

Paul Fericano

A WHITMAN ENCOUNTER

At a time in my life when I was struggling to find direction with my poetry while hiding from my landlord, I experienced a bizarre dream one night back in 1970 that eventually became the inspiration for the poem, "Loading The Revolver With Real Bullets," and, more importantly, the catalyst for the beginning of my own poetic voice.

In this very short dream, Walt Whitman is sitting in Vesuvio's Cafe in the North Beach section of San Francisco and gulping down shots of cheap whiskey. I am sitting with him dressed in a tuxedo and clutching an Oscar. Besides us, the only other persons in Vesuvio's are Allen Ginsberg and Charles Bukowski. Bukowski is out cold on the floor. Ginsberg is kneeling over him taking money from Bukowski's wallet. I am very upset by this and ask Whitman what this all means. Whitman downs another shot, leans toward me, and whispers that he has never been able to understand any of it either. With this said, he puts on his hat, throws down a buck tip, and then leaves.

The last thing I remember in this dream is Ginsberg trying to pick my pocket, and Whitman looking back at me with a smile.

Then I woke up.

And I have been awake ever since.