

“ANY MAN TRANSLATES, AND ANY MAN TRANSLATES HIMSELF ALSO”

WHITMAN, MARTÍ, AND THE MOVING TEXT

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
Department of English

MAY 2010

To the Faculty of Washington State University:

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Abstract

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May 2010

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This paper discusses José Martí’s essay “El poeta Walt Whitman,” a review and translation of Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, to show that Martí made slight but significant changes to the poetry and, subsequently, to Whitman’s literary cast. Martí’s representation of Whitman merges the North American author with the speaker of the poems to create a single, laudable figure. This figure is formed through several translations, that is, movement of content and form of the subject text. The paper argues that these translations fit Whitman into Martí’s paradigm of the “natural man,” and re-present Whitman as to amplify his revolutionary angle, egalitarian attitude, and call for unity.

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CHAPTER ONE

TRANSLATIONS

In his 1887 essay, “El poeta Walt Whitman,” José Martí rebukes the North American public for their nearsightedness. The artificial erudition of university learning has led men “to balk at recognizing the true nature” of humankind (183),¹ and the maintenance of autocratic attitudes makes one “like an oyster in its shell, seeing only the prison that traps him” (187). These critiques certainly aim at the social institutions that affix the blinders, those that adhere to a European framework of knowledge, values, and practices that are no longer suitable for a new continent and a modern people. But Martí additionally speaks against the critics and readers who would not value poetry as “indispensable” to a community, as the spirit and life-force at the core: “There are people whose mental sight is so poor that they take the peel for the whole fruit” (187). It is these myopic readers, specifically those who would cursorily treat Walt Whitman, who Martí takes on directly. His essay is an unapologetic apology, a stern defense of and fervent tribute to the North American poet. Martí translates pieces of the poetry, integrating these pieces with his own high estimation of Whitman to argue that this mountain of a man marks “the birth of an era, the dawn of the definitive religion, the renewal of mankind” (192). Those who do not see Whitman as a natural man or approve of *Leaves of Grass* as honest, unencumbered expression only demonstrate their own shortcomings as readers.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, citations from the English-language text of “El poeta Walt Whitman” refer to Esther Allen’s translation. To negotiate the differences and difficulties of the translated text, I work with Arnold Chapman’s translation as well.

The role of perception is indeed crucial to the essay, as we recognize that Martí too sees Whitman. Far from myopic, Martí's work as a literary review covers wide coordinates and excavates great depths to both summarize and illuminate much of *Leaves of Grass*. What is more, Martí passed on his perspective of Whitman's work. As the U.S. correspondent to several Latin American newspapers during his nearly fifteen years in New York, the Cuban exile regularly published on North American events and figures.² A news item for its new subject, "El poeta Walt Whitman" appeared in Mexico's *El Partido Liberal* and Argentina's *La Nación*, thus serving as the introduction of *Leaves of Grass* to the Spanish-speaking Americas. Martí's essay does not constitute the first official translation of *Leaves of Grass* into Spanish. Álvaro Armando Vasseur's 1912 translation earns this designation for its more substantial work—that is, its translation of a greater number of poems (Cohen). Yet Martí's essay is in other ways substantial, as suggested by the Nobel Laureate and Spanish poet Juan Ramón Jiménez: "Whitman came to us, and to all Spaniards, through Martí" (33).

That Whitman traveled through Martí, and met with especially warm reception through Martí, first indicates a literary kinship between these American writers. Both wrote poetry, shared aesthetic principles that favored direct, unembellished language, and have retrospectively been credited for primary roles in the initiation of new, specifically American literary movements. Both writers also had full careers in journalism, acting as editors and contributors to several newspapers. Perhaps most notable, both men sounded a strident voice in the political sphere, with the word "liberty" ceaselessly from their throats. Whitman looked back to celebrate

² The *Escenas norteamericanas* constitute five volumes of his collected works. Martí wrote on a range of topics—voting procedures, holiday festivities, natural disasters—with an eye especially for politics and art. Emerson, Longfellow, Oscar Wilde, and Helen Hunt Jackson appear also in Martí's reviews and translations.

the Revolution of 1776, and Martí turned forward with the constant urge for Cuban independence. The high praise of Martí's review—praise that angles Whitman as “an apostle without blemish” (Alegria 72)—appears as confirmation to the fitness of pairing Whitman with Cuba's Apóstol. The essay prompts Manuel Gomez-Reinoso to write that, “All that [Martí] said of the North American prophet and *Leaves of Grass*, and all that he said of himself, leads us to affirm that they are one in spirit” (47-48). Gomez-Reinoso is right to mark the affinity of thought between Whitman and Martí. However, this affinity stems from more than a shared and determined creed.

What Martí says of the North American poet does as much to create an affinity as to affirm pre-standing parity. Martí's writing shows that he finds some degree of latitude, both in Whitman's text and in his own position that moves between reader, reviewer, and translator. Martí's selections from *Leaves of Grass*, his translations of the content and form of these selections, and his method of paraphrasing and embedding Whitman's poetry in his own evaluations, all effectively blur the lines of authorship. So blurred are these lines that Doris Sommer dubs the essayist “José Martí, Author of Walt Whitman.”

The tri-part activity of reading, interpreting, and translating occurs not only in inter-lingual movements, but inherently in the processing of all language, especially literary languages. Whitman's poetry exemplifies, even articulates this process, as the speaker of *Leaves* is as well a reader of the world, “Cautiously peering, absorbing, translating” (197).³ Yet the speaker also argues against the possibility of the full transference of meaning: “I too am not a bit

³ References to *Leaves of Grass* are to the 1881-82 edition. Determined by the poetry quoted in “El poeta Walt Whitman,” Martí was looking at a printing no earlier than the 1876 Author's Edition, a special double printing that included the developing *Leaves* and *Two Rivulets*. More likely Martí had access to one of the more numerous copies of the later edition. Martí's essay also references and draws fuel from the Boston banning of the 1882 edition.

tamed, I too am untranslatable” (78). These contradictions, the often ambiguous or complex qualities of literature, account for only one end of a text’s instability. Terry Eagleton proposes that texts are unstable in part because of the interpretive movements that readers necessarily effect:

we always interpret literary works to some extent in the light of our own concerns—indeed that in one sense of ‘our own concerns’ we are incapable of doing anything else...All literary works, in other words, are ‘rewritten’, if only unconsciously, by the societies which read them; indeed there is no reading of a work which is not also a ‘re-writing.’ (12)

Martí’s reading and subsequent rewriting of *Leaves of Grass* falls to both the undetermined aspects of Whitman’s poetry and to Martí’s “own concerns.” Best summarized as the pursuit of social justice, Martí’s concerns lead him to seek and exalt the exemplary figure of *justicia*. This figure is fierce, sincere, virile. He is an advocate of freedom, defender of the oppressed, and, above all, he is perceptive to the underlying union and equality of all peoples and things. It is this figure that the Whitman of *Leaves of Grass*—rather, Martí’s Whitman—comes to represent. As Whitman’s speaker writes “any man translates, and any man translates himself also,” the poetry anticipates its own movement—translations of symbol and significance, more so than of language (136). Rather than indict Martí for the corruption of an original work, this paper intends to investigate how he reads and re-presents Whitman as means to an enhanced view of the potential of Whitman’s poetry and the complexities of Martí’s own literary output. The process will, I hope, follow Martí’s bid to sharpen our perception and pry open the oyster’s shell.

CHAPTER TWO

WHITMAN'S WHITE BEARD: BECOMING THE *HIRSUTO* NATURAL MAN

José Martí begins his essay “El poeta Walt Whitman” with a linguistic portrait of his subject: “He seemed a god last night, seated in a red velvet chair, with his shock of white hair, his beard spread out on his chest, his eyebrows as thick as forests, his hand resting on his cane” (183). The line is quoted as Martí attributes the description to the morning’s paper. From the credible journalism of the *Sun*,⁴ reporting on Whitman’s recent appearance at the April 14 Lincoln Lecture at Madison Square Theater, this description would seem accurate and informative, a true rendition. To recall the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, the description would also seem to echo Whitman’s move to begin his book of poems with a self-portrait, a daguerreotype of the “rough.” The image of Whitman, arm akimbo and in workman’s garb, tilted hat and open collar, suggests that the ostensibly candid photograph copied by Samuel Hollyer employs certain compositional strategies—strategies that are only amplified when the image is used as frontispiece to Whitman’s literary debut. One critic summarizes the pictorial composition:

This working-class figure was part of Whitman’s revolt against the profession of authorship, his attempt to equalize the traditional hierarchical relationship between writer and reader by presenting the author as a democratic presence, a common man who speaks as and for rather than apart from the people. (Erkkilä, *Whitman* 3)

⁴ The likely source. Martí regularly read and wrote for Charles Dana’s paper. Lomas identifies a similar report on Whitman at the lecture published in the *Sun*. See *Translating Empire*, 179.

Martí would take to this rebellious and democratic voice, but employ his own image of the poet. Much as Whitman's daguerreotype is a composed element of his poetry, Martí's initial portraiture and continuing descriptions of Whitman are likewise compositions. Despite the displacement of authorial decision onto either a disinterested journalist or Whitman himself, Martí likewise uproots the traditional relationship between writer and reader and speaks for Whitman.

Rather than the thirty-something, unshaven rough of the 1855 *Leaves*, Martí meets Whitman—if not in life, then through the publications—as the sage and long-bearded poet. The wisdom of the North American's figure and words come together as Martí uses Whitman as example, instructing “El hombre” to reconcile the sad and unseemly aspects of existence with the beautiful: “he should drop his white beard over all things” (101)⁵ ‘sobre todo, debe dejar caer la barba blanca’ (*OC* 13.136).⁶ This bizarre depiction of charity and sagacity only approaches the grandeur of the opening portrayal. The image of the presiding Whitman, enthroned in a velvet chair and with a cane that acts more as regal prop than sign of feebleness, places the poet far above the proletarian and even royal roles, and in comparison with a god. The deification of Whitman, then, hits the highest note of a reviewer's praise, and asks if such praise can be sustained throughout the essay. Laura Lomas argues that Martí's initial depiction of Whitman “assumes a hyperbolic tone” (179). She continues that this hyperbole is the tip off for an essay

⁵ I use Chapman's translation here. Allen translates the line as “above all, he must let his white beard grow” (188). This rendering still draws on the image of the Old Gray Poet, perhaps to exemplify wisdom. Yet this reading loses the culminating force of a passage that encourages men to accept good and bad together and merge them (“fundirlo”) in their hearts, as if in an oven. Also of note, Martí's 1886 notebooks include this entry: “El verso de W. Whitman—de barba q. se enrolla” (21.279). Whitman's poetry is again associated with an encircling beard.

⁶ Citations of the Spanish-language text refer to Martí's *Obras Completas*.

that, through quiet subversion, levels a biting critique of the man who advocated for the nineteenth-century's version of U.S. imperialism in its approach to its southern neighbors.

Lomas and other critics introduce the crucial question of just how José Martí, adherent of Bolívar and the man who wrote "Justice first and art later," could so thoroughly praise Whitman (*OC* 15.433). Yet, even if it did come later, Martí still considers his art and advises against the use of exaggeration: "As soon as one discards the excess of dead leaves, the natural intensity and grace of the feeling flourish" (*OC* 22.74).⁷ The intensity of Martí's essay does not, however, preclude all unease with *Leaves of Grass*. Rather than mask critique, Martí draws out what in Whitman is praiseworthy, and in this way draws his portrait of the North American poet.

To see Whitman as Martí did, we should begin by following the trail of passages selected from *Leaves of Grass*. Martí's selection process is the first step to his translation and, as Andrés Olaizola has suggested, "each paraphrase, each quote will help to piece together a mosaic whose image is the figure of Whitman."⁸ What is more, how these selections are couched show and, in part, create an affinity between Martían and Whitmanian thought. This affinity lies in what Martí calls the "persona natural."

The first poetry fragment presented in the essay is taken from "So Long," the poem that closes the 1881 edition of *Leaves* and one that Martí would turn to again. Whitman's "I announce natural persons" (380) becomes in the essay, "So seems Whitman, with his 'natural persons,' with his 'Nature without check with original energy'" (Chapman 97). The line

⁷ My translation. Martí: "en cto. se le quita en la traducción la hojarasca del lenguaje poético... florecen la intensidad y gracia naturales del sentimiento."

⁸ My translation. Olaizola: "cada paráfrasis, cada cita ayudará a conformar un mosaico cuya imagen es la figura de Whitman."

cascades into another excerpt from *Leaves*, this time pulled from the initial chant of “Song of Myself.” The “natural person” speaks to these poets’ Romanticist and Transcendental roots that would value the individual’s ability to perceive in herself and in human nature the universals, the “quicksilver truths” (Coviello). The phrase also connects the individual to the physical world, positing that the natural environs likewise hold these truths for those who would discover them. In an earlier appraisal from the 1884 issue of *La América*, Martí writes that Whitman “breaks a branch from the forest, and in it finds poetry” (*OC* 8.428).⁹ For Martí’s Whitman, the natural world serves as both source and model for poetic truth. In “El poeta Walt Whitman” this model grounds Martí’s flourishes—“Pollen floats on the air, beaks exchange kisses, branches unfold their leaves, which seek the Sun, and everything breathes out its own music” (185)—and brings Martí back to the lilac tree, the movements of the sea, and the blades of grass that are alternately prominent markers in Whitman’s poetry.

Yet the “natural” moves beyond a regard for the physical world and the good in human nature. Ángel Rama, prominent Latin American scholar and author of “La dialéctica de la modernidad en José Martí,” places Martí on the cusp of *modernismo* and so identifies Martí’s “nature” as not only a philosophical but also a sociological concept to confront and reconcile the economic, social, and political imbalances encountered in modernity.¹⁰ Rama defines Martí’s “nature” as “harmonized totality” and “the inanimate part of the universe to which is applied the

⁹ My translation. Martí: “quiebra una rama de los bosques, y en ella halla poesía.”

¹⁰ Latin American Modernismo, it has been argued, signified not only a literary period defined by formal or aesthetic principles, but also by its confrontation of end-of-the-century social and spiritual crises. See Jorge Camacho’s chapter “Un paradigma para la modernidad: el concepto de crisis en el modernismo” for further treatment.

human tasks of discovery, transformation, and creation” (191).¹¹ Nature stands as a capacious and recondite conceptual model for the perfect reconciliation of all aspects of society. The natural person, then, is at center in a constellation of Whitmanian attributes that suggest a cosmos of correct, social order.

Asi parece. “So seems Whitman, with his ‘natural persons’” follows Martí’s second reference to the newspaper, this time to an article on William Ewart Gladstone, “that [other] revered old man” who advocated for Ireland’s self-governance (183). After his impressive address to the British Parliament, Gladstone “looked like a bristling mastiff, upright and unrivaled amid the throng, and those at his feet were like a pack of curs” (183). “Nature without check” becomes a loaded phrase, carrying a commanding animal force. “Natural persons” likewise includes Gladstone, or rather, his figure—the bold man who would fiercely give his opinion, and whose ferocity and opinion are derived from elsewhere than organized knowledge. That this opinion is an argument for a people’s self-governance is crucial to Martí’s definition of the natural. The universals discernable to the perceptive include the socio-political order of a people, specifically an order founded on *libertad*.

Martí does twice call up Whitman’s use of the Spanish language to invoke liberty, drawing once from “A Broadway Pageant” and restating this usage in summary at the end of the essay. Even greater time is given to this key concept with Martí’s prolonged attention to “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d,” “the mystical threnody” written on Abraham Lincoln’s death (185). As both leader of a people’s republic and uncompromising advocate of abolition,

¹¹ My translation. Rama: “la naturaleza pasa a ser la parte inanimada del universo sobre la que se aplica la tarea descubridora, transformadora, y creadora del hombre.”

Lincoln stands as admirable example of Martí's principles of liberty. Martí's mentions of Lincoln, elsewhere to this essay, show that the Cuban was drawn to the merger of Lincoln's rustic beginnings with his political identity, drawn to that man who "set his broad woodsman's foot inside the house of laws" (qtd. in Santovenia 18). The essay's re-creation of Whitman's poem does not directly eulogize the president. Instead, the compacted paraphrases pile up the many images of nature in the eight page poem:

All Nature accompanies the greatly lamented coffin as it travels to the grave. The stars foretold it. Black clouds appeared a month before. In a swamp, a gray bird sang a song of uttermost woe. Between the thought and the knowledge of death the poet journeys across the sorrowing field, as if between two comrades. (185)

In form and content Martí emphasizes nature's participation in mourning Lincoln and, indirectly, Whitman's ability to perceive these natural signs. Whitman's seamless weaving of life with death attracts his reviewer,¹² but together with the seamless workings of the natural and social worlds.¹³ Following with the single line paragraph—the staccato line juxtaposing the giant statement—Martí makes his most dramatic assessment of Whitman's writing: "All of his work is embodied there" (186).

The compression of Whitman's poetry that effectively merges natural and social forces finds analogous expression in what Stephen John Mack has called "Whitman's democratic

¹² He elsewhere draws from Chant 6 of "Song of Myself"—"the smallest sprout shows there is really no death" (183)—and again, "death is 'the harvest,' 'the opener and usher to the heavenly mansion'" (186), joining lines from "As I Watch'd the Ploughman Ploughing" and "Gods."

¹³ Susana Rotker identifies a similar connection between natural and social forces in Martí's documentation of the Charleston earthquake. She argues that, as his rendering of the earthquake destroys white wealth, Martí presents the tremor as nature's response to and rectification of class and racial inequalities (97).

cosmos” (45). Mack argues that Whitman constructs a pragmatic universe, one that posits the diversity of formation of the same material elements as both model for and authorization of the social and political equality of humans (41).¹⁴ Fittingly, Martí gravitates to Whitman’s catalogue and celebration of the working class. In his own catalogue, Martí brings together Whitman’s living situation with several passages from *Leaves of Grass*:

He lives in the country, where the man of nature works the free earth...but he does not live far from...“the work-people at their meals, conversing atop piles of bricks, the swift-running ambulance that bears the hero fallen from a scaffold, the woman taken suddenly in the crowd by the august labor of maternity.” (185)

Here, the natural man both works the land and values industrial laborers who constitute and further society, at times through sacrifice. Though presented as direct quotations, these passages shift from Whitman’s lines to emphasize the working class status of the poetic subject.

Whitman’s “the loud laugh of work-people at their meals” (51) is given a backdrop of bricks yet to be assembled. The image of scaffolding is likewise an addition to the other excerpt from “Song of Myself.” Originally “The flap of the curtain’d litter, a sick man inside borne to the hospital” (35), the sick man is instead an injured man and, notably, a hero in Martí’s translation. Martí’s translations work to efficiently portray and, in the small space, intensify Whitman’s admiration of the common worker. This quiet intensification as well corresponds to Martí’s own argument for the worth of the working class; Martí’s keen comprehension of language allows him to gently move Whitman to meet and make his argument.

¹⁴ Mack works with John Dewey’s suggestion that pragmatism and democracy are two sides of the same coin: “whereas pragmatism describes the philosophical (and metaphysical) assumptions that warrant democratic life, democracy describes the way humans should—and sometimes do—translate these assumptions into institutional form” (40).

The affinity for the common worker and its accompanying celebration of the democratic spirit collaborates with Martí's aversion for the "artificial intelligentsia" who espouse institutionalized knowledge (Allen 290). Inherited and over-valued institutions are, arguably, the target of Martí's most severe critique in "El poeta Walt Whitman": "schools, be they philosophical, religious, or literary, only straitjacket men as the livery does the lackey; men allow themselves to be branded, like horses and bulls" (183). These binding, branding institutions function in opposition to Whitman's unconventional verse. Only changing to third person, Martí quotes from "Song of Myself," "he has no chair, no church, no philosophy" (184). The juxtaposition of Whitman with the "schools" is, however, achieved more forcibly through Martí's own voice. The "molds" are first condemned in the essay as response to the March 1882 banning of *Leaves of Grass* by Boston attorney Oliver Stevens and The New England Society for the Suppression of Vice. Published by James R. Osgood & Co., as was first arranged, *Leaves* would have found "institutional validation" (Folsom). Yet, as Whitman refused to eliminate the great number of passages cited as "obscene," the 1882 edition finished its publication through a house in Philadelphia (Folsom). In his essay, Martí sardonically responds to the prohibition, "And of course it was banned, for it is a book of nature" (183). Unlike most estimations of *Leaves of Grass* that would align the volume's "naturalness" with an organic composition process or the verdure evoked by the title, Martí defines natural writing as born of self-attained knowledge and keen perception, as original and sincere creation that departs from pre-established forms. With Whitman's unprecedented poetics that continued to receive mixed reviews in the 1880s, Martí finds traction in the censure of decayed values as means to praise the poet. The book's prohibition, however, was not the only spur for defining Whitman as anti-

institutional. Earlier mention of Whitman, from the November 1881 *La Opinión Nacional* in Caracas, exhibits similar censure that predates the volume's prohibition:

A poet of the United States, famous for the nerve of his rhymes, the daring of his thoughts and the shamelessness—that at times approaches dishevelment—of his form, is preparing and keeping watch in the university city of Boston, in the cultured and pretentious Boston, a collection of his work: the poet is Whitman. (*OC* 23.81)¹⁵

“Preparing and keeping watch (*vigilando*)”, Whitman is presented as if lying in wait for the opportune moment to spring his poetry on the “pretenciosa Boston.” With some dramatization, Martí has nearly predicted the banning. As suggested by this 1881 review, the celebration of the poet Walt Whitman works as much to criticize these stale and pernicious institutions as the critique of these failing models work to illuminate Whitman's writing.

Rama corroborates that these flawed institutions appear as a principal concern not only in “El poeta Walt Whitman,” but throughout Martí's extensive writings.¹⁶ Similarly developed through the *obras*, nature's guidance is posited as the alternative to institutional models and its pursuit is presented as the supreme activity for moral man. Explicit treatment of natural persons comes again in Martí's most famed composition, “Nuestra América.” Gerard Aching writes on the role of the natural person in this essay:

Martí's response to blind imitation in certain *modernista* cosmopolitanism is to imagine and advocate the rise of a figure...that would incarnate the ideals of local knowledge and

¹⁵ My translation. Martí: “Un poeta de los Estados Unidos, famoso por el atrevimiento de sus rimas, la osadía de sus pensamientos y el desembarazo, -que raya a veces en descompostura,- de su forma está preparando y vigilando en la universitaria ciudad de Boston, en la culta y pretenciosa Boston, una colección de sus obras: el poeta es W[hitman].”

¹⁶ Rama identifies this strain in the preface written to Bonalde's poem on Niagara Falls. “Nuestra América” is the site of full expression of this unease.

governance. The “natural man,” a virile and noble organic intellectual of autochthonous knowledge, would vanquish artificial intelligentsia by overthrowing the local authority of books that do not correspond to the needs of the country. (159)

This description could as well point to Martí’s portrait of Whitman. I do not argue that Martí drew from Whitman the concept, even the term “natural man,” but that “El poeta Walt Whitman” was a site of earlier articulation for what would become a principal thread in Martí’s thought and, moreover, that Martí cast Whitman as example of this ideal figure.

Whitman’s free verse and freedom of subject, his, as Erkkilä called it, “revolt against the profession of authorship,” would seem to make him an excellent candidate for filling the figure of the natural man. However, several critics have suggested that Whitman’s candidacy is tainted by the expansionist politics that found expression in his newspaper editorials. Whitman’s support of David Wilmot’s Free Soil proviso, Polk’s annexation of Mexico, and the calls to induct Cuba into the nation,¹⁷ together have garnered enough weight to prompt Mary Cruz to call the essay on Whitman “one of the most surprising Martí’s creations.”¹⁸ As ardent advocate for Cuban independence and combatant of U.S. expansion, protectionism, and any institutional imposition, Martí would certainly not align the voice of the natural man with that of Whitman’s journalism.

¹⁷ Whitman’s “Gem of the Antilles,” an 1858 article published in the *Brooklyn Daily Times*, is most often cited for his support of taking Cuba. Rather than explicitly sponsor annexation, the article assigns it to “precedent” that Cuba will be seized. The physical description of the island and the account of the sugar cane industry do, however, argue that Cuba would be a valuable addition to U.S. territory. See *I Sit and Look Out*, 157. See also Mauricio González de la Garza’s book *Walt Whitman: Racista, Imperialista, Antimexicano* for a compilation of the editorials that present a less becoming side of Whitman.

¹⁸ My translation. Cruz: “Una de las más sorprendentes creaciones martianas.” See the article by the same title in *Anuario Martiano* 11 (1988): 130-39.

There is, however, no indication that Martí was familiar with Whitman’s contributions to the *Eagle* or Brooklyn’s *Daily Times*. Considering that most of the indicting articles were published in the 1840s and 50s and Martí arrived in New York decades later, Martí had little opportunity to become familiar. Yet, as Martí was an insatiable reader and as there remains possibility that his contemporaries recalled and recounted Whitman’s political commentaries, the case remains unsolved. A more productive point to consider, Laura Lomas argues that the encouragement of expansion appears as well in Whitman’s poetry. In outward agreement, Betsy Erkkilä writes that “Whitman’s *Eagle* editorials were a prose dress rehearsal for the political text of his poems” (*Whitman* 43). It is true that the later editions of *Leaves* have removed the line from the 1855 “A Song for Occupations” that declares the speaker sees “Not only the free Utahan, Kansian, or Arkansian...not only the free Cuban...not merely the slave...not Mexican native, or Flatfoot, or negro from Africa,” (2.33). Yet this deletion says less than other passages, such as the following from “Song of the Open Road,” whose full celebration of the self validates the prerogative of the speaker (or the speaker’s nation) to subsume his or her surroundings:

From this hour I ordain myself loos’d of limits and imaginary lines,
 Going where I list, my own master total and absolute,

 Gently, but with undeniable will, divesting myself of the holds that would hold me.
 I inhale the draughts of great space,
 The east and the west are mine, and the north and the south are mine. (12-23)

With the expansionist features of the editorials to inform the arrogant face of the poetry, Lomas contends that “Whitman’s lines of poetry charge forward by subduing resistance or difference,

trampling minor worlds, ostensibly in a charge for liberty and democracy” (186). While the poetry of *Leaves of Grass* operates in a subjectivity that extends over all boundaries and often with language of incredible force, reading an imperial conceit under cover of the calls for liberty, or rather, reading that conceit as the heavier claim, discounts the complexity of Whitman’s work. Ivy G. Wilson, in his article “Organic Compacts, Form, and the Cultural Logic of Cohesion; or, Whitman Re-Bound,” offers a useful concept for teasing out Whitman’s expansionist complexities. Wilson distinguishes between “an excess of nationalism” and “excessive nationalism,” whereby the latter’s unbound support of the nation manifests in imperial tendencies, and the former “attempts to negotiate multiple national identities within the space of the nation” (207-208). Rather than bring Whitman to one side, Wilson suggests that *Leaves of Grass* pushes at these edges, so that Whitman’s formulation of the supreme nation is “as much a transcendent idea as a hemispheric entity” (208). In the eclipsed lines from the above passage, Whitman’s speaker goes on, “Listening to others, considering well what they say, / Pausing, searching, receiving, contemplating” (122). The roaming speaker of “Song of the Open Road” looks less to subdue and trample as he listens to and considers the words of others. The movement from the speaker’s “undeniable will” to his contemplation of other subjectivities occurs here in miniature, a microcosm for the fluctuations and apparent contradictions of the volume as a whole.

Whether Martí detects excessive or only an excess of nationalism in *Leaves of Grass* is not clear, but he does register an imposing force. Lomas points out that Martí compares Whitman’s poetry to galloping horses that are driven by a “dominator’s fist” ‘puño de domador’

(Lomas 183).¹⁹ There is likewise suggestion of imposition when Martí depicts the effect of the poetry: “after listening for a while one can make out the sound of the surface of the Earth when triumphant armies are marching across it, barefoot and glorious” (193). Although such depictions alarm twenty-first century pacifist sensibilities, did they also alarm Martí? As seen in the paradigm of the natural person articulated in “Nuestra América,” virility and even the capacity for violence are admirable attributes:

The natural man is good, and esteems and rewards a superior intelligence as long as that intelligence does not use his submission against him or offend him by ignoring him—for that the natural man deems unforgivable, and he is prepared to use force to regain the respect of anyone who wounds his sensibilities or harms his interests. (290)

The force available to the natural man is presented nearly as a threat, but Martí is careful to mark that such force, if provoked, is consistent with moral action. Ángel Rama takes this call to action even further, concluding that, for Martí, it is through these exercises of force that one may reach and reclaim the harmony of nature (191).

More troubling than Martí’s depictions of militancy are the evocations of blood and rape to describe *Leaves of Grass*. He writes, “At times Whitman’s language is like the entrance to a butcher’s shop, hung with sides of beef;...then again it sounds like a rough kiss, like a rape [un forzamiento], like the snap of dry leather cracking in the Sun” (193). With the regular images of flesh—animal and human—and the recurrent attention to sexual activity in Whitman’s poetry, Martí’s descriptions may well be informed by his subject text, finding a level of synergy between

¹⁹ Allen translates the phrase as “horsebreaker’s fist” (193). The effect is largely the same, though Allen’s rendering adds the motive to tame the dominated subject.

topic and expression.²⁰ Describing the language, Martí also here comments on the scandal caused by *Leaves*, as the aggressive and indecorous language of the poems broke with earlier forms. One reviewer to the first edition of *Leaves*, Rufus Griswold, writes of his difficulty in finding appropriate language to discuss the volume: “we have found it impossible to convey any, even the most faint idea of its style and contents, and of our disgust and detestation of them, without employing language that cannot be pleasing to ears polite” (Price 27). Griswold does not, of course, have difficulty expressing his detestation, but his comment drives at something else—to use rough, ravishing, and whip-like language is to approve of such language. That Martí does not shy from matching Whitman’s brusque words indicates that his praise is sincere. Further, Martí’s characterization of his own poetry with similar, lashing language, links that aggressive language with valued ingenuous expression. In his prologue to *Versos Libres*, Martí writes, “These poems emerged written not in academic ink but in my own blood. . . . I love difficult sonorities and sincerity, even when it may seem brutal” (Allen 57).

Martí does seem brutal. On the sexuality encountered in “Children of Adam,” he draws a disturbing comparison:

one must have read the patriarchal genealogies of Genesis in Hebrew or followed naked and carnivorous bands of primitive men through the untracked jungle to find anything resembling the Satanic force with which, like a ravenous hero licking his bleeding lips, he describes the attributes of the female body. (189-90)

²⁰ From “A Song for Occupations”: “Beef on the butcher’s stall, the slaughter-house of the butcher, the butcher in his killing-clothes, / The pens of live pork, the killing-hammer, the hog-hook, the scalding tub, gutting, the cutter’s cleaver, the packer’s maul, and the plenteous winterwork of pork-packing,” (175).

Both devilish and heroic, Martí's image of predation is oddly evoked in a larger defense of the erotic poems. Metaphors of rape do not occur solely in his review of Whitman, however. Rama shows that hyper-masculine force, expressed at times through metaphors of rape, is presented as the mode for reaching the inanimate, underlying truths in nature: "His exhortations to Spanish Americans are combat orders, incitations for the violation of the 'virgin forests,' such that the attack results in the deflowering and possession of the inanimate that is transmuted in that act" (191-92).²¹ Thus, though rape and bloodshed are disquieting comparisons for Whitman's poetry, they participate in the model of the natural man. What is crucial is that such acts are only suggestion. Martí pulls Whitman back from the edge of offense: "One of the sources of his originality is the Herculean force with which he kneels before ideas as if he were going to violate them, when he is only going to kiss them with the passion of a saint" (189).

Martí is not simply enthralled, however. His acclamation of Whitman does not require that he found nothing unsettling in the provocative poetry. Sylvia Molloy, in "His America, Our America: José Martí Reads Whitman," shows that Martí is drawn to "Calamus" at the same time that he refutes the homoeroticism of these poems. His selective quotations, translations that turn the lines to negation, and even name-calling of those who read homosexual lust in the passages ["imbeciles," "lewd schoolboys" (Allen 189)], indicate an "insecurity" with these pages (Molloy 87). Molloy's argument is illuminating, not for drawing up Martí's personal views on sexuality, but for drawing out Martí's method of representation. The treatment of "Calamus" is the most

²¹ My translation. Rama: "Sus exhortaciones a los hispanoamericanos son órdenes de combate, incitaciones a la violación de las 'selvas vírgenes,' de tal modo que la acometida del trabajo resulta desfloración y posesión de lo inanimado que se trasmuta en ese acto" (191-92).

salient example of Martí's compositional strategies that, rather than camouflage critique, adjust Whitman's work.

It is to the archetype of the natural man that Whitman is adjusted. In the essay's introduction, Martí outlines this model man. When those who have been formed by the mold of pre-standing schools

find themselves in the presence of a man who is naked, virginal, loving, sincere, and strong—a man who goes forward, who contends, who pulls on his oar—a man who, not letting himself be blinded by misfortune, reads a promise of final happiness in the balance and harmony of the world; when they find themselves in the presence of Walt Whitman the father-man, muscular and angelic, they flee as from their own consciences and refuse to recognize this specimen of fragrant, superior humanity as the true *type* [tipo verdadero] of their species. (emphasis mine, Chapman 97)

Lomas rightfully balks at the assignment of “superior humanity” to the *Eagle* and *Daily Times* journalist who argued for the United States' seizure of neighboring countries (205). Yet Martí does not assign superior status to Whitman so much as to the “type”—strong and sincere, argumentative and active, perceptive of and close to natural harmony—that Whitman comes to represent. That Whitman serves as a specimen of humanity rather than example of late nineteenth-century U.S. expansionism is consistent with Susana Rotker's work on Martí's U.S. chronicles. Rotker finds that, rather than construct national types, Martí disregards territorial boundaries and even some personal histories to draft the model figure. “Each ‘type’ is elaborated from a real personality, but one whose specific biography does not matter much; what matters is creating an example (Rotker 53).

We may better see how Whitman becomes exemplar of superior humanity by returning to Martí's selections of *Leaves of Grass*. A replica of Chant 40 of "Song of Myself" appears in the essay. Whitman's 1881 poem includes the following stanzas:

To any one dying, thither I speed and twist the knob of the door,
Turn the bed-clothes toward the foot of the bed,
Let the physician and the priest go home.

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

I dilate you with tremendous breath, I buoy you up,
Every room of the house do I fill with an arm'd force,
Lovers of me, bafflers of graves. (66)

Martí incorporates a summary of Chant 40, preserving the narrative and the speaker's compassion for the downtrodden: "If a man is sick, he tells the physician and the priest to 'go home': 'I will embrace him, I will throw open the windows, love him, speak into his ear; you shall see how he grows well; you two are word and herb, but I can do more than you, for I am love [soy amor]'" (189). The speaker's "resistless will" is enacted rather than stated, as Martí's Whitman repeats "I will...I will." Significantly, Whitman's will is to express love. The methods of the priest and doctor—"word and herb"—are called out as insufficient because they do not administer love, the ultimate principle of "religion and life" (188). Although Whitman's *Leaves*

of Grass persona often speaks of actively loving and, as above, of being loved, the speaker never makes himself embodiment of the principle with the declaration “I am love.” Thus Martí moves Whitman to fill this greater role.

The departure from Chant 40 curiously complements another poem—Whitman’s “Recorders Ages Hence.” Whitman directly addresses his readers:

Recorders ages hence,

Come, I will take you down underneath this impassive exterior, I will tell you what to say
of me,

Publish my name and hang up my picture as that of the tenderest lover,

The friend the lover’s portrait, of whom his friend his lover was fondest,

Who was not proud of his songs, but of the measureless ocean of love within him, and
freely pour’d it forth, (102)

Name, song, and picture—Martí does publish Whitman. Yet Martí finds his own interior in what Whitman says to him. Notably, in the above reconstruction of Chant 40, Martí’s quotation marks bind neither the narrative nor the language derived from “Song of Myself.” Instead, Martí marks dialogue. Here, then, Martí speaks for Whitman.

What Martí keeps intact from Chant 40—Whitman’s dismissal and replacement of the doctor and priest—participates in the larger argument for the replacement of ill-fitting institutional models through contact with nature. Martí’s schema of nature is all encompassing, accounting for philosophical, social, and finally religious tenets. Pulling these facets together, Martí writes, “Liberty is the definitive religion, and the poetry of liberty the new form of worship. It soothes and beautifies the present, deduces and illuminates the future, and explains

the ineffable purpose and seductive goodness of the Universe” (187). With this redefinition of religion, the essay’s initial portraiture of a divine Whitman looks less like hyperbole than the first giant step to place the North American poet into Martí’s own mold. Rotker advises Martí’s readers to reevaluate his unusual analogies: “Martí sometimes launches into florescent prose that can seem overdone, hyperbolic. It must be read carefully to see that he does not inflate, and that there are no vacuous spaces” (71). The most unusual analogy—Whitman’s great, white beard spread over all things—is neither bathetic nor illustrative of U.S. expansionism. Reading carefully we find incredible cohesion between this analogy with one that Martí used for his own poetry: “my choppy *Free Verses*, my hirsute hendecasyllables, born of . . . the untamable love of liberty, or of the painful love of beauty” (*OC* 6.143).²² The hirsute lines draw together the rough language with the bearded face, both born of love. Whitman’s beard is Martí’s instructive image of love—the visual companion to Whitman’s adjusted words.

²² My translation. Martí: “mis encrespados *Versos Libres*, mis endecasílabos hirsutos, nacidos de . . . indómito amor de libertad, o de amor doloroso a la hermosura.”

CHAPTER THREE

TAKING LIBERTIES: REVISING THE WEAPON OF REVOLUTION

For the great Idea, the idea of perfect and free individuals,
For that, the bard walks in advance, leader of leaders,
The attitude of him cheers up slaves and horrifies despots.

Walt Whitman, "By Blue Ontario's Shore"

Leaves of Grass may have appealed to Martí in part because of the poem's wide embrace of all peoples and, with the celebration of the rough, its inversion of social hierarchies. In "El poeta Walt Whitman," Martí identifies by title "Salut au Monde!", and so identifies this "tremendous tally of peoples and races" as sign of Whitman's inclusive and laudable world vision (183). He goes on to fill in this vision, now describing the writer rather than the writing: "He is of every cast, creed, and profession and finds justice and poetry in all of them" (188). It is those lower castes, the working and enslaved classes that particularly titillate Whitman and mark for Martí a source of poetry. And within these classes it is the African American slave that enables Whitman, via Martí, to "find justice." Martí's representation of Whitman's compassion for and violent defense of the black slave constitutes the reviewer's largest footprint on Whitman's text, a print that straddles a reader's interpretation and a writer's revision. Recalling Eagleton's argument that reading is also always rewriting, Martí's reworking of Whitman's text may be accounted for by this reader's own concerns. Beyond these constant interpretive conditions of reading and writing, Martí's mark on Whitman is significant, even if subtle. Martí's re-presentation is one that animates the North American poet as actively revolutionary in depiction, and actualizes the Cuban essayist as combatant of social injustice in practice.

Whitman's attractive approach to equality recognizes different identities at the same time that it transcends the boundaries of race, class, occupation, gender, religion, and nationality. This transcendence is, at times, exemplified by the poetic persona's occupying of alternate identities. The speaker of "Song of Myself" at one point declares "I am the hounded slave" and continues with a graphic description, in the present tense, of being hunted, shot at, and finally beaten over the head with whip handles (60). The persona then explains this transport as embodied sympathy: "I do not ask the wounded person how he feels...I myself become the wounded person, / My hurt turns livid upon me as I lean on a cane and observe" (60). Through this embodiment the speaker is enabled to feel anger as if for receipt of a personal injustice. This anger, however, only disables and returns him to a position apart, that of the inactive observer. Although Whitman, the poet, acts against this social injustice by writing and publishing the emotive scene, Whitman's speaker does not move to remedy this hurt.

Martí makes note of this passage of sympathetic embodiment, saying of Whitman that "He is the slave, the prisoner, he who fights, the one who falls, the beggar" (191). This sympathy, deeply internalized though not embodied, also appears in Martí's own poetry. Verse XXX of *Versos Sencillos*, a significant if small collection of poems published in New York in 1891, treats the subject of slavery with great pathos. The first quatrain depicts a fierce storm over a newly arrived slave ship, and the storm's unrest metaphorically continues through the poem as the human cargo walk in file, a mother cries, and the rising sun illuminates a dead slave, hanged in a tree. The final stanza identifies a witness for these disquieting images:

Un niño lo vio: tembló

De pasión por los que gimen:

¡Y, al pie del muerto, juró
Lavar con su vida al crimen!
A boy saw him there and shook
With passion for the oppressed:
And at his feet an oath took
That this crime would be redressed. (Tellechea 88-89)

Readers may view the child as Martí himself, and the troubling scene as the images that haunted him and required expression many years later.²³ The implied narrative of a man who would carry out his childhood oath does, however, bear “a touch of romantic idealism” (Fernández 122).²⁴ Whether or not the poem is rooted in the author’s lived experience, the “passion for the oppressed” and a life dedicated to redressing crimes against humanity have certain reverberation with the dedications and decisions of José Martí’s activism. A crucial difference between the envisioned vision of the boy of verse XXX and the imagined victimization of Whitman’s speaker is the former’s movement toward active response, even if this action can, for the boy, only be a resolve for the future.

Much like Whitman and his poem of the “hounded slave,” Martí’s resolve to redress crimes against humanity is fulfilled in large part through his writing, though not only his writing of poetry. In “A Town Sets a Black Man on Fire,” an essay published in *El Partido Liberal* in 1892, Martí forcibly demonstrates that the debasement of African Americans was to be

²³ Gastón J. Fernández de Cárdenas argues that the affected child of these final lines is Martí himself. Fernández de Cárdenas follows the Cuban’s biography to pinpoint the occasion for a nine-year-old Martí, accompanying his father to work in Hanábana, to observe slavery and its atrocities firsthand (122).

²⁴ My translation. Fernández de Cárdenas: “un toque de idealismo romántico.”

denounced at all times. The essay begins by surveying the degrading cakewalks held in New York, passes to a group of displaced persons traveling from “Indian territory,” and closes with a scene of mob rule in Texarkana that burns a black man before law can intervene (Allen 310-313). The result is a disturbing map of cruelty that stretches over the North and South, East and West of the United States. The essay lays bare the persistence of racism post emancipation, even in the abolitionist North, and suggests that these indignities continued to pain Martí throughout his life. The “race question,” then, is one that pervaded both the poesy and politics of José Martí, and one that he approached consistently through both.

In another parallel between these canonical American writers, Whitman as well gives attention to African Americans outside the arena of poetry, though with less consistency in his approach. This inconsistency has been problematic for readers who would put Whitman’s other, ostensibly non-fiction writings, alongside his poetry. In addition to keeping correspondence with various acquaintances, Whitman worked closely, beginning in 1838, with numerous newspapers and magazines as both editor and contributing writer. The result is an immense album of “candid” pieces – essays, editorials, and later published personal letters – that often present views that would seem to blatantly contradict the sympathy and radical social equality of *Leaves of Grass*. As shown by this excerpt from an 1874 essay hostile to African American suffrage, some sentiments less receptive to persons of color and other nationalities pervade even his late writings: “As if we had not strained the voting and digestive caliber of American Democracy for the last fifty years with the millions of ignorant foreigners, we have now infused a powerful percentage of blacks, with about as much intellect and caliber (in the mass) as so many baboons” (Holloway 57). Even if highly rhetorical, the attack on both African Americans and foreigners

would seem to come from a different hand than the one that wrote of *being* a slave or the one who received the feeling praise of Fanny Fern for being “something beside a mere Catholic-hating Know Nothing” (Price 46). Even as Fern has good grounds for disassociating Whitman from the xenophobic Know Nothing party, the “something” that Whitman *is*, the question of how to read these disparate Whitmans together, has aggrieved a line of critics and readers, and led to four interpretive party formations. The first group argues that as writer of nonfiction, the editorialized Whitman must regrettably be understood as the true man. The second privileges the poetry as truth, or at least all that is important, and the third regards the poetry as the mature expression of a man who underwent great personal and ideological development. The final party sees Whitman as “contain[ing] multitudes” and, more than being contradictory, working consciously to confront the contradictions that implicated Whitman as well as other writers of the period (Outka 300). With any of these evaluations, the incongruous political and social views of the Whitman of *Leaves* and the Whitman of the periodical create an ambiguity of incredible importance.

In “Whitman and Race: (‘He’s Queer, He’s Unclear, Get Used to It’),” Paul H. Outka offers an additional approach to Whitman’s disparate attitudes toward African Americans. Using what Queer theorists have done with Whitman as model, Outka argues that, in the poetry, Whitman “was never particularly engaged by truth, identity, or position, but instead preferred the unsettlement of fixed epistemologies, the imperative ‘Allons!’ of ‘Song of the Open Road’ to any final destination” (301). Outka finds that Whitman’s poetry shows intrigue in race relations for the taboo of intimacy between black and white peoples, especially for the erotic intimacy that “amalgamation” suggests. As Whitman developed this taboo in the editorials, these two arenas

interact as a “circuit” rather than “a contradiction or continuum” (302). Although Outka’s evaluations may not any better resolve the difficulty of a historicized reading of *Leaves of Grass*, he proposes a valuable concept for the poetry’s capacity to move, or rather, its anticipated movement:

The racially progressive quality of Whitman’s verse does not come from the specific political stance he takes; there is arguably no *explicit* contradiction between the journalism and the poetry. Rather, the difference comes in what I would call the *trajectory* of the poem, its implicit *telos*, the way the poem’s energy surges against the boundaries the reasonable journalist sets for it. It is not the poem’s destination or content, but its direction, its tendency. (302)

Though resisting commitment to a single stance, Whitman’s poetry is potently suggestive for the track it seems to run. Even Martí highlights this characteristic of the poetry, as one of his closing observations in “El poeta Walt Whitman” summarizes, “instead of adopting the pedestrian form of argument or the high-sounding form of oratory, his reasonings emerge from the mystery of insinuation” (194). As wonderful as are the devices of suggestion and implication, the “implicit *telos*” of *Leaves of Grass* raises the question of how much of this direction is given in the poetry and how much is taken up by the interpreter, allowing the reading practices to make a destination that the poetry itself does not arrive at.

Whitman makes use of this noncommittal mode of suggestion beginning with the earliest iteration of the poetry, as with the 1855 “Song of Myself,” and maintains the style throughout the multiple revisions. Chant 10, kept intact through this 1881 reprinting, is a key passage for the

treatment of slavery in *Leaves of Grass*. This passage depicts the (presumably white) free speaker of the poem taking a fugitive slave into his home:

The runaway slave came to my house and stopt outside,
I heard his motions crackling the twigs of the woodpile,
Through the swung half-door of the kitchen I saw him limpsy and weak,
And went where he sat on a log and led him in and assured him,
And brought water and fill'd a tub for his sweated body and bruis'd feet,
And gave him a room that entered from my own, and gave him some coarse clean
clothes,
And remember perfectly well his revolving eyes and his awkwardness,
And remember putting plasters on the galls of his neck and ankles;
He staid with me a week before he was recuperated and pass'd north,
I had him sit next me at table, my firelock leaned in the corner. (36)

More than hospitality or compassion, the passage narrates the remaking of race relations. With the image of the bath, the poem suggests a washing away of slavery; the plasters over the wounds indicate healing from suffered indignities; the shared table lends a vision of equality; the proffered bedroom, accessible only through the speaker's room, suggests intimacy. And though such care would have registered with contemporary readers as a questionable moral obligation, this act, first published five years after the enacting of the Fugitive Slave Law, would have unquestionably registered as illegal.

The assumed equality of these figures and the radical compassion of the speaker in Chant 10 are, however, internally complicated. The speaker is the figure with agency, initiating the

relationship when the fugitive is weak, and responsible for the rest of the action in the poem. The fugitive slave, with memorable “awkwardness” and “revolving eyes,” appears to feel like an uncomfortable guest. Corresponding to Outka’s reading, the suggestion of intimacy in turn suggests the speaker’s erotic interest in the fugitive slave. The anaphora of “And..And” may reinforce the merging of bodies and mixing of races that amalgamation would entail. This erotic interest and the undercurrent of inequality are most destabilizing when considered with the wonderfully ambiguous firearm that sits in the corner and at the end of the poem. The weapon functions as another symbol of power, specifically power through violence. Whether the gun is kept close or set aside, whether the intended use is against those pursuing the fugitive or to maintain a certain relation at the table, is unclear.

The suggestive firelock also serves as what Betsy Erkkilä calls “The specter of revolution” (21). In her article “Revolution in the Renaissance,” Erkkilä argues that nineteenth-century American literature was imbued with “a mode of revolutionary thinking” (21). The period is informed by its historical inheritance—the American, French, and Haitian revolutions—as well as the concurrent 1848 revolutions in Europe, the Civil War, and other social crises that followed. This backdrop influenced both the form and content of these texts, and Whitman’s work stands as one very good example. Erkkilä notes that *Leaves of Grass* was first published “on or about” 4 July, some of the poems are later named in reference to political upheavals, and, as is the case for one edition of *Leaves of Grass*, the publication information comes in revolutionary terms, dated “Year 85 of The States (1860-61)” (24). With this context and Whitman’s embrace of the American Revolution, the firelock in the kitchen suggests the lingering presence of violent change in the larger social scene.

Martí's representation of Chant 10 in "El poeta Walt Whitman" moves to revive this specter of violent revolution. Condensing the lines as the story-scene allows, Martí writes of Whitman, "When the slave arrives at his door, pursued and sweating, he fills the bathtub for him and seats him at the table, a loaded firelock in the corner to defend him with. If they come to attack him, he will kill the pursuers and sit back down at the table, as if he had killed a viper!" (191). Here, then, is the literal realization of Eagleton's observation that reading is also rewriting.

In a chapter note, Anne Fountain acknowledges that "The very last part of Martí's description is a departure from Whitman's text. Martí may have felt that it represented Whitman's feeling, even if it was not part of the poem" (133). Whether Martí is more faithful to Whitman's feelings or his own cannot be determined. What can be determined is that Martí's Whitman becomes rebellious for more than breaking the Fugitive Slave Law, but for committing murder. This idealized rebellion posits that Whitman would kill the vigilantes with no greater qualm than shooting a snake, reducing humans to despicable animals. Martí's association of the slave's pursuers with animals inverts the hunter-hunted relationship and counters the more frequently drawn connection between African Americans and animal species, such as Whitman's troublesome alignment of an uneducated black population with baboons. Symbol of sin and depravity, the snake also works to justify Whitman's counteraction as moral action. The offense of the slave hunters constitutes the provocation that authorizes the natural man to resort to violence.

While the natural man in this scenario becomes increasingly violent, Whitman's revisions to the larger sequence of Chant 10 in fact show a softening of violence in the later edition. In the

1855 chant, a firearm appears three times, once with a trapper set to marry a Native American woman: “One hand rested on his rifle...the other hand held firmly the wrist of the red girl” (1.181). The aggression of the trapper is toned down in the 1881 edition; he appears without a gun as “he held his bride by the hand” (36). This change is progressive, positing a marriage across races under more peaceful circumstances, and elimination of the weapon shows a move, if only slight, away from violence. Yet Martí moves Whitman in the other direction. Writing Whitman’s progressivism as violently enacted, the retelling also rewrites the inaction seen with the chant of the “hounded slave.” The firelock substitutes the speaker’s supportive cane and the compacted translation removes much of the speaker’s observations, all to rewrite this Whitman as a man of action. More than interpretation, then, Martí’s essay constitutes a revision of Whitman as, actually, revolutionary. Erkkilä argues that Whitman participated in “a mode of revolutionary thinking that transgressed the legal limits and nation-centered forms set in place by the Constitution of the United States in 1787,” (21). Through Martí, his revolutionary thinking is extended beyond not only his lifetime, but also, I believe, his intellectual vision. One hundred years after the Constitution, Martí takes liberty with Whitman’s work to take Whitman beyond his nationalistic focus through a revision, a re-visioning that is itself component to revolution.

Martí’s poetic (re)vision is illuminated by his historical position. Slavery was a primary issue for Cuban politics because of the large slave population—an estimated 750,000 slaves were brought to the island between 1763 and 1862 (Pérez 63). This population provided the human labor that enabled the production of sugar, and thus enabled Cuba’s economic health.

Satisfaction with the plantation economy and fear of broken social ranks actually discouraged many Cuban Creole elite from embracing the fervor for independence that was sweeping Spain’s

mainland colonies (Pérez 74). For many others though, that colonial structures facilitated the system of slavery was a very good reason for separating from Spain. Louis A. Pérez explains that “Once the momentum for Cuban separatism passed on to the popular classes, the meaning of independence, indeed, the promise of independence, could no longer be restricted simply to the ending of Spanish rule. It perforce expanded, and included political equality, social justice, and, above all, the abolition of slavery” (75). Martí’s approach to independence took this later strain, as he urged for change to create more than political autonomy, but also social justice (Pérez 109). Cuba’s gradual move to abolition did come finally in 1886, and of which Martí would write, “The abolition of slavery is the most pure and transcendental act of the Cuban revolution” (qtd. in Fernández 126).²⁵

Martí praises the former slaves for their participation in the Ten Years War and, in fact, considers this proof of “the moral and human quality of the black slave” (Fernández 126).²⁶ This praise of and propensity for violent response to social injustice, the unbending duty that would match Martí’s representation of a Whitman quick to use the firelock, was also definitive of the Cuban Revolutionary Party initiated by Martí. Unlike the Autonomists, the other reform party that sought change through unarmed lobbying, the primarily expatriate members of CRP unified around the justification of taking liberty by force and maintained “a persistent commitment to arms” (Pérez 108). Martí’s personal commitment to arms is confirmed with his organization and participation in the separatists’ 1895 uprising against Spain, the same that resulted in his death.

²⁵ My translation. Martí: “La abolición de la esclavitud...es el hecho más puro y transcendental de la revolución cubana.”

²⁶ My translation. Fernández: “la calidad moral y humana del negro esclavo.”

Yet Martí would in his notebooks insist “I am not—and God save me from being—an inveterate revolutionary. I do not bind my life to tumults. But it doesn’t matter to me whether the fulfillment of a duty is unpopular: I fulfill it, even if it is unpopular” (Allen 73). Although the unpopular duty manifests, in Martí’s biography and his essay, as a call to arms, I would like to take Martí at his word and reconsider his alignment with violence. In “Nuestra América,” his most famed essay that urges for Latin American unity to withstand the encroaching northern power, Martí also begins with a hostile tone—turning an image of blossoming bushes to militant marching trees—but encourages a single and singular means of battle: “weapons of the mind” (Allen 288). Martí calls for a mental fortification, a fortification to be constructed through exposure to and critical understanding of more than one’s own small world, but the workings of the international spheres and the existence of universal truths. This exposure and understanding would, presumably, lead Latin American communities and nations to recognize each other and stand together. Martí elaborates, “A vital idea set ablaze before the world at the right moment can, like the mystic banner of the last judgment, stop a fleet of battleships” (Allen 288). The vital idea in “El poeta Walt Whitman” is that there exists a poet who sees liberty and unity, especially in the right union of people of all races. His poetry, if only received as it deserves, has the power to unify. Martí’s review, circulating an adjusted Whitman at both ends of Nuéstra America (Mexico and Argentina), itself becomes the weapon.

Paul Giles accounts for the psychological and emotional aims of this fortification: “Martí’s idea of liberty, in fact, involves not so much pragmatic or economic concerns, but a triumph of the imagination, an emancipation of the spirit, which is why he is so keen to endorse the mythological emblems of America” (186). Martí works to cultivate imagination and spirit

through his essays on the Brooklyn Bridge and his gravitation to the figures of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. With Martí's own declaration that he "would sculpt in porphyry the statues of the extraordinary men who forged the Constitution of the United States of America," these emblems are specifically those figures that embody a revolutionary spirit (qtd. in Giles 186). The figure of the poet, one who is foremost concerned with imagination and spirit, merits her own statue. More than endorsing already mythologized figures, Martí adds one to the list.

Part and parcel to this mythologizing of figures of freedom is the focus on Whitman the poet, the living and historical man. This Whitman is, however, largely known and constructed through the speaker of *Leaves of Grass*. Opening with an image of the Old Gray Poet and combining quotes and paraphrases from *Leaves* with biographical details, Martí re-presents Whitman through a curious conflation of the poetic speaker and historical man. The speaker's recollection of the one-time meeting with the fugitive slave is through Martí made a current and continual occurrence—"When the slave arrives...he fills a bathtub for him"—and a definition of Whitman's character through determined future action—"If they come to attack him, he will kill the pursuer." Thus the armed defense of a fleeing slave is born of the passage from *Leaves of Grass*, but applied to the character of *el poeta*, the writer. Other passages excerpted in the essay act similarly, so that Martí constructs not just one Whitman with determined lines around this figure's political position, but the "real" Whitman from lines of poetry worked over by two men. This practice, then, bypasses the problem of how to read the disparate Whitmans of the periodicals and the poetry.

Martí does not, however, light on the biographical details of Whitman's sexuality. The suggestions of homoeroticism in *Leaves of Grass* are not taken to the end of their poetic trajectory since the Whitman that Martí puts in porphyry is one who celebrates only platonic male relations. Martí removes mention of the bedroom from Chant 10 and so removes the suggestion of physical intimacy and amalgamation—a suggestion that is only strengthened when reading the chant in sequence with the rest of “Song of Myself,” as the sexually-charged scene of “twenty-eight young men bath[ing]” immediately follows (37). Sylvia Molloy argues that Martí read and reproduced the North American's poetry in such a way as to capitalize on and adapt Whitmanian male bonds to his own ends. Molloy establishes the Cuban's preoccupation with masculinity and male bonds that, for Martí, translates to an ideal model for familial and political relations. She elaborates on Martí's attraction to and adaptation of Whitman:

In Whitman's communal masculinity Martí recognizes his own all-male affiliative model, the revolutionary family of sons and fathers confounded in a continuum of natural, unhierarchical masculine emotion, and he also recognizes the political, specifically *American*, potential of that model, which he will elaborate in later essays. (90)

This half recognized, half created model of male relations guides the reader's experience of Whitman: “Imagine the strange new effect produced by this language swollen with animal pride when he celebrates the passion that unites men” (190). This union of men is the table to which Whitman returns after discharging the firelock.

A union of men is also established compositionally between Walt Whitman and José Martí. With a formal consideration of the Chant 10 rewrite, the paraphrased passage does not mark itself as either translation or offspring of *Leaves of Grass*. His penchant for paraphrase not

only blurs the lines of poet and poetic persona, but also of reviewer and source, as Martí rarely signals the movement from his own personal estimation to excerpts of the poetry. Except where quoted, Whitman becomes indistinguishable from—amalgamated with—Martí.

As is the prerogative of the reviewer, Martí's alteration to Chant 10 to make and mythologize Whitman as a defender of the oppressed, an advocate of the perfect union of men, and an example of the revolutionary spirit constitute a reader's interpretation rather than an editorial manipulation or corruption. This funneling of Whitman, moving the suggestions of *Leaves* to certain ends, also constitutes a most active and potent response to the political and social crises of the late nineteenth century, a response that was also most effective with Spanish and Latin American readers: "So brilliantly inspired was Martí's exegesis that no one dared contradict him" (Alegria 72). And it is a response that fulfills either a young boy's or an advanced writer's oath to "lavar con su vida al crimen."

CHAPTER FOUR
A FORMAL UNION

Almost everything written about Whitman is ruined by two persistent errors. One is the summary identifying of Whitman, the conscientious man of letters, with Whitman the semi-divine hero of *Leaves of Grass*...The other, the senseless adoption of the style and vocabulary of his poems, that is to say, the adoption of the very same amazing phenomenon which one wishes to explain.

Jorge Luis Borges

Writing forty-five years after the publication of “El poeta Walt Whitman,” Jorge Luis Borges provides a mid-stream look at what the Whitman-Martí relationship gave rise to—a descendent line of Latin American admirers and imitators. Borges’ first criticism of these adherents tunes in to the care of authorial composition and the special threat of sliding from self-composition to lived identity—a threat as well as an invitation when the poetic persona speaks in direct address and shares the author’s name [“Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son,” (48)]. The aim of his second complaint, the rebuke of “senseless” imitation of Whitman’s poetic style, is not immediately clear, considering Borges did appreciate Whitman’s writing (Alegria 71). Rather than criticize *Leaves of Grass*, Borges speaks against imitation itself and in favor of the deliberate use and ownership of language. Indeed, that ownership expressed in Whitman’s work helped to gain him admiration, at least from his 1887 reviewer. Martí is certainly guilty of the first of Borges’ criticisms, as he consolidated the author and speaker of *Leaves of Grass* to advance the single, laudable figure of the revolutionary and “natural man.” As for the second, formal and stylistic imitation may well result from Martí’s introduction of Whitman to the Spanish-speaking world, but not from Martí’s own practice. Despite his praise for Whitman’s

poetic departure, Martí does not imitate the distinct form of the apparently formless poems in his *Versos Sencillos*, a volume of poetry published in 1891, only a few years after his Whitman review. More importantly, Martí's does not imitate the extended lines even as he translates and represents the poetry in his essay. Even though Martí had not purported to create a translation, only a literary review, his decision to describe rather than replicate the style of Whitman's poetry is significant. Rather than the "senseless" use of language, Martí's decisions regarding Whitman's style tell us something about his own poetics. Much as he harnessed the figure of Whitman to fit a social, political and philosophical vision, Martí's formal rendering of the translated lines moves the poetry, amplifying and acting on the freedom of the free verse. Martí's formal adaptations are also significant for their effect, as we find in the result the response to Whitman's call, "I announce a man or a woman coming, perhaps you are the one" (381). Martí comes after Whitman to match his predecessor through his own poetic departure.

Many of Whitman's earlier reviewers found his work to resemble prose as much as, or more than, poetry. One reviewer from *Life Illustrated* describes Whitman's writing as "lines of rhythmical prose, or a series of utterances (we know not what else to call them), unconnected, curious, and original" (Price 8). Whitman's utterances, his lengthy lines of free verse, often met the margin before finishing, creating a surge of language that visually wrapped down the page. Even the poet's famed patron, Ralph Waldo Emerson, had trouble placing Whitman's work generically. In Emerson's July 21, 1855 letter to Whitman—the same letter that held Emerson's renowned line, "I greet you at the beginning of a great career" (Emerson)—Jay Grossman has found that not once does Emerson refer to *Leaves of Grass* as poetry, nor to Whitman as a poet (76). Grossman argues that the changes made to the second edition of *Leaves*—separating the

poems by assigning titles, including in each title the designation “Poem,” and reprinting (without permission) Emerson’s letter among other mixed reviews in the back—mark Whitman’s response to Emerson’s inhibited praise. Whitman’s staking of generic ground is confirmation of the author’s stylistic deliberation. Thus, however prose-like the writing, Whitman demanded that his work be read as poetry.

Far from Emerson’s letter, Martí’s review valorizes Whitman as a poet. In addition to repeating the appellation and expounding on the crucial role of poetry in society, the essay “El poeta Walt Whitman,” unlike Martí’s essays on other U.S. poets, situates Whitman in his field through its title.²⁷ Even more vigorously, Martí argues that, thirty years later, *Leaves of Grass* continues undervalued as American poetry. Martí taps into a contemporary international debate on the value of Whitman’s verse, citing the article by English critic Robert Buchanan that snapped at the over-Atlantic literati who did not sufficiently appreciate their national poet.²⁸ Yet, despite these affirmations to Whitman’s sure position as poet, Martí’s translations of *Leaves of Grass* do not formally make the same assertion. The essayist’s propensity for the pastiche, his tendency to paraphrase, rearrange, and compile the poetry without representing line breaks, moves Whitman’s writing away from prose-poems and closer to poetic prose. For example, Martí assembles several passages from Chant 24 of “Song of Myself.” Whitman’s poem begins

²⁷ Although Martí celebrates both Emerson and Longfellow as poets, the titles for these celebrations are only the writers’ names. See *Obras Completas*, v. 13, pp. 17 and 225.

²⁸ Whitman slyly started the debate when he wrote an article arguing that *Leaves* was unduly disregarded. He published “Walt Whitman’s Actual American Position” unsigned in *West Jersey Press* in 1876. Whitman then sent copies to prominent readers in England, Denmark, and Ireland, and so solicited Buchanan’s passionate defense (Folsom). Martí becomes unknowing accomplice to Whitman’s own agitations when he calls up this debate in his essay.

with self-naming and continues to elaborate on the individual's parity and connection with all things:

Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son,
Turbulent, fleshly, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding,
No sentimentalist, no stander above men and women or apart from them,
No more modest than immodest.

Unscrew the locks from the doors!

Unscrew the doors themselves from their jambs! (48)

Eight stanzas and twenty-two lines later, Whitman writes, "Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or am touch'd from" (49). This consecration is embedded in a larger celebration of the human body, a celebration in language both spiritual and erotic. In the essay, the lines fuse together:

He wants doors with no locks and bodies in their natural beauty; he believes he sanctifies all that he touches or that touches him, and he finds virtue in all corporeality; he is "Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son, turbulent, fleshly, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding, no more nor less than anyone else."²⁹

The fused lines present a visual argument other than what Martí details in words. In his own prose, Martí closely attends to the formal qualities, even counting syllables to explain the

²⁹This English translation is a hybrid of Allen (190) and Chapman's work (103), used in effort to best represent Martí's choices with both form and content. Allen shows that Martí embedded the quotation in the paragraph, whereas Chapman departs from Martí's version by setting the quotation apart as three lines. As Allen goes directly to *Leaves of Grass* to retranslate the quoted lines, Chapman better represents the slight content change to the final line of this passage.

irregularity of the lines: “One line has five syllables, the following line forty, and the one after that ten” (193). However, the translated lines, dismantled and reassembled into paragraphs, do not represent the irregularity of the seemingly haphazard poetic line. In this way, Martí’s translations are not merely linguistic, but generic as well.

The translation of poetry into prose is one method proposed by translation theorists, though the great minority, as means of negotiating the difficulties of the task. A translation that acts as thorough explication, it is argued, better guarantees the experience of a poem through the ease of prose (Weissbort xii). Clive Scott argues that, rather than a simplification of expression, prose translations afford their own freedoms and “resourcefulness” for maintaining the communicative aspect of the text (qtd. in Boase-Beier 194). Yet, whether the translation of poetry is even possible has been questioned by many. The difficulty of achieving equivalence in the translation of any literature—the difficulty of negotiating the “literal-communicative-elegance triangle” (Jones 153)—is only amplified with a text that derives considerable meaning from style or, as Jean Boase-Beier suggests, with “a text in which style is the main repository of meaning” (195). The indispensability of form and style in constituting the poetic voice has led Roman Jakobson to argue that the translation of poetry is indeed impossible, and that only “creative transposition” remains (qtd. in Boase-Beier 195). Jakobson’s term does not denote a new model for translation practices, but a desire to rename the same processes so to acknowledge difference created in translation.

Martí’s translations first suggest an adherence to Jakobson’s conclusion that only “creative transposition” is possible. Martí was sensitive to form; his own poetry shows great regard for form and, moreover, for its relation to content. Martí’s successor, Rubén Darío, writes

that Martí's *Versos Libres* are "free because they are blank hendecasyllables, without consonance or assonance; free because they are verses of liberty" (qtd. in Alemany 127).³⁰ From the author himself, Martí detects a crucial relationship between form and content in Whitman's work, as, in an 1890 article in *El Partido Liberal*, he succinctly refers to Whitman's poetic contribution as "revolutionary rhythm" (*OC* 5.190). Yet, unable to satisfactorily reproduce this linkage, Martí privileges content and responsibly opts to describe the formal features lost in translation. The decision to privilege the content suggests something about Martí's conception of poetry as the language of the universe. Recalling the paradigm of the natural man, Whitman's poetry is valued, in part, for expressing liberty, equality, self-worth—the substance of its message.

However, a large part of this natural poetry is defined in contradistinction to the forms of expression of the academy. It is Whitman's language that Martí marks as definitive of his subject's style: "The language of Whitman, entirely different from that which poets before him have used, corresponds in its strangeness and power to his cyclical poetry and to the new humanity which has congregated upon this fecund continent" (192). Looking for language fit for a new continent, Martí's investment in this revolutionary poetry becomes an echo to the nineteenth-century's call for a specifically American literature. Whitman's vigorous and forward language coincides with Martí's own development as a poet. Carmen Alemany Bay studies the manuscript of *Versos Libres* to find that Martí revises in favor of direct language and simplicity of expression (128). This preference is made explicit in his notebooks from 1881, as he writes

³⁰ My translation. Darío: "libres porque son endecasílabos blancos, sin consonancia ni asonancia; libres, porque son versos de libertad."

that his “object is to discard useless language from poetry: to make it lasting, making it sincere, making it vigorous, making it sober” (*OC* 21.220).³¹ These descriptions of unembellished language recall those of the ideal natural person [“naked, virginal, amorous, sincere, and powerful” (Allen 183)]. Sincere language is so important to Martí that he not only employs it, but writes poetry *about* it as well. Written sometime between 1882 and 1891, “Contra el verso retórico y ornado” begins by delineating its subject, “Against rhetorical and ornate verse / There is natural verse,” and continues to describe a bird, a worm, the stars, an all-consuming conflagration, a dog, and mud—all in stark images and sharp colors (*OC* 16.239).³² Concluding “Thus should noble poetry be: / As life: a star and a cur dog,” the poem dictates an aesthetic of vivid representation and a nobility of subject that correspondingly addresses the beautiful and the lowly (*OC* 16.239). Thus unadorned, vigorous language is for Martí a key feature of natural poetry, specifically of the direction of American poetry, and an evolving aesthetic theory.

Martí’s translations accordingly favor the representation of language over form. Martí explains, “Language must be mathematic, geometric, sculpted. The idea must fit exactly the phrase, so exactly that one could not cast off any of the phrase without casting off the idea” (*OC* 21.255).³³ Martí’s language stays so close to Whitman’s that his regular paraphrasing may be seen as plagiarism. Andrés Olaizola argues that, more than the language taken directly from *Leaves of Grass*, the overall language of the essay is heavily influenced by Whitman’s poetry:

³¹ My translation. Martí: “mi objeto es desembarazar del lenguaje inútil la poesía: hacerla duradera, haciéndola sincera, haciéndola vigorosa, haciéndola sobria.”

³² The original poem: “Contra el verso retórico y ornado / El verso natural.” And later, “Así ha de ser la noble poesía: / Así como la vida: estrella y gozque.”

³³ My translation. Martí: “El lenguaje ha de ser matemático, geométrico, escultórico. La idea ha de encajar exactamente en la frase, tan exactamente que no pueda quitarse nada de la frase sin quitar eso mismo de la idea.”

“that which , Martí says of Whitman’s verse is very similar to what we could say of Martí’s prose.”³⁴ In this way, Martí’s translations begin to follow Scott’s argument for the “resourcefulness” of prose.

Thus far, Martí’s translation choices begin to show a ladder of values, descending from content, to language, and form on the lowest rung. Yet, I would like to reconsider that last rung. The prose translations and composite forms are most resourceful as they allow Martí to reveal Whitman’s artistry, “which is entirely hidden” (193). Recalling the start of his essay, Martí chides readers for a lack of perception, draws fuel from the nearsighted Boston prohibition, and references Buchanan’s argument that U.S. literati do not properly recognize Whitman’s worth. In a position between translator and reviewer, Martí acts as guide to illuminate what of Whitman’s art is hidden. The irregularity of the poetic line, the sweeping catalogues, the pairing of language grandiose and profane—this is what Martí works most to make clear: “Whitman’s apparent irregularity, initially disconcerting, soon turn out to be—but for brief moments of prodigious aberration—the same sublime order and composition as that of mountain peaks outlined against the sky” (184). Whitman’s irregularity is most sublime for its accomplishment of uniting dislike elements. Much like the natural poetry that depicts celestial stars and cur dogs side by side, Whitman, “Assured of his mastery of the impression of unity he sets out to create, . . . uses his artistry, which is entirely hidden, to reproduce the elements of his picture in the same disorder he observed in Nature” (193). As Martí drives at the harmony of difference, his formal translations—the composite paragraph that fuses poetry shards—replicates the

³⁴ My translation. Olaizola: “lo que dice Martí del verso de Whitman es muy parecido a lo que podríamos decir de la prosa de Martí.”

unification of disparate parts and gives still another meaning to the phrase “Whitman, a kosmos.” Above a generic category, Martí defines “Literature—which announces and propagates the final, joyous concordance of apparent contradictions” (186). In this way, decidedly his own way, Martí forges the crucial link between form and content.

In another adherence through difference, the reworking of *Leaves* in “El poeta Walt Whitman” acts as response to Whitman’s direct address to the reader. Taken from “Song of Myself,” Martí quotes, “He that by me spreads a wider breast than my own, proves the width of my own” (192). Whitman’s riddle, another example of unified contradictions, invites the reader to move beyond what Whitman has provided. And the suggestive quality of *Leaves of Grass* demands it. Whitman’s ambiguity and signaling to the reader combine in his final poem. After “Song of Myself,” Martí pulls most often from “So Long,” the poem that closes the 1881 edition. Here Whitman writes, “I feel like one who has done work for the day to retire awhile, / I receive now again of my many translations, from my avatars ascending, while others doubtless await me” (382). The speaker’s “many translations” anticipate the many readers and writers to follow. Martí closes his essay on the same final line of “So Long” as Whitman’s volume, but does not, like Whitman, stop there.

Whitman’s direct address is the final stylistic feature that Martí chooses to act on rather than simply represent. Whitman beckons the reader “I stop somewhere waiting for you” (79); the line serves as formal counterpart to the equality of persons asserted when Whitman declares that he is “no stander above men and women or apart from them.” Jay Grossman, among

others³⁵, has also read the direct address as Whitman's styled expression of democracy.

Grossman argues that, unlike Emerson's exclusive democracy, Whitman's work puts forward a Jacksonian-inspired approach of participatory democracy (91). Though Whitman often speaks in absolute decrees, he also grants "acknowledgement of the reader as a distinct entity, invited to *participate* in a dynamic that is at once highly structured and shared" (90). Martí takes up this invitation to thoroughly participate with *Leaves*. Despite Martí's imperative to the opposite effect—"Translating is not, for one's opinion, to show himself at the cost of the author, but to put in words the author's native language entirely, without leaving himself visible for a single instant" (*OC* 24.40)³⁶—he makes himself visible, showing himself in more than one instant, as reader, poet, philosopher, and activist. Rather than ruin Whitman, as Borges had called it, Martí follows Whitman's call for a participatory voice and his example of divergence.

³⁵ See also Doris Sommer's article "Supplying Demand: Walt Whitman as the Liberal Self." Sommer likewise draws a connection between Whitman's direct address to the reader and liberal democracy. Unlike Grossman, however, Sommer questions the spirit behind Whitman's democracy and calls Whitman's address a seduction (69).

³⁶ My translation. Martí: "Traducir no es, al su juicio, mostrarse a sí propio a costa del autor, sino poner en palabras de la lengua nativa al autor entero, sin dejar ver en un solo instante la persona propia."

CHAPTER FIVE

MOVING TEXTS

To celebrate the 1953 centennial of José Martí's birth, the Cuban people planned the construction of a new memorial for Havana's Plaza Cívica. Starting in the 1930s, contests were held to find a stone structure worthy of representing the now national hero. Without satisfactory submissions for many years, the fourth contest finally yielded winners—the finalist Enrique Luis Varela and top ranking Juan José Sicre. Proceedings were slow, however, and when Fulgencio Batista took power in 1952, the memorial was still in its infant stages. With a “strategy of self-legitimization,” Batista interceded in the project and directed Varela to build instead (Gonçales 27). Due to protests, Batista compromised for the synthesis of the two winning projects. Varela's tall, star-shaped tower went up behind Sicre's statue of a massive Martí, a Greek design of a seated and full figure in white. The memorial was not dedicated under Batista, however; the Cuban Revolution came first. Plaza Cívica became Plaza de la Revolución under Martí's stone feet, and Memorial José Martí became the spatial and symbolic companion to Fidel Castro's public politics (Gonçales 27).

This contested representation of José Martí, the Greek figure of the man who wrote against adoptive art,³⁷ and the external, here political, associations later attached to his figure, show that Martí's symbolic immortality does not equate to symbolic stability. Arguably more so than Whitman's, Martí's descendent figure has been and continues to be moved. The immense

³⁷ Martí in fact uses Greek history as symbol of the institutions that the new continent must step away from. In “Nuéstra America” he writes, “The history of America from the Incas to the present must be taught in its smallest detail, even if the Greek Archons go untaught. Our own Greece is preferable to the Greece that is not ours; we need it more” (Allen 291).

album of written work produced by each author contributes to how their texts lend themselves to various movements, adoptions, and adaptations. It is always only a partial reading, and approximating a “whole” reading often reveals inconsistencies.³⁸ Readers share much responsibility in the movements of these capacious texts, as interpreting is the cohort of reading. This is not strictly cautionary; interpretation gives texts a “life,” as Welleck and Warren say (155). This life, or instability, is additionally fueled by the symbolic products of past readings—a layer of conceptual negotiation that has particular relevance for the iconic Martí.

Martí is symbol for multiple peoples, places, and arguments. Kirsten Silva Gruesz calls Martí “hypernational,” a figure that comes to stand in for a country (14). As Memorial José Martí demonstrates, Martí’s lifetime dedication to *patria* earns him a place center stage and a role as father-figure to the free Cuba. Martí is likewise symbol of Transamericanism, due in large part to his arguments for spiritual unity and political cooperation in his essay “Nuéstra America.” Yet his international movements in exile and his participation in life and writing with the cosmopolitan spaces of New York and Argentina’s *La Nación*,³⁹ take Martí beyond a Transamerican identity. Lastly, Martí’s application to universal truths, such as those found in natural poetry, ask that he also be considered above any political space.

Martí’s movement of Whitman—his linguistic, substantive, formal, symbolic, and even geographic translations of the Good Gray Poet—next ask to be considered in light of the various

³⁸ Adalberto Ronda Varona argues that this is as much the case for Martí as we have seen it to be for Whitman. He writes, “There are also many critics who...approach the study of Martí’s works ignoring the relative independence between the many facets of his thinking and his writings, with the sad result that at times the researcher’s ideas replace Martí’s” (93).

³⁹ *La Nación* was constituted in large part by international contributors. Rotker tracks the late nineteenth-century printings in *La Nación* and finds a conspicuous absence of news and articles on the rest of Latin America (33).

positions that Martí occupies, these various spaces that he already symbolizes. With Martí's dedication to Cuba and his desire for Transamerican unity, "El poeta Walt Whitman" works, as Sommer suggests, "perhaps ...to appropriate Whitman for the Other America" (José 81). Yet the typology of the exemplary, universal figure to which Martí fits Whitman encourages a reevaluation of the nature of Martí's insistence on unity as strictly Transamerican. In addition to highlighting Whitman's periodic use of the Spanish language, Martí summarizes his use of French and Italian words. Drawing attention to one French word, Martí writes that "*Ensemble*, above all, seduces him because in it he sees the sky that looms above the life of nations and of worlds" (194). At the same time that Martí's Whitman is all-American, he is not bound to a nation, continent, or even a single world.

The literary kinship of Whitman and Martí is, then, traced to another consanguinity. Their rich texts share the ability to occupy multiple positions at once, to "contain multitudes" (Whitman 78). This time not constituting an appropriation of the poetry, Martí defines and praises Whitman for the one thing he is not, the "philosopher of one detail or a single aspect" (184).

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