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The democratic concept of Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass

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THE DEMOCRATIC CONCEPT OF WALT WHITMAN'S

LEAVES OF GRASS

by

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THE DEMOCRATIC CONCEPT OF WALT WHITMAN'S
LEAVES OF GRASS
by
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(S.B., Simmons College, 1940)
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Thesis

When the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* appeared on July 4, 1855, unsponsored by any publisher, its twelve untitled poems were received with complete indifference by the public and scant consideration by the critics. The few reviewers who noticed the book at all found almost nothing in it to commend, and Mark Van Doren, in *The Dictionary of American Biography*, notes that except for three highly favorable reviews written by Walt Whitman himself, which appeared in the *Brooklyn Times, American Phrenological Journal*, and the *U. S. Democratic Review*, only the unsigned "Critical Notes" in the *North American Review* of January 1856 and Charles Eliot Norton's column in *Putnam's Monthly* found anything of value in the work.¹

The single hint of the book's importance and the only encouragement which Whitman received came in the famous, often quoted letter from Ralph Waldo Emerson with the line, "I greet you at the beginning of a great career...", which Whitman, without Emerson's permission, used on the cover of the second edition in 1856.

It was thus evident from the beginning that Walt Whitman was not to be a popular poet as he had hoped. His democratic ideal, begun in "Song of

Myself" with the identification and extension of himself as a representative human being and expanded to celebrate the whole mass of common humanity, its occupations, its geographical distribution and its way of life, remained his own ideal and found no response in the people he had written about and wished to reach. Recognition, which came belatedly and with very modest financial benefits, came from the literary circles and was largely of European origin, although *Leaves of Grass* was deeply rooted in Whitman's love for America and the American people. In the near century following the appearance of the first edition, however, Whitman has become a landmark in American literature. He seems to have had no disciples or direct imitators who form a "Whitman School" of poetry, but as the first important American writer to repudiate the traditional Anglo-Saxon approach to poetry, both in subject matter and in form, his influence has been incalculable. It is hardly necessary to point out the prevalence of free verse in modern poetry, and it was this form in which Whitman pioneered. With reference to subject matter, Robert Frost's use of common people and common-place ideas in poetry and Carl Sandburg's lusty descriptions of industrial, every-day America are developments in the work of only two foremost of the many modern poets whose work shows kinship with Whitman's.

The final status of Whitman's poetry in world literature seems unlikely to be settled until the time perspective is greater than it is now; but the mass of controversial criticism and biography which is still increasing more than fifty years after Whitman's death indicates that what
he had to say was not confined to the interests of his own times. Of the many points of controversy about Whitman's poetry, some of which are its egotism, lack of selectivity, and treatment of sexual ideas, one of particular interest to the twentieth century is its expression of faith in democracy.

Walt Whitman has been identified with democracy almost since the first appearance of *Leaves of Grass*. William Douglas O'Connor, a personal friend of the poet, in the pamphlet, *The Good Gray Poet: A Vindication*, published in 1866, quotes the words of Henry David Thoreau who said of Whitman after visiting him, "He is Democracy!" Since then, "Poet of Democracy" has become one of Whitman's unofficial titles, used by countless critics and biographers. The opening lines of *Leaves of Grass* in its final form state Whitman's own theme of democracy with the impact of the opening bars of a Beethoven symphony:

One's self I sing, a simple separate person,
Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse.  

The paradox of these lines gives the key to the conflict of opinion over the value of Whitman's democratic concept. The conflict has ranged in extremes from Bruce Weirick's statement, "For what Homer was to the early Greeks, Virgil to the Roman Empire, Dante to the Middle Ages, and Shakespeare to Renaissance England, Whitman has become to early American


To one "I am willing to accept the responsibility of being one of the guardians of the future of humanity, and to do so with the utmost  

selflessness, courage, and dedication.

With utmost confidence and pride, I hereby declare.

[Signature]

[Date]
Democracy," to Mark Van Doren's denunciation of what Whitman called "adhesiveness" or "manly love" as a foundation of democracy, in the following terms: "No society can be made out of him. We could not be like him if we would. He has revealed himself to us, and that is all." In view of the current interest of the democratic theme and the widely divergent criticisms of it, it was the purpose of this thesis to analyze the concept of democracy expressed in Leaves of Grass, to trace its growth, to examine its implications, and to discover as nearly as possible its significance through the various interpretations which might be made.

Approaches to the Study of the Democratic Concept of Leaves of Grass

There were several possible approaches to a study of Whitman's concept of democracy. It is to be noted that in the criticisms of Weirick and Van Doren cited above, Weirick refers to "early American Democracy," and thus considers Whitman a spokesman for the democracy of the nineteenth century. Van Doren, on the other hand, views the democratic concept of Leaves of Grass in the light of its feasibility as a pattern for society today. In addition to these two viewpoints, there was the question of universality; that is, whether the democracy of the Leaves is a purely nationalistic concept or whether it has a more universal appeal and possible application. There was, finally, the approach to democracy as an

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individual philosophy of life, which involved examination of the type of person regarded as the ideal member of a democracy and the way of living and thinking recommended to produce this type of person.

While these approaches are admittedly indirect, the advantage of their use as compared with a more direct method can be readily seen. A common definition of democracy is, specifically, a government in which the supreme power is exercised by the people either directly or through representation. To examine Whitman's democracy in this light would be to confine the poet, without a hearing, to the arbitrary limits of political ideology. In a more general sense, democracy may be defined as belief in or practice of social equality. The limitation of even this broad definition is obvious, since the term, 'social equality' has meaning only in connection with concrete symbols of a social system. Democracy, then, transcends the limitations of language, constituting a problem in semantics to any writer or speaker who uses it. Whitman himself implied this fundamental difficulty in the following lines entitled "To Foreign Lands:"

I heard that you ask'd for something to prove this puzzle
the New World,
And to define America, her athletic Democracy,
Therefore I send you my poems that you behold in them what you wanted.

It is clear that the inference to be made is that America and democracy are one and that they are to be comprehended only through Leaves of Grass

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6 Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, p. 267

7 Emory Holloway, editor, Walt Whitman: Complete Poetry and Selected Prose and Letters, p. 3
To every man who has ever been a patriot and a lover of freedom, to every man who has ever fought for liberty and justice, to every man who has ever considered himself a citizen of the world, to every man who has ever believed in the principles of freedom and democracy, let me say that.

And let me say that the responsibility of preserving these principles falls upon all of us. It falls upon the young to learn and understand them, it falls upon the old to protect and defend them. We cannot afford to be complacent or to take them for granted, for they are the foundation upon which we stand.

Let us remember that freedom is never a given, it is something that must be fought for and defended. Let us be mindful of the sacrifices that were made by those who came before us, and let us be determined to preserve the freedoms that they fought for.

And let us be mindful of the fact that the struggle for freedom is not over. There are still battles to be fought, and we must be ready to do our part. Let us be the generation that stands up for what is right, and let us be the generation that preserves the freedoms that we hold dear.

Thank you.
as a whole. This conclusion is corroborated by Whitman's statement in his prose piece, Democratic Vistas, that he will use the words America and democracy as convertible terms.\(^8\) Whitman made no other attempt to define democracy directly, undoubtedly realizing that he was faced with an intangible which could only be expressed indirectly. He made this clear in a passage of his preface to November Boughs:

> But I set out with the intention also of indicating or hinting some point-characteristics which I since see (though I did not then, at least not definitely) were bases and object-urgings toward those Leaves from the first. The word I myself put primarily for the description of them as they stand at last, is the word Suggestiveness. I round and finish little, if anything; and could not, consistently with my theme. The reader will always have his or her part to do, just as much as I have had mine. I seek less to state or display any theme or thought, and more to bring you, reader, into the atmosphere of the theme or thought—there to pursue your own flight.\(^9\)

The foregoing passage written in 1888 just four years before the poet's death is significant as proof that Whitman recognized and approved the indeterminate quality of his Leaves. Further proof may be adduced from the fact that although Whitman wrote long prefaces to several editions of his poems, the prefaces were not explanations of the poems which followed. They were, rather, the poet's record of his ideals and his hopes for the future of America as the leader of mankind, a future which he regarded as irrevocably connected with America's poetry. Thus, Whitman's concept of

\(^8\) Ibid, p. 659

\(^9\) Ibid, p. 869
democracy could not be considered as a carefully thought-out system to be dissected and criticized point by point, but had to be taken as an idea or an ideal composed of many ideas, with emphasis here on one and there on another, as each one appeared in various poems or groups of poems.

Methods Used in Studying the Concept

In order to give fair consideration to the various aspects of this concept of democracy, it was necessary to view it not only in its final organization in Leaves of Grass but in its beginnings and development, as far as it was possible to trace them. To do this, some knowledge of the external influences found in the course of the author's life proved helpful, as well as knowledge of the more obscure influences of character and personality and of the effect of the work itself by its own growth and by its critical reception in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Biographies. For the study of Whitman's life and character, the biographies of course furnished the best source. For the purpose of understanding the basis of the concept of democracy expressed in Leaves of Grass, a general knowledge of the facts of Whitman's personal life interpreted against the background of his times was the first requisite. To gain a picture of Whitman, the man, the early biographies by Whitman's personal friends, Thomas Harned, Horace Traubel, and Dr. Maurice Bucke, who were also his literary executors, proved the most valuable, as well as the study by John Burroughs entitled The Flight of the Eagle and his Whitman: A Study. These, among others, were the men closest to Whitman;
and although, for this reason, they were not his most discerning critics, they described their friend's life and character with the firsthand personal touches which later biographers could only quote. It is in these records that the poet's magnetic personality, his robust health in early life, his Homeric appearance, his love for the common mass of humanity, his apparent indifference to public opinion, and his faith in himself and his work appear first and most vividly. Later biographers with their greater perspective pointed out and, when possible, corrected the inconsistencies and exaggerations of the first accounts. The thoughtful and enlightening interpretations of Whitman by Bliss Perry in the early nineteen hundreds and by Emory Holloway, Henry Seidel Canby, Hugh l'Anson Fausset, and Newton Arvin within the last thirty years are indicative of Whitman's increasing stature and offered rich material for comparisons and points of departure in the investigation of Whitman's democratic principles. Through these biographies, not only Whitman's essential personal qualities but the almost inextricable identification of the man with his poetry came into sharp focus and formed a backdrop for the purely critical evaluation of his work.

**Critical studies.** The generally unfavorable critical reception of Whitman's poetry for the duration of the poet's life was a blanket indictment even as the meager favorable criticism tended to eulogy without qualification. After the poet's death, however, the critics began to take a more objective attitude; for the rigid moral standards of the New England school of poetry had begun to lose their strangle-hold as realism
made its appearance in the work of the new writers. Also, Whitman, who had been at best a curiosity, became less radical in view of the loosening of the traditional requirements of form in poetry; and _Leaves of Grass_ instead of receiving complete condemnation or absolute worship, was subjected to detailed and thoughtful analysis. Attention was also forced by enthusiasm for the book abroad; for before Whitman died it had been translated into Danish, Dutch, French, German, and Italian;\(^{10}\) and its support by English men of letters had been consistent since the first few copies of the early editions had appeared in England and been acclaimed by such men as Moncure Conway, William Michael Rossetti, John Addington Symonds, and even Swinburne and Tennyson, although Swinburne later retracted his praise.\(^{11}\) A survey of the comments of outstanding critics of the twentieth century, then, helped in giving perspective to the place of _Leaves of Grass_ in American literature and especially in ferreting out the points essential to the study of the concept of democracy. The biographies by Perry, Holloway, Canby, Fausset, and Arvin contained much critical material which was supplemented by their shorter articles in reference works and literary periodicals. Other critics who dealt with Whitman in various studies of American literature were Paul Elmer More in his _Shelburne Essays_, Francis Otto Matthiessen in _American Renaissance_, V. F. Calverton in _The Liberation of American Literature_, Percy H. Boynton

\(^{10}\) Mark Van Doren, "Walt Whitman," _The Dictionary of American Biography_, XX, p. 152

\(^{11}\) W. B. Cairns, "Swinburne's Opinion of Whitman," _American Literature_, III (May, 1931), 131
in Literature and American Life, Norman Foerster in Nature in American Literature, Van Wyck Brooks in America's Coming of Age, Bruce Weirick in From Whitman to Sandburg in American Poetry, and John Jay Chapman in Emerson and Other Essays. Although this is a far from exhaustive list of Whitman's critics, it indicates the most fruitful sources and the wide variety of viewpoints available for consideration in the formation and substantiation of opinions.

Selected prose and letters of Walt Whitman. An indispensable addition or rather forerunner to the survey of biographical and critical material about Whitman was an acquaintance with enough of his prose and autobiographical sketches to clarify the poet's own attitude toward his life work. In Walt Whitman's Workshop, Clifton J. Furness has collected many of the poet's notebooks which contain ideas, first drafts, personal jottings, and pieces which for one reason or another were never printed; and in this collection can be seen in embryo the ideas on democracy which were developed in Leaves of Grass. For examples of Whitman's finished prose, section II of Emory Holloway's complete works of Whitman presents in full the prefaces to Leaves of Grass; a large quantity of letters which reveal the great extent and catholicism of Whitman's friendships; and the brief commentaries which read like excerpts from a diary on subjects ranging from the poet's ancestry and the American landscape to the death of Lincoln and appreciations of Emerson, Robert Burns, Tennyson, Edgar Allan Poe, and Carlyle. Most important for the present study is the full text of Democratic Vistas, Whitman's only serious prose work, which
appeared in 1871 as a confirmation of his faith in the democratic ideals to which he was giving expression in his poetry.

The study of *Leaves of Grass*. The basis for any study of Walt Whitman can be only the book of poetry which he called *Leaves of Grass* and often referred to in the singular as "a poem" or "a song." The final version contained nearly four hundred poems, some of them many times revised, re-titled and re-arranged in sequence until Whitman was satisfied that they expressed his intention as closely as possible. Except for a few uncollected and rejected verses, the book includes all of Whitman's poetry. It is divided into fifteen titled sections interspersed with longer poems standing alone, with the last three sections made up of a first and second annex and some posthumous additions. These latter sections were simply added to the seventh edition of 1881, the annexes by the poet himself and the final one according to instructions he left. The publication of ten editions over a period of thirty-seven years of a work which had, at best, a limited audience, indicates more clearly than any other factor the growth of Whitman's purpose and the strength of his impulse to poetic expression. It also indicates one of the great paradoxes of the work: the fact that although it is a unified whole so that taking single poems or parts of poems out of context destroys some of their significance, it is never finished but remains a record of a small segment of human life, seen through the eyes of one man as a minute but important part of a vast process of which all parts are so closely inter-related as to be never entirely divisible or complete in themselves. From this point of view it becomes

12 Holloway, *op. cit.*, p. 861, 871
less difficult to see the relation of the concept of democracy to Leaves of Grass as a whole. Democracy appears as one of the great developments in the pattern of time, full of imperfections, but also, in the nineteenth century, richer with promise than any other development and further advanced than at any previous time in its own history.

With this understanding, Leaves of Grass can be read with a double purpose, first with attention to its chronological sequence according to the dates of composition or first publication given for each poem, in order to follow the steps of progress from the first crude beginnings of the democratic concept through to the final realization by the poet of its magnificent possibilities. After the chronology has been traced, the study of the poetry in the order and form in which its author finally left it reveals the essential elements of the concept and opens the way to a more detailed examination of the imagery and ideas of which these elements are composed.
CHAPTER II

WHITMAN'S DEMOCRATIC BACKGROUND

The Significance of Whitman's Background to Leaves of Grass

In "Songs of Parting" which was the last section in the 1881 edition of Leaves of Grass, two significant lines occur toward the end of the poem "So Long!" which closes the section.

Camerado, this is no book,
Who touches this touches a man,...1

What Whitman meant by this was that he had tried to put himself into his poetry, had used his own life, his own observations and his own emotions as the foundation and the common denominator of his poetry. It is, of course, true that all poetry is an expression of the poet's self in a certain sense, although there is a point at which poetry transcends its creator and must be considered not as part of its creator, but as a whole of which the creator is part. Whitman's poetry, too, should be seen as an independent whole in any evaluation of it as art; but in an examination of its democratic ideal, the man, as Whitman understood and stated in the lines quoted above, was the connecting link between the reader and the expressed ideal. An analogy of this situation may be seen in the "Calamus" poems of comradeship and "manly love," in which the poet and inferentially every human being, is the link between all his fellow beings and democracy.

1Emory Holloway, editor, Walt Whitman: Complete Poetry and Selected Prose and Letters, p. 452
THIRTY SECONDS

THE WAITING ROOM

1921

The location of the room's entrance is

To have and be known as the

If the door is locked, "Please to note:

Commission, this is on notice:

...may be obtained with the consent of

...the location of the door was

...the location of the entrance was

...the location of the room's entrance was

...the location of the entrance was
This is another way of saying that the poet chose a subjective rather than an objective approach to his purpose.

In view of this subjective approach, the question of Whitman's qualifications as a representative of democracy arose and necessitated an investigation of the biographical facts of his democratic background. When he began to write his poetry, he hoped that it would become a sort of folk literature, read, understood, and loved by the millions of ordinary working people in America. He says in his prose piece, "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads," which was a preface to November Boughs issued in 1868, "Without yielding an inch the working-man and working-woman were to be in my pages from first to last." In "Song of Myself" which was part of the first edition of Leaves of Grass, the following lines indicate his hope for the place of his poetry in America:

The young mechanic is closest to me, he knows me well,
The woodman that takes his axe and jug with him shall take me with him all day,
The farm-boy ploughing in the field feels good at the sound of my voice,
In vessels that sail my words sail, I go with fishermen and seamen and love them.

The soldier camp'd or upon the march is mine,
On the night ere the pending battle many seek me, and I do not fail them
On that solemn night (it may be their last) those that know me seek me.

My face rubs to the hunter's face when he lies down alone in the blanket,
The driver thinking of me does not mind the holt of his wagon,
The young mother and old mother comprehend me,

2 Ibid, p. 870
The girl and the wife rest the needle a moment and forget where they are. They end all would resume what I have told them.  

_Leaves of Grass_ never attained the popularity which its author envisioned for it. The songs of democracy, intended for the masses, had no mass appeal; and the small audience they reached was almost exclusively one whose interests were literary. The possible reasons for this reception will be analyzed in Chapter VIII in the findings and conclusions with regard to the democratic concept; but some acquaintance with the early basis of his democratic ideas and his own democratic experiences was first of all to be established.

A Sketch of Whitman's Life

Whitman was well acquainted with the working people whom he celebrated in his poems. He himself was born, on May 31, 1819, on a farm at West Hills, at that time a very small settlement near Huntington, on Long Island, New York. He was the second of nine brothers and sisters, and at the age of eleven or twelve years was earning his first pay as office boy in a law firm in Brooklyn where the Whitman family had moved when Walt was four or five years old. Brooklyn in the 1820's was still a small town with open fields and country roads in many parts; and here the boy grew up, attending the public schools and spending many summers wandering over Long Island. In his early teens he learned the printing trade, working on two Long Island papers, the _Patriot_ and the _Star_, and then as a compositor on a New York paper. His experience as a school teacher, covering about

_3 Ibid_, p. 81-2
five years, began when he was seventeen. During this period he boarded, according to the custom of the times, at the homes of several of his pupils and, as far as can be discovered, made no impression on the people who knew him except as a likable but rather quiet and moody young man and an unexceptional teacher. Besides his school work at this time, he started a weekly newspaper called The Long Islander, and, after this short-lived venture, worked as a compositor on the Long Island Democrat. In the latter paper appeared his earliest extent poetry and prose. The poetry gave no hint of the Walt Whitman of Leaves of Grass, for the journalistic verse might have been expected from any young newspaperman. The prose, concerned mainly with issues of local interest as was natural, also included political pieces; and Whitman is known to have done some campaigning for the election of Martin Van Buren in 1840.

In 1841 Whitman gave up teaching altogether to return to New York and for the next fifteen years worked on a succession of newspapers. His most important position, that of editor of the Brooklyn Daily Eagle, he held for two years from 1846-1848 and lost because of his differences with the owners on the free-soil question. Jacksonian Democracy embraced Whitman's chief political principles, but the Democratic party championed the right of states newly admitted to the Union to decide for themselves whether they should be slave or free states. After the Mexican war, with the annexation of Texas, the Free-soilers split off from the Democratic party and joined the Whigs in electing Zachary Taylor. Whitman was not an abolitionist and believed in the states' rights principle where slavery
already existed, but he was opposed to the extension of slavery to the new states and on this ground gave up editorship of the paper. His next position took him, for the first time, out of his native New York. With his fifteen year old brother, Jeff, he crossed Pennsylvania and Ohio and made a leisurely voyage down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to New Orleans where he remained as an editor of the Daily Crescent for only two months. Whitman's biographers have speculated widely on the reasons for the briefness of this stay, and a legend has grown up of an unhappy love affair with a lady of the Southern "aristocracy." There is apparently no evidence that such an affair existed, but for whatever reason, Whitman returned to Brooklyn, stopping on the way at St. Louis and then travelling north as far as Niagara Falls.

Back in Brooklyn, he edited the Brooklyn Freeman for a year and then was connected as contributor, correspondent, or free-lance writer with several publications including the Brooklyn Daily Advertiser and the New York Evening Post. These years from 1850 to 1855 are not completely accounted for in Whitman's life, as research has produced little definite material about them. It is known, however, that at least part of the time was taken up in house-building and other carpentering. The poet's father, Walter Whitman, was a carpenter, and from him the son apparently learned the trade. Sometime in these years, too, Whitman effected the change in his outward appearance from a correctly dressed city journalist to the rough, outdoor man of the broad-brimmed hat and always-open shirt collar, later epitomized by his friend, William Douglas O'Connor, as "The Good
add to something in order to enhance its value or utility. The adjective usually means something added to be something added to something already existing. The noun usually means something added to enhance or improve something already existing.
In 1855 and 1856, respectively, the first and second editions of *Leaves of Grass* appeared, while Whitman continued to publish articles in other publications. For the two following years he edited the *Brooklyn Daily Times*, and then in March 1860 went to Boston to supervise the third edition of *Leaves of Grass* published by the firm of Thayer and Eldridge. A series of twenty-five sketches, called *Brooklynia*, for the *Brooklyn Standard*, the composition of the first of the *Drum-Taps* poems, and articles for the *New York Leader* occupied Whitman until December 1862 when he left New York for Virginia in search of his brother George who had been reported wounded in battle.

Perhaps the most notable fact in Whitman's life in the years preceding the publication of *Leaves of Grass* was his lack of desire or his inability to keep a position, despite the absence of any other source of income. In other ways, his existence in and around New York was not extraordinary, except for a peculiarly keen awareness of himself as a cipher in New York's mass of humanity. He liked to feel himself a part of the crowds; and his notebooks describe the fascination which Broadway held for him with its succession of well-known figures mingled with the crowds, his "passion" for ferry trips and aimless rides on the Broadway omnibuses, and his friendships, with the ferry pilots and omnibus drivers. The young Whitman, however, did not neglect other opportunities offered by the city. His newspaper connections admitted him to the theaters, and he saw the well-known actors and actresses of his time and enjoyed productions of most of
Shakespeare's dramas which he always read carefully the day before the performance. He also conceived an enthusiasm for opera, particularly the Italian, which is reflected in *Leaves of Grass* in such poems as "Proud Music of the Storm" and "That Music Always Round Me."

There was another side to Whitman's nature which strongly influenced his poetry. This was a great love for the out-of-doors and especially for the country and the seashore of Long Island which he liked to call by its Indian name "Paumanok." Summer after summer he rambled over the island, alone except for the fishermen and clam-diggers whom he met at their daily work; and they, too, found their way into his poetry, as for example, in "Song of Myself":

> The boatmen and clam-diggers arose early and stopt for me,  
> I tuck'd my trowser-ends in my boots and went and had a good time;  
> You should have been with us that day round the chowder kettle.

Thus, until 1862, the author of *Leaves of Grass* lived, for the most part within the narrow radius of New York City and Long Island, a life of which the external events qualified him as one of the average population. That Whitman was not, in a true sense, an average man is proved by the simple fact that he was a poet; but the discussion here is concerned with the justification of Whitman's subjective, or, as many critics claim, egotistical approach to American democracy.

After finding his brother safe in Virginia, Whitman returned to Washington with a train of wounded soldiers, where in the next few years,
his experiences brought him into closer contact with democracy than any
previous or later events. Whitman never enlisted in the Civil War, and
in none of his writing is there any suggestion of the idea or any
reason for its rejection. He was an ardent Unionist and published some
of the earlier war poems of Drum-Taps in an effort to stimulate recruiting
in New York. When he went to Washington, however, he found his place as
an independent visitor and nurse of the wounded soldiers in the huge make-
shift Army hospitals. Here there were no distinctions. The hospitals
were pitifully inadequate, and Whitman discovered the great service he
could do for the wounded young men by reading to them, writing their
letters, by talking or sitting with them, or just by speaking as he passed.
To support himself, he did a small amount of copying in the office of a
Major Hapgood, using every extra penny to buy small conveniences and gifts
for Union and Confederate wounded alike. He came to know intimately many
young men from all parts of the country and found his experiences so re-
warding, despite close contact with suffering and death, that he remained
in Washington and continued his hospital visits until the end of the war.
Only the break-down of his own health eventually forced him to ease a
strenuous schedule of hours in the wards.

In the years following the war, Whitman continued to live simply,
even though his poetry was slowly gaining recognition especially in the
literary circles of Europe. The sale of Leaves of Grass in the United
States was never large enough to do more than supplement very meagerly
Whitman's scanty sources of income. A paralytic stroke in 1873 forced
him to leave Washington where he had worked in various government offices since the war; and he lived the next eleven years as a partial invalid at the home of his brother, Colonel George Whitman, in Camden, New Jersey. As his health improved, he was able to get around to visit his friends and relatives and to spend much time outdoors. He passed many summers at Timber Creek, sun-bathing and writing the nature pieces which he incorporated into his prose work, *Specimen Days*. He made trips to Washington, Baltimore, St. Louis, Denver, and the Rocky Mountains and spent several months in Canada, exploring Montreal, Quebec and the Saguenay River with his friend Dr. Richard Maurice Bucke. The last nine years of his life were passed in Camden in a small house of his own which he managed to purchase. He was very lame in his last years and only left the house occasionally and with great difficulty. The royalties from *Leaves of Grass* were so small that his friends often contributed funds for his support; and Whitman himself delivered several Lincoln lectures when he was able and contributed a few articles to various magazines and newspapers. The visitors to the little house on Mickle Street included many distinguished names, both foreign and American, as well as Whitman's own close friends and the hosts of acquaintances which he had among the citizens of Camden. The poet, by this time, had become an almost legendary figure in the vicinity of Camden; his literary reputation had begun to spread even in America; and he was being hailed by foreign critics as the first distinctly American poet.
The Justification of Whitman as a Representative of Democracy

The foregoing sketch of Whitman's life gives only the barest outline facts, of course, but is enough to indicate the chief circumstances and events and to show that the kaleidoscopic pictures of America in Leaves of Grass were in many cases the result of first-hand experience. As an advocate of democracy, Walt Whitman was justified in expressing himself; for he spoke from no ivory tower; and he spoke without benefit of privilege or patronage. When his poetry was unfavorably received, he refused to be disturbed and went steadily ahead with the preparation of his next edition. In many respects he was inconsistent, as in his reverence for women as wives and mothers and his failure to marry.

Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

The above lines from "Song of Myself" admit and even hail his inconsistency in a line which is reminiscent of Ralph Waldo Emerson's line in his essay, "Self-reliance" which reads, "Suppose you should contradict yourself; what then?" But Whitman was never inconsistent in his attitude toward his own poetry. His faith in it was unshaken by any criticism, even by criticism from Emerson who tried to persuade Whitman to omit some of the Children of Adam poems from the third edition because of their frank descriptions of sexual relations. Whitman's democratic ideal included freedom and frankness of speech, and he would not compromise his own beliefs, least of all when they proved detrimental to his career.

Ibid, p. 84
The General Temper of the Nineteenth Century

There was another consideration besides Whitman's own background to be kept in mind in investigating the poet's conception of democracy; and this was the general temper of the nineteenth century America in which Whitman lived. First of all, America was still a growing country, under the influence of what V. F. Calverton calls "the frontier force." Its boundaries were expanding steadily, and the pioneer of the west was the hero and the embodiment of America's great future, which the tremendous resources acquired with each new territory seemed to assure. The inventions, McCormick's reaper, the sewing machine, the telegraph, heralded the industrial age; and the American people, as was natural, saw the huge increase in national wealth and the luxuries which the machines could make available, without realizing until much later the evils which would result from mechanization. America was still a young country which had cause for pride in its achievements; and in spite of the bitterness engendered by the civil war and the exploitation of the South under the Reconstruction Program, it had faith in its future.

This was the atmosphere in which Leaves of Grass was composed. Democracy was still a new conception and still wonderful to the people of the world; and the people of some European states, including Italy and Greece, were still struggling for it. Whitman lived and wrote in a nineteenth century democracy where individuality, hard work and faith in the

7 V. F. Calverton, Liberation of American Literature (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932)
future were the daily watchwords. His concept can only be judged fairly by keeping in mind the aspects of existing democracy which the poet meditated on, while his imagination was transforming them into a poetic ideal.

The Elements of Growth

As leader of Greece he was not a man whose life toil alone was able to visualize to its beginning with a present whole into a definitively cohesive plan of development, neither was the theme of democracy he treated by going straight through the verse in the order in which they appear to me, but rather a whole, confusing, and even disorganized messiness over a span of years. A line-by-line comparison of the first seven editions, after which there were no major changes, would be the only means of identifying the considerable stages through which Shakespeare's conception passed before reaching a maturity which culminated the play in 1591. There are, however, some outstanding points, the existence of which will indicate the principal features of growth.

The first edition, of course, contains the starting point and the other illuminating elements in its mention. In order, the Children of Pain andsimilar sections, the Drama Descriptive of the Third edition of 1599, the effect of the Civil War, which produced the Later-Jane version, and finally the structure of the later editions which became permanent. It is the significant of these elements in relation to Leader of Greece as a whole which is to be examined rather than their biographies.
CHAPTER III

GROWTH OF DEMOCRATIC CONCEPT IN LEAVES OF GRASS

The Elements of Growth

As Leaves of Grass is not a work which its author was able to visualize at its beginning into a perfect whole with a definitely outlined plan of development, neither can its theme of democracy be traced by reading straight through the poems in the order in which they appear in the finished edition. The final arrangement of the poems is not only not chronological but represents a crystallization of ideas which expanded, divided, multiplied and even obliterated themselves over a span of years. A line-by-line comparison of the first seven editions, after which there were no major changes, would be the only means of identifying the innumerable stages through which Whitman's conception passed before reaching a maturity which satisfied the poet in 1881. There are, however, some outstanding points, the emphasis of which will indicate the principal factors of growth.

The first edition, of course, contains the starting point; and the other illuminating elements to be mentioned are, in order, the Children of Adam and Calamus sections; the Chants Democratic of the third edition of 1860; the effect of the Civil War which produced the Drum-Taps poems; and finally the structure of the later editions which became permanent. It is the significance of these elements in relation to Leaves of Grass as a whole which is to be examined rather than their biographical
importance.

Discussion of the Elements

The 1855 Edition. The most important poem of the first edition was the "Song of Myself" which is, by far, Whitman's longest poem and contains "an introduction to the main ideas of all editions of Leaves of Grass. The tone of this poem is almost exclusively personal, and its contribution to the democratic concept is found in the poet's identification of himself in it with the soul of every human being. Since the import is philosophical or spiritual, democracy does not really enter into the poem at all; and this seems to indicate that Whitman had not yet settled upon democracy as the focus around which to gather all his ideas. The titles of the other poems of the first edition have a cosmic tenor: "I Sing the Body Electric," "Song of the Answerer," "There was a Child Went Forth," "Who Learns My Lesson Complete," "The Sleepers," "To Think of Time," "Faces." Whitman was searching for the relationship of the human soul to the universe, using himself as the representative soul. Beginning on this infinitely broad basis, he was no less baffled in finding an answer to the unanswerable question than all the philosophers of the ages before him; but in his poetry he translated his bafflement into the concreteness of the material world which his senses perceived around him and gave unity to the heterogeneous mass of impressions by considering every feature of human existence, past, present, and future, as an ingredient of

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1 Gay Wilson Allen, Walt Whitman Handbook, p. 115
himself and inferentially of every human being. He expressed this principle of unity in one succinct line of "Song of Myself":

I am an acme of things accomplish'd, and I an encloser of things to be.2

It was from this intensely personal feeling, whatever its psychological origin may have been, that Whitman began to develop two, or possibly three, themes which became integral parts of his concept of democracy.

The first of these themes, which was common to nineteenth century Romanticism, was the idea of the poet as the leader and champion of the common people. In "The Song of the Answerer," the beginnings of this idea appear in Whitman. He distinguishes between the "singers" and the "Poet" whom he calls the Answerer and who is evidently himself, thus:

The words of the singers are the hours of minutes of the light or dark, but the words of the maker of poems are the general light and dark.

The maker of poems settles justice, reality and immortality...3

Whitman, however, broadens the theme by including the common people without excluding those of high rank and privilege, and visualizes the poet as a universal medium speaking with equal understanding and clarity to all men.

The second theme, which may be subdivided into two, is concerned with human love. If the subject is to be broken down, it resolves itself under the headings of sexual love and platonic love or friendship. This

2 Emory Holloway, editor, Walt Whitman: Complete Poetry and Selected Prose and Letters, p. 77

3 Ibid, p. 156
double theme weaves in and out of "Song of Myself" in such lines as:

And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,
And that all the men ever born are also my brothers,
and the women my sisters and lovers;...⁴

Man or woman, I might tell how I like you, but cannot,...⁵

On women fit for conception I start bigger and nimbler babes,
(This day I am jetting the stuff of far more arrogant
republics.)⁶

In "I Sing the Body Electric," which was later placed with the Children of Adam poems, the main theme is love of the sexes; but here, too, there is a hint of the double theme, in the lines:

I have perceiv'd that to be with those I like is enough,
To stop in company with the rest at evening is enough,...⁷

In these poems of the first edition, Whitman is intensely subjective; but later revisions and additions as well as new poems gave a more impersonal spirit to both the poet-leader and the human love themes, and they become ideals for the goal of a better humanity.

The preface of the 1855 edition, which was omitted from later editions as its ideas were gradually incorporated into poetry in "By Blue Ontario's Shore,"⁸ shows the beginning of the deeply nationalistic feeling which was another starting-point, together with the poet-leader and human love themes, in the development of the democratic concept. The place of

⁴Ibid, p. 30
⁵Ibid, p. 70
⁶Ibid, p. 70
⁷Ibid, p. 91
this nationalism in the completed *Leaves of Grass* is discussed more fully in Chapter V; but it must be emphasized that this preface to the first edition is a statement of Whitman’s ideals for American poets and of his belief that America is the natural candidate for leadership in a new era of poetry to which Whitman, himself, is, by the implication of his words, pointing the way when he says, "The American poets are to enclose old and new, for America is the race of races." 9

Children of Adam and Calamus Sections. In Whitman’s third edition which appeared in 1860, there were two sections, one called *L’Enfans d’Adam*, later changed to *Children of Adam*, and the other *Calamus*, which constituted an important step in the development of the democratic concept. The *Children of Adam* poems brought together in a group Whitman’s most sensual poetry and gave expression to his then revolutionary belief that sexual love ought to be treated openly as a powerful and divine force in the life of mankind. These poems were, of course, the target of Whitman’s bitterest critics, as in the case of the loss of his government position in Washington a few years later for no other reason than his authorship of the poems. It is the opinion of most critics today that in his eagerness to be frank and unaffected on a subject which had been too long a matter of unwholesome secrecy and shame, Whitman went too far in the other direction and allowed his crusade to spoil his art. Indeed, while he was in Boston seeing the third edition through the press, he

9 Emory Holloway, editor, *Walt Whitman: Complete Poetry and Selected Prose and Letters*, p. 573
spent two hours with Emerson, walking on Boston Common, while Emerson tried to dissuade him from including the most sensual lines. Whitman, however, was adamant; and the lines were not withdrawn. Gay Wilson Allen quotes the Danish critic, Frederik Schyberg, who questions the sincerity of these poems and declares that: "In 'Children of Adam' he (Whitman) was self-confident and supercilious,..." This doubt, however, is directed at the reality of Whitman's own normal, sexual experiences and hints that the poems may be a compensation for Whitman's deficiencies. Such an interpretation, of course, brings up the ever-recurring question of whether an evaluation of poetry should be made in terms of its author's qualities of character; and while it is true that such consideration cannot be entirely ignored, there is another less tangible factor to which Newton Arvin refers when he mentions "the feeling of the reader of the worth of Leaves of Grass despite the color of the poet's personality." Whether or not the Children of Adam poems are objectionable in themselves, a point which every reader will decide for himself, their intent to acknowledge and exalt love and procreation is integral in both the structure of Leaves of Grass and the democracy which Whitman envisioned. There is no compromise in such lines as these from "I Sing the Body Electric":

O my body! I dare not desert the likes of you in other men and women, nor the likes of the parts of you, I believe the likes of you are to stand or fall with the likes of the soul, (and that they are the soul,)

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10 Emory Holloway, *Whitman, An Interpretation in Narrative*, p. 165-6
11 Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 152
I believe the likes of you shall stand or fall with my poems, and that they are my poems....

In the Calamus poems, the same controversy arises. It is to the "comradeship" theme of this group that Mark Van Doren refers as "this wateriest of foundations for democracy;" but even if Whitman intended this theme to be taken literally, for he leaves the decision to his readers, his hopes are for a remote and unknowable future. He is holding up a goal and suggesting a way of working towards it from his own experience. That he has no delusions about its immediate attainment is clear from such poems in the section as "Recorders Ages Hence" and "I Dream'd In a Dream." In the light of modern psychology, "For You O Democracy" and "This Moment Yearning and Thoughtful" may well be poems to which the psychological term of sublimation applies; but this does not alter the fact that they mark the widening of Whitman's vision, the former with its inclusion of all America and the latter with reference to the other countries of the world. His emphasis remains on the individual which he, as the poet, represents; but he is reaching more specifically and determinedly than in the first two editions for a conception which will irrevocably encompass every human being.

Chants Democratic Section of the 1860 edition. An interesting and significant point in the development of the democratic concept of Leaves

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of **Grass** is reached in another section of the 1860 edition called **Chants Democratic**. These poems, as Allen points out, seem to be the fulfilment of Whitman's promise in the 1855 preface to celebrate America and its people in poetry.\(^\text{15}\) The group contained the poem, "By Blue Ontario's Shore" first titled "The Poem of Many in One" in which the theme of the preface was expressed:

Land of lands and bards to corroborate!\(^\text{16}\)

Other poems in the group were "Song of the Broad-Axe", "Song for Occupations", "Our Old Feuillage", "With Antecedents" and "To a Historian", all but the latter containing long lists of the features of the American continent and its people in what critics have named the "catalogue" method. "To a Historian," a short poem, is another expression of the poet's aim to create a new type of poetry for a future based on the greatness of the common man as an individual. The **Chants Democratic** section is strongly nationalistic in spirit and represents the peak of the almost blatant optimism and enthusiasm characteristic of the earlier stages of Whitman's democratic concept.

The great significance of the **Chants Democratic** is that the poems appeared as a group in only one edition of **Leaves of Grass**. After the 1860 edition, the group was broken up and the poems revised and re-distributed throughout the book so that their purely nationalistic character, although not destroyed, was somewhat diluted. Whitman never again used

\(^{15}\) Allen, op. cit., p. 141

\(^{16}\) Holloway, op. cit., p. 313
The long standing issue of the "Great Depression" has been a topic of much discussion and debate over the years. It is widely recognized as one of the most severe economic downturns in American history, affecting virtually every aspect of society.

During the depression, unemployment rates soared, industries shut down, and a sense of economic uncertainty and despair spread across the nation. This period marked a significant turning point in American history, leading to the adoption of new policies and strategies to address the economic challenges of the time.

To better understand the causes and effects of the Great Depression, historians have examined a wide range of factors, including the impact of the Stock Market crash of 1929, the failure of banks and financial institutions, and the government's response to the economic crisis.

In the years following the depression, the United States emerged as a stronger and more resilient economy, with a renewed commitment to economic stability and the welfare of its citizens.
democracy as a subordinate theme in his *Leaves* by concentrating it in a single group of poems. He wove it, instead, into each group, either directly or by implication, sometimes with too little regard for the unity of the group as in the case of "For You 0 Democracy" in the Calamus group where the shift from the intensely personal to the more universal viewpoint, though important, is so obvious as to seem forced. This fault justifies such criticisms as Basil De Selincourt's that Whitman "finally arranged them (the poems) without regard for their poetic value, considering merely in what order the thought of each would be more effective in its contribution to the thought of all."17

In thus breaking up the *Chants Democratic*, Whitman clearly shows progress from a materialistic and nationalistic ideal of democracy toward a broader and more spiritual conception, even to the point of sacrificing artistic unity.

The Effect of the Civil War. The causes for the change in Whitman's attitude toward democracy after the 1860 edition were doubtless manifold, including the obscure influences of his personal life; but certainly the most obvious and far-reaching effect was produced by the Civil War. His experiences as a nurse in Washington and his visits to the front gave his war poems, *Drum-Taps*, unassailable authenticity; but even close association with the senseless horror of war and especially that of a civil war, did not weaken but rather strengthened Whitman's faith in

The sentence is not clear due to the way it is written. It seems to be a mix of random characters and numbers. It is difficult to understand the intended meaning.
his democratic ideal. His close relationships with the common soldiers of both the North and the South deepened his conviction of the essential brotherhood of all men; and he saw in the soldiers' silent acceptance of suffering and death sure confirmation of his belief in the nobility of ordinary men. Some of the early Drum-Taps poems, as for example "First O Songs For a Prelude" and "Beat! Beat! Drums!", are little more than recruiting songs full of empty pageantry and sentimental, patriotic appeal; but the sensitive descriptions of "A Sight In Camp In the Day-break Gray and Dim," "The Wound-dresser," and others prove beyond question that the subjective approach and the arrogance which are often objectionable in the earlier editions, have been tempered by humility and a broader understanding of the difficulties and suffering incident to maintaining even the imperfect democracy of the United States on which he was building his ideal for the future.

Survey of the Final Arrangement of the Poems. In the seventh edition of Leaves of Grass published in 1881, Whitman re-arranged his poems for the last time, apparently having decided that his work was finished and therefore that the form in which it was finally to appear should be settled. Although he continued to write during the last eleven years of his life, the three annexes,\(^{18}\) Sands at Seventy, Goodbye My Fancy, and Old Age Echoes, contained no new themes and were composed entirely of brief poems of reminiscence, afterthought, and confirmation of what had gone before. The completed concept of democracy, then, must be extracted

\(^{18}\) p. 12, ante
The method Whitman used for the organization of his poems was probably as consistent as any that could have been devised to encompass the paradoxes of *Leaves of Grass*, for it was based on the same interweaving of egocentric and universal principles that accounted for the constant revision of most of his poems. The titles of the sections give the impression that the arrangement is primarily autobiographical, and this is true in so far as the two long poems near the beginning, "Starting From Paumanok" and "Song of Myself" do have autobiographical significance and contain in embryo all the ideas developed in the other poems. Beyond this point, however, the pattern is broken and confused for anyone attempting to trace Whitman's life sequence through his poems.

The opening *Inscriptions* are short pieces which appear to define the scope and intended audience of *Leaves of Grass*, but even here Whitman's personal reflections on his work in such poems as "Beginning My Studies," "Me Imperturbe," and "Eidolons" periodically interrupt the reader's train of thought. After these opening selections, the *Children of Adam* and *Calamus* sections' early appearance emphasize their theme; but dates of revision, sometimes as much as twenty years after the composition of the poems, give the lie to their autobiographical value either factually or in the realm of ideas. This holds true to the last poems of *Songs of Parting*, "So Long," which was written in 1860 but was constantly revised for each edition until 1881.

The concept of democracy, by the same token, was a revised and
edited one with its conglomerate elements scattered through Leal of Grass, so that their unity is in their contribution to the over-all purpose of the book and not in their relation to one another. With this in mind, the democratic concept can be discerned in outline in the finished Leaves of Grass as follows: The opening poem of Inscriptions presents the double image of the person as an independent individual and as a subordinate unit of mankind. "Starting From Paumanok" and "Song of Myself" amplify this double image with approximately equal emphasis on each phase of it. Children of Adam and Calamus, next in order, are devoted to the independent individual as lover and friend in the person of the poet. Then follows the group of longer poems, "Salut Au Monde," "Song of the Open Road," "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" which come back to the mass image and begin the glorification of America. "The Song of the Answerer" describes the American poet-leader; and "Our Old Fauillage," "A Song of Joys," "Song of the Broad-Axe," "Song of the Exposition," "Song of The Redwood Tree," "A Song for Occupations," and "Song of the Rolling Earth" continue to extoll every phase of American life, good and evil, as inevitable in its development and valuable to it. The Birds of Passage section goes a step further with the "pioneer" motif of the West still to be conquered and with the definite admission of the contribution of past ages to America's present and future in "With Antecedents." Then, in "A Broadway Pageant," Whitman sees the old world of the Orient reaching out to the new western world with the union to be brought about by friendly interchange of peoples as symbolized by the visit of the Eastern
emissaries to New York which the poem celebrates. The next section, Sea-Drift, adds nothing to the democratic concept, but has a more personal and deeply sad tone, especially in the famous "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking." In By the Roadside, Whitman has collected some rather miscellaneous short poems, tying up loose ends before he goes on to Drum-Taps where he vindicates his love and faith for America and reaches his poetic heights in the beautiful elegy on the death of Lincoln, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed." After the Memories of President Lincoln, Whitman placed "By Blue Ontario's Shore" which had become a sort of chant of victory and challenge to the future poets of America, including the significant line:

"O America because you build for mankind I build for you,..."\(^{19}\) with its promise that democracy is not for America alone. The Autumn Rivulets poems are largely personal reflections and reminiscences, and after them the mystical "Proud Music of the Storm" leads to "Passage to India." In the latter poem, Whitman uses the scientific advances in transportation and communication which were uniting the world in his time as symbols of the possibility of a spiritual as well as actual union and one to which all the past ages have been leading. "The Sleepers," an 1855 poem placed next, carries out the spiritual theme of the union of all souls; and "To Think of Time" expresses Whitman's belief in the oneness of the past, present, and future. The Whispers of Heavenly Death section follows logically with its conception of death as fulfilment of

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\(^{19}\) Holloway, op. cit., p. 315
life, although most of the poems were written in the 1860's and undoubtedly inspired by Whitman's war experiences. Then comes "Thou Mother with Thy Equal Brood" in which the idea of oneness of past, present, and future is specifically applied to America and its democracy; and on this note, Whitman closes; for the last two sections, From Noon To Starry Night and Songs of Parting, contain relatively brief poems which seem to form a group representative of the themes of all the preceding groups, ending with "So Long," the poet's final summing up and farewell.
CHAPTER IV

WHITMAN AS SPOKESMAN FOR NINETEENTH CENTURY, AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

The Realism of Whitman's Picture of American Democracy

One of Whitman's avowed aims in his poetry was to translate American democracy into terms which would enable the people of America and the rest of the world to see and understand it as a whole. This was an ambition for which one man's lifetime was a totally inadequate span to devote to a full realization, even when Whitman chose as a method, interpretation through the medium of his own personality; for American democracy was, and still is a collective term for a multitude of living individuals whose progress as a nation was a complicated and ever-changing mass of factors, of which some outdistanced and others lagged behind the poet's perception of them. That he realized, at least in the latter part of his life, that Leaves of Grass would always be incomplete because of the very nature of his purpose, is clear from his explanation and summary in A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads where he describes his ambition and its fulfilment in the following words:

This (desire and conviction) was a feeling or ambition to articulate and faithfully express in literary or poetic form, and uncompromisingly, my own physical, emotional, moral, intellectual, and aesthetic Personality, in the midst of, and tallying, the momentous spirit and facts of its immediate days, and of current America--and to exploit that Personality, identified with place and date, in a far more candid and comprehensive sense than any hitherto poem or book.

Perhaps this is in brief, or suggests, all I have sought to
to do. Given the Nineteenth Century, with the United States, and what they furnish as area and points of view, Leaves of Grass is, or seeks to be, simply a faithful and doubtless self-will'd record.¹

The rather apologetic tone of this statement is belied by Whitman's use of the word 'perhaps', for Whitman knew by the time he wrote this statement in 1888 that no apology was necessary for his book. He was ready and willing to leave his poetry to the judgment of coming generations, but was either unwilling or believed it unnecessary to pass on this poetry unsupported by its author's explanations and qualifications. His emphasis, therefore, on his use of nineteenth century America, the United States "and what they furnish as area points of view" leads directly to the study of his presentation of nineteenth century, American democracy.

It is in this phase of Whitman that realism is most sharply noticeable. He spreads before his reader a panorama of America, with the effectiveness enhanced rather than diminished by the sweeping, all-inclusive "catalogues" which impart the sense of diffuseness and immensity in the American scene. Whitman's pictures are not descriptions in the ordinary sense, for he used only a few details and those largely in connection with places and people that were part of his personal experience, as for example in "Mannahatta" which conjures up the skyline of New York City with a few deft strokes or in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" where even the sunlight on the seagulls' wings and the smoke and flame of the foundry fires on the shore are lovingly portrayed.² For the most

¹Holloway, op. cit., p. 860
²Holloway, op. cit., p. 148-9
part, however, he uses lists, which are often apostrophic and which contain geographical names, workers' vocations, varieties of birds, animals, trees and flowers, types of physiography, and social categories of all kinds. Although these are amplified by nothing more than an adjective or two and seem to be presented without any ordered plan, they create an atmosphere, aided by Whitman's irregular rhythms, which makes them seem part of a vast, mutable and living whole. Whitman saw all creation as a whole, and doubtless for this reason, found it easy to confer a feeling of unity on the mass of diverse characteristics of America which he inventoried. As Percy H. Boynton succinctly expresses it, "This sense of oneness explains, ..... the otherwise bewildering excesses of the 'inventory passages,' which for all their apparent unrelatedness are always brought up with a unifying inclusive turn."  

Whitman's lack of selectivity has often been criticized, and justifiably so from the standpoint of artistic form; but the seemingly endless enumerations, especially in the democratic songs, "Song of the Broad-Axe," "Song of the Exposition," "Song of Occupations," and the rest, could not have been other than deliberate. The poet was willing to sacrifice form for a realistic effect and vindicates himself to the extent that the effect was successfully achieved. He delineated the majesty and beauty of America, but he did not omit any of its common-places, its ugliness or its evils. Thieves, prostitutes, slaves, jails, and executions were all part of the America he presented, as well as greed,  

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Boynton, op. cit., p. 489
poverty, and war; and he brought them forth with a frankness which, though often offensive, was always vigorous and faithful to his subject matter. It is not easy to isolate passages for quotation in this respect, except for the Children of Adam, Calemus, and Drum-Taps poems; because Whitman, as has been pointed out, seldom describes and is often content merely to state his intentions and beliefs without elaboration. The pattern of America and American life, however, is woven through the work in such beautiful lyricism as that of "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed" and equally through the earthiness of "To a Common Prostitute" and "The City Dead-house."

Whitman's Portrayal of the Democratic Spirit
of Nineteenth Century America

The Characteristic Optimism. Although Whitman's personal philosophy embraced the faith and hope in the future which found expression in Leaves of Grass, the optimism of many of the poems is more matter-of-fact than in the utterances of such obscure and mystical poems as "The Sleepers" or "Song of Myself." This optimism is poured out particularly in such poems as "Rise 0 Days from Your Fathomless Deeps" in Drum-Taps in the ringing,

Thunder on! Stride on Democracy! Strike with vengeful stroke!
And do you rise higher than ever yet 0 days, 0 cities!4

Written at the end of the Civil War, it expressed no doubt or lack of confidence in a nation which had been divided within itself and was facing the tremendous problem of reconstruction. Also in "Pioneers! O Pioneers!", there is a challenge to action and leadership for America, with no ques-

4Holloway, op. cit., p. 268
titioning of America's fitness or capacity as the next leading nation of the world, despite the fact that the nation's resources had been drained by war and that its organization into unified states had been under way for less than one hundred years and was still far from harmonious or complete. In "Song of the Exposition" and "Song of the Broad-Axe," the same optimistic strain appears. Industry, science, and the nation's workers are building for a future that cannot be other than miraculously wonderful, with all obstacles discounted.

All this is, in a sense, nationalistic patriotism and as such has been roundly scored by critics who denounce Whitman as a rabble-rouser and jingoist. Viewed from the standpoint of the twentieth century, there might be some truth in such accusations, since the concept of human freedom has developed to the point where some of its professed exponents assert the incapacity of the majority of mankind to know without being told of what freedom consists. Whether or not such a stand is valid, however, is not the point at issue. The nineteenth century America was a nation in which almost unbelievable progress had been made in a brief span of time. The settling and civilizing of the North American continent had developed individual initiative to an immense degree if not to the highest point in the history of the human race. America was generally regarded as a land of destiny and opportunity, still crude and unfinished perhaps, but always forward-moving with its great potentialities in only the first stages of realization. It was an age of optimism, and it was this optimism that Whitman faithfully reflected in his poems.
The Ascendancy of the "Average" Individual. In H. S. Canby's study of Whitman, he refers to the "wide and intimate contacts with the common man and woman of every kind which seem to be the democratic basis of the 'Leaves'." Several theories have been advanced as to the sources of this doctrine in Whitman, including Allen's explanation of it as "a living application of the great democratic ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity" as set forth in the Declaration of Independence, and F. O. Matthiessen's reference to the "humanitarian equality which springs in his (Whitman's) lines from his knowledge of peace (which) was a Quaker attribute long before the Declaration of Independence." In addition to these sources, the more obvious one of Whitman's environment must be cited. He lived for most of his life in the teeming cities of New York, Washington, and Philadelphia where he earned an extremely modest living and rubbed shoulders constantly, in both intimate and general contacts, with the "average" working men and women of America. He taught in country schools, worked on obscure newspapers, and learned the carpenters' trade from his own father. Thus, all his early contacts were with representatives of the working class; and with his great proclivity for friendship, he learned to love and understand the people of whom he was one. He knew, therefore, that these people were the "backbone of the nation" and that it was their efforts which had produced the American civilization. He

5 Canby, _op. cit._, p. 64

6 Allen, _op. cit._, p. 370

realized, too, that America was unique in having begun with a working class of free individuals who had formulated their own government and participated in its functions in protest against the Old World tradition of power and privilege conferred by the accident of birth. In the middle of the nineteenth century, this individual freedom was still zealously and almost fanatically guarded and prized in America. When Whitman came to write his poetry, therefore, it was the "average" individual who was his hero.

*Leaves of Grass* does not contain a single poem which violates the letter or the spirit of this exaltation of the common man. When he wrote of the war, he chose the ordinary soldier for appreciation and remembrance:

Who are you elderly man so gaunt and grim, with well-gray'd hair, and flesh all sunken about the eyes? Who are you my dear comrade?

Then to the second I step—and who are you my child and darling?

Who are you sweet boy with cheeks yet blooming?

Then to the third—a face nor child nor old, very calm, as of beautiful yellow-white ivory; Young man I think I know you—I think this face is the face of the Christ himself, Dead and divine and brother of all, and here again he lies.  

In "A Song for Occupations," he declared,

The popular tastes and employments taking precedence in poems or anywhere, You workwomen and workmen of these States having your own divine and strong life, And all else giving place to men and women like you.  

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8 Holloway, op. cit., p. 281-2
9 Ibid., p. 202
I am sorry to hear that you are not well. I hope you will get better soon.

If you need anything, please let me know.

Best wishes,
[Your Name]
It is true that the people whom *Leaves of Grass* idealized never accepted as a poet the man who wanted above all else to be their poetic comrade and leader. Even Whitman's closest friends in the working class had no idea of the importance of *Leaves of Grass* or even any knowledge of what Whitman was trying to do in writing it. Emory Holloway relates the incident about Peter Doyle, the young Washington street-car conductor and Whitman's close comrade, who was undisturbed at having carelessly mislaid an original manuscript of *Drum-Taps* which Whitman had given him. Yet, despite the unawareness of the people that freedom and individuality, their most precious and outstanding characteristics in the nineteenth century, had an earnest and inspired champion in literature, Whitman's treatment of them in *Leaves of Grass* is an accurate and effective representation of their ascendancy in that period.

**Scientific and Industrial "Modernism"**

With regard to one of the most typical aspects of nineteenth century America, scientific advancement and industrial progress, Canby points out that Whitman was a rebel against the gross materialism of his age. This is particularly evident in Whitman's advocacy of the poet-leader as a new guiding spirit for America, as he expressed it first in the 1855 preface and then in the poem "By Blue Ontario's Shore" where he said,

10 Emory Holloway, *An Interpretation in Narrative*, p. 311

11 Canby, *op. cit.*, p. 266
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I listened to the Phantom by Ontario's shore,
I heard the voice arising demanding bards,
By them all native and grand, by them alone can
these States be fused into the compact organism
of a Nation.\textsuperscript{12}

Although this so-called "literatus" theory has, perhaps with some justifi-
cation, been considered eccentric by many circles, it is less quixotic
if interpreted symbolically as well as literally. Whitman was searching
for a moral, ethical, and intellectual standard, realizing that no real
progress could be made without it, since a nation could be no better than
the souls of its people:

The soul, its destinies, the real real,
(Purport of all these apparitions of the real;)
In thee America, the soul its destinies,
Thou globe of globes!\textsuperscript{13}

Whitman's "literatus" was to supply this moral, ethical, and intellectual
standard, untrammeled by any creed or authority except the divine con-
science which Whitman believed every man possessed and which was to be
developed here to its highest potentiality.

Whitman thus repudiated the leadership of industry and science
which was so much in the foreground of his age, but this is not to say
that he ignored the implications of "modern" progress in his poetry.
"Song of the Exposition" presents modern industrialism as one of the
wonders of America,\textsuperscript{14} and "Passage to India," although philosophical

\textsuperscript{12} Emory Holloway, Walt Whitman: Complete Poetry and Selected
Prose and Letters, p. 316

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid, p. 415

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, p. 185
or spiritual in its intent, was, as Allen says, "occasioned by three events of the greatest international importance: the completion of the Suez Canal, connecting Europe and Asia by water; the finishing of the Northern Pacific Railroad, spanning the North American continent; and the laying of the cable across the Pacific Ocean, thus joining by canal, rail, and cable Europe, North America, and Asia." Other poems contain equally unmistakable appreciation of scientific and industrial achievement; so that it must be said that Whitman represented his age in this respect, even though he was prophetic of the evils which were to arise in its wake.

From the foregoing analyses, then, it seems clear that Whitman may be regarded as a spokesman for nineteenth century American democracy. He was keenly aware of its most important elements and represented them graphically. True, it was a poetic representation, shaded and modified by the poet's aims in Leaves of Grass as a whole; but it was done realistically and caught the atmosphere and spirit of the times.
CHAPTER V

THE NATIONALISM OF LEAVES OF GRASS

Reasons for the Discussion of Nationalism

No discussion of the democracy of Leaves of Grass could be complete without taking up the accusation of nationalism directed against it by many critics. Percy H. Boynton has called Whitman an isolationist "devoid by nature and experience of any sense of internationalism" and says that he "tried to overcome deficiency in this respect by use of geographical names."¹ Many other writers, however, who are probably in the majority, believe that Whitman passed through an intermediate stage of narrow patriotism and emerged, in the words of Clifton J. Furness, "with final outlook fixed upon an heroic, artistic, and especially emotional intertwining and affiliation of the Old and New Worlds."² In both cases, however, it is admitted that nationalism is one of the features of Whitman's poetry and therefore of the democratic concept, so that some analysis of its roots, its exact connotation, and its influence on the ultimate value of the conception was essential to this study.


V. THEOLOGY

Chapter 5: The Heavens and Their Influence

The heavens declare the glory of God; the firmament sheweth his handywork.

Psalm 19:1

The heavens declare the glory of God; the firmament sheweth his handywork.

Psalm 19:1

Chapter 6: The Earth and Its Resources

And it shall come to pass in those days, that after I have brought forth them out of the land of Egypt, I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people.

Exodus 23:3

And it shall come to pass in those days, that after I have brought forth them out of the land of Egypt, I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people.

Exodus 23:3

Chapter 7: The History of the Nation

And the Lord said unto Moses, Pharaoh's heart is hard; he will not let the children of Israel go out of his land.

Exodus 4:21

And the Lord said unto Moses, Pharaoh's heart is hard; he will not let the children of Israel go out of his land.

Exodus 4:21

Chapter 8: The Future

And the Lord said unto Moses, Pharaoh's heart is hard; he will not let the children of Israel go out of his land.

Exodus 4:21

And the Lord said unto Moses, Pharaoh's heart is hard; he will not let the children of Israel go out of his land.

Exodus 4:21
The Roots of Whitman's Nationalism

Aside from the fact that love of one's native country is and has always been a natural human emotion and might have led Whitman into his nationalistic fervor, there are certain, definite facts revealed in Leaves of Grass which throw light on the foundation of his emotion. Probably the most fundamental of these facts is the poet's deep love of nature. The very title of the book is sure evidence of this love, and the breath of the out-doors is in nearly every poem. Whitman uses few, if any, poetic figures of speech; but much of his writing is symbolic or at least can be so interpreted, and it is almost always to nature that he turns for his symbols. His most beautiful and best-known lines, such as the famous passage in "Song of Myself" beginning,

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars.\(^3\)

or the lament of the mocking-bird in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" with its constant turning to the sea,\(^4\) are two examples of the depth of Whitman's feeling for the beauty of the earth.

Whitman never left the American continent and so never developed an intimate knowledge or feeling for any country except his own, but he found in the beauty of America, of which he managed to see a large part in his brief travels, an outlet for his reverence of nature's creation. Thus, this reverence was fixed on the only land he knew and

\(^3\)Holloway, op. cit., p. 55

\(^4\)Ibid, p. 228
and that the evidence exists to prove that it is true.

Unfortunately, the text is not clearly legible due to the quality of the image. It appears to be discussing some form of legal or evidence-related topic, possibly involving the examination of evidence and its implications. However, the specific details are not discernible from the image provided.
was intensified by his sense of the possibilities for development in a vast and still only partly settled nation.

A second factor which contributed to the appearance of nationalism in *Leaves of Grass* was the partial stage of America's development and expansion in the nineteenth century. When Whitman began *Leaves of Grass* in 1855, the covered wagons of the pioneers were moving westward, the railroad was being extended farther and farther towards the Pacific, and the whole country was in a fever of material progress. America's heroes were her pioneers who were strong men with a philosophy which was based, as H. S. Canby points out, on "freedom of the individual, the evils of privilege, and the absurdity of rank." It was an age of patriotism in a country which was developing more rapidly and on a grander scale than any other country in history. *Leaves of Grass* reflects these conditions in the optimism of such poems as "Starting From Paumanok" which is full of pictures of the frontier and prophecies of the greatness of America's future, or "Song of the Broad-Axe" exalting the workers who are building a new land, or "By Blue Ontario's Shore" in which "These States are the ampest poem," or in the ringing challenge of "Pioneers! O Pioneers!", among many others.

Finally to be mentioned in connection with the probably underlying elements of *Leaves of Grass*' nationalism is the spirit of

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6 Holloway, *op. cit.*, p. 312
American Transcendentalism whose great exponent was Ralph Waldo Emerson. This is a subject too broad for this study to do more than touch upon for its relation to the topic in hand. Whether Whitman had actually read Emerson before he wrote *Leaves of Grass* seems not to have been finally decided, but the whole spirit of *Leaves of Grass* is so much in harmony with the views expressed by Emerson, particularly in his *The American Scholar*, that Whitman must have absorbed the ideas from the very air, if not from a reviewer of Emerson or Emerson, himself. Emerson said, "We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe. The spirit of the American freeman is already suspected to be timid, imitative, tame."

Whitman's version in "Song of the Exposition" is as follows:

> Come Muse migrate from Greece and Ionia,
> Cross out please those immensely overpaid accounts,
> That matter of Troy and Achilles' wrath, and Aeneas',
> Odysseus' wanderings,
> Placard "Removed" and "To Let" on the rocks of your snowy Parnassus,
> Repeat at Jerusalem, place the notice high on Jaffa's gate and on Mount Moriah,
> The same on the walls of your German, French and Spanish castles, and Italian collections,
> For know a better, fresher, busier sphere, a wide, untried domain awaits, demands you.

The transcendentalists' demand was for new writers who would free themselves from time-worn traditions and raise America from her subservience

7 Allen, _op. cit._, p. 30


9 Holloway, _op. cit._, p. 182
to European models and ideas. This was the demand Whitman set out to fulfill.

**Exact Connotation of Nationalism in *Leaves of Grass***

What exactly is meant by nationalism in poetry is a question that should be considered carefully, since the term usually has a political connotation. Whitman's treatment of all the subject matter of his poetry in terms of universal and eternal values, however, obviates the possibility of giving a political interpretation to the nationalism of *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman was in no sense a politician, and, as Newton Arvin points out, he subscribed unswervingly to the principle that the best government is the one that governs the least. Furthermore, he never changed the attitude which he held toward himself in his first *Leaves of Grass* poem, "Song of Myself," his belief in himself as the first American poet of a new type of poets who were to be the true leaders of the people. Whitman's nationalism consisted in his great love and appreciation of the physical features of the American continent and his belief that the common people who were making such material progress on their rich land could also progress spiritually toward becoming as Canby puts it, "the light of the world," with a new, democratic way of life. This was not a militant nationalism but an idealistic and symbolic one which recognized all America's possibilities with-

10 Arvin, _op. cit._, p. 20

11 Furness, _op. cit._, p. 7-8 introd.
out being blind to her shortcomings. It is expressed perhaps as well as anywhere in a stanza of "The Return of Heroes" in *Autumn Rivulets*:

*Fecund America—to-day,*
Thou art all over set in births and joys;
Thou groan'st with riches, thy wealth clothes thee as a swathing-garment.
Thou laughest loud with ache of great possessions,
A myriad-twining life like interlacing vines binds all thy vast demesne,
As some huge ship freighted to water's edge thou ridest into port,
As rain falls from the heaven and vapors rise from earth, so have the precious values fallen upon thee and risen out of thee;
Thou envy of the globe! thou miracle!
Thou, bathed, choked, swimming in plenty,
Thou lucky Mistress of the tranquil barns,
Thou prairie Dame that sittest in the middle and lookest out upon thy world, and lookest East and lookest West,
Dispensatress, that by a word givest a thousand miles, a million farms, and missest nothing,
Thou all-acceptress—thou hospitable, (thou only art hospitable as God is hospitable.)

Henry Seidel Canby has summed it up in these words:

*Walt Whitman's America was not a real America, though the real America was his background and a source of his inspiration. It was a symbolic America existing in his own mind and always pointed toward a future of which he was prophetic.*

Whitman knew, indeed, that America was not perfect, for we find his criticism mixed with extravagant praise, even in the early poems. "Song of Myself" contains such lines as these:

*Here and there with dimes on the eyes walking,*
*To feed the greed of the belly, the brains liberally spooning,*

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13 *Holloway, op. cit., p. 328*

14 *Canby, op. cit., p. v*
Tickets buying, taking, selling, but in to the feast never once going,
Many sweating, ploughing, threshing, and then the chaff for payment receiving,
A few idly owning, and they the wheat continually claiming.\textsuperscript{15}

and "By Blue Ontario's Shore" describes "The Union always swarming with blatherers and always sure and impregnable."\textsuperscript{16} Nor can a reader believe that Whitman's nationalism is blind and unthinking worship after reading the Drum-Taps poems. It is rather a nationalism of a nation that does not yet exist, a nationalism that eventually transcends itself and becomes, to use a stock phrase, a hope for a better world.

The Effect of Nationalism on the Democratic Concept

In order to round out the examination of the charge of a narrowing patriotism in \textit{Leaves of Grass}, let us check its effect on the universal appeal of the democratic concept. Particularly in the twentieth century, Whitman's strong faith in the American nation might easily turn a discussion of his democratic ideal into a fruitless argument on ideologies. In this connection it is interesting to note that one of the first books published by the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' in Russia after the revolution of 1917 was a collection of Whitman's verses entitled \textit{Poetry of the Democracy of the Future}. The poem "Pioneers! O Pioneers!" was printed in leaflet form and received

\textsuperscript{15}Holloway, \textit{op. cit.}, p. v

\textsuperscript{16}\textit{i}bid, p. 314
wide distribution in Russia. More recently, various newspaper articles have mentioned that Whitman is one of the few American authors currently read in the Soviet Union; and although one unfortunately must suspect that his poetry has been given an ideological interpretation, his continuing popularity gives ground for hope that at least some readers have found the deeper meaning in it.

Of further significance is the understanding and enthusiasm with which Leaves of Grass was received in England and other European countries as already noted. Even as early as 1866, although the complete work was still too strong for British tastes, a selective edition was widely appreciated in England; and the rejected portions were largely those concerned with sex. The nationalistic songs of democracy created no antagonism, but were received favorably as revitalizing influences in the realm of poetic values.

The rest of the world wanted and expected a poetic interpretation of American democracy; but it recognized the universal quality of the interpretation which Whitman presented far more readily than his own countrymen, and was undisturbed by the lines of flamboyant patriotism. The foreign nations were the first to recognize Whitman as an

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17 Robert Magidoff, "American Literature in Russia," Saturday Review of Literature, XXIX, No. 4 (November 2, 1946)

18 p. 10, ante

19 Allen, op. cit., p. 19
international poet who, in the words of the British critic, Edward Carpenter, "seems to claim to take his place in the line of those who have handed down a world-old treasure of redemption for mankind."20
CHAPTER VI

THE DEMOCRATIC CONCEPT AS A SOCIAL PROGRAM

The Social Implications of Democracy as a Theme in Poetry

When Whitman chose democracy as a theme for *Leaves of Grass*, he opened a wide field for the discussion and interpretation of his poetry. It is true that his earlier biographers refrained from any critical analysis of the concept of democracy, for their attitude was well typified by such statements as Henry Bryan Binns':

To be an American poet-prophet, to make the American people a book which should be like the Bible in spiritual appeal and moral fervour, but a book of the New World and of the new spirit—such seems to have been the first and last of Whitman's daydreams.¹

Other critics, however, began a closer investigation of Whitman's democratic principles in such brief studies as those by Helena Born,² John Robertson,³ Francis B. Gummere,⁴ and Oscar L. Triggs.⁵ Inevitably, in viewing the democratic concept from religious, economic, ethical,

⁵ Oscar L. Triggs, *Browning and Whitman: A Study in Democracy*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1893)
IV.

MANO几I0 DA SAI A MAHOI10.

The Chaldean interpretation of astronomy is a theory in astrology.

There have been various attempts to explain the Chaldean interpretation, but the details are still somewhat unclear.

In ancient times, the Chaldeans were known for their advanced knowledge of astronomy, which they used to predict events and guide their actions.

Many believe that the Chaldeans were able to make accurate predictions due to their understanding of the movements of the stars and planets.

The Chaldean interpretation of astronomy continues to be studied and debated by scholars today.
philosophical, and literary standpoints, the critics came to considering its value as a social doctrine.

If Whitman had left no criticism of his own of *Leaves of Grass* and refrained from any explanation or rationalization of his motives in writing it, the controversies over the book, although no less bitter, would probably have been far less complicated, particularly in respect to the democratic theme. Whitman, however, did not refrain, either because of his sensitivity to criticism or the belief that he could promote the understanding of his readers or perhaps both. In his prefaces and other prose pieces, he expounded in minutest detail his theories about poetry, inferentially his own in the 1855 preface and specifically so in the later ones. His beliefs about democracy and America were necessarily included since they were the basis for his poetic theories, but they were repetitions of what had already been said in *Leaves of Grass* with their meaning in no way clarified. Instead, Whitman gave his personal estimation of their importance and effect and thus made objective evaluation more difficult. This is one of the reasons for the variety of possible approaches to the democratic concept of which the question of its practical social value is one. With the emphasis laid heavily on individualism, nationalism, universal love and brotherhood, and a new poetry as the foundations for democracy, it seems natural to expect from *Leaves of Grass* some organization of these principles into a program for social development. The arrangement of the poems makes it clear that no such integration was
achieved, but a few suggestive elements in *Leaves of Grass* indicate that Whitman was not unaware that a social program might be expected. It was, therefore, worth-while to consider these elements.

**Emphasis on the Physical Improvement of Man**

In the opening poem of *Leaves of Grass*, "One's-self I sing," which Whitman obviously intended as the introduction of the themes of his larger "poem," we find the lines,

Of physiology from top to toe I sing,  
Not physiognomy alone nor brain alone is worthy for  
the Muse, I say the Form complete is worthier far,  
The Female equally with the Male I sing.\(^6\)

Whitman does not fail to carry out this theme, for in "Song of Myself" he says,

I am the teacher of athletes,  
He that by me spreads a wider breast than my own proves  
the width of my own,  
He most honors my style who learns under it to destroy  
the teacher.\(^7\)

Whitman's pride in the magnificent physique of his younger years is well-known, and he is here exhorting young men to emulate and surpass him. In "A Song of Joys" he continues,

To walk with erect carriage, a step springy and elastic,  
To look with calm gaze or with a flashing eye,  
To speak with a full and sonorous voice out of a broad chest,\(^8\)

and in "By Blue Ontario's Shore," "All comes by the body, only health

\(^6\) Holloway, *op. cit.*, p. 3
\(^7\) Ibid, p. 80
\(^8\) Ibid, p. 168
"Why I Think so" must be revised in each instance and in no instance must the sentence "the®®" appear in the final draft.

"Always to you?" of all, every little bit helps in this case, each question is

"Always to you?" of all, every little bit helps in this case, each question is
puts you rapport with the universe." Even in the Sands at Seventy section which presumably contains the thoughts of Whitman's old age, the poem, "Small the Theme of My Chant" repeats almost word for word the lines quoted above from "One's-self I Sing." These examples taken at random, illustrate the importance of physical well-being in Whitman's vision of the future democracy. This is not to say that he denied a hearing to those who did not come up to the ideal of physical perfection, for in other places we find him saying, "If you become degraded, criminal, ill, then I become so for your sake;" but he is offering the perfectly healthy individual as one of the goals of democracy. His suggestion of how to attain the goal is again found in "Song of Myself": "And I swear I will never translate myself at all, only to him or her who privately stays with me in the open air." This theme, as Bliss Perry states, was very similar to that of Rousseau. "Back to nature' was the burden of their chant; back to the 'natural man', to the ego stripped of all artificial and social disguises."13

All this might well be a precept for a social program, but it seems rather to be an indictment against the indoor city life and the

9 Ibid, p. 311
10 Ibid, p. 469
11 Ibid, "Song for Occupations," p. 196
12 Holloway, Op. Cit., p. 81
decorum of manners and dress of the nineteenth century. Health cannot be guaranteed simply by an outdoor life; and if it could, only an agrarian society could live in the open air as Whitman recommended. Whitman's awareness of modern science and industry and his pride in its advances are a contradiction to any implied recommendation of such an agrarian society. It is more likely that his own love for the outdoors was extended for emphasis upon the sordidness of the lives of the common workers of his time.

Whitman's Scorn for Laws and Government

When the search for social precepts turns to laws and government, Leaves of Grass is even less rewarding. Whitman said his final word on the subject in "By Blue Ontario's Shore" with the lines,

The American compact is altogether with individuals,
The only government is that which makes minute of individuals.  

Some critics, indeed, have accused him of advocating anarchy and revolt because of his antipathy for all formal institutions:

Let the school stand: mind not the cry of the teacher!
Let the preacher preach in his pulpit: let the lawyer plead in the court, and the judge expound the law.  

This, however, is not a fair accusation, because Whitman never advocated the overthrow of such institutions. His was an inner revolt destined to produce a caliber of people which needed institutions less and would improve those already in existence, doing away with the ones that became

14 Holloway, op. cit., p. 322
15 Ibid., p. 146
useless. What was to produce the impetus for revolt, however, he did not explain. It is not unreasonable to conjecture that he hoped *Leaves of Grass*, itself, might furnish the desired stimulus.

There was nothing unrealistic in Whitman's view of the political and social institutions of his own century. One has only to read the prose of *Democratic Vistas*, which is a denunciation of the achievements of democracy to date, to realize this; for in the words of Bliss Perry he begins "with a confession of the appalling dangers of universal suffrage, (and asserts) that the real problems of humanity are not political, merely, but social and religious." Further on in this same work, Whitman says:

I say that our New World democracy, however great a success in uplifting the masses out of their sloughs, in materialistic development, products, and in a certain highly-deceptive superficial popular intellectuality, is, so far, an almost complete failure in its social aspects, and in really grand religious, moral, literary, and esthetic results.

Such poems as "To a President" and "To these States" remove any doubt of Whitman's penetrating observation of the actual political and social conditions then in existence.

Perhaps in "emphasizing our American contempt for statutes and ceremonies, Whitman claims too much for the *laissez-faire* theory," but Whitman's contempt is for the observed defects of American democratic institutions. He is setting up higher ideals for democracy and knows that ideals cannot be created by legislation or systematic reform.

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16 Bliss Perry, *op. cit.*, p. 198
17 Holloway, *op. cit.*, p. 166
18 Bliss Perry, *op. cit.*, p. 296
The "Comradeship" Motif

If legislation was not the answer to the problem of a better society, Whitman had to supply something in its place, and he did so, at least according to his own feelings. Throughout *Leaves of Grass*, it is "adhesiveness", which he defined as the love of comrades, that is to ennoble men and women. Enough has already been said on this topic to make clear the derision and skepticism which this principle has aroused, so that only a brief word in regard to its status as part of a social program is necessary.

Like ideals of government, love for fellow human beings cannot be legislated and therefore can be only a result, never a component of any specific program. Certain conditions, of course, may be favorable toward the achievement of such a result; but it is only the conditions which can be created by any outside agency. Whitman omits mention of any of the possible conditions, and Perry's summation of this omission is most appropriate:

...Whitman's mind passes quickly from the individual to the mass. He paints men and women, but rarely the transfiguring love of one man for one woman upon which rests the family; he writes glorious things about physical fatherhood and motherhood but little about the home.19

Perry might have added that Whitman writes feelingly about joy of human comradeship but nothing about the shared interests and experiences which are its basis. Whatever the intrinsic value of the "adhesiveness" which

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19 Perry, *op. cit.*, p. 292
Whitman celebrated, it stands expressed in *Leaves of Grass*, like all Whitman's principles, without any suggestion of methods for its realization. If it should ever be attained, and not all modern critics discount the possibility, it would be fair to speak of the "comradeship" motif as Newton Arvin does:

...he (Whitman) remained to the end, in almost every real and visible sense, a sweet and sane human being...

... who had proved himself capable of easy and genial friendship with hundreds of ordinary people.20

and "it would not be incredible if even the most personal poems in 'Calamus' should come to be cherished, as Shakespeare's sonnets have been, by thousands of normal men and women."21 This too, however, would be a result; and *Leaves of Grass* contains no hint of the possible nature of causes which could be integrated into a social program to produce the result.

The "Literatus" Theory

*Leaves of Grass* embodies one more theory which should be examined for its social value, to which Whitman himself has given the appellation "literatus." He explains it most clearly in *Democratic Vistas*:

Never was anything more wanted than, to-day, and here in the States, the poet of the modern is wanted, or the great literatus of the modern. At all times, perhaps, the central point in any nation, and that whence it is itself really away'd the most, and whence it sways others, is its national literature, especially in its archetypal poems. Above all previous lands, a great original literature is surely to

20 Arvin, *op. cit.*., p. 277
21 Ibid, p. 258
become the justification and reliance, (in some respects the sole reliance,) of American democracy.\textsuperscript{22}

This is the mission of the "bards" demanded by the "Phantom" of "By Blue Ontario's Shore,"\textsuperscript{23} and although Whitman gave no comparative example, in keeping with his determination not to use any existing literature for specific reference, the thought that Homer was in his mind is irresistible.

The "literatus" theory, alone, of the elements of possible social value, is tenable; for the poetry of a nation or civilization is always the expression of its social, moral, and religious standards. Poets as Whitman envisioned them could conceivably be the real leaders of a people, the expression and source of high standards of thinking and living. Their contribution would be in the tangible form of the written word and might stand at the top of the social scale. The remainder of the scale, however, remains blank. The smaller, practical issues of every-day life, innumerable and trivial, yet merging imperceptibly into the larger issues could not be covered by such leadership. Only one illustration of these lesser issues is sufficient, and that is the maintenance of economic balance in a world in which no nation is entirely self-sufficient for the establishment of desirable economic conditions. The "literatus" can be considered as an important element of a social program, but all other essential elements are absent from the pages of \textit{Leaves of Grass}.

\textsuperscript{22} Holloway, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 661

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid, p. 316
Conclusion of the Non-existence of a Social Program

Whitman's paradox of the individual and the democratic "en-masse" poses what is still the fundamental problem of democracy today. He tried to correlate the fullest development of millions, or even billions in the international sense, of diverse, single persons, with the growth of an interdependent, collective society. He realized that such an idealistic concept could not be legislated, and his answer as to the method was "Produce great Persons, the rest follows." 24 This is a valid enough answer, but it raises a further question expressed in the terse query, "How?" "Great persons" seem to be the physically perfect specimens which he advocated, whose moral and spiritual development is correspondingly perfect. Whitman offers only poets as the leaders in this higher development, and they are to spring from the people they lead. Here the argument becomes an endless circle, for the people must be great to produce their peerless leaders, and the leaders must be great to guide and inspire the people. Nor does the ennobling ideal of universal, human brotherhood provide the answer; for even its universal application could not resolve the problem of intellectual superiority.

Whitman said in "Thou Mother with Thy Equal Brood,"

The paths to the house I seek to make
But leave to those to come the house itself. 25

He might better have said that he could see the house at a great distance

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24 Ibid, p. 311
25 Ibid, p. 410
and point it out in a poetic and beautiful affirmation of faith, but the paths to it were no clearer to him than to those who deny that the house is there because they are unable to find the paths to it.

As a social program, then, Whitman's democratic concept is not impractical or faulty. It simply does not exist. This, however, is not a condemnation of the concept for Whitman's own and future generations. The questions which he did not and could not answer in Leaves of Grass are the universal and eternal questions of life, itself; and the picture of an ideal democracy, which he did portray, is at the farthest extreme from being a deterrent in solving the practical problems of the imperfect democracy of the present. Leaves of Grass is a statement of principles—not a remedy—although Whitman's enthusiasm especially in his earlier poems is often misleading in this respect. Whitman did not formulate a program, but in setting up universal principles, he did democracy no disservice, for an unprincipled program is indisputably worse than none at all. Paul Elmer More's objection, "...for the problems confronting the actual militant democracy, I cannot see that his poems have any answer," is undeniably justified, but not more so than Newton Arvin's conclusion that Leaves of Grass is a courageous "anticipatory statement of a democratic and fraternal humanism."27


27 Arvin, op. cit., p. 290
CHAPTER VII

THE DEMOCRATIC CONCEPT AS AN INDIVIDUAL PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

The Philosphic and Religious Basis of the Concept

The examination of Leaves of Grass for social doctrine has shown that the democratic concept, although it depicts clearly the manifestations of democracy in Whitman's time, has its real basis elsewhere. It was Henry Seidel Canby who first expressed this clearly and indicated the underlying basis when he said,

Walt Whitman's America was not a real America, though the real America was his background and a source of his inspiration. It was a symbolic America, existing in his own mind, and always pointed toward a future of which he was prophetic.\(^1\)

A more specific illustration is given in Henry Alonzo Myers' "Whitman's Conception of the Spiritual Democracy," where Myers points out that Whitman's poem, "A Song For Occupations",

...presents an antithesis between people as they appear in society and as they really are, an antithesis between the surface classification of people as mechanics, laborers, Presidents, drunkards, thieves, or prostitutes, and people as the equal, infinite personalities of the spiritual democracy.\(^2\)

From this viewpoint, the whole purpose of Whitman's democratic concept appears as an attempt to reveal in the actual democracy of nineteenth

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1 Canby, op. cit., p. v

CIVIL STATISTICAL DATA AND ITS EFFECT ON MODERN SOCIETY

described above is the latest research from the statistical society.

[...]

The data collected from various sources show that the population growth is significantly influenced by economic factors. A detailed analysis of the data reveals that urbanization and industrialization have played a crucial role in shaping the demographic trends.

In conclusion, the importance of statistical data cannot be overstated. It serves as a vital tool for understanding and addressing the complexities of modern society.
century America an inherent, finer democracy which could become the actual democracy through the physical, moral, and spiritual advancement of every individual. Whitman thus began with democracy as he saw it around him and progressed to an idealistic concept which would first make America the realization of his vision and eventually attract—there was never a hint of any type of force—all the people of the world to a similar realization. He expressed it unmistakably in "Thou Mother with Thy Equal Brood":

Sail, sail thy best, ship of Democracy,
Of value is thy freight, 'tis not the present only,
The past is also stored in thee,
Thou holdest not the venture of thyself alone, not of the Western continent alone,
Earth's resume entire floats on thy keel O ship, is steadied by thy spars,
With thee Time voyages in trust, the antecedent nations sink or swim with thee,
With all their ancient struggles, martyrs, heroes, epics, wars, thou bear' st the other continents,
Theirs, theirs as much as thine, the destination-port triumphant; ^3

These lines contain the germ of the democratic concept in the metaphor of democracy as a ship carrying all of past and present human experience. Time and again in Leaves of Grass, Whitman used similar metaphors of life as a voyage or a journey through time, with each voyager or traveller carrying within himself the sum of all that had gone before. This was Whitman's so-called egotism, and at the same time it explains his insistence on the essential equality of all people. Every human being encompasses within himself all the experience of the past and

^3 Holloway, op. cit., p. 412
is the sum-total of it, and therefore, in the last analysis, is no better and no worse than any of his fellow-men. Hugh I'Anson Fausset says Whitman "wanted a world of people in his own image. He had found such people average, unacquisitive, self-respecting, working folk and was happy mixing with them." Whitman's friendships with such well-known men of his time as John Burroughs, Robert Ingersoll, Moncure D. Conway, and others certainly leave room for doubt on this point; and the knowledge of Whitman's underlying belief in the equality of all human beings is further refutation, although his emotional make-up doubtless justified at least a small part of the accusation.

At times, the concept of life as an unending, accumulative process almost leads Whitman into a kind of fatalism, as in the lines of "With Antecedents",

I assert that all past days were what they must have been, And that they could no-how have been better than they were, And that today is what it must be, and that America is, And that today and America could no-how be better than they are. But Whitman is not a fatalist, for although he might have added to these lines that the future will be what it will be, he would only have meant that the future will be the sum of the past and the present; and he believed that each "present" throughout the stream of time adds something new to its heritage from the past; and he believed that democracy could

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5 Holloway, op. cit., p. 223
be improved and added to, not only by his own "present" in the nineteenth century but by all "presents" to come, bringing his ideal concept closer and closer to reality. Every man's life was to be dedicated to this purpose, so Whitman's absorption in the individual was inevitable. The importance of the "average" men and women who were the active workers of every age could not be over-emphasized, for they were the majority and had to be fitted for their role as citizens of the ideal democracy.

Whitman's democratic concept, then was based on his concept of life. It was rather philosophical and religious than political or social, and its origins must be sought on philosophic and religious grounds. *Leaves of Grass* reveals some of these grounds; and although the survey cannot be exhaustive, an indication of the principle influences in these fields may serve to conjoin the loosely related elements of Whitman's democratic concept and enable some conclusions about it. As a final preliminary word, the fact again should be emphasized that Whitman was first of all a poet, for although he frequently borrowed the language of philosophy and religion for use in his poetry, he never pretended to the formation of or adherence to any system of thought. His avoidance, in fact, was almost studied, for he said in "Myself and Mine",

I charge you forever reject those who would expound me, for I cannot expound myself;
I charge that there be no theory or school founded out of me,
I charge you to leave all free, as I have left all free.6

6 Holloway, *op. cit.*, p. 220
The Democratic Concept and American Transcendentalism

The study of Whitman's indebtedness in Leaves of Grass to American Transcendentalism and especially to Ralph Waldo Emerson is extensive in its possibilities, but with regard to the democratic concept, the main feature of resemblance is found between Emerson's doctrine of self-reliance and Whitman's "I announce the great individual." E. C. Stedman has said that the difference between Emerson and Whitman was that while both professed to include the people in the application of their philosophy, Emerson was provincial and aristocratic and Whitman was provincial and suspicious of all but the masses. This may have been entirely true in actual fact, for the temperament of each man would have explained these attitudes toward the people of their own century. Each, in his writing, however, spoke in the vocative to "you", excluding no one who cared to listen, but realizing that there were many who would not care to. Stedman seems to be denying value of their democratic ideals, because they did not wholly live up to them. Emerson's essay, "Self-Reliance", moreover, was largely concerned with the state of mind necessary to the self-reliant individual in a society such as that of the nineteenth century where the majority of people were not those who "in the midst of the crowd keep with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude." Whitman was envisioning a society made up entirely of

7 Ibid, p. 451
9 Emerson, "Self-Reliance," op. cit., p. 125
The Commission Courts have jurisdiction of:

1. Sexual offenses

2. Criminal offenses

3. Civil offenses

4. Misdemeanors

5. Juvenile offenses

The jurisdiction of the Commission Courts is limited to offenses committed within the county in which the court is held.

The Commission Courts have authority to:

1. Impose fines

2. Issue restraining orders

3. Order community service

4. Require attendance in a rehabilitation program

5. Place individuals on probation

6. Send individuals to a state correctional facility

The Commission Courts may also issue search warrants and issue subpoenas for the purpose of obtaining evidence.

In granting an appeal, the court shall:

1. Review the record

2. Consider the evidence

3. Determine if the decision is supported by the evidence

4. Issue a written opinion

5. Order a new trial if necessary

6. Dismiss the appeal if the decision is upheld

The Commission Courts shall comply with all state and federal laws and regulations.

In the event of a power outage, the court shall:

1. Continue with the hearing

2. Postpone the hearing

3. Adjourn the hearing

4. Resolve the issue through a written order

5. Issue a written opinion

6. Order a new trial if necessary
such self-reliant individuals, and though Emerson never went so far because he was expounding a philosophy rather than projecting its future, he did not criticize Whitman's embodiment of his principles in *Leaves of Grass*—and he could hardly have been unaware of it—except in the matter of the propriety of the *Children of Adam* poems. It is true that Emerson's ideal of self-reliance had an intellectual as well as a spiritual basis, whereas Whitman either entirely discounted the intellectual side of man or else intended to include it by implication in his "great persons." Otherwise, Whitman's democratic individual is Emerson's self-reliant man, casting off dependence on the past and drawing strength from communion with nature in the pantheistic belief of the immanence of the Divine Being. Whitman, of course, added "adhesiveness" where Emerson had only tolerance, but the effect of eliminating strife would be the same in both cases.

Whitman probably owed his conception of the continuous unity of all life at least indirectly to Transcendentalism through which he was introduced to the nineteenth century German philosophers and the Oriental mystics. To attempt even a brief summary of those ideas of Whitman which are related to these movements would lead to a lengthy discussion of philosophical terms and definitions which has no place here, but it should be noted that Whitman himself acknowledges a debt in a note to *Democratic Vistas*, in the description of his ideal for democratic literature, as follows:

The altitude of literature and poetry has always been religion—and always will be. The Indian Vedas,......
The text on the page appears to be a mix of random letters and numbers, making it difficult to understand any coherent meaning. It seems to be a piece of text that has been distorted or altered, possibly through a typographical error or a spectral imaging artifact.

Without further context, it is challenging to provide a meaningful interpretation of the content.
... and to the invaluable contributions of Leibnitz, Kant, and Hegel—these, with such poems only in which (while singing well of persons and events, of the passions of man, and the shows of the material universe,) the religious tone, the consciousness of mystery, the recognition of the future, of the unknown, of Deity over and under all, and of the divine purpose, are never absent, but indirectly give tone to all—exhibit literature's real heights and elevations, towering up like the great mountains of the earth. 10

In general it may be said that Whitman's pantheism, which gave dignity to all nature's creation including every living being, is related to the ideas of the German school, as Gay Wilson Allen affirms in a quotation from Woodbridge Riley:

The migrations of the Germanic mysticism form a strange story. It began with what has been called the pantheism of the Rhine region; it ended, if it has ever ended, with the poetic pantheism of Walt Whitman, for in this modern American may be found traces of a remote past, and echoes of a distant land. 11

Allen also calls attention to the fact that Whitman's "self-hood" has been found to parallel the self of the Indian Bhagavad Gita, 12 and it was Whitman's awareness of "self" that developed into his feeling of kinship with all men and ultimately into his expression of the kinship of all mankind.

One other figure closely connected with American Transcendentalism, whom Whitman knew well, was Thomas Carlyle. Since Whitman knew no language except English, he was forced to depend on translations and transcriptions for all his knowledge of foreign literature; and much of

10 Holloway, op. cit., p. 713
12 Allen, op. cit., p. 458
it came from the writings of Carlyle in the field of German philosophy. Whitman could not agree with Carlyle's pessimistic views of democracy, but he had a deep respect for Carlyle's rugged honesty and vitality and admitted its premises if not its conclusions in a comment on "Shooting Niagara":

I was at first roused to much anger and abuse by this essay from Mr. Carlyle, so insulting to the theory of America--but happening to think afterwards how I had more than once been in the like mood,........ -- I have since read it again, not only as a study, expressing as it does certain judgments from the highest feudal point of view, but have read it with respect as coming from an earnest soul, and as contributing certain sharp-cutting metallic grains, which, if not gold or silver, may be good, hard, honest iron.13

Whitman's Quaker Heritage

Although Whitman, himself, belonged to no religious denomination, his early life brought him into close contact with Quaker beliefs, for both his mother and father had strong Quaker leanings. One of Whitman's early recollections is of being taken to hear Elias Hicks preach in a ball-room on Brooklyn Heights,14 and the impression made by the Hicksite leader was so profound that his picture was still in a place of honor in the room where Whitman spent his last days. This was the other possible source for Whitman's democratic ideals and confirmation of their religious basis, for according to F. O. Matthiessen, the "humanitarian equality which springs in his (Whitman's) lines from his knowledge of peace was a

13 Holloway, op. cit., p. 671 note
14 Ibid, p. 541
Quaker attribute long before the Declaration of Independence.\textsuperscript{15}

Spiritual Universality

The democratic concept of *Leaves of Grass* emerges from the confusion and vagueness of the many inconsistent and contradictory lines of the poems, as the expression of Whitman's beliefs about the very nature of life and of its potentialities. Whitman has used his belief in the dignity and worth of the individual, the possibility of universal human brotherhood, the greatness of the American nation, and the supremacy of poetic literature as a moral and spiritual guidepost, to forge an ideal of a future civilization of abundance made up of completely free and noble persons. It is undeniably an inspiring conception, perhaps Utopian in the remoteness of the possibility of perfect attainment, but not absolutely impractical, because it offers a goal for all mankind regardless of differences in time, place, or opportunity. It is an individual philosophy of life which is possible, even though not probable, for every human being.

\textsuperscript{15} Matthiessen, *op. cit.*, p. 536
CHAPTER VIII

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The Democratic Concept in Relation to Other Themes of Leaves of Grass

Following the thread of the democratic concept through the intricate and uneven pattern of Leaves of Grass leads inevitably to the discovery that Whitman has woven a tapestry in which each thread is multicolored; and no single one, including the democratic thread, can be unraveled without pulling the rest of the design with it. The themes of the individual and the mass, of sexual love and "adhesiveness", of nationalism growing into internationalism, and of the poetic "literatus" can be seen as the main elements of Whitman's democracy; but each one is also a separate theme of which the others including democracy become elements. The complication does not end even here, because each theme contains its own contradictions which appear in new relationships with every combination. Whitman's emphasis, too, is constantly shifting so that the importance of one theme over the others cannot be definitely stated until a decision is made as to the ultimate purpose of Leaves of Grass, and not even then if one agrees with many critics that the purpose is as complex as the themes. The democratic concept therefore appears either as a dominating theme made up of lesser themes or as one of several essential ideas of an interlocking group of which the total effect is expressive of a deeper reality than that of any single one of the ideas.

A summary of the democratic concept in its several phases will
bring out the factors favorable to each interpretation and enable better understanding of Whitman's method of treatment and final intentions with regard to democracy in *Leaves of Grass*. Before the summary is undertaken, attention should once more be called to the fact that *Leaves of Grass* is first of all a poem and as such loses the intangible quality that gives it vitality and determines its degree of greatness, in any attempt at analysis or dissection.

A Summary of the Democratic Concept

The chief problem in regard to democracy as a poetic theme was that democracy is an abstract term which means many different things to many people. Walt Whitman gave no categorical definition which could limit the approach to the concept to a single field, such as politics, economics, ethics, philosophy, or religion. The only hint he offered was buried in the unwieldy prose of *Democratic Vistas* where he stated his intention of using the terms America and Democracy interchangeably, and this did little to clarify his meaning since America might also denote an infinite variety of possibilities. When Whitman's own qualifications as a representative of democracy had been taken into account and the fact established that the democratic concept was not a static one but a living, changing, and, above all, growing feature of *Leaves of Grass*, the way was clear for its consideration from the several points of view most frequently taken by its critics.

Since Whitman had said in *A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads*
red, blue, and green. The red wave will move ahead and
be joined
the other waves. The blue wave...
that one of his aims was to express his own distinctive era and surroundings,¹ his success or failure in this ambition was one of the justifiable approaches to the democratic concept. In his picture of America in the nineteenth century, which was not really a picture at all but a succession of images, Whitman realistically included not only innumerable geographical names and physical features of the American continent but every phase of American life; and he managed to convey the impression of the vastness and diversity of the land he was describing without losing the feeling of its essential unity. He was not content, however, with representing only the material aspects of the nineteenth century America. The tone of his poems was one of confidence and optimism, based on implicit faith in a way of life which had made such impressive advances in a brief period of time that most of the world considered it history's omen of a brighter future for mankind. This optimism was keyed to the tenor of the American people who recognized no insurmountable obstacles to their further progress. Whitman also included the jealous regard for personal independence and equality among all men, thus representing the spirit as well as the letter of the characteristics of his age. He was scrupulously "modern" in his viewpoint, acknowledging all the advantages of the industrial and scientific discoveries which he saw multiplying around him, and although he stepped out of his role as interpreter long enough to warn of the evils of industrial and scientific materialism, he in no way relinquished his claim to having

¹ Holloway, op. cit., p. 868
represented fairly and fully his "distinctive era and surroundings."

The contention of many critics that Whitman's concept of democracy was an expression of pure nationalism was discounted, but since nationalism was patently a phase through which Whitman passed, the course it took and its ultimate significance could not be eliminated from the discussion. Its basis was found in Whitman's affinity with the natural world restricted by circumstances to America alone, his participation in the pioneer spirit of a country which was still far from the limit of its expansion, and finally in his receptiveness to the influence of the American Transcendentalist school of literature which was under the leadership of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Had Whitman confined his concept of democracy to a poetic interpretation of the nineteenth century, the charge of pure nationalism might have remained a valid one; but he did not do so. He went on from his first representation of himself as a conglomerate American, to a narrow, enthusiastic patriotism, then to a more sober appraisal of a war-ravaged nation, and at length to the vision of a world voluntarily united by the common bond of humanity. The final test of the narrowness or width of Whitman's vision lay in the reception which was accorded Leaves of Grass in foreign countries. The reception was not only favorable, but so favorable that American critics were virtually compelled to re-consider their own general verdict that the book was worthless. The situation was paradoxical for a poet who had advocated the repudication of American dependence on Old World models and influences in literature, but it absolved him in a large degree of the accusation of a cramping nationalism and gave
a perspective to the universal message which could gain a hearing in such widely differing civilizations as England and Russia and nearly all of the countries between.

With the universality of *Leaves of Grass* fairly established and nationalism reduced to its proper proportions, the social implications of Whitman's concept of democracy posed the next question. Since the ordinary associations of democracy are political or, more broadly, social, there was some reason to expect at least the outlines of a practical program. Whitman had contributed to such an expectation by an ambiguity of cause and effect which seemed to indicate that he had in some stage of the development of *Leaves of Grass* contemplated the possibility of setting up a social program. The "great individual" was to be the cornerstone of the future democracy, but how humanity's metamorphosis was to be accomplished was not carried beyond the recommendation of a healthy, out-door life for physical improvement. Likewise, perfect love and comradeship were indispensable prerequisites, but beyond the basic fact of physical closeness there was no foundation on which to build. As for existing political and social institutions, the first impression was that Whitman was promoting a revolution to do away with them entirely. A more careful analysis revealed that he condoned their existence as long as they were necessary to an orderly civilization but that he felt they would be superfluous in his new democracy. Finally he exhorted great "bards" to appear and prove themselves worthy of intellectual, moral and spiritual leadership; but as in the case of the "great individuals, no mention was made of
the social conditions which must obtain to produce these persons. The program was not a program. It was the prophetic vision of an ideal democracy to which the road was yet to be discovered.

In each of the approaches considered, a common factor appeared which pointed to a spiritual rather than a temporal foundation for the democratic concept. Whitman's poems took inspiration for their imagery from the poet's actual observation of nineteenth century American democracy, but the poems did not remain within this limited time period. Whitman went much further by seeking to interpret the significance of all that he observed in terms of the eternal mysteries of life and death on earth. His theory was one of a creation which was a perfect and unified whole through which human life moved in temporal succession toward the source of perfection. Each new individual enclosed within himself the sum of all that had gone before and added his own contribution which became a part of the collective contribution of his age. Democracy was the culmination of the experiences of past ages and was to be developed to a further perfection by the succeeding centuries. It was a step toward eternity, and Whitman represented it as an ideal state of which only the beginnings had so far come into being. The concept of democracy in Leaves of Grass was, therefore, philosophical or religious in its real nature and viewed in this light became Whitman's philosophy of life which, if adopted by his own age and the ages to come, would advance democracy continually closer toward its ideal form. The probable sources of this life philosophy of Whitman's lay in his interest in the American Transcendentalist
movement, particularly Emerson's doctrine of self-reliance which Whitman either borrowed or paralleled in *Leaves of Grass*. There is evidence that the movement led him into an acquaintance with the ideas of the great romantic German philosophers and the Vedantic literature of the East, for his conception of the nature and meaning of life shows a close relationship to the ideas of Leibnitz, Kant, and Hegel, even as his conception of the individual self bears resemblance to the self of the devotional scripture of India. A possible earlier source has been conjectured in Whitman's family background of Hicksite Quakerism; but whatever its sources—for the sources of a man's fundamental beliefs can never be completely catalogued—this religious or philosophical conviction emerged as the most deeply underlying motive in the structure of *Leaves of Grass*, wherein lay the only real unity of the poems.

Conclusions

With the slow evolution of the democratic concept as incontrovertible proof that Whitman's intentions with regard to democracy in *Leaves of Grass* were at no time fixed, it is impossible to say that the expression of democracy was the highest aim of Whitman's poetry. On the other hand, as Whitman worked out the final broad construction of *Leaves of Grass* from the subjectiveness of the early editions, he found that the basis for all his convictions was an unshakeable faith that there is a Divine element in every individual, human being. He could accept nothing, therefore, that rejected or depreciated the supreme importance of personal
identity in the scheme of human values; and some of the most fervent lines of his poetry affirm this:

Underneath all, individuals,
I swear nothing is good to me now that ignores individuals.  2

The soul, its destinies, the real real,
(Purport of all these apparitions of the real;).  3

This is the ground in which the seeds of Whitman's *Leaves* are sown, and democracy becomes the most favorable climate for their development that history has yet produced. Democracy is not the end but the means to the end; and if the end is ever achieved, the world in which it exists will bear little or no resemblance to the actual democracies of Whitman's age or our own. Unless this is understood, it is misleading to speak of Whitman's democratic ideal. The meaning of democracy, if the ideal state is to be called a *democratic* state, would be expanded beyond recognition but would still have its roots in the democratic standards which Whitman knew. This was the breadth and depth of Whitman's vision which made it possible for him to incorporate all the themes of *Leaves of Grass* into his vision, while in the last analysis, it prevented any one theme from dominating *Leaves of Grass*. Democracy was the term Whitman chose to represent nineteenth century America; and because he saw infinite potentialities in that America, although its evil and corrupted side was sharply obvious to him, he used the same term,

2 Holloway, *op. cit.* , "By Blue Ontario's Shore", p. 322

3 Ibid, "Thou Mother With Thy Equal Brood", p. 415
democracy, to bridge the vast space between temporal and ideal reality.

The beginnings of the democratic concept were in a real America, but the actual substance was in the timeless realm of the speculations of humanity upon the meaning of existence, where no one is excluded because of nationality, social standing, race, or creed. Whitman's failure to become a popular poet in America undoubtedly has its cause in this very element of universality and timelessness. The American singer filled his songs with the images of his own democratic nation and its people, but the people could not or would not recognize themselves against the universal background. The language of Whitman's democracy was not the language of the democracy they knew, and Whitman's symbolic use of familiar names and objects was outside of their experience and comprehension, partly, no doubt, because they were too close to the originals and found no order or meaning in Whitman's completely flexible and uncategorical system of ideas.

The democratic concept was certainly not an orderly or systematic organization of ideas, but its lack of order was the same lack found in the organization of life itself. It was based on a few changeless principles such as man's actual material being, his reproduction of himself, and his common experience with all the rest of humanity; but around these principles, all the rest of reality moves in a pattern that is only generally predictable and dependable; and in view of Whitman's philosophical and religious beliefs, the order could not have been other than it was. As it stands, each age may interpret the democratic concept in the
The text in the image is not legible. It appears to contain a mixture of letters and symbols that do not form coherent sentences or paragraphs. Without clearer text, it is not possible to accurately transcribe the content.
light of its own beliefs and experience and emphasize the part most closely related to its needs and values. Proof that this is so has already been given by the fact that Whitman has been claimed as one of themselves by English intellectuals, Russian revolutionaries, Italian fascists, American Christians and free-thinkers, Hindu mystics, and, in fact, the majority of national ideologies and religious creeds of the world.

Whitman's democracy was neither an ideology nor a religion, however, in the accepted meaning of these words. It was a dynamic theory of evolution, grounded upon reality, but translated by poetic power and insight into a spiritual conception of the highest laws which man could evolve to govern himself in his relations with the universe and his fellow-men.
John Doe aged 32 has experienced and dealt with the problem of being

more than just a friend or acquaintance. He has been in relationships

with more than one person, and has had to confront the challenges

of maintaining multiple relationships simultaneously. This has

led to a complex emotional state, with feelings of love,

passion, and commitment. He has found it difficult to

balance his commitments, and has had to make difficult

decisions about what is best for himself and his partners. Despite

these challenges, John has continued to pursue his

relationships, and has found that the experience has

been both rewarding and fulfilling.
ABSTRACT OF "THE DEMOCRATIC CONCEPT OF WALT WHITMAN'S LEAVES OF GRASS"

The purpose of the study of the democratic concept of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* was to trace its development in the poetry; to examine its implications; and, if possible, to discover its significance through the various interpretations which might be made of it. These several interpretations were as follows: (1) Whitman as spokesman for nineteenth century American democracy, (2) the democratic concept as an expression of nationalism, (3) the democratic concept as a social program, and (4) the democratic concept as an individual philosophy of life. For full understanding of the beginnings and development of the concept which made so many approaches to it possible, biographies by Richard Maurice Bucke, Bliss Perry, Henry Seidel Canby, Emory Holloway, and several others were used, as well as critical studies, literary histories, and periodical articles. Whitman's prose and letters gave the poet's own point of view, and the groundwork was thus laid for the main part of the study, *Leaves of Grass* itself.

Since Whitman had put so much of himself into his poetry, his personal qualifications as a representative of democracy had also to be considered in some detail. A brief biographical sketch showed him as one of the ordinary working class who tried teaching, newspaper work, and carpentry before he turned to poetry. His interests were broad, including politics, music, drama, and the industrial and scientific develop-
null
ments of his age; and his chief personal characteristics were an extraordinary gift for friendship, a deep love for the out-door world, and an exceedingly sensitive awareness of the teeming humanity around him. His experiences as a volunteer nurse in the Civil War and the invalidism of his later years were the only external events which distinguished an otherwise common-place life, marked by a perpetual lack of money and the almost complete absence of recognition as an outstanding poet by his fellow countrymen. The general characteristics of nineteenth century American civilization completed the sketch of Whitman's life and confirmed the fact of his unexceptional and completely democratic background.

The growth of the democratic concept of Leaves of Grass had a rough chronology from the first edition of 1855 through the Children of Adam, Calamus, and Chants Democratic sections of the third edition of 1860, the Drum-Taps poems of the Civil War, to culmination in the final arrangement of the poems in the seventh edition of 1881. The final arrangement was not in the order of the composition of the poems or even in the order of the development of their chief ideas. The poems were placed in the positions where Whitman felt that they would contribute most to the total effect of Leaves of Grass, and it was from this arrangement that the version of the democratic concept which Whitman regarded as the final one had to be extracted.

The elements of the democratic concept emerged in fairly clear outline as each of the possible interpretations was analyzed. The realism of Whitman's representation of nineteenth century America brought out
not only the material aspects of geography, physiography, and social organization but the spirit of personal independence and equality which did not preclude an underlying feeling of unity. This was the living manifestation of Whitman's doctrine of the paradox of the individual and the mass, which became an element of the democratic concept, carrying with it the confidence in a bright future which Whitman also idealized.

The nationalism of *Leaves of Grass*, growing out of Whitman's love for the only country he had ever seen and his conception of himself as a representative American, was shaken out of its blind patriotism by the shock of war which brought home all the evils and shortcomings of American democracy but also gave substance to Whitman's belief in the heroic potentialities of the individual. The nationalism became the internationalism and universal sympathy of "Passage to India", and the democratic concept had thus expanded an immeasurable degree.

The attempt to discover a practical social significance in Whitman's concern with democracy led to the analysis of his treatment of the themes of human love and comradeship. Here again, there was the metamorphosis from a narrow, subjective attitude to a broad human sympathy which formulated no specific program but did set up an ideal in human relationships. The poet "literatus", too, seemed to be a possible feature in a democratic program but was really a provision for leadership, through great literary masterpieces, in the intellectual, moral, and spiritual spheres of the ideal democracy.

Consideration of the democratic concept as a philosophy of life
brought to light Whitman's belief about the nature of life as a cumulative and continuing process of advance toward perfection or completeness, which were terms synonomous with God. Democracy, in the manifestations of its material existence, was a step in the process and the greatest step that had yet been taken, however short it fell of the ultimate perfection. The real nature of the democratic concept, therefore, could only be philosophical or religious, a point further borne out by the appearance of some of Whitman's fundamental ideas in Emerson, the Transcendentalist, and in the German philosophy of Leibnitz, Kant, and Hegel and in the sacred literature of Hindu mysticism, from which Transcendentalism inherited many of its principles.

With the democracy of *Leaves of Grass* finally and definitely placed in the spiritual realm far beyond the actual political, social, economic, and other realities which it had included and transcended, it became the connecting link between these realities and the ideal state. As a spiritual conception, it could comprehend the other themes of the individual and the mass, of love and comradeship, of nationalism and internationalism, and of the poetic "literatus" in *Leaves of Grass*, and at the same time contribute to them. The basic concept of *Leaves of Grass*, however, lay even deeper in Whitman's belief in the Divinity of every individual being. The democratic concept together with the other themes was directed toward universal recognition of this Divinity and thus was not the highest aim of *Leaves of Grass*. Its universal element, moreover, blinded the average reader to its essential reality and de-
...
prived Whitman of the mass audience he had hoped to reach. The concept lacked an easily recognizable order, yet followed a more profound, natural order which gave it a flexibility not dependent upon time and circumstance, and so, adaptable to the particular requirements of any age. Its final value was dynamic and evolutionary in the direction of faith in human ability to establish proof of the Divine origin of mankind by a way of living.
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