

Spinning Walt Whitman

by Richard Melo

In San Francisco, there rides at night a phantom streetcar whose driver is none other than Walt Whitman -- long-missing-from-the-hip-hip-scene Walt -- long-dead Walt, or so they have thought these past five score years. Walt Whitman -- good guy, roaming poet -- what else would Walt Whitman do with himself these days other than drive a MUNI? Phantom Walt sees driving a MUNI as more than a job, but as a privilege -- transporting people -- getting them where they need to go -- moving their lives along.

Work is where we're social -- work is where we meet the people who will always intersect our lives -- the people we are going to love. Walt Whitman takes you to work, then he takes you home. Home holds all the more meaning when measured against Friday nights -- the whole weekend unfolding before you. You smell your neighbor's dinner through open windows -- through a surprise December balm. You wish you were eating what they're eating. Instead you are going to work -- the night shift -- looking for that streetcar that will take you there.

Walt Whitman carries on -- driving the MUNI -- even when you have gone home & gone to sleep. Walt Whitman carries on -- a patriot in love with all the riders & nonriders alike -- in love with the United States of America & all of its textures & scents. It is the perfume inside his mouth forever. He is not the kind to wrap himself up in an American flag -- Walt's not. Life is too many colors for Walt Whitman to settle for no more than red, white & blue. Walt rather sees America as a conglomeration of faces & voices: Railroad worker, Tucka Hoe, U.S. Senator, all irresistibly the same, the faces weaving together -- they warp & weft. The resulting fabric becomes the flag waving in the American breeze.

You salute with your spirit & somewhere, Earth bless him, Walt Whitman is still spinning.

