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NOW, VOYAGER:WHITMAN'S POEM *THE UNTOLD WANT*, PROUTY'S NOVEL *NOW, VOYAGER*, RAPPER'S FILM *NOW, VOYAGER* , AND NOW

Larry D. Griffin

American University of Ras Al Khaimah, United Arab Emirates

The second line of Walt Whitman's short poem "The Untold Want" reads: "Now, Voyager, sail thou forth, to seek and find." Olive Higgins Prouty entitles her 1941 novel *Now Voyager,* and Irving Rapper names his 1942 film, starring Bette Davis, *Now Voyager.* Both the novel and the film explicate the meaning of how one must change their life now as presented through the character of Charlotte Vale. After the 1940's the concept enters into mainstream twenty and twenty-first century American enterprises and cultural activities, including American law, pop psychology, fiction and nonfiction books, poems, songs, art, and the nomenclature of other material culture artifacts.

Keywords: Now, Voyager, Poem, Novel, Film.

Not knowing how *now*here really to begin, this writer seizes this *now* in your presence whether one reads his words or hears his voice as he speaks words or writes them in this document in the only *now*, for in the small pieces of presented experience of poetry and the fictions of the novel and the film, all the spoken *now*and *now* read (heard in the ear's mind, seen in the mind's eye),all exists in the present, all any human has, perhaps why symbolic analysts write literary criticism as much as possible in the present tense. Thatcontinues to place all in the immediacy ofthese words of Walt Whitman:

> THE untold want, by life and land ne'er granted,
> Now, Voyager, sail thou forth, to seek and find.

Whitman's lines direct and establish an important concept of change, and Olive Higgins Prouty's novel and Irving Rapper's film of the same titles, *Now, Voyager*, in the 1940's subsequently enter and influence American culture in a variety of ways.

Olive Higgins Prouty's novels, *Now Voyager* (1941) and its sequel *Home Port*, taketheir titles fromWhitman's poems (Lemaire, "Prouty"). There are five Vale novels, and in "A Woman Hits her Stride" ofonly writing for one person, some Henry, Prouty reports: "'I began to think of myself as trying to write a book that would matter to Henry'" (Lemaire, "Woman"). Prouty knows the problemsof characters, but not the solutions to their problems(Lemaire, "Woman"). What the American poet Frank O'Hara insists in his "Personism"informs the message for Prouty as one person only communicatesto another person now.Prouty reports: "'In *Lisa Vale* it was pathetic,ridiculed, and embittered Aunt Charlotte who kept nagging at my curiosity. Therefore I wrote *Now Voyager'"*(Lemaire, "Woman"). This novel remains one among five Vale novels

about that Boston family, and they include *The White Fawn* (1931), Lisa *Vale* (1938), *Now Voyager* (1941), *Home Port* (1947), and *Fabia* (1951).

When asked if she has a favorite Whitman poem, Prouty says she does not,but she reports in that nowthat "A Boston Ballad" was "maybe his most macabre and funniest poem"(Lemaire, "Woman"). Nonetheless, it remains "The Untold Want" that drives Prouty'swritingof her*Now, Voyager.*

In both Prouty's novel and Irving Rapper's film of the same title based on Prouty's novel, Charlotte Vale hides her passionate inner life from others as demonstrated in her smoking cigarettes, hiding a travel album about her earlier unsuccessful romance, and reading racy novels in the privacy of her room (Price, 120-22). Then both in the novel and the film, when Charlotte faces complete mental disintegration, her sister in law, Lisa, brings in the specialist Dr. Jaquith (Claude Raines in Rapper's film) to help Charlotte confront her challenges as a human being. As Jaquith's patient at Cascade, Charlotte recovers. Prouty herself is hospitalized in Dr. Austen Fox's sanitarium in Massachusetts in 1925, and Proutylater pays for Sylvia Plath's attempted suicide recovery in 1953 "only to be caricatured as the fatuous Philomena Guinea in Plath's novel, *The Bell Jar.*"(Hughes). Charlotte in both novel and film recovers enough to take a voyage, a personal adventure that changes her life, because she finds love and affirmation. Then readers and viewers confront once again Whitman's admonition for individuals to begin change themselves immediately.

In flashbacks in the film and the novel and in their first private visit, Charlotte tells Dr. Jaquithabout her motherputting an end to her first love in a voyage of her youth. The ship's captain and Mrs. Vale discover Charlotte kissing Leslie, a crewman on a ship. James Cameron copies almost verbatim in his *Titanic* (1997). That scene offers a pause in Charlotte's past that serves almost as a comma in her experience in both the novel and the film.

The comma that Walt Whitman follows his "Now" with in the line of his poem, Prouty includes in the title of her novel, and Rapper includes in the title of his film. Aldus Manutius (1449-1517) prescribes comma usage in his Aldine classics, like a quarter stop based upon early Western music notation (c. 1494), and this remains why our learners today remain challenged about commas in academic writing in the twenty-first century. Challenged writers continue to think commas suggest oral pauses, which they do not always, for that has little or nothing to do with written literate punctuation. In the written word, sound (oral) has less to do with logical communication (literacy) than with precision of communication in properly punctuated and literate academic writing. Whitman, of course, writes his comma in a literate poem, just as Prouty uses it in a literate novel, and as Rapper uses it in a secondarily oral film that depends, like all secondary orality, upon literacy. Now, followed by a comma in writing, presents the present, of course, in apposition to what follows it.

Irving Rapper's *Now, Voyager* (1942) remains the biggest box office hit of Bette Davis' entire career, and Davis only loses Best Actress, the Oscar, to Greer Garson for*Mrs. Miniver* that year (Chadwick). M. Lynda Ely in her "The Untold Want: Representation and Transformation of Walt Whitman's Passage to India in *Now Voyager*" argues that Whitman's transformative metaphor not only fails in Whitman's lifetime, but also in Prouty's novel and subsequently in Rapper's film. Tara Brabazon explores the changes Charlotte Vale undergoes in Rapper's film from a 2000 feminist perspective. Martin Shingler in his "Bette Davis Made over in Wartime" explores why Warner Brothers shows a more feminized character than the Charlotte Vale character in Prouty's novel, especially given Hollywood's support of the war effort. Ely's, Brabazon's, and Shingle's interpretations demonstrates their interpretations within their own

respective *now*'s. With his 1942 *now* setting in Brazil, Rapper replaces Prouty's 1941 *now* setting in Italy, because the United States is by 1942 in that *now* is at war with Italy.

Several feminists writers, readers, and viewers misunderstand coding and encoding and claim that the film reinforces gender stereotypes (cf.Mayne, 274), and others in their *now* experience Rapper's film today as only a "chick flick" (Chadwick), which demonstrates the difference among middle twentieth-century interpretations and latter twentieth- and early twenty-first century considerations. The encoding of *now* for Walt Whitman in the nineteenth century, decoding of it by later readers in their own *now*'s, such as this writer in this present *now,* Prouty's decoding of Whitman in the 1941 *now*, and then encoding it in her novel, Rapper's decoding of Prouty's 1941 *now* in his 1942 *now* and then encoding it in his film, etc. follows with all the subsequent encoding and decoding in an infinite number of possible now's *now*. James Joyce suggests as much in his *Ulysses* when his Stephen Daedalus says: "'Hold to the now, the here, through which all future plunges to the past'" (Episode 9: "Scylla and Charybdis").

In an American law review case study, Jeremy Graboyes in his "Now, Voyager: Deixis and the Temporal Pragmatics of Statues" takes up the whole difference between encoding and decoding in the different *now*'s and their importance in interpreting American law. Like the advice in fortune cookies, Grayboyes reminds his readers of the differences between *now* when written and *now* when read. Further, Graboyes explores the use of *now* in various United States Government treaties with Native Americans to demonstrate the government's intention to use *now* of encoding to continue to exploit Native Americans in the decoding of documents. This remains not only an interesting linguistic exploration of the issue of encoding and decoding, but demonstrates the American government's continuing *now* even into twenty-first century to steal land from its indigenous populations and to exploit them.

After Rapper's film of 1942 *Now, Voyager* enters the onamastics and nomenclature of a variety of American enterprises and activities. The American spiritual philosopher Eckhart Tolle in Chapter 3 of his *The Power of Now* (1999) exploressuch a *now* in sections of his tome titled "Moving Deeply into the Now" (47-70),"Nothing Exists Outside the Now"(49-50) and "Assessingthe Power of the Now"(53-55), and also in a section of his Chapter 10, a section he titles "Acceptance of the Now" (205-209). Tolle provides a general model of spiritual recovery that parallels Prouty's own with Dr. Austen Fox on whom she models her Dr. Jaquith in her novel and the same character played by Claude Raines in Rapper's film. Today*, now*, hypnotherapist, Danny Cabrera names his Arizona practice Now Voyager Hypnotherapy. Now Voyager is the name of a weight loss program (James). There is a Now, Voyager fan club and a Charlotte Vale fan club (*Fanpop*). Burbank, California, has a Now Voyager nightclub. Educator Carol Cohen of Middleboro, Massachusetts, names her school Now Voyager Education. Couriers Incorporated Now Voyager uses the name for their delivery service in New York. Mark Leach's bookstore in Provincetown, Massachusetts, is the Now Voyager Bookstore. The American government also follows Prouty's and Rapper's them withnomenclature allusion for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) missions, Voyager 1 and Voyager 2, and the name of the *Star Trek U.S.S. Voyager*continues in nomenclature in the science fiction of Gene Roddenberry's *Star Trek: Voyager*, television seasons 1995-2001.

Books that utilize the *Now, Voyager* title include*Bette Davis, NOW VOYAGER*, a film novelization in French, and published in 1948 by *Mon Film.* Lynne Sharon Schwartz's memoir*Not Now, Voyager* supports this claim. Born in 1941, James McCourt takes up the general idea in his *Now Voyagers*: *The Night Sea Journey: Some Divisions of the Saga of Mawrdew Czgowchwz, Oltrano, Authenticated by Persons Represented Therein*, and Diana

Gabaldon entitles her novel *Voyager.* Belgian born, American poet May Sarton entitles one her poems "Now Voyager," and she opens the first and last stanzas of the poem with the two words. Gary Mitchner entitles a poem "Morgan Watches 'Now, Voyager.'" W.H. Von Dreele writes a political poem "*Now, Voyager*" in which he criticizes Hillary Clinton. The Canadian author, Charlotte Vale-Allen writes to this writer that she takes her *nom de plume* and legal name from Prouty's character. She finds that her personal experience parallels that of Prouty's character (*Daddy's Girl*[1980]), and Allen does upon her relocation from Canada to England (her voyage), her own 1961*now*, assume her new name. Also, David Denby uses "Now, Voyager" as the title of his review of the Ryan Murphy's film Love, Eat, Pray (2010).

Printed music and recorded music and its bands use Whitman's *now*, too. Sheet music includes Kim Cannon's *It Can't Be Wrong*, also in Rapper's film, including words by Walt Whitman, and Ernest Herrman Meyer's *Now Voyager. Ode for Baritone (or Mezzo Soprano) and String Quartet, Words by Walt Whitman.* Max Steiner's song "Now, Voyager" also appears in Elia Kazan's film *A Streetcar Named Desire.* Singer Barry Gibbs' *NowVoyager*CDuses the Whitman words in his title, and the Belgian band, Now, Voyager, call themselves by that name.

Several American travel agencies capture the appellation, such as Now Voyager Travel Agency in Huntington Beach, California, and Now, Voyager World Wide Travel Services in San Francisco. Katharine Friedgen names her personal Italian travel blog "Now Voyager." In the United Arab Emirates, this writer reminds readers that the Dubai Tourism Authority in a recent campaign, 2012 *now*, 2013 *now*, and 2014 *now*, claims that Downtown Dubai is "The Centre of Now." Also, the airport and duty free magazine of Dubai Airports is named *Voyager Dubai*.

In material culture, this writer discovers the 1996 Hallmark Keepsake Ornament,*Star TrekU.S.S. VoyagerMagic Light Ornament,*the Plymouth Voyager automobile (1974-2000) manufactured by the Chrysler Corporation. One may recall that in Rapper's film Charlotte takes Jerry's daughter, Tina, on a camping trip in a woodie, a 1940 Buick Estate Wagon, a car owned then by Warner Brothers, but later the possession of Davis; this automobile still exists from among the only 495 produced (McEwen). The smoking of cigarettes Rapper employs in his film, Prouty hardly in her novel, and the two cigarette lighting, now famous, Rapper extrapolates from Alfred E. Green's *The Rich Are Always with Us* (1932) in which Davis also appears; nonetheless, the flirtation scenes become famous from Rapper's film and not from Green's. The Gold Leaf Tobacco Corporation in the Union of South Africa manufactures and produces Voyager cigarettes. Australian quilter Jennie Haskin designs and creates a quilt and a pattern for that quilt, which she names *Now, Voyager.* Now Voyager Utah jewelry maker so names the turquoise necklace she designs and produces. Now-Voyager Deviant Art produces a Voyager necklace and a Voyager bracelet both inscribed with Whitman's Now Voyager line. Swiss Watch company, Stuhrling, has a line of "Now Voyager" watches. African American artists Ellen Gallagher and Edgar Cleijne, who simultaneously have art exhibitions at both the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York and the Tate Modern Gallery in London, name both exhibitions "Now, Voyager" (Belcove).

Both Prouty's and Rapper's attention to fashion remains an outward reflection of Charlotte's inner psychological character. Alison Kerr reports that Now*, Voyager* is "a fashion film if ever there was one, and one which emphasizes the power of clothes." Textile designer, Catherine Cane calls her website "Now Voyager," and Jonathan Shia names his interview with Prada's Danish male model, Eddie Klint, "Now Voyager." The Now, Voyager concept remains very much in fashion.

Question: "How many psychologists does it take to change a light bulb?" Answer: "It doesn't matter, for the light bulb must want to change." Once one, whether a country or human

being, in whatever *now* they find themselves and having decided to meet the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke's challenge put forth at the end of his "Archaic Torso of Apollo"--"You must change your life."--only then can they try. Whether the one desiring to change succeeds in changing does not undermine their "untold want" to bring about change, whether of Whitman's nineteenth century America, Prouty's novel, Rapper's mid-twentieth century film, or the continued use of the idea in the present now in the world in books, articles, places, psychotherapy, nomenclature of products, works of art, and businesses That the importance of such germinates from the small seed of Whitman's poem reminds this writer, and must remind listeners *now* and readers *now* that Walt Whitman remains the American poet *now* and after "Passage to India" the poet of the world *now*: "THE untold want, by life and land ne'er granted, / Now, Voyager, sail thou forth, to seek and find."

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