

Overview of Walt Whitman's Democratic Ideals

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Abstract – This is an effort to interpret the meaning of the magnificent poem, *Leaves of Grass* by Whitman, and how it appears to be an affirmation of a new political identity for his time's American politics and culture. Whitman wished to bring a major reform in the democratic culture of America. He felt that it's possible to achieve it through *Leaves of Grass*, so, he underscores his basic attitude towards America, which remains to be the part of his ideal of human life. He stresses procreation in *Leaves of Grass*; he uses procreation to describe a new American literary culture, and his sexual overtones in *Song of the Open Road*, as in many other poems, point to the need for a reader to participate in the creation of a new democratic culture.

Key Words: Idealistic, American, Democratic, Music, Prosperity

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I. INTRODUCTION:

Walt Whitman was primarily Nineteenth-century American music loving poet. I hear America singing, starting with the inscription poems of *Leaves of Grass*, is an adulation an extended metaphor, of the throbbing humanity, a musical symphony of the American jubilant, hard-working laborers, each in his own way an individual. Documentary evidence shows that, in the year 1855, I heard America singing first published in his book *Leaves of Grass*. We can't compact in a single phrase that the poem I hear singing America is a patriotic song of fervor that, with its variety, vivacity and simplicity, exalts the everyday American life.

II. WHITMAN'S DEMOCRATIC IDEALS

The author refers to the merriment, the pleasure of life in the opening lines of the poem and there is no possibility of sorrow or disappointment or grouse over something. Perfectly contended, the artifact in the free verse explicitly states the gifted American sings of unmixed, unbiased happiness. The song's mood and setting are similar to that of William Wordsworth's, 'My heart leaps when I see rainbow in the sky' (William Wordsworth. 1958:65). Either a carpenter or a mason or a ploughboy, each of them is delighted to rotate their own assigned path:

I hear the sounds of America, the various carols that I hear;

Mechanics-each, as it should be, singing his own, blithe and strong;

The carpenter singing his, when weighing his board or post,

The mason singing his own, or leaving work ready;

(Singing from America, Walt Whitman. 1986:12).

He calls it 'varied carols,' it's not just music, it's more than that, it's the vastness of American life's standard, the craftsmanship and hard work that the respective worker sings and delights. One might say the entire universe itself is in symphony of notation. If the poet uses the word 'singing,' it is not merely articulation or vibrating vocal cords, or the melody of each person, it is the voluntary participation of mind and body placed together to gather complete fruition or dedication to a symphony in a positive way.

The mother's or the young wife's delicious singing at work-or the girl sewing or washing-Each singing what belongs to her, and to none other;

The day that belongs to the day - At night, young fellows' band, vigorous, polite,

Singing their strong melodious songs, with open mouths

(1986, Walt Whitman; 12-13).

Whitman included every worker he might think of including the women and girls who stayed at home doing housework. He pictured them as happy and happy people who put dignity and respect into the labor force. A special status or rank has been

allocated to a woman who plays the role of a mother, wife, or child, each singing only from the point of view of what fishermen mean within their allocated path precincts. A close examination will show that the poet is very careful to use words of joy and wisdom in this poem from beginning till end.

The words 'carols, blithe, delicious' show that for joy and prosperity, all is a successful augury. The women who cooked, sewed, and washed sang to cast away their boredom and welcomed the happiness for their loved ones in doing their domestic chores. He spoke of feelings of lightness, amid the work's demand. In the poem, he employed contrasts. They sang whole heartily, in spite of their heavy or light work. He made an effort by making the staff sing, and succeeded in uniting or bringing the differences together. The staff didn't sing to impress an audience but sang for themselves. Happy men and women make successful democracies for the poet-prophet.

He liked to pay tribute to American jobs. In the poem, the worker carried with a light heart the physical burden of his work that had made him sing. The whole country was euphoric in the first line and they sang different songs at one. He has described America's emotions through carols. Carols were usually sung on Christmas seasons when people were upbeat and perfectly suited the holiday's celebratory mood. The Americans did not sing common songs in the poem but those like carols that were mostly cheerful and bouncy.

The poet isn't partial yet he says some young fellows sing their melodious songs aloud in parties at night. The melodies remain unending as the day begins with the dawn and ends in the dusk. Possibly one might interpret the definitive lines with different connotation. "Singing their powerful melodious songs with open mouths." Particularly with open mouths meaning open hearts, their night-time joy unbounded, breaks the silence. "The poem as a whole is an apotheosis of American Dream, of America's life and future itself. This study aims to present American Life's standard as the poet imagines it to be in terms of music, melodious, true to life".

This was how he gave his feelings of exhilaration, liberty and happiness to express America's joy. The shoemaker and hatter had imagination flowing as they each went about their daily work. They were most relaxed whether sitting down or standing up. Singing came naturally to them and it did a lot of things for the staff. They maintained that joyful mood.

The mechanic lightened the carpenter's load, and opened the mason's exciting day. The mason puts innovation in the job of the boatman, let the thrill in on the deckhand, fed the poem with imagination. The reader envisages a country where people work for the greater good of humanity. When part of the larger

community that is evolving industry and production, these people come together. Each person has a different occupation, but each and every individual is important to the greater picture of the progress of the country. All are working together to bring about a successful and harmonious civilization. Whitman's great focus was America, but to achieve the challenge of understanding the nature of this country he wrote on an vast array of smaller subjects. "Many of his many topics included slavery, democracy, reading and writing methods, varied professions and forms of employment, the American environment, the sea, the natural world, the Civil War, education, aging, death and immortality, deprivation, romantic love, spirituality and social change. I Hear America Singing is one of Whitman's favorite poems, and it is an excellent example of how he uses such diverse topics to create an egalitarian image of America".

For Whitman, democracy was more like an experiment in law than the future administration like American culture and agrarian idealism. The faith was founded on human hearts, not on organizations. This means that the voices of the working class consist of America, Whitman hears singing. The voices which don't sing the same old despotism anthems and which would be the new democratic voice. When he began to write poetry he felt the need for an exclusively American literature. He replied in a way that Longfellow could not, to Emerson's intense search for an American poet. Whitman took poetry out of the study and put it on the workbench to truly write, in an innovative manner by overcoming British writers' conventional ways. His poems are about the connection between physical labor and the paradox of the individual American voice. Whitman wanted to see America win glory by spreading the message of democratic life. "In Whitman's America the color of a worker's skin is irrelevant, and singing is free, both by law and expense. Money is absent from the poem too, although labor is present in almost every line. So the slave, the indentured servant, the free labourer, all have the right to own a song, and the right to sing as an American by Whitman's declaration. Whitman certainly didn't have enough to just sing to be American. To the contrary; he asserts that one can sing amid injustice and suffering, and one's song will eventually impact both the unity of America and its dissonance" (Sean Robisch.1998:1-3). The reader envisions a nation in the poem, people who work for the common benefit of humanity. As part of the whole society the people come together to develop industry and production.

A Whitman democracy was his dream. It was still in the experimental stage, waiting to be confirmed, workable or a broken idealistic vision. In response to this uncertainty, he felt compelled to assume the mantle of the epic bard and write a poem with a national scope for distinguishing American literature and shaping an American

democratic culture. "Such a piece of literature would breathe a new breath of life into it [America], giving it a decision, affecting politics far more than the popular superficial suffrage, with results inside and under the presidential or congressional elections" (Walt Whitman.1996: 956). This new life would help the fledgling democracy to remain united since he believed that a political culture, democratic culture in his case, had to be in place before a political system could function for the people.

Radical democrat, republican, liberal democrat, socialist, craftsman democrat, conservative, leftist, radical leftist these are just a few of Walt Whitman's labels. From Whitman's earliest critical research, "his poetry's political essence has been discussed, rejected and contested. To explain how Whitman's politics is central to his lyric-epic *Leaves of Grass*. It is worth exploring the political goals of Whitman. Rather than listing his ideals, we can begin with his history just prior to the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* because the first edition, as Betsy Erkkila notes, 'was born of political fury and frustration' (Erkkila Betsy.1989:03).

"Whitman always insisted *Leaves of Grass* was a religious text- an effort to begin a post-Christian faith appropriate for America's emerging scientific and democratic culture: and some of his contemporaries fully agreed, even to the point of declaring him a major prophet and the *Leaves of Grass* a new Gospel. But with the demise of his early disciples, few readers, especially critics have approached the *Leaves* as an attempt to forge a modern religion" (Donald Kummings.2009:197).

Before Whitman became an active poet, he was active in editing party newspapers, electioneering, party organizing, and working for the government. He abandoned these pursuits to write *Leaves of Grass*. In that book he displays an alternate political path to the one he was attempting in the years before it. As such, the book grew out of his disappointment in contemporary politics and his optimism for the future. Exploring his political actions and beliefs before *Leaves of Grass* will aid in understanding the reason for its existence and why the lyric-epic was an appropriate format.

Whitman edited eight newspapers and contributed to over twenty others between 1830 and 1848. Jerome Loving states that "Whitman's journalism is known for its working class allegiance" (Jerome Loving.2000:104). In his times Whitman was known as a liberal. In the newspapers he championed improved schools, opposition to the death penalty, fair wages, public parks, affordable housing, temperance, public education, clean water, clean streets, women's rights, and the preservation of Native American heritage. On economic issues he advocated free trade, hard money, and open immigration. Above all in his journalism, Whitman preached a libertarian agenda; he advocated

freedom and local sovereignty, which is not surprising considering the Jeffersonian/Jacksonian political beliefs of his father.

III. CONCLUSION:

Whitman is unquestionably America's most authentic voice. His art is one mode of American discourse as a whole; thus, in affirming a new democratic identity through poetry, Whitman actively asserted a new democratic identity for American politics and culture

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