

Walt Whitman and His Utopian Body

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This paper examines Walt Whitman's thoughts on sense of touch in *Leaves of Grass* (1855). As a poet who eulogizes human body and drives his poems with its eroticism, Whitman reveals his keen interest on body and its tactility mainly in "Song of Myself" and "I Sing the Body Electric." The poet regards body as a translucent form and touch as the most intense force to disturb it. Giving a new identity to those who are touched each time, each touch betrays one single fixed identity of the body. Whitman's notion of body and touch in his poems seems similar to what Michel Foucault calls "Utopian Body." Foucault states that human body is a placeless place, for we could not sense our own existence and its occupation in space by ourselves, but that body can be reclaimed with sense of touch from Others. Foucault suggests that love making is how the body is reclaimed. Whitman also, like Foucault, represents the erotic situations, in which male and female have sexual intercourse or the addressee's intense sensual touch overwhelms the poetic speaker, as the new space where one reclaims his/her existence. In his poems, Whitman takes the new identity and space, to which one is led by sense of touch from Others, as the locus in which the boundaries between subject and Other disappears and the communicative power of the mutual body is recuperated.