

I's

I like words because they are not messy (they say exactly what they mean). When they are messy and their meaning multiple and unclear, I like them all the better. You see, writing has the unique propensity of making everything possible and not possible all at the same time. It is in this way that writing both matters very much and not at all. I would like to say here that I can do anything, everything. But of course I cannot. This delicious paradox holds me willing and desperate at the edge of every book, licking, tasting nothing, but continuing to lick. Words curate our perception of the world, and therefore our living in the world, and therefore life, which sometimes seems the only thing that Matters. In *A Lecture On Corners*, Anne Carson ties and unties the very end of her lecture by quoting her late early father with; "By means of a box of matches you can demonstrate almost anything in the world except a box of matches." From which I can use that poetic property of transmutation to say: By means of poetry we can demonstrate almost everything in the world except poetry.

## Whitman-skeleton-soul

### EPITHET:

Cut to the quick, quick to the middle, molten, drip skeleton soul, I heard you when I was 14, and now I  
too am, water bone, flower tip, sunshine, scout,

*Dear N,*

*This is a letter to, about, and of you. I hope you don't mind.*

*The first memory I can reach is of lying on my back and looking up at you.  
The sky was blue and the leaves were waving in the wind. I can't remember what I was thinking. Perhaps  
I was not thinking at all and this is why I remember...*

We can start with the title, as titles are almost always where we start anyways whether we want to or not. In 1855 Walt Whitman published a collection of untitled lines which would later be named "Song of Myself." The collection was published within a larger containing poem titled *Leaves of Grass*. When I read, and read into this title, several things surface in my mind. 1. The word "leaves" isn't usually used to describe grass, this alternate association seems poetic in that it broadens my understanding of the thing(grass), or serves to make it larger than it is. 2. Leaves can refer to pages, so I begin to read the pages as grass. Or, as me thinking that Walt was insinuating that the pages *are* grass (another poetic action). Or, that he is trying to write *of* grass, or make us believe that he *is* writing grass. Or, all of the above simultaneously. 3. Leaves can also mean leaving. He leaves, she leaves, they leave, I leave, grass leaves. This makes me think of death, and grass as "the uncut hair of graves" (Whitman, canto 6). In this way I understand grass to be an evidence of leaving.

Let's now look into the title that was given 1881 : "Song of Myself," which seems to be doing something similar to that of the larger containing title (*Leaves of Grass*) in that it is again coupling words that are not typically associated with each other e.g. "Song" and "Myself." This title also immediately does to me something that the whole poem does to me, which is that makes a person more than a person. As if the "song" is not just *of* Whitman, but as Noah Miller

said in class 9/20/19 “it is of him and it *is* him.” When I read “Song of Myself” I also think of *myself*, and of *my song*, and then I feel as though I could read myself through these words.

*Dear N,*

*Is that why you read? To become yourself?*

I then started thinking about what Whit was saying about himself. With a title like “Song of Myself” it can be assumed that the author is claiming the whole song/poem as themselves, or using the song as a medium through which to describe themselves in a way which would not be possible any other way. Another propensity of the poetic medium is that it allows the subject to be fluid, as, in poetry things are not often very clear. The instability, or murkiness of poems allows the reader to be the writer and the objects and subjects of the poem to be anything imaginable. Anything imaginable and very specific.

There are 49 uses of the phrase “I am” in the Poetry Foundation 1892 edition of *Song of Myself* by Walt Whitman. I read through all of them to try to figure out what Whitman was saying that he was. By looking for phrases in which Whitman was claiming what he was, and *that* with which he was, I was also looking for what I am, and what I could be. I feel that a particular property of poetry is the ability to transform things into other things while at the same time remaining themselves, and to put things from different places into a type of close communion that does not typically exist.

About seeing a spotted hawk: “I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable” (Whitman, canto 52). And in the way that Whitman becomes like the hawk, untamed and untranslatable, I can become like the likeness of Whitman to the hawk. And *I* love to then be in some way more untamed and untranslatable. “I depart as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun, I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags” (Whitman, canto 52). I do.

We can of course read poetry, especially autographical poetry, and say *there is no way he did, there is no way he was*. Yet poetry provides a specific and unusual realm in which he is/can, and therefore I am/can.

In canto 20 Whitman writes "I know I am august"

*Dear N,*

*when I read "I know I am August" I feel like something shoots through me and out to the other side. And in a way I know that I am august too. Or I am august today. Or maybe I'm not august right now but I will be tonight when I'm lying almost asleep in the dark with the windows open and I can smell the end or august coming in through the windows. I am august and I am in love with august.*

*Love*

*august*

When he says this it does again to me what the titles do, which is make him more of/than himself. More but not all. Although sometimes it seems that he tends towards an all encompassing ontology, he can also be very specific in his distinctions. For example he is specifically august rather than every month in a year. This specificity makes both him and august seem more rather than less. There is a way that writing only "august" punches me acutely than anything other or broader. It makes august huge... A person, a whole world. Later in canto 7 he specifies what he is and what he is not: "I am not an earth nor an adjunct of an earth, I am the mate and companion of people, all just as immortal and fathomless as myself[.]" He says that he is *not* "an earth" *but* a "mate and companion of people." In this instance he does not imbue earth or object with human attribute. However later, when he writes: "The city sleeps and the country sleeps" he does imbue (canto 15). Sleep is a bodily word, so to say that the city and country "sleep" makes me feel like the city and country are bodies, or part of bodies, or at least alive, or at least that Whit thinks that they are.

Last year I made two instagram posts about the city and what the city is, because to say that the city was something different than it was usually named/seen made me feel comforted somehow. The first post was titled: "# 1 : the city has a body" (February 19, 2019). It was a series beginning with a video of construction workers climbing a building, then a shiny cellophane star in a puddle, then an external lift moving up and down the side of a building. Four posts later is a picture of the flower stand on 17th and Chestnut with ornamental pear trees flowering above it, and then a close up shot of a someone holding a bag with a photo of pink tulips on it. The caption reads: "The city is a jungle and the jungle is in bloom." In trying to say what the city was/is I think that I was trying to reword it in order to negotiate my emotional relationship to it. Is this what poetry does? Is this why I have been so drawn to Whitman? For a generative, and comforting re-understanding?

*Dear N,*

*I don't know if I can keep living in the city. Everyday it feels like some small battles sadly press myself out of the sunlight into the train car into the sad streets the fluorescent light of the rooms and rooms and endless walls. I want to be OUT when I want to be and IN when I want to be. I want to come and go as I*

*please!*

## Pico-heart-flesh-cunt

### *EPITHET:*

EAT IT WHILE IT'S SWEET! honey

Somebody screams at me like a slap in the face I love you is also a slap in the face.

I could, come cream, crop tip, post grass, "congratulations on your late wind", this is pointless I continue,  
the sycamores across the street continue holdgolden, neighborhood petition to cut down sycamore trees,  
leave, me, alone come closer

In Tommy Pico's *Nature Poem*, it seems as though he is also looking for a comfort in painting a broader understanding of nature and the natural. Rather than seeking the "I am" from Pico, I instead found myself looking for what nature is, or at least what Pico thinks nature is. Through this look for a 'nature is' I am also looking for how we are in relation to it, or *are* it.

I can relate my search through Pico to my search thorough Whitman by looking for equivalencies in what I see as the poetic functionalities of their poems. Where Whitman seems to again and again be shouting what he is, and therefore what he desperately wants to be, Pico seems to be trying to claim what nature is, or what he wants it to be. For an equivalent to Whitman's "I am," I looked for Pico's "Nature is," through the sections in *Nature Poem* which conclude: "This is a kind of nature I would write a poem about." To me this phrase suggests and continues to suggest both what Pico is defining as nature and how he is *wanting* to define it, in ways that also suggest an alterity to stereotyped definitions(poems) of nature. This refusal to conform to nature poem stereotypes serves to both distort and broaden my conceptions of nature.

"He puts his hands on the ribs of my chair and asks do I want to come to the bathroom with him

Let's say he doesn't turn me on at all

Let's say I literally hate all men bc literally men are animals-" (Pico, p.2).

He says : "This is a kind of nature I would write a poem about" (Pico, p.2).

If we look at depictions of nature as portraits that these writers are painting, it feels as though Pico's portrait of Nature is rather dark and gritty. A nature that has a wild and vast side like the ocean and the stars, and another side that spits and grinds on you in a club, or offers you half a cigarette in a drunken alley.

"Nature is kind of over my head  
the speech sweeps inland is overtaking  
Nature keeps wanting to hang out" (Pico, p.22).

*Dear N,*

*Im sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry  
I know its the way that I'm living that is hurting you but the thing is that even if I bring my lunch to school  
in glass containers I am still buying non-organic produce and if I broke my glass jar I would have to  
sweep it up and put it right into the trash and then here we are again but I still wanted to say that I love  
you and won't stop*

There are many instances in the text in which Pico paints Nature as a character in what is usually an intimate encounter. When he uses that form it speaks to me of the propensities of poetics again. To write Nature as lover or a body broadens both my concept of Nature and my concept of bodies.

*Dear N,*

*I went to Wawa again today, I know fuck me right, at least I said I was sorry,  
my mother's grandmother picked blackberries.*

"Knowing the moon is inescapable tonight

and the tuft of yr chest against my shoulder blades.

This is the kind of nature I would write a poem about” (Pico p. 27).

What is he doing by saying that nature has a flesh aspect almost? Or a flesh aspect and a sea aspect both? To me this flesh aspect (Human AS Nature), makes the very broad concept that is ‘nature’ feel closer to me, and I to it. I imagine the ways that I interact with flesh differently than the ways I interact with “nature,” so to say that nature is flesh too makes it feel very close and tangible, and as though I could show my care for it by taking it in my arms. This excites me to the possibilities of what poetics does/can do. To paint nature as a body, specifically a lover’s body, makes it feel closer. When it feels closer I feel like I can take care of it. “Taking care” of ‘nature’ seems essential to me, which makes this poetic property feel important. However, does making a concept feel metaphorically “closer” actually do anything tangible, or are its intangible attributes enough?

*Dear N,*

*IS THIS DOING ANYTHING?!?!?!?!?!?*

*“My family’s experience isn’t fodder for artwork,*

says nature in btwn make outs” (Pico 43).

Rather than a lover, Pico could also be referring to himself when he refers to nature. When he writes: *“My family’s experience isn’t fodder for artwork,”* it feels less about nature and more about himself. However; the closeness in possible receptions of this passage ultimately speak of a bothness or allness akin to Whitman’s idealogies. It’s like Nature is Nature is his Lover is Himself. When he says: “to show again the sea of my body,” and, “the cloud’s arms sweep down the mountainside,” it follows poetic reason that nature is both *a* body and *his* body, his lover *and* the wind (Pico p. 28 and 23). By this property he then also defines nature when he defines himself: “Today I am a handful of raisins and art 15 ppl on the water taxi” (pico 30).

Poetically functioned, he is also saying: today *Nature* is a handful of raisins and 15 people on



the water taxi. It is also important to note that he prefaces that sentence by saying “you become a little bit of everything you brush against” (Pico 30). Gathered with the functioning of ourselves as our lovers as Nature, that line serves to acknowledge the blurring of lines.

*Dear N,*

*I am practicing saying “I am never not my body, I am never not nature, I am never not in love,”*

## Ginsberg-skin-brain

### *EPITHET:*

The skin in a porous substance through which, especially if exposed, raw, inflamed, can feel, and transmit substance, emotion, information. When you are hot skin sweats, the glisten, trace amounts of, whatever you took, you can't remember, the world is ending, the mind a sight of hallucinations, unintelligible and beautiful and terrible run on/off

In *Howl* perhaps Ginsberg too was trying to illustrate similar blurring when he talks of the “angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night” (Ginsberg, page 1). This passage is so blurry to me that I looked up the words in order to better understand it. There is no definition for “angelheaded” in the dictionary, so I will take it here to mean ‘head in the clouds’, lackadaisical, doped, and delirious. Although I am aware that these words merely surround and not describe the term, I must throw. *Hipster* : “a person who is unusually aware of and interested in new and unconventional patterns” quoth Merriam Webster. *Dynamo*: “a machine for converting mechanical energy into electrical energy; a generator” (Merriam Webster). The passage rewritten by me just now: FUCK ME ALL I WANT IS TO OOF FEEL LIKE IM A PART OF IT OF WHAT OF WHAT EVER IT IS THAT WE'RE IN AND MADE OF I WANT TO MAKE IT MOVE WITH MERELY THE POWER OF MY BODY I WANT TO SCREAM IT AGAIN AND AGAIN INTO THE NIGHT.

It is not once or twice that Ginsberg sends me into a blur, but rather again and again, and again, indeed perhaps, for the entire poem. The reason for the blur is the medium. Poetry has the propensity both of changing and nearing abstract articles, and also of taking things that are known and making them not yet known, new, or(/and) false, and/or blurred. Though it is blurry, I think that Ginsberg is saying and doing something congruent or at least in conversation with

Whitman and Pico. An “ancient heavenly connection” relates me to Whitman’s “to me converging objects of the universe perpetually flow,” and Pico’s

“if the spark is elemental if the phase changes [...]

if infusing the valley with yrself

if the light is over

whelming" (Ginsberg, p.1. Whitman, canto 20. Pico p. 35). All of these passages speak of something grand or even all or even everything, to which these writers are trying to write themselves to, and in that writing to, perhaps become. In searching for the equivalent to an *I am*, or *nature is*, from Ginsberg I found something different, he speaks not so much of an “I” or a “Nature,” but of a multiple “who”.

There are 92 "who" 's in the Poetry Foundation copy of *Howl* by Allen Ginsberg.

These ‘who’s’ are named only briefly as “the best minds of my generation,” before Ginsberg goes into a poem’s worth of detail about what the who’s did, and what was done to them, and where they were (Ginsberg, p. 1). He rips open a quite gory description of human nature, using poetic property to fabricate imagery, shot directly into the brain. The majority of the poem is essentially a vignettted description. Ginsberg uses poetics differently than the other two writers in that he gets into rolling so fast that he cuts out the syntactic machines. When describing the “storefront boroughs” they are "teahead joyride neon blinking traffic light, sun and moon and tree vibrations” (Ginsberg). This gives me a poetry like a hit of color snorted. Rather than *being* in between he *cuts out* the in between. This reminds me of open wounds, and intoxication.

*Dear N,*

*last night in my sleepless delirium I wrote about Allan: “His poetry is running me on and disheartening  
and making me closer and further away and throwing it in the trash and “*

*Epilogue:*

*Dear N,*

*Once I heard a girl say “the grass feels like tongues.. if the grass were tongues I would lay in it..  
hahaha..”*

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