Whitman’s Legacy

A Modern Declaration
by Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950)

I, having loved ever since I was a child a few things, never having wavered
In these affections; never through shyness in the houses of the rich or in the presence of
clergymen having denied these loves;
Never when worked upon by cynics like chiropractors having grunted or clicked a
vertebra to the discredit of those loves;
Never when anxious to land a job having diminished them by a conniving smile; or when
befuddled by drink
Jeered at them through heartache or lazily fondled the fingers of their alert enemies;
declare

That I shall love you always.
No matter what party is in power;
No matter what temporarily expedient combination of allied
interests wins the war;
Shall love you always.

Old Walt
By Langston Hughes (1902-1967)

Old Walt Whitman
Went finding and seeking,
Finding less than he sought
Seeking more than found,
Every detail minding
Of the seeking or the finding.

Pleasured equally
In seeking as in finding,
Each detail minding,
Old Walt went seeking
And finding.
A Supermarket in California
By Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997)

What thoughts I have of you tonight, Walt Whitman, for I walked down the streets under the trees with a headache self-conscious looking at the full moon.

In my hungry fatigue, and shopping for images, I went into the neon fruit supermarket, dreaming of your enumerations.
What peaches and what penumbras! Whole families shopping at night! Aisles full of husbands! Wives in the avocados, babies in the tomatoes! --- and you, Garcia Lorca, what were you doing down by the watermelons?

I saw you, Walt Whitman, childless, lonely old grubber, poking among the meats in the refrigerator and eyeing the grocery boys.
I heard you asking questions of each: Who killed the pork chops? What price bananas? Are you my Angel?
I wandered in and out of the brilliant stacks of cans following you, and followed in my imagination by the store detective.
We strode down the open corridors together in our solitary fancy tasting artichokes, possessing every frozen delicacy, and never passing the cashier.

Where are we going, Walt Whitman? The doors close in an hour. Which way does your beard point tonight?
(I touch your book and dream of our odyssey in the supermarket and feel absurd.)
Will we walk all night through solitary streets? The trees add shade to shade, lights out in the houses, we'll both be lonely.
Will we stroll dreaming of the lost America of love past blue automobiles in driveways, home to our silent cottage?
Ah, dear father, graybeard, lonely old courage-teacher, what America did you have when Charon quit poling his ferry and you got out on a smoking bank and stood watching the boat disappear on the black waters of Lethe?