

“THE PRAIRIE-GRASS DIVIDING” AND “LOCATIONS AND TIMES”: WHITMAN’S OLFACTION-CENTERED THINKING IN HIS POETICS AND EPISTEMOLOGY

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***Abstract:** Although various critics have noted Whitman’s interest in the five senses in his poetry, the role olfaction plays has not been fully explored. I examine “The Prairie-Grass Dividing” and “Locations and Times” – the only two poems which explicitly bear the term “correspond”, and the term “odor.” Throughout the investigation, this essay aims to show that olfaction is at the center of Whitman’s poetics – which consists of a dilation-respiration-olfaction scheme – and of his epistemology – based on the olfaction-mediated correspondence between the material and the spiritual.*

***Keywords:** poetics, epistemology, correspondence, dilation, respiration, olfaction*

1. Introduction

This essay investigates Whitman’s thinking – his poetics and epistemology – through the study of two poems, “The Prairie-Grass Dividing” and “Locations and Times”, the only poems in the deathbed edition of *Leaves of Grass*, which explicitly bear the terms “correspond”, and “odor”. While it has been noted that, in Whitman’s poems, the five senses play an “important role in comprehending or achieving the spiritual” (Miller 1957: 77), this essay specifically focuses on the roles olfaction plays in his poetics and epistemology. I argue that Whitman’s poetics consists of a dilation-respiration-olfaction scheme, which I illustrate in the second and third section, and that his epistemology centers around the term “correspondence”, an overarching term that also bears various implications in his poetics, which I illustrate in the fourth section. Thus, I aim to reveal Whitman’s olfaction-centered thinking.

2. Whitman’s poetics: dilation, respiration, olfaction

Let us start with Richard A. Law’s essay “The respiration motif in *Song of Myself*”. Law (1964: 92) maintains that the respiration motif plays the key role in Whitman’s “twofold lifework of personally assimilating and diffusing all existence”. He states:

To articulate the ‘mystical interpenetration of the Self with all life and experience,’ Whitman represents the human organism in its continuous physiological and psychological processes constantly stimulated by and responding to its environment.

It is appropriate that the first image pattern in ‘Song of Myself’ is that of respiration, because among the life processes of an organism respiration is primary. [...] Respiration intimately unites the organism and its environment in their continuous exchange of gases. In the human being the critical center of exchange is the lungs, [...] These principles of respiration underlie the imagery in sections 1 and 2 of ‘Song of Myself’ and are image referents in other sections of the poem. (idem: 92-93)

Law considers that there are two types of respiration motifs. One, which is explicated in the above quote, is the interpenetration between Whitman and his surroundings, where lungs serve as a critical center in the connection process. Apart from this, Law also calls attention to another type of respiration motif. He remarks the line “I dilate you with tremendous breath, I buoy you up” as one of the examples of “the poet’s mystical service [...] of nourishing or sustaining mankind with all that he ultimately absorbs” (idem: 93)

I would like to add that Law deals solely with “Song of Myself”, and in my essay, I aim to expand the respiration framework to make it applicable to other poems as well. First, I intend to make a distinction within the respiration motif between the interpenetration within an individual consciousness – Law’s first type – and the communal intersubjectivity – Law’s second type. For instance, Whitman’s (1855a: 18) phrase:

My respiration and inspiration, the beating of my heart, the passing of blood and air through my lungs

is about the interpenetration within an individual consciousness, whereas

I dilate you with tremendous breath I buoy you up (47)

is about communal intersubjectivity. The direct object “you” shows that there is an interrelation between Whitman and “you” and that they both have their own subjectivity. (In a broader sense, Whitman seeks to attain communal intersubjectivity through his poetry. From my point of view, communal intersubjectivity has a narrower sense in this line, which is in contrast with the interpenetration within an individual consciousness.)

In this respect, Matt Miller’s study on Whitman’s concept of “dilation” is - another helpful instrument. Miller (2010: 131) defines dilation as “reference for spiritual expansiveness” as well as “a concept crucial to his [Whitman’s] spirituality, in both spiritual and physiological terms.” Law’s wording of “personally assimilating and diffusing all existence” (Law 1964: 92) signifies the same thing as Miller’s wording of “spiritual expansiveness” (Miller 2010: 131).

In his reasoning, Miller makes a distinction between the poet’s personal dilation – the interpenetration within an individual consciousness – and interpersonal dilation – the communal intersubjectivity:

“Song of Myself” begins with the assumption that the speaker has already experienced the kind of complete inclusion and becoming that the soul requires, and the work the poem would achieve is to help its audience become and include that which it names (or, put another way, to “assume” what the poet “assumes”, beginning with the poet himself). (Miller 2010: 143)

Dilation signifies “the kind of complete inclusion and becoming that the soul requires”. Miller differentiates the poet’s personal dilation from the interpersonal dilation between the poet and his readers. Together with the phrase “I dilate you with tremendous breath I buoy you up”, he (idem: 131, 147) quotes from the Preface to *Leaves of Grass*, published in 1855:

The greatest poet hardly knows pettiness or triviality. If he breathes into any thing that was before thought small it dilates with the grandeur and life of the universe. (Whitman 1855a: 7)

In these quotes, Miller illustrates the centrality of the concept of dilation in Whitman’s poetics. He points out the key role which breath plays in the context of physiological and spiritual dilation, yet does not touch on breath per se. From my standpoint, both Miller and Law explore the similar notion of personal and interpersonal spiritual expansion in Whitman’s poetics on different levels: Miller explores the level of concept, whereas Law explores the level of physiology. I would also like to argue that both Miller and Law miss another dimension: the level of sense. Olfaction is the sense most closely related to respiration. In his self-review, Whitman (1855b: 8-9) notes that “he makes audacious and native use of his own body and soul. He must re-create poetry with the elements always at hand”. Sensuous experiences are “the elements always at hand”, and Whitman’s frequent employment of corporeal metaphors indicates that the experience of dilation is universal, not limited to some chosen people. This is the key tenet of Whitman’s poetics, and thus the inclusion of the level of sense – olfaction – in the appreciation of the levels of concept and physiology is indispensable. Strengthening my position is Whitman’s own inclination related to the five senses: Whitman is said to have had a keen sense of smell (Bailey 1926: 211). Whitman (1882: 159) states:

there is a scent to everything, even the snow, if you can only detect it – no two places, hardly any two hours, anywhere, exactly alike. How different the odor of noon from midnight, or winter from summer, or a windy spell from a still one.

Whitman’s sensitivity to smell is such that olfaction can be said to be an integral part of “the elements always at hand”. The mediation of these three levels – concept (dilation), physiology (respiration), and sense (olfaction) – shows the interplay of similar ideas at different levels; for instance, “interpenetration” corresponds to “personal dilation,” and “communal subjectivity” to “interpersonal dilation”.

Moreover, olfaction is the sense of temporal and perceptual liminality and inter-subjectivity, these characteristics being crucial to the concept of both personal and interpersonal dilation. As regards olfaction’s temporal and perceptual liminality, Alfred Gell (1977: 28), in “Magic, Perfume, Dream”, notes that:

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.

David Howes (1991: 131-132), in “Olfaction and Transition,” agrees that:

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.

Indeed, olfaction’s liminality can be said to be the pillar of the concept of personal dilation or interpenetration. Among the five senses, the sense of smell is the best to portray expansive spirituality. In respect to interpersonal dilation or inter-subjectivity, olfaction has played a vital role in human history, especially, in mystical service. Howes (idem: 133-134) asserts that:

it will be recalled that de Montaigne saw the purpose behind the use of incense and perfume in churches as being to ‘fit us for contemplation,’ presumably of God. [...] the burning of incense creates an ‘intersubjective we-feeling’ among the participants in a rite as each is forced to introject particles of the odour. One cannot not participate in the effervescence (or fellow-feeling) of the situation, because it participates in you. What is more, the use of incense ‘provides for the senses a symbolic representation of the invisible action (communion) that is taking place’...

Incense and perfume in churches are indispensable in the creation of the “intersubjective we-feeling”. Likewise, in the poetics of Whitman, the sense of smell is the mainstay to actualize communal intersubjectivity or interpersonal dilation. For instance, this feature of olfaction is the undertone in the phrase “The prairie-grass dividing, its special odor breathing”, which signifies interpersonal dilation (as well as personal dilation). Through “the elements always at hand”, Whitman (1855b) seeks to create intersubjective we-feeling different from that experienced in church. Whitman (1855a: 15) notes that “there will soon be no more priests. Their work is done”; instead, “a new order shall arise and they shall be the priests of man, and every man shall be his own priest”. It is through the employment of commonplace olfactory metaphors that Whitman demonstrates the universality of the experience of personal and interpersonal dilation.

As Miller suggests, personal dilation and interpersonal dilation go hand in hand. Both in “Song of Myself” and “The Prairie-Grass Dividing”, Whitman first experiences his own dilation and then brings about interpersonal dilation. The difference is that “The Prairie-Grass Dividing” bears “the Prairie’s special odor”, which is more specific and more suggestive of the concept of dilation rather than the symbolic “open air” in “Song of Myself”. The next section analyses the poem “The Prairie-Grass Dividing” in detail.

3. “The Prairie-Grass Dividing”: “Song of Myself” transplanted on the West

In “The Prairie-Grass Dividing”, communal intersubjectivity or interpersonal dilation is at the forefront. The fact that Whitman uses the verb “demand” in it three times shows that the focal point is not within Whitman’s own subjectivity. The theme of the poem is the attainment of an interpersonal dilation or intersubjectivity between Whitman and “Those of inland America” through the rite of “breathing the prairie-grass’s special odor”. Whitman (1882-83: 283) later states that the American character “shall be revitalized by [...] the strong air of prairie”. (The term “revitalize” suggests that the American character’s vitality had been lost in the meantime. Of the three versions of the poem – 1860 manuscript (1955: 106), 1860 the first published version (1860-61: 368), and 1867, the final version (1980: 23) –, I have chosen the last one:

The prairie-grass dividing, its special odor breathing,
 I demand of it the spiritual corresponding,
 Demand the most copious and close companionship of men,
 Demand the blades to rise of words, acts, beings,
 Those of the open atmosphere, coarse, sunlit, fresh, nutritious,
 Those that go their own gait, erect, stepping with freedom and
 command, leading not following,
 Those with a never-quell'd audacity, those with sweet and lusty
 flesh clear of taint,
 Those that look carelessly in the faces of Presidents and governors,
 as to say Who are you?
 Those of earth-born passion, simple, never constrain'd, never
 obedient,
 Those of inland America.

The first line poses a question: “what does “The prairie-grass” divide?” Although the overall tone of the poem suggests that the term “divide” signifies “expansion” – *dividing* and multiplying –, I argue that the comparison of the three different versions of the poem reveals something different. Indeed, there are three stages in the development of the poem, namely, (1) the manuscript lacks the first line; (2) the first published version has the first line, but the phrasing is a little different – the term “own” is used instead of “special”; and (3) the final version has the term “special” in the first line. A closer look provides us with the key to the meaning of “dividing”.

Firstly, Fredson Bowers’ manuscript of “The Prairie-Grass Dividing” in *Whitman’s Manuscripts: Leaves of Grass (1860)* shows that there are two crucial differences between the final form of the poem and the manuscript. The first difference concerns the title of the poem; the title of the manuscript is *Prairie-Grass* – without the term “dividing”. The other is that the manuscript starts with the second line of the final version of the poem; the manuscript starts with the phrase “I demand the spiritual / that corresponds with it” (1955: 106). This comparison between the final form and the manuscript goes a long way toward the understanding of the role the line “The prairie-grass dividing, *its special odor breathing*” plays. Whereas Whitman refers specifically to *Prairie-Grass* area in the manuscript, in the final form, he makes a distinction between the *Prairie-Grass* area and other areas. This is the answer to what “The Prairie-Grass” does divide.

Secondly, the comparison between the first version (1860) and the final version corroborates this line of thought. There are two differences, and the first is in the title. The poem is in the Calamus cluster, in *Leaves of Grass 1860*, so it is titled “Calamus 25.” The other difference regards wording and is more significant. Although Whitman added the first line, the phrasing is slightly different from that of the final version: “The prairie-grass dividing, its *own* odor breathing” (1860-61: 368).” The difference between the terms “own” and “special” gives us a clue. I argue that these two wordings relate to the distinction Whitman seeks to make between the *Prairie-Grass* area and other areas I have mentioned. While the term “own” suggests that the emphasis is on the Prairie itself, “special” emphasizes the comparison between the Prairie and other areas. In other words, the term “special” creates a binary pair between “own” and what is distinctive, different. Furthermore, it is noticeable that in the three-stage development of the poem, Whitman came to make the distinction between the “special” Prairie area and other areas.

To conclude, Whitman added the term “dividing” so that he could highlight the Prairie’s specialness, which consists of its odor. In this distinction, the touchstone is whether such “special odor” exists or not. The double roles of the olfactory metaphor – the symbol of something essential and the basis of a comparison – are not limited to this poem, but can also be seen in other poems. For instance, in section 2 of “Song of Myself”, Whitman (1855a: 18) writes:

Houses and rooms are full of 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.

Here, Whitman prefers fragrance to perfumes, since perfumes signify the Old World, and fragrance – Whitman’s own odour, inherent to him – the New World (Kiyotaka 2022: 95-96). The same logic runs in “The Prairie-Grass Dividing” and section 2 of “Song of Myself”.

“The Prairie-Grass Dividing” was first published in *Leaves of Grass* in 1860, when Whitman came to be more of a poet of the West than of all the U.S regions. Henry Nash Smith (1950: 44-45), in “Walt Whitman and Manifest Destiny”, holds that during the period between 1856 and 1860, the subject matter of *Leaves of Grass* moved from the overall U.S. to the West. He (ibid.) states that:

Whitman originally set out to sing the whole continent, East and West, North and South; [...] But the Atlantic seaboard after all represented the past, the shadow of Europe, cities, sophistication, a derivative and conventional life and literature. Beyond, occupying the overwhelming geographical mass of the continent, lay the West, a realm where nature loomed larger than civilization and where feudalism had never been established. There, evidently, would grow up the truly American society of the future. By 1860 Whitman had become aware that his original assumptions logically implied the Western orientation inherent in the cult of manifest destiny.

Whitman’s gradual attraction to the West is also detailed by Folsom’s “Walt Whitman’s Prairie Paradise”. Whitman became a cult of the Prairie. Folsom (1999: 47-48) points out that Whitman went so far as to say that his Western experiences are the core to all his life work.

Thus, it is appropriate to suppose that there is an incentive for Whitman to bring the key motif in the original “Song of Myself” (1855a) – the concept of dilation or the respiration motif – onto the West he was newly attracted to. As I have mentioned, Whitman gradually came to make an increasing distinction between the Prairie area and other areas. In line with this, he (1980: 230) wrote another short poem titled “Others may praise what they like”, which contains both the respiration motif and the West.

Others may praise what they like;
But I, from the banks of the running Missouri, praise nothing in art or aught else,
Till it has well inhaled the atmosphere of this river, also the western prairie-scent,
And exudes it all again.

Although the subject matter of the poem is limited to “art or aught else”, this upfront of respiration motif in this poem as well as in “The Prairie-Grass Dividing” is that of “Song of Myself” in redux. Of course, art here signifies more than merely an art form, it is seen as an ideal American manifestation of the future; art here is a

future or an ideal of America. For Whitman (1882-83: 142), the American Prairie is “the home both of what I would call America’s distinctive ideas and distinctive realities”, and art needs to reflect those. The respiration of “the atmosphere of this river, also the western prairie-scent” (ibid.) becomes the flesh and blood of art.

Interestingly, insisting on the respiration motif in “The Prairie-Grass Dividing” and “Others May Praise What They Like”, Whitman is in line with the conventional wisdom of the time. There are two points to consider. The first is the difficulty in grasping the Prairie visually (Kinsey, Roberts and Sayre 1999: 62-63), and the flip side of it – the Prairie as the symbol of Great Leveler (idem: 63), and the other is the association of the Prairie with the lung of the continent (idem: 28). As far as the first point is concerned – the difficulty in visual perception – Kinsey, Roberts and Sayre (1999: 62-63) state that:

Prairies had long been considered both artistically and physically barren by Euro-American travelers and artists – the prairies were difficult to “read” using conventional understandings of the uses and artistic values of landscapes. Because of the seeming absence of prospects or viewpoints provided by mountains, forests, houses, and cultivated fields, the prairie could seem like a sea made of grasses; with no points of reference and no signs of agricultural promise, one could easily get lost.

In spite of the image of a panoramic view of the Prairie – enabled nowadays by our spatial perception with the help of technology –, in the nineteenth century, people were at pains to perceive it visually. Nevertheless, the artistic difficulty in visualizing the Prairie has a silver lining. The limitless expansion of the flat surface was the “Great Leveler”. Jane E. Simonsen (1999: 63) suggests that:

The prairie’s level plane became the “Great Leveler,” a region where American citizens would stand on equal footing with one another, united in their purpose and struggle to create fertile farmland out of the ocean of prairie grass. Natural features reinforced this democratic vision: grand vistas of sky and grassland and gently rolling hills symbolized grand purpose. The prairie’s prospect was a level one in which national democratic goals were echoed and legitimated by the very landscape on which those dreams were built.

The expansive levelness of the Prairie evokes an image of egalitarianism and democracy, which Whitman (1855a) sings in the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* 5. This feature of the Prairie is enough to encourage the poet to overcome the difficulty in the visual portrayal of the Prairie and seek an alternative modality – olfaction – so that he can poetize the Prairie.

The second point – more important and direct in the explanation of Whitman’s use of respiration motif in describing the Prairie – is that the prairie was viewed as the lung of the continent. Kinsey, Roberts and Sayre (1999: 28) point out that:

“The prairies of the West are the lungs of the continent, and upon reaching them men take a long breath, which makes them more largely human than they ever were before.” Prairie-as-lung saves the writer from describing prairie-as-prairie, while also promoting the connection between prairie and person. Prairie-as-lung becomes enlarged human lung; enlarged lung becomes expanded, “more largely human” person; and person embodies prairie.

The phrase “take a long breath, which makes them more largely human than they ever were before” rings a bell; this is the process of dilation I mentioned in the

second section. In “The Prairie-Grass Dividing”, Whitman’s phrase “I dilate you with tremendous breath, I buoy you up” in “Song of Myself” (1855a) is united with the distinct air of the Prairie. The “tremendous breath” of the Prairie, not Whitman, “dilates you” and “buoys you up” to renewed vigour. The Prairie air is native to the U.S.; it is a soul, an emanation from the soil (Folsom 1999: 50).

In the next section, I investigate “Locations and Times”. In the metaphysical poem “Locations and Times”, Whitman seeks to do his soul-searching without the special odour of the Prairie which helps Whitman to dilate personally and interpersonally. Still, in “Locations and Times”, Whitman appeals to olfaction by adding “odors” to the property of a thing; he seeks to go beyond *locations and times*.

4. Whitman’s epistemology in “Locations and Times”

As Lawrence Buell (1974: 52, 149) points out, American Transcendentalists valued the notion of correspondence; he (1974: 149) states that “The basis of Transcendentalist thinking as to the role of nature in art is the idea of a metaphysical correspondence between nature and spirit, as expressed chiefly by Emerson”. Emerson (1939: 435) declares:

(I am a poet) in the sense of a perceiver and dear lover of the harmonies that are in the soul and in matter, and specially of the correspondences between these and those.

It is easy to see the influence of the Transcendentalist notion of correspondence on Whitman (1980: 41), which is represented, for example, by the line “I will make the poems of materials, for I think they are to be the most spiritual poems” in “Starting from Paumanok.” Yet, oddly enough, *Leaves of Grass* has only three poems which explicitly contain the term “correspond” (including its variants); the first is “The Prairie-Grass Dividing”, the next “Locations and Times”, and the last one “By Blue Ontario’s Shore” (1980: 123, 230, 275). Given that “By Blue Ontario’s Shore” is the preface to the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* turned into a poem (Gruesz 1998: 91), there are only two poems where the term “correspond” appears, which were written as poetry from the beginning.

Even more interestingly, both “The Prairie-Grass Dividing” and “Locations and Times” have olfactory metaphors; “The Prairie-Grass Dividing” – “The prairie-grass dividing, its special odor breathing, I demand of it the spiritual corresponding,” and “Locations and Times” – “Forms, colors, densities, odors – what is it in me that corresponds with them?” (1980: 230). This singularity may be just a coincidence, but I argue that it warrants a closer examination; it seems likely that these two poems are quintessential in representing the two strands of Whitman’s poetics. “The Prairie-Grass Dividing” embodies interpersonal dilation or communal intersubjectivity, and “Locations and Times”, personal dilation or the individual interpenetration. “Locations and Times” is a short poem, so insignificant that the *Walt Whitman: An Encyclopedia* (1998) omits mentioning it.

Locations and times – what is it in me that meets them all,
whenever and wherever, and makes me at home?
Forms, colors, densities, odors – what is it in me that corresponds with them?
(Whitman 1980: 230)

I argue that the usage of the term “odors” in the poem reveals much of Whitman’s epistemology; its seeming extraneity to the subject matter – odour is not a good indicator of space and time; it is hard to pinpoint these aspects of an odorant (Batty 2010: 531, 533) – suggests that Whitman seeks to grasp more than purely materialistic “Locations and Times”, and that odour plays a special role in his doing so. Examining Whitman’s epistemology helps. Marion Harris (1963: 85) states that in Whitman’s epistemology, there are two levels of experiences which lead to understanding: sensory experience – leading to “the physical conscience” (Whitman 1871: 64) – and affective experience – “the moral and spiritual conscience”, which is the final goal of Whitman’s epistemology. In the process, there is a correspondence between the two experiences: the sensory experience leads to the affective one (Harris 1963: 85). Harris (1963: 85-86) refers to the importance of the five senses in Whitman’s poems, but he does not specify which sense plays a particular role.

In order to better investigate the poem, it is worthwhile to draw a comparison between “Locations and Times” and another poem titled “Of the Terrible Doubt of Appearance”, which was written in the same period (between 1856 and 1860) and contains the phrase “colors, densities, forms may-be these are (as doubtless they are) only apparitions, and the real something has yet to be known” (Whitman 1980: 117). It is noticeable that between the two poems, there is a slight difference in the enumeration of the properties of a thing. Whereas “colors, densities, forms” are picked up in “Of the terrible doubt of Appearance” – the result being that “the real something has yet to be known”, in “Locations and Times”, “Forms, colors, densities, odors” are chosen so that Whitman can contemplate “what is it in me that corresponds with them?” The comparison of the two poems reveals that Whitman demands more than “temporal appearance”, and that the insertion of the term “odors” in “Locations and Times” provides the poem with a spiritual correspondence, which is spaceless and timeless; Whitman writes here that “what is it in me that meets them all, / *whenever* and *wherever*, and makes me at home?” (emphasis mine). The usage of “odors” in “Locations and Times” illustrates the role odor plays in the shift from sensory experience to affective one. The sense of smell – a sense of emotion rather than cognition (Engen 1982: 3) – serves as a bridge between the two types of experiences. This interpretation is borne out by the general notion that the term “odors” in “Locations and Times” – by its nature, as I have mentioned – is not suitable as the supplement for “Forms, colors, densities”. In other words, the use of odor here is meant solely to express the elevation from sensory experience to affective one; it is a process of sublimation of a lower consciousness to a higher one. It is through olfaction that the correspondence between sensory experience and Whitman’s innermost mind is reached.

In this case, revisiting the dilation-respiration-olfaction scheme is revealing. The elevation from the sensory experience to the affective one is similar to the concept of dilation – spiritual expansiveness – or interpenetration within an individual consciousness. It is interesting to see that olfaction plays various roles by serving as a hub in Whitman’s thinking. The use of “odor” in “Locations and Times” is also explained by the olfaction’s characteristic temporal and perceptual liminality in the context of dilation. The comparison of the poem with “The Prairie-Grass Dividing” also helps. On the one hand, the prairie grass itself provides an odorant – its special smell –, which enables personal and interpersonal dilation. On the other hand, in “Times and Locations”, without any specific odorant given, seeking after personal dilation or interpenetration necessitates an (artificial) appeal to odour.

5. Conclusion

In this essay, I have investigated Whitman's poems: "The Prairie-Grass Dividing" – one of his canonical works – and "Locations and Times" – a minor one. "The Prairie-Grass Dividing" and "Locations and Times" are the only two poems in the deathbed edition of *Leaves of Grass*, which explicitly contain the term "correspond", and which also happen to contain the term "odor".

Through the investigation of the two poems, I showed Whitman's olfaction-centered thinking in his poetics and epistemology. "The Prairie-Grass Dividing" concerns communal intersubjectivity or interpersonal dilation, representing the poetics of dilation-respiration-olfaction scheme. "Locations and Times" focuses on individual interpenetration or personal dilation, illustrating Whitman's epistemology. What connects the two poems is the key overarching terms "correspond" and "odor." Serving as a hub, olfaction plays the central role in Whitman's thinking.

I have also shown that the respiration motif runs from "Song of Myself" to "The Prairie-Grass Dividing", while "the open air" in "Song of Myself" takes the more specific form of "air of Prairie" in "The Prairie-Grass Dividing". In the analysis of "Locations and Times", I have illustrated the special role odour plays in the sublimation of a lower consciousness to a higher one. It is through olfaction that the correspondence between sensory experience and Whitman's innermost mind is reached.

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