

**Eliot Katz**

**AS I STAND BEFORE YOUR GRAVE, CAMERADO**

*—lines written at Whitman's tomb, July 5th, 1986*

Cheers, Walt! I raise my bottle to you.  
Ignored or worse in your life's time,  
now you've made it:  
superstar, the original American poet recognized by all.  
Yet, as I stand before your grave, camerado,  
how I grieve for you,  
for your vision of America becoming just a dot in the universe's  
rearview mirror  
as real America drives further away every day from your dream of  
libertad.  
Even as I stood last night  
among half million mothers, daughters, fathers, sons,  
Battery Park, Manhattan, cheering explosions of fireworks  
tremendous,  
drunken happy, loud proud voices toasting Statue of Liberty's 100th  
birthday,  
how sad I grew thinking how hidden true liberty today,  
thinking your lines in Democratic Vistas  
that in this great new country feudalism would end  
or America would be the greatest failure of all time.  
Walt, stand up! Can you walk a bit?  
Stroll your body's final resting place,  
Camden, New Jersey, once Garden State, now world's cancer  
capital.  
Look with your love-of-workers eyes at homes built with broken  
boards on made-to-break foundations!  
Try to treat with experienced nurse's hands the casualties of the  
longest running war America refuses to admit, the war on its  
own!  
Try to treat the long suffering sufferers of the disease caused by  
extreme poverty of open space!  
Pick up a few McDonald's wrappers and Pepsi cans loitering on  
sidewalks and in tenement hallways!

Inhale car and factory exhaust in the air you loved odorless and  
free!

Taste the water that doesn't even look like water anymore!

Walt, in your wildest prophetic imagination did you imagine the  
hydrogen bomb?

The Neutron Bomb? Plutonium waste dumps?

The country you loved atom bombing Hiroshima?

Acquiring wealth by arming tyrants Southeast Asia to Latin  
America?

Over a century after Lincoln, condoning black American poverty  
and black South African slave systems?

Did you foresee 1986 America stealing more land promised forever  
to its Native Americans?

Are your feet too tired to walk further, Walt?

and watch America's homeless driven with invisible economic  
psychological sadistic whips out of barely sheltering shelters  
from Santa Barbara, California to New Brunswick, New  
Jersey?

You wrote that in a generation or two there'd be no more priests,  
everyone his or her own priest.

Yet, today, guilt-inflicting grabbers of the names Morality and  
Religion grow richer denying Christ's concept of compassion  
than ever before!

You wrote liberty was preparing for us,  
that liberty would not be first to leave earth,  
nor second, but last, after all life in every form had already  
departed.

Now Russia, another nation so failing its great poetic vision,  
and America run a weapons race that if not stopped  
will surely destroy all lifeforms and your cherished liberty.

Yet, Walt, as I stand before your grave,

I can somehow feel your breath shooting through my feet and  
ankles and knees and thighs and balls and ribs and heart and  
chest and neck and chin and mouth and eyes and ears and  
skull!

Oh, to look at the leaves around your tomb!

To touch with my hands the encasement of your dreams and desires  
for a just, uplifting America!

Walt, for as long as my body shall live  
so shall your spirit and struggle for libertad!  
I swear it! here and now!  
    on your grave!  
        camerado!

**Brian Carr**

**WALT WHITMAN, AUTUMN, 1987**

Camden, Walt, is a star fallen from your Federal  
morning sky. Don't fret, Campbell's Soup  
is still afloat, and the University restores  
whatever won't make a better parking lot.  
I'm sorry, too, but these days you're just a long green  
bridge to people, ninety lousy cents each way,  
any day now a dollar. We'll cross if you'd like to stick your  
finger in the crack  
of the Liberty Bell, just for fun. I'd rather walk  
the other way, hit a Boulevard  
booze shop for a quart bottle of Bud, skip  
the windowless white strip joint, and head  
for the county park. The walk is a tribute to the dead  
and dying, abandoned autos, broken glass on the sidewalk  
where a round-faced black lady  
watches strangers pass, her row home leaning left, patched  
pants boys who will stare right through us as we weave  
through the littered streets. We might have a quarter left  
for the corner beggar who screams, 'I fought for this country,  
they screwed me.' (If I have two, Walt, I'll give one  
for you.) Weeds grow out through the shattered windows, knock  
like dead friends on boarded doorways. It is the trees though  
I want you to see, still standing together in the park,  
except for a fat one I know fallen in the autumn sun  
where we can rest our cheeks awhile, swill  
some brew, and joke about Allen Ginsberg's pecker.