

Some Notes on Whitman for Allen Joyce

Jack Spicer

"Let shadows be furnished with genitals."

He was reaching for a world I can still remember. Sweet and painful. It is a world without magic and without god. His ocean is different from my ocean, his moon is different from my moon, his love (oh, God the loss) is different from my love.

In his world roads go somewhere and you walk with someone whose hand you can hold. I remember. In my world roads only go up and down and you are lucky if you can hold on to the road or even know that it is there.

He never heard spirits whispering or saw Aphrodite crawl out of the water or was frightened by the ghost of something crucified. His world had clouds in it and he loved Indian names and carried some of his poems in a pouch around his neck. He had no need of death.

Rimbaud without wings.

Forgive me Walt Whitman, you whose fine mouth has sucked the cock of the heart of the country for fifty years. You did not ever understand cruelty. It was that that severed your world from me, fouled your moon and your ocean, threw me out of your bearded paradise. The comrade you are walking with suddenly twists your hand off. The ghost-bird that is singing to you suddenly leaves a large seagull dropping in your eye. You are sucking the cock of a heart that has clap.

Calamus cannot exist in the presence of cruelty. Not merely human cruelty, but the cruelty of shadows, the cruelty of spirits. Calamus is like Oz. One needs, after one has left it, to find some magic belt to cross its Deadly Desert, some cat to entice one into its mirror. There Walt is, like some great seabird from the Emerald Palace, crying, "Calamus, Calamus." And there one is, at the other side of the desert, hearing Walt

but seeing the impossible shadow, those shimmering heat waves across the sky. And one needs no Virgil, but an Alice, a Dorothy, a Washington horsecar conductor, to lead one across that cuntlike mirror, that cruelty.

So when I dreamed of Calamus, as I often did when I touched you or put my hand upon your hand, it was not as of a possible world, but as a lost paradise. A land my father Adam drove me out of with the whip of shadow. In the last sense of the word—a fairy story. That is what I think about Calamus. That is what I think about your damned Calamus.