

Kiyotaka Sueyoshi 

University of Szeged, Szeged, Hungary
sueyoshikiyotaka@gmail.com

New Decorums

Whitman's Olfactory Metaphors in *Song of Myself*

Whitman's olfactory metaphors are key tropes in his poems but they have been neglected so far. Furthermore, Emerson's reaction to them sheds light on the relation between the two men, and shows that we need to expand our research on them through the incorporation of various 'olfactory perspectives.' This essay is about olfactory reading of *Song of Myself*—reframing it through a lens of the sense of smell. It will show that Whitman's exploration for new poetic diction and the semantic of Whitman's materialization into a poet—both are correlated—necessitate frequent usages of olfactory metaphors. With the inclusion of various olfactory viewpoints, the essay shows that Whitman's metaphors of this kind portray his transformation into a mythical poet and smooth out this transition. Through his 'celebrations'—calling body odor the fragrance and enjoying it, coming into contact with the atmosphere, and calling breath 'smoke'—Whitman metamorphoses into a mythical poet, while all these celebrations are effected by his verbal fiat through olfactory metaphors, which finally enables him to communicate with 'a spirit,' which spreads his 'barbaric yawp.' All of these are fruition of Whitman's 'new decorums.'

Key words: Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, New decorums, Transcendentalism, olfactory metaphors, olfaction, smell

Introduction

The relation between Whitman and Emerson, who represents Transcendentalism (Loving 9), has intrigued manifold critics (xi). What makes things complicated is that Whitman's own accounts run the gamut from the full influence of Emerson on him—master-disciple relation (11)—to almost none (Burroughs 16). Whitman seems both in and out of sync with Transcendentalism; on the one hand, Emerson had faith in Whitman (Loving 142). On the other hand, Whitman was at the periphery of Transcendentalism (Buell 7).

There are two climaxes in their relation; one is Emerson's 1855 letter to Whitman, which started the relation, and the other is the confrontation over the parts of 1860 *Leaves of Grass* (J. Grossman 75), which led to the end of personal ties between the two (Loving 107). Yet the main point of the contention among critics is 'a long foreground' from Emerson's 1855 letter which reads, 'I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which you must have had a long foreground somewhere, for such a start' (Zweig 267). The relation between Whitman and Emerson translates into a question: To what extent was Whitman influenced by Emerson especially in 'a long foreground'? (J. Grossman 94)

Although the overall tone of Emerson's 1855 letter to Whitman is very positive, the devil is in the detail. We are not sure what specific parts made Emerson praise *Leaves of Grass* (Loving 92-93). Jay Grossman points out that neither the term 'poet' nor 'poetry' appears in the letter (J. Grossman 93). Thus, what critics have argued about the letter amounts to drawing the line in the sand in their evaluation of the letter, and by extension, the relation between Whitman and Emerson.

Indeed, Emerson would add qualification if he had known his letter would be published (Conway 360). He states: 'There are parts of the book where I hold my nose as I read. One must not be too squeamish when a chemist brings him to a mass of filth and says, 'See, the great laws are at work here also,' but it is a fine art if he can deodorise his illustration...'

Emerson most probably mentions section 49 of *Song of Myself*: Whitman writes, 'As to you corpse I think you are good manure, but that does not offend me, / I smell the white roses sweetscented and growing, / I reach to the leafy lips... I reach to the polish'd breasts of melons' (Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* 56). What is inoffensive to Whitman is offensive to Emerson. Apart from this instance, there are various other candidates, 'the scent of these arm-pits finer than prayer (33),' for instance, which would make Emerson hold his nose. He dislikes Whitman's olfactory metaphors because they are not suitable in 'fine art.' Emerson is specific about that.

The term 'deodorize' deserves attention; it is a newly coined word from around 1820 that started to get wider circulation in 1850s¹ after the publication of such books as James F. Johnston's *The Chemistry of Common Life* in 1853 (Kiechle 71). Americans started to deodorize (xiii), and Emerson's (jocular) usage of the term shows that he was keen both on this phenomenon and on Whitman's (re)odorization. Emerson's reaction is understandable; Whitman was against the trend of deodorization in American society.

Focusing on what is clear is better than on what is unclear. In this sense, grasping the relation between Whitman and Transcendentalism through Whitman's employment of olfactory metaphors shows promise. This approach is new because critics — who themselves have lived in more and more deodorized society (Howes 144) — have followed in the footsteps of Emerson; they have studied Whitman's poems while 'deodorizing' them. Although Emerson's use of 'deodorize' is not as famous as the 1855 letter itself, the word seems to have influenced the critics of Whitman. Whitman sought to break the taboo of the sense of smell whereas the critics have

¹ https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=deodorize&year_start=1800&year_end=2019&corpus=28&smoothing=3&direct_url=t1%3B%2Cdeodorize%3B%2Cc0.

made that taboo remain taboo. Small is the number of research on Whitman's olfactory metaphors; they include Kenneth Burke's 'Policy Made Personal: Whitman's Verse and Prose-Salient Traits,' Christopher Looby's 'The Roots of the Orchis, the Iuli of Chesnuts: The Odor of Male Solitude,' and Daniela Babilon's 'Wafted with the Odor of His Body or Breath: Walt Whitman's 'Song of Myself' in her book *The Power of Smell in American Literature: Odor, Affect, and Social Inequality*.

Burke's essay was not written in the context of Transcendentalism's influence on Whitman but Burke's dramatic poetics (Rueckert 62), and he does not put an emphasis on the first five stanzas of *Song of Myself*. Looby's essay investigates the features of 'The olfactory Text' (170) which covers Walt Whitman (Looby calls *Leaves of Grass* 'a redolent text'), Francis Parkman, Herman Melville, and Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Yet Looby does so as a context for understanding an American anti-masturbation treatise of the mid-nineteenth century. Babilon 'has aimed at giving a panoramic view of how smell reference were used throughout the centuries in order to chronicle the great significance of the motif of olfaction for American literature' (17). Her interest in 'examining the textual and social impact of the literary motif of smell' (12) prompts her to state that 'Whitman changes the course of American literature' (100) in this respect. Babilon's focus is on Whitman's olfactory metaphors both as 'his call for democracy, unity, and individuality' (18) and as social criticism which breaks down the various dualisms: between body and soul, self and others, and so on (101). Babilon investigates various parts of *Song of Myself* which spread over the whole of it (100-109), but unlike hers, my focus is on the specifics of figures of speech in the first five stanzas of poem. Thus, the focal points of these three researches are different from mine.

My approach has another advantage; it is a clean slate and thus it enables one to refocus solely on the relation between Whitman and Emerson, and more importantly, on *Leaves of Grass* per se. The relation between Whitman and Emerson is so important that some critics tend to fail to differentiate the actual relation between Whitman and Emerson from the imbroglia about its analysis.

In speaking on where Emerson and Whitman stand on olfactory metaphors, the focus is not on the similarities but on the dissimilarities. First of all, Loving states that Emerson and Whitman played 'complementary roles in the literature of the American Renaissance' (Loving 12). He explains their roles: 'Emerson provided the literary vision and Whitman conducted the celebration' (18); Whitman is both disciple (11) and benefactor (Zweig 267) to Emerson. Buell states that the literary vision is founded on 'the method of moment-by-moment inspiration as the most natural path for the intellect' (330). I argue that this distinction of the roles is the key to understanding Whitman's and Emerson's different perceptions of olfactory metaphors; in actual enactments of Emerson's literary vision in the poem, Whitman needed to employ them.

Second, the difference between Whitman's and Emerson's attitude toward experience are noteworthy. On the one hand, Whitman seeks to incorporate the whole range of human consciousness, including his seamy sides (327); he states, 'We shall cease shamming and be what we really are' (Whitman, *Walt Whitman and His Poems*). On the other hand, Emerson is solely after mystical experience, and the rarity of it (Buell 59) made him admit that 'it is remarkable that our faith in ecstasy consists with total inexperience of it' (Emerson 213). In this context, it is natural that

Whitman surpasses the limit of Transcendentalism in the enactment of experience of moment-by-moment inspiration. As Buell states, Whitman 'indulged and expressed the chaos of experience that Emerson came to fear' (330). Whitman's olfactory metaphors appear to Emerson one of such chaotic experiences.

Third, Loving also observes Whitman's distinctive view of science in his poems; 'whereas Whitman's aim is to combine scientific materialism and mysticism, Emerson used science as a means to an end' (58). Joseph Beaver (121-25) maintains that while Emerson was attracted by only the laws and the order in science which can confirm the moral laws – the attitude embodying the Old World's way of thinking in the eyes of Whitman – Whitman accepted science as such. Whitman states, "Exact science and its practical movements are no checks on the greatest poet but *always* his encouragement and support" (Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* 10, emphasis mine). Thus, while Whitman seeks to 'bring a chemist with filth' into his poems, Emerson demanded and afforded to be choosy about how to 'illustrate.' Emerson seeks to deodorize fine art, Whitman intentionally 'odorizes' it.

Last not but least, Emerson states that 'Whitman is hurt by hard life and too animal experience' (Rusk 520). What made Emerson associate Whitman with 'animal experience' is corporeal metaphors in *Leaves of Grass*, especially olfactory ones. I will touch on this association later. Emerson views this association negatively but Whitman, the poet of body, positively.

Leaves of Grass is both in and out of the orbit of Transcendentalism. On the one hand, Whitman's 'language experiment' (Traubel xiii) corresponds to Emerson's language experiment. Buell points out:

because spiritual experience is inherently an irrational thing, indeed a denial in itself of reason and logic, it will not bear to be talked about for very long in the language of the understanding, as Emerson noted. To make it convincing demands all the resources of which language is capable. Sensing this, Emerson wisely accompanied his call for an original relation to the universe (in *Nature*) with a call for original use of language (45).

In *The Poet*, Emerson states, 'The man is only half himself, the other half is his expression' (Porte and Morris 184). The emphasis on the role of language has bearing on Self-reliance, which enables Whitman to self-publish *Leaves of Grass* in his original language (Loving 99). Yet, the Transcendental idea here is top-heavy as if to make the power of language compensate for the scarcity of inspirational experience. It can be said that Whitman tries to correct the Transcendentalist's top-heaviness by giving a voice to the whole range of experiences through his 'language experiment.'

On the other hand, Whitman's employment of olfactory metaphors goes beyond Transcendentalism. In light of the differences that I have shown above, Transcendental perspectives might not enhance but diminish the appreciation of them. Although Whitman's use of olfactory metaphors may not be related to science, 'a tendency' in the quote below from Beaver's book is applicable here:

We must recall, too, the intellectual outlook and influence of the transcendentalists, but we must be careful not to overestimate that influence. Much of the failure to evaluate correctly Whitman's achievement in science may be traced directly to a *tendency* to lay everything not explainable in any other way at the door of Emerson and his followers (121, emphasis mine).

This 'tendency to lay everything not explainable in any other way at the door of Emerson and his followers' in the case of Whitman's olfactory metaphors has been an obstacle to the appreciation of them. Indeed, a contemporary reader who was free from Transcendentalism called *Leaves of Grass* 'odoriferous' (Kaplan 237-238). Likewise, William Douglas O'Connor in *The Good Gray Poet* (1866) states that *Song of Myself* starts 'with the five senses, beginning with that of smell' (Bucke 107). (I add that Emerson's qualifications themselves conversely show the conspicuousness of the olfactory metaphors in *Leaves of Grass*.) Thus, the study of Whitman's olfactory metaphors requires a new approach. By incorporating various olfactory perspectives, this essay reexamines the beginning of *Song of Myself*.

In fact, in the first five stanzas of *Song of Myself*, there are sixteen olfactory-related words: a spear of summer grass, perfumes (twice), breathe, fragrance, distillation, intoxicate, atmosphere, perfume, distillation, odorless, smoke, respiration, inspiration, air, and sniff (of green leaves and dry leaves, and of the shore and darkcolored sea-rocks, and of hay in the barn) (Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* 18). I argue that in these stanzas, there are three celebrations—Whitman says, 'I celebrate myself'—first, calling odor the fragrance and enjoying it, second, coming into contact with the atmosphere, and third, calling breath smoke, and that all these celebrations are related to olfaction, which makes olfactory metaphors outstanding. Simultaneously, in terms of language, Whitman 'substitutes new decorums for the old decorums of writing' (Whitman, *Walt Whitman and His Poems*); he broke free of literary conventions in these celebrations.

James E. Miller, Jr., who calls the poem 'the dramatic representation of a mystical experience' (6) points out that the beginning signifies 'entry into the mystical state' (7). To express this transition, Whitman was at pains to search for his language. In his self-review, Whitman said, 'He makes audacious and native use of his own body and soul. He must re-create poetry with the elements always at hand' (Whitman, *Walt Whitman and His Poems*). R.W.B. Lewis asserts that Whitman tries to communicate absolute novelty (42) and that his new miracles were acts of senses (43). It is well known that Whitman is 'the poet of body' (Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* 30). But the question remains: Why did he forefront olfaction in the first five stanzas?

These stanzas are striking in two ways. First, in the works of Whitman, olfactory metaphors are most densely placed here. Second, they not only bear the numerous presences of olfactory metaphors but also the relative absence of other senses (except for the fifth stanza). I argue that these are related to what Miller calls the 'entry into the mystical state,' and in those occasions the sense of smell comes into play most. About the sense of smell and transition—materialization and dematerialization—Alfred Cell asserts in *Magic, Perfume, Dream*, 'The sense of smell comes into play most when the other senses are in suspense, at moments, one could say, of materialisation and dematerialisation, the coming into being and passing away of things...' (28). And later on:

'The smell of something cooking or the tang of an aperitif mark a transition from concept, expectation, to fact—a notional meal to the actual one—and conversely the standard and familiar postprandial aromatics, nuts, cheeses, coffee and cigars set a seal of finality on the dematerialisation of a meal, now only an insubstantial trace. A mere aroma, in its

very lack of substance is more like a concept than it is like a “thing” in the usual sense, and it is really quite appropriate that the olfactory sense should play its greatest role at junctures when it is precisely this attribute of a meal (meal-concept or meal-fact) which is in the balance...’

This train of thought supports the roles of the sense of smell in Whitman’s celebrations through which he gradually materializes into a mythical poet. Olfactory metaphors are there to smooth out the transition. Among ‘new miracles of sense,’ the three celebrations I point out—calling odor the fragrance and enjoying it, coming into contact with the atmosphere, and calling breath smoke—I view the last one as the most important. There is a sea change here; one of his salient traits of his poetry, catalogue, manifests itself for the first time (Gelpi 175). This essay is about olfactory reading of *Song of Myself*, reframing it through a lens of olfaction. It will show that Whitman’s exploration for new poetic diction and the semantic of Whitman’s materialization into a poet—both are correlated—necessitate frequent usages of olfactory metaphors.

It should be borne in mind that apart from the first five stanzas of *Song of Myself*, olfactory metaphors abound in Whitman’s works (Kiyotaka 33). Nonetheless, as I mentioned above, research on Whitmanian olfactory metaphors is very scant. This essay investigates the relatively unexplored field of Whitman’s olfactory metaphors with various perspectives. It consists of two parts: one will focus on the semantics of odor in Whitman’s poetic diction and the second on a specific example of Whitman’s language of odor.

The Semantics of Odor in Whitman’s Poetic Diction

As Louise Vinge has argued in *The Five Senses: Studies in a Literary Tradition*, among the senses, sight and hearing, considered solely related to reason and civilization, have enjoyed primacy over others, that is, the senses of smell, taste and touch, and literal representations of the senses have reflected this precedence (25, 157). In *Olfactory Ontology and Scented Harmonies: On the History of Smell*, Stephen Kern states that the sense of smell tends to be regarded as the lowest of the human senses: animalistic, primitive and so on (816) and that ‘[it] reminds us of the intrusiveness of corporeality in human affairs’ (818).

As an iconoclastic poet, Whitman put those characteristics of the sense of smell in a positive light; in the section 4 of *Song of Myself*, he said, ‘Welcome is every organ and attribute of me, and of any man hearty and clean, / Not an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile, and none shall be less familiar than the rest’ (Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* 19).

Furthermore, I argue, the semantics of odor is relevant to Whitman’s composition of his poems, especially his figurative language. Engen Trygg points out the uniqueness of the semantics of odor (Engen, *Odor Sensation and Memory* 84). He asserts that a semantic model for how odors are encoded is lexical collocation at the same level of abstraction (86). Although he admits the existence of olfactory hierarchical semantic system of super- and subordinates, he calls into question the actual use of it. He shows an example: ‘the smell of onion may cause one to think of spices or pizza rather than plants and vegetables... Speaking of the verbal encoding of odors, we remain children’ (85). Thus the emphasis of olfaction is not on cognition

but rather on feeling, experience (Engen, *The Perception of Odors* 3). In other words, olfactory metaphors help readers to have a mind of children like Emerson's eye-ball metaphor in *Nature* (Porte and Morris 29).

Although I. A. Richards scarcely touches on Whitman (Zweig 185), Richards's concept of poetic language and the uniqueness of the semantics of odor have something in common. The comparison between the two is revealing in three ways. First, I. A. Richards states that in poetry 'language tends to return towards a more primitive condition,' evoking feeling rather than cognition (Richards, *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment* 353-354). In this sense, Whitman's adoption of olfactory metaphors, unfamiliar as it was at the time, makes sense. Second, Richards also states that 'a metaphor is a shift, a carrying over of a word from its normal use to a new use' and that 'in an emotive metaphor the shift occurs through some similarity between the feelings the new situation and the normal situation arouse' (221). Given its nature of the aforementioned semantics of odor, an olfactory metaphor has a potential to be a consummate form of emotive metaphor. And last, Richards states that the gift of a poet is the command of original metaphor, through which feelings of readers are controlled (223). Whitman desires that his original metaphors – olfactory ones – evoke an original feeling inherent to his poem. These concurrences between Richards's concept of poetic language and the uniqueness of the semantics of odor favor Whitman's employment of olfactory metaphors.

Besides, the disruption of hierarchical semantic system leads to egalitarianism where individuals are treated as individuals. Whitman said, 'He [Whitman] gives to each just what belongs to it, neither more or less' (Whitman, *Walt Whitman and His Poems*). In so doing, Whitman 'judges not as the judge judges but as the sun falling around a helpless thing' (Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* 6). In *Song of the Answerer*, he says:

Every existence has its idiom... every thing has an idiom and tongue;
He resolves all tongues into his own, and bestows it upon men (86)

In his poetry, Whitman seeks to represent everything in an all-inclusive manner by giving it a voice. By extension, non-hierarchical semantic of odor reminds us of Whitmanian catalogue where 'unity in diversity' is expressed. The spontaneous association of individual entities free from hierarchical semantics helps to connect them on an equal footing, furthering the significance of the additive structure of the technique. As regards the catalogue technique, Paul Zweig points out:

'The catalogues are bristling and random, and their randomness is important. For they are extended symbols of a mind that excludes nothing. A random list is by definition, merely a sample of an *unspoken list containing everything*; and "Song of Myself," similarly, contains everything (248-249, emphasis mine).

It can be said that Whitmanian catalogue and the sense of smell have something in common. Both can be called liminal by their capability of signifying both what is there and not there. About the liminality of the sense of smell, David Howes in *Olfaction and Transition*, states:

'As Gell's analysis suggests, the sense of smell is the liminal sense par excellence, constitutive of and at the same time operative across all of the boundaries we draw between different realms and categories of experience' (131-132).

Zweig's 'unspoken list containing everything' corresponds to Howes' 'constitutive of and at the same time operative across all of the boundaries.' Liminality between private and public is one of the major themes of Whitman's poetry (LeMaster and Kummings 436), and thus his language is the one of liminality (A. Grossman 118), which is most evidently shown in his catalogue. It can be said, consequently, that the sense of smell – liminal sense – is paramount to his works.

The suspension of a hierarchical semantic system has another advantage; it facilitates direct, firsthand experience, which has the potential of firsthand revelation without removes. These well serve the goal of Whitman-Transcendentalist because transcendentalism's central principle is that everyone is divine enough to experience firsthand revelation (Buell 269). In Section 48 of *Song of Myself*, Whitman said, 'I hear and behold God in every object' (Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* 55) and 'In the faces of men and women I see God.' To express these revelational experiences, transcendentalists engaged in a language experiment as I showed in Introduction.

The original use of language occupies the center of Whitman's language experiment; he writes, 'In most instances a characteristic word once used in a poem, speech, or what not, is then exhausted' (Traubel 27).

In the preface of *Leaves of Grass* 1855, he states:

As the attributes of the poets of the kosmos centre in the real body and soul and in the pleasure of things they possess the superiority of genuineness over all fiction and romance. . . (12).

The poems distilled from other poems will probably pass away (16).

The autonomy of a poem from outside reference is crucial. I.A. Richards says, 'Poetry affords the clearest examples of this subordination of reference to attitude. It is the supreme form of emotive language. But there can be no doubt that originally all language was emotive' (Richards, *Principle of Literary Criticism* 273). Whitman's saying 'Only the soul is of itself. . . all else has reference to what ensues' (Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* 13) recapitulates the gist of Richards's statement. This conviction of Whitman in his poetization culminates in *Had I the choice*:

Had I the choice to tally *greatest bards*,
 To limn their portraits, stately, beautiful, and emulate at will,
 . . .
 Metre or wit the best, or choice conceit to wield in perfect
 These, these, O sea, all these I'd gladly barter,
 Would you the undulation of one wave, its trick to me transfer,
 Or breathe one breath of yours upon my verse,
 And leave its odor there. (Allen 388-389, emphasis mine)

Through olfactory metaphors, Whitman appeals to the sea – anthropomorphized; it has breath and odor – for showing him how to capture the undulating of one wave, which takes precedence over the works and the devices of 'great bards' since the former represents 'poetic soul' and the latter 'reference to what ensues.' Seeking revelations which can lead to 'absolute novelty,' Whitman entreats sea to 'breathe one breath of it upon his verse, and leave its odor there.' Whitman's distinction between breath and odor – even in a poem about poetization – illustrates his

predisposition to the sense of smell. The sense of smell is one of the essential aspects of Whitman's poetics.

Olfactory Reading of the First Five Stanzas of *Song of Myself*

In the first and second stanzas of *Song of Myself*, Whitman writes:

I celebrate myself,
 And what I assume you shall assume,
 For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you. (18)
 (first stanza)

I loafe and invite my soul,
 I lean and loafe at my ease... observing a spear of summer grass.
 (second stanza)

The meditation over 'a spear of summer grass' is a subject matter of *Song of Myself*. Zweig points out that Whitman 'is the quiet, almost shy observer of the spear of grass' (299) here. But thereafter he undergoes changes which are expressed through olfactory metaphors. Whitman continues:

Houses and roof *perfumes*... the shelves are crowded with *perfumes*,
 I breathe the fragrance myself, and know it and like it,
 The distillation would intoxicate me also, but I shall not let it.
 (third stanza, emphasis mine)

There are two odorants here — perfume and fragrance — which seem to constitute dualistic elements. A general distinction can be made between perfume: the odorant of artificial origin, used first by wealthy Parisians (Engen, *Odor Sensation and Memory* 62); and fragrance: of the natural and egalitarian origin (53). Perfume here is an imaginary odorant and fragrance a real one. (Strictly speaking, this is a misnomer; what is there is not fragrance but body odor.) But what is 'perfume' and 'fragrance' more specifically?

On the one hand, Whitman shows the meaning of perfume in his later poem. In *Thou Mother with Thy Equal Brood*, he states, 'The conceits of the poets of other lands I'd bring thee not, / Nor the compliments that have served their turn so long, / Nor rhyme, nor the classics, nor perfume of foreign court or indoor library' (Allen 351). Thus, perfume is 'of foreign court or indoor library': namely the influence of the Old World. From the usage of 'houses,' 'roof,' and 'shelves,' it can be said that this reading is appropriate.

On the other hand, fragrance poses a challenge. Whitman seems to call his odor fragrance but we usually do not do so. This idiosyncratic usage of the word 'fragrance' implies a change caused by his meditation. Engen states that we call our body odors fragrance only when affection is there (Engen, *Odor Sensation and Memory* 2-3). Calling odors fragrance and enjoying it constitute Whitman's first *celebration*. This line of thought helps us to recognize the formal resemblance between 'I celebrate myself' in the first stanza and 'I breathe the fragrance myself' in the third stanza. The subjects and the objects in both sentences are the same; 'I' and 'myself,'

with the addition of 'the fragrance' in the latter. To 'breathe the fragrance' is more specific than to 'celebrate.' Syntactically, there are two ways to interpret the relation between 'the fragrance' and 'myself.' The first possibility is that 'myself' is an adverb, and the other is 'the fragrance' and 'myself' are in apposition. Yet, given that the intended emphasis on the comparison between 'perfume' (something foreign) and 'fragrance,' it is better to interpret 'the fragrance' as equal with 'myself,' which Whitman 'know it and like it.' Loaded with the sense of interchangeability expressed in the first stanza (And what I assume you shall assume, / For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you), Whitman feels – through the fragrance – an affection both for himself *and* for others, and expects readers to do the same. This harmony between individuality and the whole is one of the main themes of Whitman's works, and even though for commentators *I celebrate myself* is in the spotlight and *I breathe the fragrance myself* in a limbo, the latter amplifies the meaning of the former through olfactory metaphor.

Furthermore, when Whitman rejects perfume and accepts fragrance, there occurs a reversal of the value system of the Old World and the New World. In his preparatory note, Whitman said:

Their [men that have lived mainly in the open air] indefinable excellence gives out something as much beyond the special productions of colleges and pews and parlors as the morning air of the prairie or the sea-shore outsmells the costliest scents of the perfume shop (Bucke 125).

Indeed, the conversion of body odor into fragrance is deliberate and paves the way for challenging the Old World. I mentioned earlier that calling odor fragrance is spurred by the meditation. But this conversion serves a dual purpose which Whitman intended; the first, as I said, is to show affection for odor (and by extension, affection for himself and others) and the second is to challenge the Old World. The elevation of body odor to fragrance gives a basis for a comparison between the New World and the Old World (perfume) and for a case that fragrance is better than perfume.

The reason why Whitman prefers 'the fragrance' to 'perfumes' also relates to his democratic republican enterprise through literature. In *Democratic Vistas*, he states:

I say that Democracy can never prove itself beyond cavil, until it founds and luxuriantly grows its own forms of arts, poems, schools, theology, displacing all that exists, or that has been produced anywhere in the past, under opposite influences (5).

Whitman seeks to establish original American literature, which in turn is necessary for the full development of democracy. Related to all these, the beginning of 'I celebrate myself' comes to take the more specific form of 'I breathe the fragrance myself.' Whitman continues;

The atmosphere is not a perfume... it has no taste of the distillation... it is odorless,
It is for my mouth forever... I am in love with it,
I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked,
I am mad for it to be in contact with me. (Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* 18)
(forth stanza)

Whitman continues to talk about the new beginning. Freed from *intoxicating perfume* of the Old World, he enjoys the atmosphere of the New World. He loves doing

so much that he hits on the idea of reveling more by going to the bank and 'becoming naked.'

The objective of Whitman's going naked here can be said to be twofold. Obviously, the first is with his naked body to appreciate 'the atmosphere' more directly. The other is to appreciate 'the fragrance himself' more: Engen points out the distinctive mode of 'nudism which stresses the natural, animal-like, and aphrodisiac attributes of body odor' (Engen, *Odor Sensation and Memory* 2).

As regards Whitman's liking for his own odor, he also says, 'The scent of these arm-pits aroma finer than prayer' (Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* 33). Interestingly, Engen, the founder of the psychological study of olfaction, points out (most probably without the knowledge of Whitman):

During the student upheavals of the late 1960s and early 1970s, there were some who gave up deodorants, claiming that body odors are natural and that deodorants are therefore unnatural constraints. One might have been inclined to believe that this occurrence was a first, but references to this attitude go back at least 100 years, and it was then associated with nudism (Engen, *The Perception of Odors* 12).

A hundred years before the 1960s is the 1860s, when Whitman was in his prime. It can be concluded that Whitman may be one of the first who ceased to care about 'the scent of these arm-pits' with the attitude of nudism I mentioned above. More generally, in his dense use of olfactory metaphors in the first five stanza of *his first poem*, Whitman seems to show his resistance against the rising trend of deodorization in American society which I touched upon in the Introduction. And more specifically, this can be the background for what prodded Whitman to call body odor 'the fragrance' (Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* 18) in the third stanza.

As Albert Gelpi points out, Whitman's 'contact with the atmosphere' causes further change in him; he starts the first catalogue of the poem (175). So far Whitman's diction is rather abstract but from here it becomes more concrete.

The *smoke* of my own breath,
Echos, ripples, and buzzed whispers... loveroot, silkthread, crotch and vine,
My respiration and inspiration... the beating of my heart... the passing of blood and air
through my lungs,
The *sniff* of green leaves and dry leaves, and of the shore and darkcolored sea-rocks, and
of hay in the barn,
The sound of the belched words of my voice... words loosed to the eddies of the wind,
A few light kisses... a few embraces... a reaching around of arms,
The play of shine and shade on the trees as the supple boughs wag,
The delight alone or in the rush of the streets, or along the fields and hillsides,
The feeling of health... the full-noon trill... the song of me rising from bed and meeting the
sun (Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* 18).

(fifth stanza, emphasis mine)

Importantly, although Whitman comes into contact with the atmosphere, he does not 'go to the bank' or 'become naked' but continues his meditative loafing. Nonetheless, even with his clothes on, his aroused state is sustained by the reinforced association – through contact with the atmosphere – between the inner bodily experience and the outer world stimulation. So far Whitman's first celebration is to call

body odor fragrance and enjoy it, and the second one is to come into contact with the atmosphere. Now Whitman embarks on the third one: a ritual of fumigation.

The term 'smoke' is idiosyncratic. Just as we do not call odor fragrance, so we do not call breath smoke. (Whitman did not smoke by the way (Miller 305).) I argue that Whitman enacts a ritual of fumigation and that the smoke is the result of it; 'in' is good spirit (atmosphere, and fragrance) and 'out' is bad spirit (perfume). This fumigation is the process of learning and unlearning, and may perhaps be overdue; Emerson states, 'Our American literature and spiritual history are, we confess, in the optative mood' (Porte and Morris 98). With the effects of the first and second celebrations, Whitman displays metamorphoses from the Old World consciousness to the New World consciousness. His entrance into a new phase is emphasized by olfactory metaphors.

This ritual of fumigation is distinctive in various ways; the place and the catalyst are atypical. Over a long time, people around the world have used fumigation for physical and psychological health, and usually ritual of fumigation is held in a dark, hidden place (Parkin 542). But Whitman's fumigation is held 'in the open air,' tallying with the tenet of his theory on poems; Whitman said, 'I swear I never will translate myself at all, only to him or her who privately stays with me in the open air' (Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* 55). Moreover, the catalyst used in rite of fumigation is usually smoke from a particular substance burned (Parkin 542). However, the catalyst of Whitman's fumigation is *atmosphere* – life-giving air – whose affordability and availability is the key. In section 16 of *Song of Myself*, Whitman says, 'breathe the air and leave plenty after me' (Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* 28) and in section 17 (later deleted), 'This is the common air that bathes the globe.' The place and catalyst for the fumigation needs to be native-origin. This is a new mysticism performed not behind the closed doors but in the open air. The site and the catalyst need to be commonplace because this sort of fumigation is supposed to develop into common experience.

Last not but least, Whitman seems to undergo the ritual of fumigation (or other *celebrations*) *delightfully*. Whitman shows the essence of learning and unlearning; these processes need not be painful. After all, Whitman continues to 'celebrate himself.' To pave the way for this realization, to smooth out the transition, he has already employed various olfactory metaphors. Indeed, he seems free from anxiety in his meditative loafing, and, if anything, his inner senses and the outer world get more and more in sync. It is worth repeating that the fifth stanza is the first catalogue in the poem and 'the smoke,' a token of the ritual of fumigation, is the first word of it. This first catalogue – a symbol of a new decorums breaching with vigor of the five senses – is like a bulldozer which shoves the old decorums out of the way.

The term 'sniff' (Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* 18) deserves the attention, too. It shows Whitman's sense of smell heightens more than usual; sniffing renders the exposure to olfactory stimuli stronger; usually only 5 to 10% of the air inhaled gets to the olfactory cleft but sniffing makes the ratio increase (Engen, *Odor Sensation and Memory* 24-25). Nevertheless, the term 'sniff' has a negative connotation; sniffing is socially frowned upon because of its forefronting of the animalistic side of humans (Elias 171). Sniffing at foods (nose approaching close to food) is like physically putting a feeler for it. Whitman shows an example of this in his poem *Faces*: 'a dog's snout sniffing for garbage' (Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* 82). Yet, with this sniff, Whitman found a new delight; he can differentiate between 'the sniff of green leaves and dry leaves, and of

the shore and darkcolored sea-rocks, and of hay in the barn.' (We rarely pay attention to the difference between various smells.) This increased appreciation of the sense of smell is a *quid pro quo* for Whitman's breaking free of socio-cultural taboo through sniffing. These delights of senses are what is all about this catalogue.

'The sound of the belched words of my voice... words loosed to the eddies of the wind' (18) signifies the first actual deliverance of his 'barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world' (57). This is Whitman's first utterance of the term 'words.' The structure of the phrase 'The sound of the belched words of my voice' is idiosyncratic; just as 'The smoke of my own breath' is made of two-tiered structure (smoke, breath), so is this phrase (sound, words, (and voice)). It is not 'words' but 'sound' that is 'loosed to the eddies of the wind.' The *sound* of belched words is devoid of artificiality, untranslatable, and I argue that this is the feature of the sound that enables it to be 'loosed to the eddies of the wind' and deliver the message. More specifically, I think that 'the eddies of the wind' signify presence of a spirit. David Parkin, in his *Wafting on the wind: smell and the cycle of spirit and matter*, points out that 'the eddies of the wind' is an 'evidence of a spirit' for some people.

It is also common among peoples of the East African coast and inland to point to a sudden eddy of wind in the otherwise calm air, usually on a hot day, as evidence of a spirit. Spirits are normally invisible but can manifest themselves occasionally, as in this example of moving air or wind (540).

Wind itself is not thought of as visible. Yet there is visible and tangible evidence of its presence, as ground leaves and dust swirl in the unexpected gust (549).

Whitman consigns 'The sound of the belched words of my voice' to 'a spirit' so that his 'barbaric yawp' can travel 'over the roofs of the world.'

By extension, this part can be said to be related to the sense of smell. Wind consists of air, which in turn is the medium of the sense of smell. Smell is elusive like a spirit (Parkin 540). In his *Jacobson's Organ and the Remarkable Nature of Smell*, Lyall Watson states that 'The ideas of life and breath and spirit and smell are intertwined in many cultures' (5). This train of thought tallies with the overall meanings of Whitman's (olfactory) celebrations.

Whitman states, 'For the old decorums of writing he substitutes new decorums' (Whitman, *Walt Whitman and His Poems*). From the perspective of language, what we have investigated embodies 'new decorums.' His forefronting of olfactory metaphors in itself epitomizes 'new decorums,' and especially his conversion of body odor into 'the fragrance,' breath into 'the smoke of the breath,' voice into '[t]he sound of the belched words of my voice' typifies it. Form and content, both liberated from the traditional rules, began to affect and reflect each other. Whitman's 'new decorums' encompass these mediations between form and content.

Conclusion

This essay starts with the investigation into the relation between Emerson and Whitman, and in the process, it finds that Whitman's employment of olfactory metaphors signifies the salient difference between the two. Based on the finding, I take an alternative approach to reading of the first five stanzas of *Song of Myself*.

With the incorporation of various olfactory perspectives, the essay shows that Whitman's olfactory metaphors portray his transformation into a mythical poet and smooth out this transition. Through his 'celebrations' (calling body odor the fragrance and enjoying it, coming into contact with the atmosphere, and calling breath smoke), he metamorphoses into a mythical poet, and all these celebrations are effected by his verbal fiat through olfactory metaphors, which finally enables him to communicate with 'a spirit,' which spreads his 'barbaric yawp.' All of these are fruition of Whitman's 'new decorums.'

The foundation of these texts is the uniqueness of the semantic of odor, which lets us call olfactory language 'natural' poetic diction. The suspension of a hierarchical semantic system through olfactory language helps to return to a mind of children, to enhance spontaneous association, and to feel a sense of liminality with the same effect as Whitmanian catalogue. This is a 'language experiment,' in which other transcendentalists were also engaged. Whitman entrusted his career as a poet to olfactory metaphors. One of his first risk-takings is to call body odor fragrance, by which he both communicates the central theme of his poem – the harmony between self-love and affection towards others – and challenges the conventional wisdom concerning the difference between the New World and Old World. 'The smoke' are the first words of his first catalogue – a symbol of 'new decorums' breaching with vigor of the five senses – which shoves 'old decorums' out of its way in the poem.

References

- Allen, Gay Wilson, ed. *Leaves of Grass with an Introduction by Gay Wilson Allen*. New York: Penguin Books USA, 1980.
- Babilon, Daniela. *The Power of Smell in American Literature: Odor, Affect, and Social Inequality*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.3726/b10595>.
- Beaver, Joseph. *Walt Whitman – Poet of Science*. New York: King's Crown Press, 1951.
- Bucke, Richard Maurice, ed. *Notes and Fragments Left by Walt Whitman*. London: Talbot, 1899.
- Bucke, Richard Maurice. *Walt Whitman*. Glasgow, Wilson & McCormick, 1884.
- Buell, Lawrence. *Literary Transcendentalism: Style and Vision in the American Renaissance*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974.
- Burke, Kenneth. "Policy Made Personal: Whitman's Verse and Prose-Salient Traits". *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Walt Whitman*, edited by Harold Bloom, New York: Chelsea House, 2006.
- Burroughs, John. *Notes on Walt Whitman as Poet and Person*, 2nd ed. New York: American News Company, 1871.
- Conway, Moncure Daniel. *Emerson at Home and Abroad*. Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1882.
- Emerson, Edward W., ed. *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson VI*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1904.
- Elias, Norbert. *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*. Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.
- Engen, Trygg. *The Perception of Odors*. New York: Academic Press, 1982.
- Engen, Trygg. *Odor Sensation and Memory*. New York: Praeger, 1991.
- Gell, Alfred. "Magic, Perfume, Dream". *Symbols and Sentiments: Cross-cultural Studies in Symbolism*, edited by Ioan Lewis, London: Academic Press, 1977.
- Gelpi, Albert. 1975. *The Tenth Muse: The Psyche of the American Poet*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1977.

- Grossman, Allen. "Whitman's *Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand*: Remarks on the Endlessly Repeated Rediscovery of the Incommensurability of the Person". *BREAKING BOUNDS: Whitman and American Cultural Studies*, edited by Betsy Erkkila and Jay Grossman, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Grossman, Jay. 2003. *Reconstituting the American Renaissance: Emerson, Whitman, and the Politics of Representation*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11hpn9z>.
- Howes, David. "Olfaction and Transition". *The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses*, edited by David Howes, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991.
- Kaplan, Justin. *Walt Whitman: A Life*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1980.
- Kern, Stephen. "Olfactory Ontology and Scented Harmonies: On the History of Smell". *The Journal of Popular Culture Volume*, vol. 7, no. 4, 1974, pp. 816-824, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-3840.1974.0704_816.x.
- Kiechle, Melanie A. *Smell Detectives: An Olfactory History of Nineteenth-Century Urban America*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2017.
- Kiyotaka, Sueyoshi. "Walt Whitman's Common Sense". *Distinguished Szeged Student Papers 2020*, edited by Attila Kiss, Szeged: JATE Press Szegedi Egyetemi Kiadó, 2020, pp. 33-60.
- LeMaster, J.R. and Donald D. Kummings eds. *Walt Whitman: An Encyclopedia*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1998.
- Lewis, R.W.B. *The American Adam: Innocence Tragedy and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1955.
- Looby, Christopher. "The Roots of the Orchis, the Iuli of Chesnuts': The Odor of Male Solitude". *Solitary Pleasures: The Historical, Literary, and Artistic Discourses of Autoerotism*, edited by Paula Bennett and Vernon A. Rosario, New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Loving, Jerome. *Emerson, Whitman, and the American Muse*. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982.
- Miller, James E. Jr. *A Critical Guide to Leaves of Grass*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1957.
- Parkin, David. "Wafting on the Wind: Smell and the Cycle of Spirit and Matter". *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 13: *Wind, Life, Health: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives*, 2007, pp. S39-S53, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2007.00408.x>.
- Porte, Joel and Sandra Morris eds. *Emerson's Prose and Poetry*. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2001.
- Richards, I.A. *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1930.
- Richards, I.A. *Principle of Literary Criticism*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, Inc., 1930.
- Rueckert, William H. "Kenneth Burke's Encounters with Walt Whitman". *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review*, vol. 6, 1988, pp. 61-90, <https://doi.org/10.13008/2153-3695.1207>.
- Rusk, Ralph L., ed. *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson, VI*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1939.
- Traubel, Horace, ed. *An American Primer by Walt Whitman with Facsimiles of the Original Manuscript*. Boston: Small, Maynard and company, 1904.
- Vinge, Louise. *The Five Senses: Studies in a Literary Tradition*. Paris: Liber Laromedel, 1975.
- Watson, Lyall. *Jacobson's Organ and the Remarkable Nature of Smell*. New York: Plume, 2001.
- Whitman, Walt. *Democratic Vistas*. Washington, D.C., 1871.
- Whitman, Walt. *Leaves of Grass*. New York: Walt Whitman (self-published), 1855.
- Whitman, Walt. "Walt Whitman and His Poems". *The United States Review*, vol. 5, 1855, pp. 205-212, <https://whitmanarchive.org/criticism/reviews/lg1855/anc.00176.html>.
- Zweigg, Paul. *Walt Whitman: The Making of the Poet*. New York: Basic Books Inc., 1984.