

SOLITUDE, SINGULARITY, SERIALITY:
WHITMAN VIS-À-VIS FOURIER

BY MICHAEL MOON

One evening as the sun went down
 and the jungle fire was burning,
Down the track came a hobo, hikin'
 And he said, Boys, I'm not turning—
I'm headed for a land that's far away,
 beside the crystal fountain.
So come with me, we'll go and see
 the Big Rock Candy Mountain.

In the Big Rock Candy Mountains,
 there's a land that's fair and bright,
Where the handouts grow on bushes
 and you sleep out every night,
Where the boxcars all are empty
 and the sun shines every day
On the birds and the bees and the cigarette trees,
The lemonade springs where the bluebird sings
In the Big Rock Candy Mountain.

In the Big Rock Candy Mountains,
 all the cops have wooden legs,
And the bulldogs all have rubber teeth
 and the hens lay soft-boiled eggs.
The farmers' trees are full of fruit
 and the barns are full of hay.
Oh, I'm bound to go where there ain't no snow,
Where the rain don't fall, the wind don't blow,
In the Big Rock Candy Mountain.

In the Big Rock Candy Mountains,
 you never change your socks,
And the little streams of alcohol
 come a-tricklin' down the rocks.
The brakemen have to tip their hats
 and the railway bulls are blind.
There's a lake of stew and whiskey, too.
You can paddle all around 'em in a big canoe
In the Big Rock Candy Mountain.

In the Big Rock Candy Mountains,
the jails are made of tin,
And you can walk right out again
as soon as you are in.
There ain't no short-handled shovels,
no axes, saws, or picks.
I'm a-goin' to stay where you sleep all day,
Where they hung the Turk that invented work
In the Big Rock Candy Mountain.

The success of the Coen brothers' film *O Brother, Where Art Thou* (2000), and especially of its soundtrack, had the effect of temporarily propelling Harry McClintock's 1928 recording of "The Big Rock Candy Mountain" back to somewhere near the top of the charts. Here at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it may be hard to hear much more in the song than some over-familiar strains of "old-timey music," but at the time McClintock recorded the song seventy-five years ago it was just coming to the end of its long career as an anthem of a far-flung "hobohemian" sub-culture that had strong affinities with such varied social movements as anarchism, communalism, and tramping. Although its topography of "candyland" may sound innocuous, the song actually gives us a key back into the heyday of the ideal of roving camaraderie that Walt Whitman saluted in poems such as "Song of the Open Road," and, even farther back, into the protosocialist utopias—social, economic, and sexual—planned by the French theorist Charles Fourier. Or so I shall argue in this essay. But in order to do that, I need first to discuss the relation of the individual person to the group in Whitman's writing, and, in turn, the relation of Whitman's way of imagining this to Fourier's theories of social and sexual seriality.

I.

Walt Whitman projects two equally powerful, in some ways quite contradictory, versions of himself through his poetry. I believe we are to take this contradictoriness as part of the design of the writing, this being the poet who famously indemnified himself at the beginning of his career by announcing, "Do I contradict myself? Very well then, I contradict myself; / I am large, I contain multitudes."¹ One of these versions of himself is as the celebrator of the American social mass, in which he is part of and in the midst of the throngs of the citizens, laborers, loafers, and holiday-makers the poetry evokes: "I Hear America Singing." The other is the "Solitary Singer," the title of Gay Wilson

Allen's long-standard 1955 biography of Whitman, a designation for the poet that derives from his own writing, as in the line, "Solitary, singing in the West, I strike up for a New World," from "Starting from Paumanok" (line 13), or the "singer solitary" he styles himself at the dramatic climax of another 1860 poem, "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" (line 150).

Many of Whitman's most influential critics have emphasized the singular and supposedly isolated figure who inhabits some of the poetry, almost to the exclusion of the merging and massifying self and body that impel so much of the rest of it. Allen, Edwin Haviland Miller, Quentin Anderson, and Paul Zweig, for example, have, for all their considerable differences, tended to privilege a version of Whitman as a figure of lonely pathos. To this way of thinking, such self-figurations of Whitman's in his poetry as the hyperactively amorous speaker in yet another 1860 poem ("So Long!") who presents himself as leaping off the pages of *Leaves of Grass* into the arms of his readers (line 57), or the speaker who claims in "Song of Myself" to "fly the flight of the fluid and swallowing soul" (section 33, line 800), are simply the pitiful fantasies of a morbidly withdrawn man, about an exuberant manner of living of which he could only dream.²

This version of Whitman as a person isolated by his remarkable gifts and anguished by some irresolvable sexual secret or ambiguity was solidly in place by 1955, the year of the centennial celebrations of the publication of the first *Leaves of Grass* and of the appearance of Allen's biography. The saturation of such an image with two such familiar shibboleths of the 1950s as the open secret of the closet and the supposedly terrible price of artistic genius makes it instantly recognizable as a piece of Cold War cultural ideology. The dominance of these motifs in Whitman criticism and biography from the 1950s through the 1970s represented a long-lasting foreclosure of another, quite different paradigm—one that had been established during the poet's lifetime through the work of such critics as the Anglo-Irish man of letters Edward Dowden. In 1871 the young Dowden published in the *Westminster Review* one of the first strong essays to insist that what is distinctive about Whitman's poetry is a product of the intensity of his interest in what Dowden calls "men of every class," and his poetry's relative lack of interest in any single or particular individual, himself included—despite the commonly-made mistake of reading "Song of Myself" as a paean to narcissism, Whitman's in particular. Dowden argues:

No single person is the subject of Whitman's song, or can be; [for him,] the individual suggests a group, and the group a multitude, each unit of which is as interesting as every other unit, and possesses equal claims to recognition. Hence the recurring tendency of his poems to become catalogues of persons and things. . . . Men and women are seen *en masse*. . . . Whitman will not have the people appear in his poems by representatives or delegates; the people itself, in its undiminished totality, marches through his poems, making its greatness and vitality felt.³

Much gay criticism on Whitman since Robert K. Martin's pioneering book of 1979 has been instrumental in disrupting the critical consensus that had held for much of the twentieth century about his alleged solitariness and anomalousness as person and poet. The reinvigoration of the long-established, but temporarily disrupted, practice of reading Whitman as a fascinated and ardent member of groups and masses of men has had the effect of producing two quite different ways of responding to much of his writing. If reading the lists of names of hundreds of men and boys whom Whitman encountered in his daily rounds in Brooklyn and Manhattan and with which he filled the pages of some of his 1850s notebooks brings tears to the eyes of Whitman biographer Paul Zweig, who imagines the poet more or less stuck in a state of wistful, unavowable desire for these men, critic Charley Shively, in his account of these same lists, assumes that Whitman got down with every last man and boy he names; for Shively, only the readily decodable symbols are missing that would inform us whether the tricks catalogued in this little black book were oral, anal, or manual; active or passive; a two-way, a three-way, a small circus, or whatever.

Why *did* Whitman in the 1850s make long lists—of the names of men, often young men, with frequent brief annotations about their ages, their occupations, their appearances, and where he had encountered them: “Wm Culver, boy in bath, aged 18 (gone to California 1856)”; “Sam, young fellow I met at Dominick Colgan's [the] plumber”; “Mark Ward—young fellow on [F]ort Greene—talk from 10 to 12, / John Sweeten—tall, well-tann'd, born in New Jersey,—driver”; “Aaron B. Cohn—. . . appears to be 19 years old—fresh and affectionate young man—spoke much of [another] young man named Gilbert L. Bill (of Lyme, Connecticut) who thought deeply about *Leaves of Grass*, and wished to see me”; “Charley (black hair and eyes—round face) 4th av.”; “John Kiernan (loafer young saucy . . . pretty good looking)”⁴

Without assuming that such lists are simply the names of Whitman's tricks, we can, I believe, draw from them a sense of the radically en-

larged social, political, and erotic possibility that began to impel his writing in the mid-1850s. It has long been a commonplace in Whitman criticism to speculate about what the elusive quantity *x* was that allegedly transformed the very ordinary-seeming writer that Whitman had been into the visionary poet he suddenly became in his mid-thirties. Was it reading Emerson's essays, being told that he was a genius by a phrenologist reading the bumps on his head, or the volatile political atmosphere of New York City in the years leading up to the outbreak of the Civil War? Each of these three factors has been put forward at different times as the likely precipitant of Whitman's transformation into a powerful poet. Or was it Whitman's belated discovery, sometime in his early thirties, of masturbation? (Jerome Loving proposes this last possibility in the most recent full-scale biography of the poet.)

I don't myself believe that there can be any single explanation of what catalyzed Whitman's transformation. For me, the Whitman who wrote the poetry of the first four editions of *Leaves of Grass* between 1855 and 1867 had everything in common, so to speak, with the person who had been involving himself in the increasingly hectic life of New York City for fifteen or twenty years before he started writing remarkable poetry. Part of what I want to retain for my purposes here from the keen insights of such early liberal-democratic critics of Whitman as Dowden is the possibility that it was a powerful set of discoveries about the immense worthiness, lovability, and desirability of ordinary men, and of one ordinary man for another, that began to electrify Whitman's previously rather pedestrian poetry. What much of Whitman's poetry of the mid-to-late 1850s announces and avers, I believe, is that every one of the men he names on the long lists in his notebooks potentially constitutes in himself and for his "camerados" an entire world of intense goodness and pleasure: a whole "cosmos"—to use a favorite term of Whitman's and of his age—instinct with love and joy. So does every other person, but this list-maker is especially cued into the young men he names because each of them carries some kind of erotic charge—actual or potential—for him, and he, actually or potentially, for each of them.⁵

Dowden speaks, in the passage I have quoted, of "the recurring tendency of [Whitman's] poems to become catalogues of persons and things," and these so-called catalogs have been one of the most frequently discussed topics in, and one of the most widely parodied features of, Whitman's poetry. The "tendency" to catalog actually "recur[s]" notably only in his poetry of the 1850s, as, for example, in sections 15 and 33 of "Song of Myself," "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," "By

Blue Ontario's Shore," "Salut au Monde!," or "A Song for Occupations." I would relate this cataloging habit of Whitman's early poetry to the long lists of men's names he made in notebooks during the same years, in order to argue that these practices bespeak an epistemology—not of the closet, of the kind Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has anatomized so brilliantly, but of "the street or ferry-boat or public assembly," as Whitman puts it in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry"—an epistemology of any space in the city where the poet might wedge himself into throngs of young men and, as he writes, "[eel] their arms on my neck as I stood, or the negligent leaning of their flesh against me as I sat" ("Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," section 6, lines 81, 80). Finding himself squeezed between some other male bodies and at the same time propping up or supporting the weight of yet other male bodies enables the poet to know or learn crucial things about himself and his world and the others who constitute it which he could learn by no other means that he can envision. Perhaps rather than simply discovering masturbation or homosexuality, Whitman began to realize or to imagine sometime around the mid-1850s that some kinds of social and political contexts and public supports were beginning to emerge for this surprising and transformative new kind of knowledge or understanding he had recently discovered among the throngs of young men in Brooklyn and Manhattan. What I imagine Whitman possibly recognizing at this point is that erotic desires and activities between and among men were just beginning to become the subject of public discourses in which they might conceivably come to be understood by increasingly larger numbers of people as constituting potentially world-making, life-affirming practices, rather than the so-called filthy abominations they had widely been considered to be. Whitman, I believe, discovered and made available to readers a way of re-experiencing their and our worlds as multiple, serial phenomena of a richness and intensity so strong that one's response would perforce be an erotic one.

What other kinds of previously excluded and condemned practices and desires may have been beginning to emerge into the public sphere of recognition and possibility at the time, among women, among laborers, among immigrants, among the poor, among those communities of peoples—displaced Indians, enslaved blacks—that had been most sorely oppressed by the tumultuous inroads of white-racist nation-building during the decades of Whitman's youth and first maturity? More particularly, what currents were circulating through the 1850s U.S., through 1850s New York in particular, that might have supported or enabled such phenomena as Whitman's epistemology of the mass

urban male throng and its potential for serial attraction and what he would call “adhesiveness” to emerge? In his last years, Whitman told a friend that when he had started out he had felt that there were very few if any other people like him, but that over the years he had come to feel that there were more and more people like him. Here is perhaps the most salient aspect of Whitman and seriality for my purposes—his coming to see himself as both part of and constituted by virtually endless series or chains of association—in twos, threes, fours, hundreds, or thousands of persons. Where and how can we locate the most productive sites in which to consider the meaning of Whitman’s sublimely shifting perception of himself from “solitary singer” to specimen of some new type of mass-being?

One answer may lie in the much under-researched question of Whitman’s relation to the communities of his fellow mid-nineteenth-century sex radicals, who began to emerge into print and into the public sphere during the same years he produced much of his own most radically innovative writings. Historian Christine Stansell’s fine recent work on the emergence of the first American bohemia in New York City locates a useful starting point for such an endeavor; this work of hers has made evident that a full-fledged proto-bohemia with all the recognizable features of such a novel social space emerged around a place called Pfaff’s Tavern on Broadway just above Bleecker Street in the 1850s, flourished for a few years, and then disappeared in the tumult of the Civil War.⁶ No successor-bohemia replaced it until a full generation later, near the end of the nineteenth century. Whitman was one of the leading figures in this first American bohemia, along with his friend and sometime publisher Henry Clapp, Jr., the so-called “King of New York Bohemia.” Clapp published Whitman’s “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking” in his bohemian literary review *The Saturday Press* in 1860, the year I see as the culminating one in Whitman’s brief but intense career as a visible and public bohemian.

Also present at Pfaff’s Tavern were the two brilliant and notorious actress-writers Ada Clare and Adah Isaacs Mencken. In her analysis of Pfaff’s, Stansell makes the case that the development and proliferation of new high-powered technologies of cheap print were the crucial enabling factor for this early bohemian space. Whereas the simultaneously emergent bohemia of Paris was a cultural space dominated by painters and the visual arts in general, the core of New York’s first bohemia, Stansell argues, was composed of a group of newspaper and magazine writers, most of them with poetic and artistic aspirations, of whom Whitman was in the late 1850s an entirely representative specimen.

The presence of two women participants who published extensively as well as appearing in a wide range of public spectacles and theatrical events considerably heightened the association of the bohemian scene that emerged at Pfaff's with a daring and even dangerous level of experimentation in the realms of sexuality and gender.

Whitman and several of his fellow writers at Pfaff's—Clare and Mencken certainly included—were among the chief participants in the 1850s in the production of a novel set of discourses about experimental sexual practices that came to be known as “free love.” Rather than some generic straight-male bohemia of wine, woman, and song, the crowd at Pfaff's and their free-love allies beyond it celebrated a highly specified and quite diverse range of erotic practices and relationships that included “advanced” sexual technique, several different technologies of birth control, and the extension of couple bonds to include serial partners for both men and women through what they called “group” or “complex” marriage. Whitman's key term for his own socio-erotic project was “adhesiveness,” by which he meant males sticking together, heart, soul, and body fluids, a word he appropriated from the phrenological publishers Fowler & Wells, who also distributed the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*. The free-love movement in this country originated in the proto-marriage-and-sex manuals that the Fowler brothers authored and published—*Amativeness, Love and Parentage*, etc.—tracts that tended to move in the course of the 1850s from only grudging tolerance of nature's pressing sexual demands to public “celebration” of the inextinguishability of human sexual desires. In uttering the ringing opening assertion of “Song of Myself” and of the poetry of the first *Leaves of Grass* overall—“I celebrate myself”—Whitman was adopting a key word from early American sex-radical discourse and assuming a position that was being advanced not only by himself but by other writers and activists who came to constitute the advance-guard of the free-love movement.⁷

Whitman's poetry, I believe, demands to be understood in general and in detail as part of the complex web of discourses of the sex-radical movements from the 1850s to the 1880s. Critics often assert that Whitman was unsympathetic to free love and quote his newspaper editorials to support their assertions. His poetry, I would argue, has a much more complicated kind of relation to free-love discourses—one that proceeds mostly by occlusion and by frequent performances of a kind of silent-eloquent gesture that is quite different from the open announcements and declarations that many critics seem to expect the poetry to make.

If Whitman does appear to have hung back from publicly endorsing the free-love movement, I believe it is important to consider that his self-distancing may have been strategic and tactical, a product of the distance that may have been inevitable between his own project of producing a public discourse of the high value of bodily desire and erotic pleasure between men and the otherwise exclusively male-female focus of his free-love contemporaries—for, some of Whitman's writing aside, the free-love movement of the 1850s U.S. was relentlessly hetero. And yet to count Whitman as simply a nonparticipant in or conscientious objector to the American sex wars of the 1850s and after is to eliminate from the historical narrative the age's most visible and audible proponent of new modes of same-sex love. Some of the specific ways in which the particular version of bohemianism enacted at Pfaff's may have helped enable Whitman to open and elaborate his own discourses of utopian sexuality and "adhesiveness" manifest themselves most conspicuously in the "clusters," as he called them, entitled "Calamus" and "Children of Adam," that he added to *Leaves of Grass* in 1860. It may, for example, have been highly enabling of Whitman's own daring and risky project for him to have encountered frequently at Pfaff's such women as Clare, "Queen of New York's Bohemia" to Clapp's "King," and Mencken. Like Whitman and Clapp, both women pursued complicated literary careers. They were also popular actresses as well as leading figures in a series of highly publicized sex scandals. In the intense, chastened theatricality—no longer opulent, but severe and even nihilistic-sounding—of some of the most characteristic "Calamus" poems (for example, numbers 6, 7, 8, 9: "Not heaving from my ribbed breast only," "Of the terrible question of appearances," "Long I thought that knowledge alone would suffice me," "Hours continuing long, sore and heavy-hearted"), it is possible, I believe, to hear the accents and manner of the bohemian histrionics of such figures as Mencken and Clare, who waged some of their most intimate struggles with their lovers in print and in public. For example, when celebrated composer and pianist Louis Moreau Gottschalk denied his paternity of Clare's child, she fought back through the media most readily available to her, those of cheap print and the emergent mode of bohemianism, in the latter of which intimate experience—erotic union, sexual betrayal—could sometimes be enacted with a high degree of publicity.

Whitman's mode of participating in the bohemian scene is very different from the sensational style of his women allies. He represents his own presence there as contrastingly quiet and often entirely silent. Since an important aspect of the innovativeness of this scene lay in

its circulation of novel sexual as well as social practices, I want to discuss briefly a sexual practice which may in some ways be cognate with the “withheld” quality of the mutely gazing lovemaking enacted in several of the “Calamus” poems (as in, for example, “A Glimpse”). This is Whitman’s practice of the free-love technique known in the nineteenth century as “Karezza”—a form of *coitus reservatus*, or the practice of the male repeatedly halting his own sexual exertions just short of ejaculation.⁸ According to Edward Carpenter, who claimed to have had sex with Whitman while visiting him in Camden, New Jersey, this consisted of Whitman’s bringing his younger partner to orgasm by oral means while “reserving” or forgoing his own orgasm. Several of Whitman’s poems set in places like Pfaff’s tavern suggest sequences of thought that allow us at least to speculate about the relation between erotic atmospheres as they are powerfully evoked in some of his poems and the kinds of experimental sexual practices and relationships, including those between males, that were emerging from bohemia into mass discourse at the same time.

Imagine the denizens of Pfaff’s awash, if you will, in this newly energized atmosphere of relatively open discussion of many kinds of new sexual and romantic possibilities, and, within this scene, imagine further the ripe eloquence of Whitman’s sitting, as he several times depicts himself doing in his “Calamus” poems, in a noisy and crowded tavern like Pfaff’s, holding hands with his current “camerado” and, as he writes, “speaking little, perhaps not a word” (“A Glimpse,” line 5). Consider how much of the poetic power of Whitman—supposedly the most garrulous and in-your-face of poets (“I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world” [“Song of Myself,” section 52, line 1333])—is concentrated in his writing in what is repeatedly presented in it as these rare but stunning moments of absolute stillness and wordless satisfaction between the poet and another man he loves and desires. To my mind, the crucially important thing to register about these scenes of finding and forming some intense, intimate bond, at least partially visible if not audible to others, is that they are not in themselves moments of closure—no “permanent” couple is necessarily formed by them—but rather moments in the production of a series, a series of shared recognitions between and among actual and potential lovers. The silent hand-holding may serve as much as instruction and model-for-imitation to other potential lovers as it does as a mode of two-way communion or communication for the two men performing it, and although it may look like a symmetrical interaction, in reordering and disrupting the otherwise pervasively homosocial and heteroerotic

dynamics of this bohemia, it paradoxically bespeaks an asymmetrical, “Karezza”-style erotics between males.

For me, the question this point raises is, how can we further articulate the relation between the kinds of wordless interactions Whitman makes so important in his explicitly “bohemian” poetry, and the kinds of contrasting and alternate scenes of the epistemology of the public throng of males, in which the poet derives deep and epistemologically consequential gratification from another kind of asymmetrical physical and affective interaction with other males, in the experience of the arm draped unceremoniously about his neck by other fellows, and the “negligent” weight of yet others leaning against him? I propose to try to answer this question by bringing to bear on these aspects of Whitman’s poetry the most highly elaborated theory of sexual attraction available in his time; this is found scattered through the voluminous writings of the French theorist and radical social planner Charles Fourier.

II.

The communal-utopian movement that swept the U.S. in the 1840s, from Brook Farm to Sodus Bay, and the free-love movement that became associated with it in the 1850s, are both routinely traced by historians back to Fourier’s writings and to his activities as an early advocate of socialist cooperatism, in the sexual as well as in the social and economic arenas. Fourier’s “gospel,” in considerably but not altogether bowdlerized form, was brought to the States by Albert Brisbane, and promulgated by Horace Greeley, editor of a dominant New York daily, the *Tribune*. Whitman was well acquainted with several of the principal American Fourierists: Brisbane was a long-time acquaintance of his, and Whitman’s bohemian friend and literary ally Clapp served as Brisbane’s secretary for some time. In 1857, Clapp produced the first translation into English of *The Theory of the Four Movements*, Fourier’s first and arguably most important book, and the one which contains the fullest account of the serial dynamics of what Fourier called “passional attraction.”⁹ Although Whitman may well have been unsympathetic with Fourierism as it was actually put into practice in the U.S.—mostly with disastrous results, as far as practical outcomes are concerned—Fourier’s exorbitant and outrageous theories of sexuality are the closest thing we have to anything like a fully elaborated system of erotic invention and discovery of the kind that Whitman sometimes gestures toward in his poetry but leaves generally more invoked and implicit than avowed and articulated. I propose

to read Fourier's theories of "passional attraction" and the complexly serial sexualities he advocated in relation to the kinds of desires and practices that Whitman occasionally openly invokes—but also, at other moments, especially at moments of highly erotically charged male-male relation in his writing, shrouds in silence, in a kind of mute and overripe eloquence.

For all their differences, there are some striking parallels between Fourier's and Whitman's lives and careers. As was the case with Whitman, Fourier had no formal education or intellectual or literary credentials to speak of. Both men were ferocious autodidacts who dedicated their lives, against considerable opposition, especially early on, to articulating their respective visions of their worlds. Neither married, and both were widely dismissed as crackpots and as sexually suspect figures. Possible relations between the respective erotic worlds these two near-contemporaries projected have attracted surprisingly little critical attention from either Whitman or Fourier scholars. As two of the most influential sexual-utopian writers and theorists of the nineteenth century, the works of Fourier and Whitman seem in many ways designed to illuminate and extend each other. Even a brief outline of some of the key concepts of Fourierism will, I hope, make this apparent.

"Association" is the first key term in Fourierism; both the central practice and one of the ideals of the movement, "association" names the general desire of many persons to leave behind them the claustal work and family relations of early industrial capitalism in order to associate more freely with each other and to form bonds and alliances with likeminded and likehearted persons based on shared passions, rather than on the often degrading and alienating demands of the workplace and the conjugal fireside. Fourier's idea of the freely constituted group and the serial possibilities of the intermingling of such groups as the basis of all social formations bears striking affinities with what I am calling Whitman's epistemology of the "street and ferry-boat and public assembly"; what one may learn from the practice of free association, including free erotic association, is a set of political and social possibilities that is as fundamental to the writing and thinking of Whitman as it is to Fourier. Besides "Association," "Harmony" was the other key word in his system; in contrast with so-called "Civilization," in which people lived mostly miserable lives, "Harmony" was the name of the state which masses of people would ultimately achieve through the practice of serial association. Pursuing one's inclinations and proclivities in association with groups and series of other similarly

impassioned persons, Fourier believed, would inevitably produce a social field that provided all the gratifications and all the connections—“Harmony”—that “Civilization” fails to deliver.

Although Whitman may have known only from hearsay what Fourier thought about the incalculably diverse future of sexual practices as he believed they would develop under more propitious conditions, it is likely that he was fairly familiar with the elements of Fourier’s theory of desire from accounts in the popular press as well as from the work of various of his friends. As Clapp rehearses in his translation of *Theory of the Four Movements*, Fourier identifies twelve kinds of passions in human nature. The first five are the simplest; each is simply an effect of one of the five senses—the passion to see, to hear, to touch, to taste, to smell. Next come the four passions Fourier calls the “affective” or relational ones: friendship, love, ambition, and familism. These are the passions that tend to bring people together into groups; these impulses direct people toward one another, just as the five sense-passions direct us toward various objects. The final three passions Fourier calls the distributive or serial ones. Considered shameful and even immoral in Civilization, in Harmony they will enable the formation of “passionate series” of all kinds.¹⁰ The first of these Fourier calls the Cabalist passion, the impulse toward intrigue and rivalry, for forming factions and cliques. The second he called the Butterfly passion, the impulse toward change and novelty, variety and contrast—the fundamental human urge to “flit.” This middle term of Fourier’s “passionate series,” the butterfly passion, is most important for understanding the powerfully implicit relation of Whitman’s poetry to Fourier’s writing. The third is the Composite passion, the impulse to mix and match pleasures of supposedly incommensurable kinds—physical and spiritual ones, selfish and altruistic ones. It is these three serial passions—for more intrigues and carryings-on, more variety, and headier combinations of pleasures—that keep passionate life dynamic throughout the community, casting and recasting persons into an endless succession of groups and relationships of all degrees of intensity and duration.¹¹

Fourier was no elitist like his contemporary Honoré de Balzac; fulfillment in Harmony was not to be just for the relatively affluent and leisured 20,000 women and 40,000 men of fashion to whom Balzac addressed his *Physiology of Marriage* of 1829. Instead, Fourier promised what he called “a sexual minimum”—like a minimum wage—to every adherent in association, male or female, old or young, homely or comely.¹² In order to effect this, of course, radical interventions would have to be made in the thoroughgoing privatization of sex that characterized

bourgeois coupling. Mass orgies in broad daylight will become the preferred means of sexual gratification in Harmony, in contrast with the somewhat dreary nocturnal ones, limited to a paltry party of six or eight men and women, that Fourier casually mentions having attended around provincial France in his early days as a traveling salesman. These sorry nights had clearly fallen far short of the great expectations with which he had anticipated them, and they seem to have left him with an abiding sense of the intolerably disappointing quality of life in Civilization. What may have sparked Whitman's interest even more than Fourier's assertion of the centrality of mass sexual celebrations in the coming world was the French theorist's insistence that in Harmony *all* sexual practices to which their respective participants consented would not only be tolerated but communally recognized and supported as valuable expressions of human diversity. Sometime in his late thirties Fourier became aware of lesbian sexual activity, and expressed to his associates a desire to do anything he could to support and encourage women in enjoying such desires and activities.

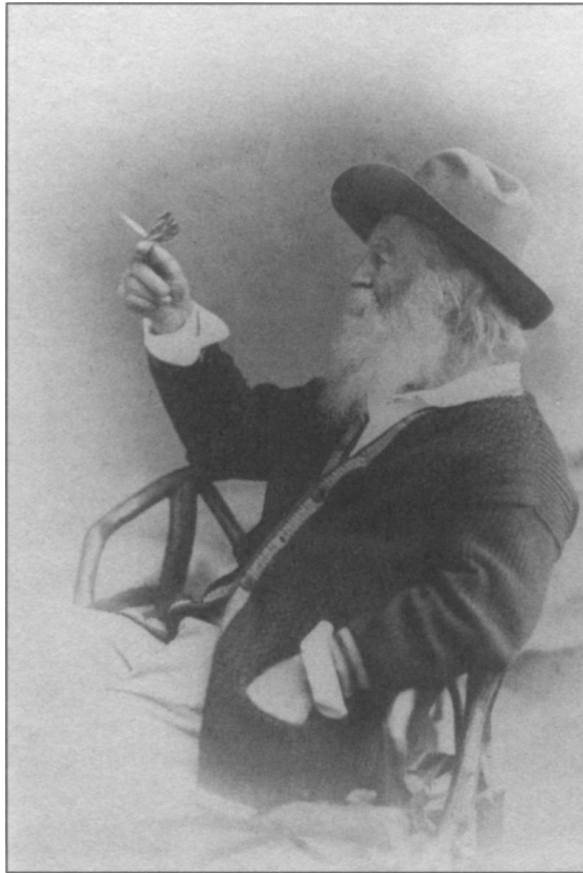
Fourier does to the category "orgy" what he does to every other category he takes up, whether it be one of industrial economics or his own peculiar brand of erotic planning: he projects a series of types which would serve different social purposes as desired, ranging from "introductory orgies" to "welcoming orgies" for visiting groups of sexual adventurers to "farewell orgies" when that special someone was leaving one Harmonian community for another. In Harmony, there will be "orchestrated orgies" modeled on the quadrille that would rotate partners and positions with quasi-military precision—but, never fear, there will also be bacchanalias, drunken and disorderly for those still so inclined.¹³ Some of Fourier's orgies involve elaborate banquets, providing scope for his new science of gastrosophy, which he claimed was the first modern theory to take the activity of dining well sufficiently seriously. Fourier is said to have been related, by his sister's marriage into the family, to the most celebrated of modern gastrosophists, Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, author of *The Physiology of Taste*, and it is interesting to think of the respective writings of these two contemporaries stimulating and provoking the other. Sharon Marcus has made some suggestive comments in her introduction to a recent edition of Balzac's *Physiology of Marriage* about how the one indispensable model for that innovative early sexological treatise appears to have been Brillat-Savarin's book on dining well of a few years before. It should not surprise us to learn in this way that marriage manuals and sexual-instruction guides take their essential form

directly and derivatively from that overmastering modern genre the cookbook—witness the chain of perennially bestselling titles: *The Joy of Cooking* (privately printed, 1931; published 1936), *The Joy of Sex* (1972), *The Joy of Gay Sex* and *The Joy of Lesbian Sex* (both 1977). The most notorious moment in Fourier's sanguine predictions of our collective future in Harmony is a food-related one—or, to be more precise, a drink-related one; it comes in one essay when he opines that with only minor chemical modifications the hitherto excessively salty oceans of the world could become vast pools of a refreshing, lemonade-like beverage. When, in chapter seven of Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*, the smitten Coverdale misguidedly courts his fellow communard Hollingsworth by translating bits of Fourier to him, it's the passage about the ocean's being turned into lemonade, come Harmony, that sends Hollingsworth into a spitting fit of phobic revulsion against Coverdale and his favorite utopian philosopher.¹⁴

After the collapse of the Fourierist phalanx-building movement in the literal ashes of Brook Farm, which burned, and La Reunion in Texas, which less dramatically just dried up in the heat and was eventually absorbed into the present-day suburbs of Dallas (as Brook Farm has been absorbed, without a trace, into present-day Roxbury), much of the American Fourierist experience went underground, where it fed subsequent communal movements, and whence it gushed powerfully once again in the 1960s and 1970s, when Fourier's writing came back into vogue for a time; today, most of Fourier is back out of print in English—with the exception of the fine recent translation of *The Theory of Four Movements* in the Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought series. Fourier's major work on sexuality, entitled *Nouveau monde amoureux—New World of Love, New Amorous World*—was published in French only in 1967; so far, only bits of it have been translated into English.

III.

After the demise of Whitman's and Clapp's and Mencken's proto-bohemia at Pfaff's during the Civil War, a fascinated and often fragmentary knowledge of Fourier's sexual theories went *way* underground, whence it, too, has periodically emerged. I take this famous photograph of Whitman, aged 64, taken in 1883, to record such a moment. He reclines comfortably in a large, openwork bamboo chair. We are to assume, I believe, that he is sitting outdoors, although, artful as ever, he may be posing against a backdrop in a downtown Philadelphia



Walt Whitman, 1873. Photograph by Phillips & Taylor, Philadelphia (Library of Congress, Feinberg-Whitman Collection).

photographer's studio. There is a butterfly perched on the extended forefinger of his right hand. A comment of Allen Ginsberg's provides a passageway through this image into the corridors of anarchic and underground sexual and political history. Ginsberg professed to see in this famous photograph not the vague emblem of rebirth or emergence that other students of Whitman have generally taken it to be. He saw in it, rather, a tacit performance on Whitman's part of tribute to Fourier and particularly to Fourier's theory of the "butterfly" passion, the impulse toward promiscuity and caprice.¹⁵ I imagine Whitman in this photograph conducting yet another version of those sexy séances of the kind of which he stages several in the "Calamus" section, sitting and gazing and holding hands with some man, and saying little or nothing, but quietly and ecstatically exchanging promises of worlds of

pleasurable sensation, delicious emotion, intense affection. This image no less than a number of the other most famous photographs of Whitman encapsulates one of those pungently intimate “glimpse[s], through an interstice caught” which the poet specialized in crafting (“A Glimpse,” line 1).

Like so much else in Whitman’s domestic environment, the butterfly turned out to be not the genuine article but a paper simulacrum, with a wire attached for convenient positioning on the forefinger. This indicative little object turned up in a carton of his papers years after his death, and has now long resided in the Library of Congress, where it has been duly catalogued and can still be visited. A quarter of a century before, an engraved emblem of a butterfly perching on a pointing forefinger, just like Whitman’s in the photograph, appeared across the page from the first poem (“Proto-Leaf”) in the third, 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, and again, after the last poem (“So Long!”); the emblem is thus positioned at the very beginning and at the very end of that text. This is of course the edition of *Leaves of Grass* that introduces the “Calamus” and “Children of Adam” clusters into the project, the most remarkable and extensive poetic traces of Whitman’s engagement with the social and intellectual ferment of bohemianism and free love in 1850s New York. The periodic reappearance in Whitman’s productions of Fourier’s emblem of the *passion de papillon*, the butterfly passion, the perverse urge to flit, has constituted a somewhat hermetic, but to insiders readily recognizable enough, gesture of tribute on Whitman’s part to the French theorist’s enthusiastic vision of a world of sexual types and practices previously despised or even unthought of. I think Whitman differed considerably from Fourier on how articulable all these erotic comings-into-public-discourse might be; some of Whitman’s poetry evokes his own “new amorous world” in loving material and corporeal detail, but I believe much of the poetry is engaged in a kind of world-making in which the “new amorous world” Whitman envisions will be safe but in which it still best flourishes in a highly resonant and charged silence. This silence, I want to insist, is not simply that of the closet, but also of a public sphere—an overlapping series of public spheres—“streets, ferry boats, public assemblies”—in which hitherto proscribed desires and activities have begun to find eloquent, albeit often quiet or silent, modes of manifestation.

Soon after I began to associate the butterfly emblems in the 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass* with Fourier’s butterfly passion, I began to notice the prominence of the word “flit” in a number of the “Calamus” poems, the great addition to the third edition of the book. Take, for

example, “Calamus” #29 (to use its 1860 designation): in all editions of *Leaves of Grass* after that in which the poem first appeared, it begins, “A glimpse through an interstice caught,” but, interestingly, as Whitman first published it, it begins with the word “flit”—“One flitting glimpse, caught through an interstice”—a pun of a kind on the word we expect to hear in the common form of the phrase, “a fleeting glimpse.” Another brief “Calamus” poem, “That Shadow My Likeness” (#40), also turns on the Fourieresque word “flit,” at the end of its second line:

That shadow, my likeness, that goes to and fro seeking a
 livelihood, chattering, chaffering,
How often I find myself standing and looking at it where it flits,
How often I question and doubt whether that is really me;
But in these, and among my lovers, and caroling these songs,
O I never doubt whether that is really me.
(lines 1–5)

The word “flit” bears a significant burden of meaning in yet another “Calamus” poem, entitled “To a Stranger” (#22), in which the speaker recalls an entire life of pleasure and intimacy with a person glimpsed as they “flit by each other” on the street (line 4). Whitman also writes of the “flit[ting]” glimpses of pedestrians rushing by Pfaff’s in a manuscript poem entitled, “The Two Vaults,” in which he compares life in the tavern-cellar with something like the proverbial quiet of the grave, the “other” vault (line 20). Whitman characterizes his own desire to become the particular kind of poet he was as having begun as a “flitting” one in perhaps his most important published statement about his poetry from his later life, “A Backward Glance o’er Travel’d Roads” (line 70). Anyone who professes today to find the emblem of a butterfly’s “flitting” to be lacking in earthshaking significance should be reminded of the immense influence that Edward Lorenz’s classic formulation of “the butterfly effect” has come to have in chaos theory since he first formulated it around 1970: in his paper, Lorenz theorizes the possibility of a butterfly’s flapping its wings in Brazil causing a tornado sometime later in Texas. Fourier would have responded, “But of course.”

IV.

I shall in closing turn back to “The Big Rock Candy Mountain,” the second chorus of which goes:

. . . the birds and the bees and the cigarette trees,
The lemonade springs where the bluebird sings
In the Big Rock Candy Mountain.

Anarchist-writer and Islamicist Peter Lamborn Wilson has suggested in a recent essay that we recognize that the “lemonade spring” in this popular song is fed underground by the ocean of lemonade that Fourier imagined the whole world might enjoy, come Harmony.¹⁶ The song may not strike one on first hearing as a likely analogue to Whitman’s “Calamus” poems, but behind the bowdlerized version of the song popularized by McClintock in the 1920s, and again by Burl Ives in the 1950s, lies a previous version that is explicitly about male-male recruitment and seduction. The forgotten or suppressed first verse of the song—as it appears, for example, in George Milburn’s 1930 *The Hobo’s Hornbook*—makes it clear that this series of blandishments called “the big rock candy mountain” is being offered by an adult hobo to a boy whom he is in the process of luring away from home to join him as a partner. In this context, the combination of childish pleasures (candy and soda) with adult ones (cigarettes and alcohol) can be seen as one that might be especially enticing to a youngster who is just post-pubescent, still quite childish in appetites and fantasies but also eager to sample the forbidden fruit of adult addictions.¹⁷ In the homely and ironic strains of this song we hear the anthem of an American hobo-utopia that is also a redaction of “Come live with me and be my love, / And we will all the pleasures prove.” Nearly a century ago, Whitman’s champion, Havelock Ellis, the preeminent anglophone sexologist before the advent of Alfred Kinsey, was the first scholar to discuss in print the open secret that the new but already extensive U.S. hobo underclass was in significant part a nomadic homosexual and pedophile culture. Many hobos worked with boy partners, and many memoirs of this subculture report the widespread practice among hobos of taking boys either as “punks,” their term for nonsexual boy-partners, or “prussians” (also spelled “preshuns”), their term for boys who served as sexual as well as business partners of adult hobos.

Fourier’s opponents loved to mock his “ocean of lemonade” as an irredeemable bit of bathos that in itself exposed its author as a fool and a charlatan. But the lemonade springs that flow down “the Big Rock Candy Mountain” preserve a political desire for abundance and pleasure for all, for at least a regular quota of good food and drink and at least a measure of—as an aunt of mine once unforgettably put it—whatever kind of sex makes your socks roll up and down, a politi-

cal desire that, far from being ridiculous or despicable, seems more remote from fulfillment today than it may have in Fourier's 1820s or Whitman's 1850s. It also points an irony about the inhospitality of the environment we have made, that, on today's increasingly contaminated planet, far from being beneath our notice, seems more urgent than ever. Our ocean is rapidly turning into a great slag of chemical waste products and floating masses of plastic garbage bags, and no one today would dare enjoy a smoke from the cigarette tree or take a drink from the lemonade springs; it's Nicorette and bottled water for us. From a lot of perspectives, our world looks like a puritanical kind of hell more toxic in many ways than our worst contemners from our collective Calvinist past would have made it in their most sadistic fantasies. All the more reason, as I believe Whitman to some degree foresaw, that in such a dire world as we have come to inhabit, some of us should remember that his poetry, like Fourier's social and economic theories, draws on and contributes to a stream of anarchic political and erotic aspirations in which sexual variance in its myriad forms has not been a marginal or tolerated feature, but a central and fundamental value.

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NOTES

¹ Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," section 51, lines 1324–26, in *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*, ed. Michael Moon (New York: Norton, 2002). All subsequent quotations of Whitman poems are from this edition and are cited parenthetically by line number.

² The line reads, "I fly the flight of the fluid and swallowing soul" in the first three editions of *Leaves of Grass* (line 799 of the 1855 edition); "I fly those flights of a fluid and swallowing soul" in the fourth (1867) and all subsequent editions, in which it appears in section 33 at line 800.

³ Edward Dowden, "Walt Whitman: The Poetry of Democracy," in *A Century of Whitman Criticism*, ed. Edwin Haviland Miller (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1969), 43.

⁴ Whitman, *Walt Whitman: Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts*, ed. Edward F. Grier, 6 vols. (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1984), 2:481, 2:482, 2:486–87, 1:248, 1:251, respectively.

⁵ Peter Coviello provides a stimulating discussion of the dialectic of anonymity and attachment in Whitman's verse as well as in his world in "Intimate Nationality: Anonymity and Attachment in Whitman," *American Literature* 73.1 (2001): 85–119.

⁶ See Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000).

⁷ Here I am depending on some of the standard sources for the history of the free-love movement in the U.S., such as Hal D. Sears, *The Sex Radicals: Free Love in High Victorian America* (Lawrence: Univ. of Kansas, 1977); John C. Spurlock, *Free Love: Marriage and Middle-Class Radicalism in America, 1825–1860* (New York:

New York Univ. Press, 1988); and *Free Love in America: A Documentary History*, ed. Taylor Stoehr (New York: AMS, 1979). Whitman's biographers have tended to take him at his word (his word as a journalist rather than as a poet) about his skepticism regarding the free-love movement, but I believe that it is crucial to see that although Whitman sought in scattered public pronouncements (non-poetic ones) to distance himself from the emergent sex radicalism of his day, he participated in it centrally and influentially through his poetry, especially "Song of Myself," "Children of Adam," and "Calamus." See the following references to Whitman's relation to free love: Jerome Loving, *Walt Whitman: The Song of Himself* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2000), 241, 417–19; and David S. Reynolds, *A Historical Guide to Walt Whitman* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), 7. Reynolds's work is a productive place to start thinking about Whitman's highly absorptive relation to the popular culture of his time; see both *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1995) and *Beneath the American Renaissance* (New York: Random House, 1988). For a recent discussion of free love and related topics, see Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Rereading Sex: Battles over Sexual Knowledge and Suppression in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Knopf, 2002).

⁸ On "Karezza" and similar practices, see, for example, John Humphrey Noyes, "Male Continence," and George Noyes Miller, "Zugassent's Discovery," both reprinted in *Free Love in America*, 549–55 and 588–97, respectively.

⁹ For the most accessible current edition of the book, see Charles Fourier, *Charles Fourier: The Theory of the Four Movements*, ed. Gareth Stedman Jones and Ian Patterson (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996); for the discussion of "passional attraction," see 84–88.

¹⁰ See Fourier, "The Passionate Series," in *The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier: Selected Texts on Work, Love, and Passionate Attraction*, ed. Jonathan Beecher and Richard Bienvenu (Boston: Beacon, 1971), 228–32.

¹¹ For the names of these passions, see Fourier, *Four Movements*, 152 n. 1.

¹² For the "sexual minimum," see Fourier, "The Nature and Uses of Love in Harmony," in *The Utopian Vision*, 336–40. The most thorough discussion of Fourier's idea of a "sexual minimum" occurs in Jonathan Beecher's authoritative intellectual biography, *Charles Fourier: The Visionary and His World* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1986), 305–6.

¹³ On the place of the orgy in Fourier's experience as well as in his utopian theory, see Beecher, 310–11. See also Fourier, "The Orgy," in *Harmonian Man: Selected Writings of Charles Fourier*, ed. Mark Poster (New York: Anchor, 1971), 261–80.

¹⁴ For this notorious passage, see Fourier, *Four Movements*, 50–51.

¹⁵ Peter Lamborn Wilson refers to a personal communication from Ginsberg as the source of his assertion about Whitman's having adopted the butterfly as an important figure for desire as "flitting" in his book *Escape from the Nineteenth Century and Other Essays* (New York: Autonomedia, 1998), 8 n. 2.

¹⁶ See Wilson, "The Shamanic Trace," in *Escape*, 131 n. 52.

¹⁷ Milburn asserts in a headnote to the version of "The Big Rock Candy Mountain" that he prints in *The Hobo's Hornbook*, "In many small cities and towns the children of poor whites used the railway yards as their playgrounds. From these urchins the jockers sometimes recruit the road kids, and to entice them they tell them roseate tales of tramp life." He goes on, "To homeguards [the non-hobo public] [it] may appear a nonsense song, but to all pied pipers in the know it is an amusing exaggeration of the . . . stories used in recruiting kids" (*The Hobo's Hornbook*, ed. George Milburn [New York: Washburn, 1930], 39).