, 63; Nicholas Black Elk and John G. Neihardt, Black Elk Speaks 173-174.

68. Walt Whitman, P&P 76, 21, 10 (emphasis mine), 106.

69. Lawrence Buell, The Environmental Imagination 107.

70. Walt Whitman, P&P 30-31.

71. M. Jimmie Killingsworth, Walt Whitman & the Earth 31.

72. Diane Kepner, "From Spears to Leaves" 182.

73. David S. Reynolds, Walt Whitman's America 235.

74. Walt Whitman, P&P 51; Lawrence Buell, The Environmental Imagination 97.

75. Walt Whitman, P&P 11, 49.

76. Whitman's "natural theology," Bruce Piasecki claims, involves a "God of immanence, not transcendence" ("'Conquest of the Globe'" 40).

77. David S. Reynolds, Walt Whitman's America 236. See Eric Wilson, Romantic Turbulence 136 and M. Jimmie Killingsworth, Walt Whitman & the Earth 92 for what Killingsworth dubs Whitman's later "more abstract treatment of nature"; both point to "Passage to India" as a prime example of this later apostasy.

78. Walt Whitman, P&P 19, 16, 25; Bruce Piasecki, "'Conquest of the Globe'" 32.

79. M. Jimmie Killingsworth, Walt Whitman & the Earth 58.