1940

The Sources of Democracy: A Study in the Meaning and Idea of Democracy in the Works of Walt Whitman

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Recommended Citation


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THE SOURCES OF DEMOCRACY:

A Study in the Meaning and Idea of Democracy in the Works of Walt Whitman.

Submitted as a Partial Requirement for a Master's Degree at LOYOLA UNIVERSITY by Frances R. Paine

June, 1940
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THE SOURCES OF DEMOCRACY:
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Part I
INTRODUCTION

"Democracy: near at hand to you a throat is now inflating itself and joyfully singing." 1

Whitman stands undisputed as the greatest poet of democracy. We believe that his most valuable contribution to his time and to ours has been obscured by hostility to other phases of his writing. If, as some contend, his high hopes for his beloved form of government have not been realized, there is still more reason for a present reconsideration of all Whitman's positive suggestions for the revitalization of democracy.

A study of Whitman's complete works will yield many suggestions for strengthening our democratic education. He gave new intellectual and emotional meanings to such abstract terms as "liberty", "equality", and "enfranchisement". They were re-vivified as democratic symbols. They are at once the goal and

the motivating forces of a practical philosophy of democracy.

For the purposes of this thesis, we shall assume two working definitions of democracy. For its political aspects, we shall accept the words of Lincoln, "the government of the people, by the people and for the people." Even the full significance of this phrase, said Whitman, was rarely comprehended.

As to the political section of Democracy, which introduces and breaks ground for further and vaster sections, few probably are the minds, even in these republican States, that fully comprehend the aptness of that phrase, "THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE," which we inherit from the lips of Abraham Lincoln; a formula whose verbal shape is homely wit, but whose scope includes both the totality and all minutiae of the lesson.

For the definition of democracy in its moral terms, we shall accept Thomas Mann who says: "We must define democracy as that form of government and of society which is inspired above every other with the feeling and consciousness of the dignity of man." 3

Whitman, in his own time, was most absorbed in the problem of reaching and maintaining an ideal democracy. Young as our country then was, selfish and corruptive forces were threatening its structure. Against these manifestations, Whitman cried out.

His appeal was directed to all, but especially to the bulk of the people, - the middle class. He calls them variously the "middle class population," the "multitudes," the "fair aver-

4"The Coming Victory of Democracy, 19."
age of the American born people," the "main thing," the "average," the "word En-Masse," the "average identity," and the "democratic bulk people."

These "people" are placed in the last four lines of Whitman's hundred page contribution to democratic philosophy, "Democratic Vistas."

"... the main thing being the average, the bodily, the concrete, the democratic, the popular, on which all the superstructures of the future are to permanently rest."

In the average man, in whom he so completely believed, Whitman found the clue to his chants.

I was looking a long while for Intentions,
For a clew to the history of the past for myself, and for these chants - and now I have found it,
It is not in those paged fables in the libraries, (them I neither accept nor reject,)
It is no more in the legends than in all else, It is in the present - it is this earth to-day,
It is in Democracy - (the purport and aim of all the past,)
It is the life of one man or one woman to-day - the average man of to-day
It is in languages, social customs, literatures, arts,
It is in the broad show of artificial things, ships, machinery, politics, creeds, modern improvements, and the interchange of nations, All for the modern - all for the average man of to-day.

Further, this same average man is the bulwark of democracy.

4 "Complete Works, V, 149.
5 "I Was Looking a Long While," Complete Works, II, 162.
Then, perhaps, as weightiest factor of the whole business, and of the main outgrowths of the future, it remains to be definitely avow'd that the native-born middle-class population of quite all the United States - the average of farmers and mechanics everywhere - the real, though latent and silent bulk of America, city or country, presents a magnificent mass of material, never before equal'd on earth. It is this material, quite unexpress'd by literature or art, that in every respect insures the future of the republic. During the secession war I was with the armies, and saw the rank and file, North and South, and studied them for four years. I have never had the least doubt about the country in its essential future since.  

Whitman's temperament, his methods of writing and his subject matter offer difficulties in the development of this thesis. There is an overlapping of the same or similar attributes in his positive constituents of democracy, and in his concepts of the "average man", the "individual", and the "people". The positive constituents of democracy are listed as the franchise, legal authority, equality, liberty, spirituality and religion. The average man is described as enfranchised, law abiding, equalitarian, liberty-loving, spiritual, source of all types, conscious of his powers, heroic and the sum of all occupations. The individual, too, is conscious of his powers, and is independent, self-reliant, and the centre of the government. The people have continuity and permanence, in addition to all the qualities of the average man and the individual.

These repetitions, under four headings, make for redundancy and indistinctness. Sometimes the "totality of the lesson" is obscured by the "minutiae".

His self-contradictoriness he acclaims in "Song of Myself."

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

He says of "Democratic Vistas":

... and though it may be open to the charge of one part contradicting another - for there are opposite sides to the great question of democracy, as to every great question - I feel the parts harmoniously blended in my own realization and convictions, and present them to be read only in such oneness, each page and each claim and assertion modified and tempered by the others.  

This very sway from one position to another typifies the conflicts within the middle class. What might be a fatal clash of ideas within himself, Whitman resolves into a conciliatory philosophy. He would extend this resolution to the democratic process. The middle class he perceives as the key to the struggle. Its intelligent and pliable handling of disagreement will spell progress; while rigidity and violence will lead to hatred, fear and sure defeat.

7Complete Works, I, 108.
8Ibid., V, 51.
At times, our author seems vague. This vagueness is partly accountable to the extensiveness of his subject, which must be ballasted with concrete facts in order to be kept more definite. The recurrent cataloguing may function as tacks to the earth.

"Democratic Vistas" is a melange of ideas. It is based partly on essays which appeared in Galaxy during 1867 and 1868. Therefore, it is not a unified piece of work. It digresses, repeats and restates. It is sketchy and incoherent. The hiatuses are probably the endings and beginnings of separate essays.

An ecstatic, prophetic tone pervades Whitman's works. Democracy, in itself an optimistic creed, is championed with a buoyant hopefulness. This apostle to the people would stir them to their highest powers. His visions are those of the poet who, according to Aristotle, draws "things which may possibly happen."

Whitman so generally superlative, has, underlying his boundless enthusiasm, a real critical strain. There is at once a sense of power, a cry of alarum, and a voice of prophecy. Those who are interested in the humanly fine things which might "possibly happen" under a democracy can well afford to study the hopeful, joyful singing of this evangelist of democracy, Walt Whitman.
Part II

BACKGROUND AND INFLUENCES

Whitman, himself, was born from the "fair average" of Americans. He lived among the people, studied, loved and served them.

Walt Whitman was born on May 31, 1819, at West Hills, Long Island, the Paumanok of his poems. Emerson was then sixteen years old and James Monroe was president of the United States.

In "Specimen Days," (Vol. IV, p. 28), Whitman tells us that his three leading influences were his father, his mother, and Long Island.

Whitman's father, Walter, was a resolute and freedom-loving carpenter and farmer of English descent, tracing his lineage to a New England Puritan. These paternal influences made Walt peculiarly responsive to transcendentalism and reform movements. His mother, Louisa, was the daughter of Major Van Velsor, a Long Island farmer of Dutch lineage. Walt was more profoundly influenced by his Quaker mother, from whom he inherited an affectionate nature and a spiritual warmth. Emory Holloway, in the Cambridge History of American Literature, traces Whitman's mysticism to his Dutch ancestry.

Walt was not a particularly good pupil at school, as he
was a non-conformist. He left at the age of twelve, and entered
the printing field, first as a "devil" and then as a compositor.
At sixteen, he returned to a Long Island country school room as
teacher. At nineteen, he started a weekly newspaper at Hunting-
ton. He contributed to the Brooklyn Star and did some other
writing, including a dime melodrama, Franklin Evans, or The In-
coriate, a Tale of the Times, written in the cause of temper-
ance.

When twenty-seven, in January, 1846, Whitman assumed the
editorship of the Brooklyn Daily Eagle, a democratic vehicle.
Whitman took this position seriously. Says Holloway:

Editing a paper was thus a form of democratic
statesmanship. With Whitman patriotism was a sort
of religion, and he conceived of it as essentially
a new religion. It had glamour, it inspired, it
involved responsibilities; in a word, it made life
at once serious and romantic. In this he shared a
feeling common in his day. The young country was
so loosely held together, was so heterogeneous in
its varied provincialisms, was so conscious of the
experimental nature of its government, that it felt
a natural need to stress the more what unifying
memories and ideals it had. The Fourth of July,
for instance, was more than a patriotic gesture; it
had the value of a sacrament. 9

When the Mexican War began, Whitman approved of it, and
unqualifiedly supported President Polk. In the matter of slav-
er, too, Whitman at first upheld the Democratic policy of the
supremacy of state government. But when the battle over the Wil-

9 Whitman: An Interpretation in Narrative, 7.
mot Proviso began and the extension of slavery threatened his beloved West and the national union, Whitman broke with the democratic county chairman, a slave-soil advocate. Moreover, because of his advocacy of Free Soil and his differences with the owner, Whitman, after two years, left the editorship of the Eagle in January, 1848. About the same time, he left the Democratic party.

Within two months thereafter, when thirty, Whitman was at work on the New Orleans Crescent, an independent paper. His journey southward was of great importance to this future poet of democracy. As he tells us in one of his prefaces, he had already begun to form his poems. They were, when he began his tour, in the gestation period.

En route to New Orleans, Whitman traversed a large section of the country and absorbed many new types and locales.

Leaving New York with his younger brother, Jeff, on February 11, 1848, he went to Baltimore and thence to Cumberland by rail. They drove from Cumberland in four-horse stage coaches to Wheeling, where they embarked for New Orleans on the packet steamer, St. Cloud. For almost two weeks they sailed down the Ohio and the Mississippi. In New Orleans, Whitman was thrown into the life of his new environs. One of his duties on the Crescent, that of exchange editor, kept him in constant touch with the currents of national and international affairs.
However, the new writer was not was valuable to the owners of the Crescent as New Orleans was interesting to him. He began his work on March 1st, 1848, and left in May. With his brother he boarded the Pride of the West, and returned home via St. Louis, Peoria, Chicago, Wisconsin, Lake Huron, Lake Erie, Niagara Falls, and Albany. At twenty-nine, he had encircled a large portion of his country.

Shortly after his return to New York, the liberal Democrats, who had now formed a third party called the Free-soilers, financed a weekly campaign paper, The Freeman. They asked young Whitman to become its editor. He was sent to the Free-soil Convention at Buffalo as a delegate. Here Van Buren was nominated for the Presidency on a platform which called for the exclusion of slavery from the territories by Congress. The party, of course, lost in the election; but, in the spring of 1849, the paper had become a daily instead of a weekly. However, in September of 1849, at the convention in Utica, the Free-soilers, under the aegis of Van Buren, united with the regular wing of the Democrat party.

Again Whitman was out, out of his editorship, and, for the second time, out of a political party. His retirement announcement on September 11, 1849, read:

After the present date, I withdraw entirely from the Brooklyn Daily Freeman. To those who have been my friends, I take occasion to proffer the warmest
thanks of a grateful heart. My enemies - and old Hunkers generally - I disdain and defy the same as ever. Walter Whitman.

He now made a second trip South, of which there is but slight record.

In 1850, when the slavery question was becoming more acute, Whitman was perturbed by the compromising attitudes of such men as Clay and Webster. He considered the problem a moral one, on which there could be no compromise. In Europe the revolutions had failed to establish liberty, equality and fraternity. At home his country was in sore distress.

What did Whitman do? He penned a few scornful poems, contributed anonymously to the Advertizer, corresponded for Bryant's Evening Post, went into the housebuilding business with his aging father, and took more time for leisurely seeing, thinking and independent writing. He attended lectures on Greek and Roman civilization, concerts, opera, and the drama. He browsed about the ferries, visited expositions or retreated to Long Island. He was done, for a time, with political parties.

He was back to nature, animate and inanimate. Her infallible curative gifts he transferred to his faith in democracy which, just as the air and sun restore vitality, must heal its own defects.

Writing in the Brooklyn Daily Eagle on April 20th, 1847, Holloway, Whitman: An Interpretation in Narrative, 60.
under the caption of "The Democratic Spirit," Whitman said:

We know, well enough, that the workings of the democracy are not always justifiable, in every trivial point. But the great winds that purify the air, and without which nature would flag into ruin—are they to be condemned because a tree is prostrated here and there, in their course?

In 1855, *Leaves of Grass*, was published. It was a small quarto of ninety-four pages, containing twelve poems. The book was emended and enlarged from edition to edition. It was republished in Brooklyn, Boston, New York, Washington, Camden, London, Philadelphia and Glasgow.

From 1857 to 1859, Whitman was editor of the *Brooklyn Times*. He was far less partisan in politics than he had been some ten years before, though he was still ardent on the question of free-soil, which no longer had a party but individual champions such as Greeley and Phillips. Whitman had turned philosophical rather than partisan.

In "Democratic Vistas," he strongly advises young people to enter politics, but as non-partisans.

To practically enter into politics is an important part of American personalism. To every young man, North and South, earnestly studying these things, I should here, as an offset to what I have said in former pages, now also say, that may be to views of very largest scope, after all, perhaps the political (perhaps the literary and sociological), America goes best about its development its own way—sometimes, to temporary sight, appaling enough. It is the fashion among

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*The Uncollected Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman*, I, 160.
dillettants and fops (perhaps I myself am not guiltless) to decry the whole formulation of the active politics of America, as beyond redemption, and to be carefully kept away from. See you that you do not fall into this error. America, it may be, is doing very well upon the whole, notwithstanding these antics of the parties and their leaders, these half-brain'd nominees, the many ignorant ballots, and many elected failures and blatherers. It is the dillettants, and all who shirk their duty, who are not doing well. As for you, I advise you to enter more strongly yet into politics. I advise every young man to do so. Always inform yourself; always do the best you can; always vote. Disengage yourself from parties. They have been useful, and to some extent remain so; but the floating, uncommitted electors, farmers, clerks, mechanics, the masters of parties - watching aloof, inclining victory this side or that side - such are the ones most needed, present and future. For America, if eligible at all to downfall and ruin, is eligible within herself, not without; for I see clearly that the combined foreign world could not beat her down. But these savage, wolfish parties alarm me. Owning no law but their own will, more and more combative, less and less tolerant of the idea of ensemble and of equal brotherhood, the perfect equality of the States, the ever-overarching American ideas, it behooves you to convey yourself implicitly to no party, nor submit blindly to their dictators, but steadily hold yourself judge and master over all of them.

He was especially vocal on the three administrations preceding 1861.

In the edition of 1860-1861 appeared "To the States."

Why reclining, interrogating? why myself and all drowsing?
What deepening twilight - scum floating atop of the waters,
Who are they as bats and night-dogs askant in the capitol?

What a filthy Presidentiad! (O South, your torrid suns! O North, your arctic freezings!) Are those really Congressmen? are those the great Judges? is that the President? Then I will sleep awhile yet, for I see that these States sleep, for reasons; (With gathering murk, with muttering thunder and lambent shoots we all duly awake, South, North, East, West, inland and seaboard, we will surely awake.)

In "Specimen Days," published in 1882, he says,

I have said somewhere that the three Presidentiads preceding 1861 showed how the weakness and wickedness of rulers are just as eligible here in America under republican, as in Europe under dynastic influences.

To Whitman's hereditary influences, and journalistic and political experiences, was added a most potent emotional and spiritual trial - the threat and actuality of a Civil War. He had heard the clouds rumble in the year 1859-60, the "year of meteors," "all mottled with evil and good - year of forebodings." As noted he had seen the disastrous drift during the administration of Fillmore, Pierce and Buchanan. The flag was fired upon at Fort Sumter. Lincoln called for volunteers to put down the rebellion. The war was on and Whitman's brother George was one of the first to enlist in the 51st New York volunteers. Whitman did not enlist. He probably felt that he had work to do as a writer, reaching the people. He began his "Drum-Taps."

In "By Blue Ontario's Shore," first published in 1856, Whitman says of the poet:

13 Whitman, Complete Works, II, 39.
14 Whitman, Complete Works, IV, 29.
"In war he is the backer of the war,
he fetches artillery as good as the engineer's,
he can make every word he speaks draw blood." 15

After the war was over, in 1867, he said:

Not the pilot has charged himself to bring his ship
into port, though beaten back and many times
baffled;
Not the pathfinder penetrating inland weary and long,
By deserts parch'd, snows chill'd, rivers wet,
perseveres till he reaches his destination,
More than I have charged myself, heeded or unheeded,
to compose a march for these States,
For a battle-call, rousing to arms if need be, years,
centuries hence. 16

When his brother George was wounded in 1862, Walt sped for
the army camp on the Rappahannock. There he remained for three
years, ministering to the wounded in the army hospitals. In January
of 1863, he went to Washington. For a few hours of each day
he worked in the office of the army paymaster, copying. The re-
main ing hours were given, as a volunteer, to the army hospitals.
These experiences he wrote up in "Specimen Days."

The results of the Civil War reinforced Whitman's belief
in the common people.

In my judgment it will remain as the grandest
and most encouraging spectacle yet vouchsafed in
any age, old or new, to political progress and dem-
ocracy. It was not for what came to the surface
merely - though that was important - but what it
indicated below, which was of eternal importance.
Down in the abysms of New World humanity there had

15 Complete Works, II, 115.
16 "Not the Pilot," Ibid., 72.
form'd and harden'd a primal hardpan of national Union will, determin'd and in the majority, refusing to be tamper'd with or argued against, confronting all emergencies, and capable at any time of bursting all surface bonds, and breaking out like an earthquake. It is, indeed, the best lesson of the century, or of America, and it is a mighty privilege to have been part of it. 17

Through a friend, he secured a clerkship in the Department of the Interior, Indian Bureau. He was dismissed, however, when the Secretary of the Interior found out that he was the author of Leaves of Grass.

In 1867 and 1868 Whitman contributed to the Galaxy the essays, "Democracy" and "Personalism." These essays were merged into a larger one, "Democratic Vistas," which was published in 1870. Here Whitman voices his faith in the ultimate triumph of democracy.

From 1873 to 1876, Whitman was disabled by a paralytic stroke. His health was sufficiently improved in 1879, however, to allow him to journey West again, - farther than before - to Missouri, Kansas and Colorado. His prose writings were published in 1862, entitled Specimen Days and Collect.

In 1884, he settled at Camden, New Jersey, where he passed away on March 26, 1892. His entire life had been spent in America.

Traubel records a conversation relative to the extent of

Whitman's travels. On February 2, 1889, Whitman said:

I don't spend much of my time with regrets for anything: yet sometimes I regret that I never went to Europe: other times I regret that I never learned to read German and French. No doubt it's all just as well as it is: it all came about according to what they used to describe as "the ordinance of God": there's no chance in it: maybe I'd have been modified if I had ever broken loose from my accustomed ways - become a traveller, become a linguist: that might have meant harm to the Leaves: my destiny seems to have been to live my whole life here in America without any untoward interruptions. 18

What are some of the events which he witnessed in his gigantic span of years? What was happening to the country and the people?

The completion of the Erie Canal; the completion of the fight for manhood suffrage; the popular election of the presidents; the panic of 1837; the development of the middle border and the great West; the opening of the Southwest; the Mexican War; the opening of the Oregon country; the boundary dispute with England; the opening up of California; the discovery of gold; the opening of the Overland trail; the establishment of the Mormon empire in Utah; the rise and dominance of the industrial system; the invention of the steam engine, the railroad engine, the sewing machine, the telegraph and the reaper; the immigration of foreigners; the rise of labor organizations; the growth of Southern hostility to Northern industry, and of Northern sentiment

against slavery; the Missouri Compromise; the defeat of the Wilmot Proviso; the panic of 1857; the woman's rights movement; the formation of the Confederacy; the Civil War; the Emancipation Proclamation; the Homestead Act of 1862; the rise of the corporation, the trusts, and Tammany Hall, the extension of the railways to the Pacific; the building of irrigation projects; the expansion of the American world market; the currency question; and the Alaska purchase.

Whitman was alive to all these forces and events. He expressed himself on some; he criticized others; he gloried in many.

He saw, in his youth, the time when the Missouri-Arkansas Territory and Louisiana were the Westernmost parts of the United States. He witnessed the years of the greatest real equalities in our history, 1820-1850. In his old age, he saw the States extend from coast to coast and the nation become a world power. His death year practically coincides with the closing of free land.

Whitman lived during the administrations of Presidents Monroe, Adams, Jackson, Van Buren, Harrison, Tyler, Polk, Fillmore, Pierce, Buchanan, Lincoln, Andrew Johnson, Grant, Hayes, Garfield, Arthur, Cleveland and Harrison. He belongs to the self-asserting period of our national life, the era of expansion
and the moving frontier.

We have dealt with the heritages of Whitman's birth and the chronological facts of his life, with its diverse political and historical influences. Not only were his years remarkably extended, but his types of experience were multiform, leading to an awareness of the varieties of life. What were the other urges or forces which affected his voicing and interpretation of democracy?

Parrington, in his *Beginnings of Critical Realism in America* in the chapter, "The Afterglow of the Enlightenment - Walt Whitman," lists thirteen influences. They are: the Enlightenment, or rationalistic school of philosophy following Bacon; Jeffersonianism; Jacksonian individualism; the West; the naturistic school or creative ideal of individualism; revolutionary and radical influences of the forties; emotional liberalism of the fifties; the monistic idealism of the transcendental school; science; Emerson and transcendentalism; Hegel and other German idealists; romanticism and realism.

Whitman's ideas of the free and self-reliant individual are traceable, says Parrington, to the Enlightenment.

If, according to rationalistic philosophy, man is perfectible, why should he be kept down? Growth into self-reliant and free individuals such as the democratic society must be composed
of would follow freedom from repression.

The impact of Jefferson's political philosophy was still new and strong in Whitman's youth. An editorial written in the Brooklyn Daily Eagle reads like portions of Jefferson's first inaugural address:

It is only a novice in political economy who thinks it the duty of government to make its citizens happy. - Government has no such office. To protect that weak and the minority from the impositions of the strong and the majority - to prevent anyone from positively working to render the people unhappy, (if we may so express it,) to do the labor not of an officious inter-meddler in the affairs of men, but of a prudent watchman who prevents outrage - these are rather the proper duties of a government.

... The legislature may, and should, when such things fall in its way, lend its potential weight to the cause of virtue and happiness - but to legislate in direct behalf of those objects is never available, and rarely effects any even temporary benefit. Indeed sensible men have long seen that "the best government is that which governs least." 19

As we have seen, the young Walt witnessed the almost revolutionary changes under Jackson in the forties.

The West provided a real spiritual challenge. Its liberalism developed into a reaction against Calvinism.

Whitman hailed it as an antidote to the effete East. The following editorial from the Brooklyn Daily Eagle appeared on February 12, 1847, captioned "The West."

19 The Gathering of the Forces; edited by Cleveland Rodgers and John Black, I, 55-57.
Radical, true, far-scoped, and thorough-going Democracy may expect, (and such expecting will be realized,) great things from the West! The hardy denizens of those regions, where common wants and the cheapness of the land level conventionality, (that poison to the Democratic vitality,) begin at the roots of things - at first principles - and scorn the doctrines founded on mere precedent and imitation ... There is something refreshing even in the extremes, the faults, of Western character. Neither the political or social fabric expect half as much harm from those untutored impulses, as from the staled and artificialized influence which enters too much into politics amid richer (not really richer, either) and older-settled sections. 20

The expanding territory of the West stimulated democratic idealism and heightened its imaginative energy. It rejuvenated freedom. In "Song of the Redwood Tree," its bold freshness, growth and accomplishment are transferred to a broadening of the intellectual scope of the actual life of the nation. Moral and democratic principles are introduced. In such poems as: "Pioneers, 0 Pioneers," "Song of Occupations," and "The Song of the Broad Axe," Whitman would have the political and moral qualities of the people match the goodness and vastness of the woods and soil. Thus the naturistic school left its imprint upon the creative ideal of individualism.

The decisive voice in winning Whitman to idealism, says Arvin, reached him through Emerson, particularly in his Nature and the first and second series of Essays.

The following excerpts from Emerson's The American Schol-
ar, an address delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Cambridge, August 31, 1837, will indicate Whitman's stimulation from and indebtedness to that Brahmin. Emerson before him had elevated the commonplace.

I read with some joy of the auspicious signs of the coming days, as they glimmer already through poetry and art, through philosophy and science, through church and state.

One of these signs is the fact that the same movement which effected the elevation of what was called the lowest class in the state, assumed in literature a very marked and as benign an aspect. Instead of the sublime and beautiful, the near, the low, the common, was explored and poetized. That which had been negligently trodden under foot by those who were harnessing and provisioning themselves for long journeys into far countries, is suddenly found to be richer than all foreign parts. The literature of the poor, the feelings of the child, the philosophy of the street, the meaning of household life, are the topics of the time. It is a great stride ... I embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low.

Emerson had also proclaimed the dignity and self-reliance of the individual.

Another sign of our times, also marked by an analogous political movement, is the new importance given to the single person. Everything that tends to insulate the individual, - to surround him with barriers of natural respect, so that each man shall feel the world is his, and man shall treat with man as a sovereign state with a sovereign state, - tends to true union as well as greatness ... The world is nothing, the man is all; in yourself is the law of all nature, and you know not yet how a globule of sap ascends; in yourself slumbers the whole of Reason; it is for you to know all; it is for you to dare all. ²²

²² Ibid., 118-14.
The Over-soul preceded Whitman's idea of Oneness.

"A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men." 23

The transcendental fusion of the human identity with the universal Oneness was reflected in Whitman's belief in the individual as fused with the whole. This binding "en masse" was a step toward solidarity, social and spiritual. From solidarity comes comradeship and then love. These are the religion of democracy.

"I was simmering and simmering; it was Emerson brought me to boil," commented Whitman. To Whitman, the average, plus Whitman, the rationalist, plus Whitman, the Jeffersonian, was now added Whitman, the transcendentalist.

Through the influence of the transcendental philosophy, Whitman shifted the bulwark of the democratic conception from the Constitution to the inner consciousness of man.

Science also was to impose itself upon Whitman's mystical beliefs. The Spencerian concept of evolution was woven into his thinking and combined with his transcendental premises. Democracy and the United States, translated in terms of Spencer, Darwin and Hegel, are but a step in the evolutionary process.

Great as they are, and greater far to be, the United States, too, are but a series of

Ibid., 115.
steps in the eternal process of creative thought. And here is, to my mind, their final justification, and certain perpetuity.

The glory of the republic of the United States, in my opinion, is to be that, emerging in the light of the modern and the splendor of science, and solidly based on the past, it is to cheerfully range itself, and its politics are henceforth to come, under those universal laws, and embody them, and carry them out, to serve them. And as only that individual becomes truly great who understands well that, while complete in himself in a certain sense, he is but a part of the divine, eternal scheme, and whose special life and laws are adjusted to move in harmonious relations with the general laws of Nature, and especially with the moral law, the deepest and highest of all, and the last vitality of man or state - so the United States may only become the greatest and the most continuous, by understanding well their harmonious relations with entire humanity and history, and all their laws and progress, sublimed with the creative thought of Deity, through all time, past, present, and future. Thus will they expand to the amplitude of their destiny, and become illustrations and culminating parts of the kosmos, and of civilization. 24

In the cosmic scheme of things, democracy will surmount all its diseases and become a perpetual step in the evolutionary process of civilization and humanity.

Should you not be proud, Whitman asks the people, to be a part of such an inevitable step in progress?

"Haughty this song, its words and scope,
To span vast realms of space and time,
Evolution – the cumulative – growths and generations." 25

Added to the influence of Science and the acceptance of reality in materialism, is the philosophy of Hegel. Good as the

continuous, immutable law of the universe and vice and disease as transients presented a faith reconcilable with the scientific theory of evolution. It was also "fit for America."

Only Hegel is fit for America - is large enough and free enough. Absorbing his speculations and imbued by his letter and spirit, we bring to the study of life here and the thought of hereafter, in all its mystery and vastness, an expansion and clearness of sense before unknown. 26

Hegel, to Whitman, represented "the most thoroughly American points of view" he knew. He urged the people to accept them as placing themselves and their New World democracy "in the creative realms of time and space." 27

In all Whitman's works, acceptance preponderated rejection.

"My gait is no fault-finder's or rejecter's gait,
I moisten the roots of all that has grown." 28

Whitman's affirmative acceptance of the universe was extended to an all-time faith in democracy.

"But thou shalt face thy fortunes, thy diseases, and surmount them all,
Whatever they are to-day and whatever through time they may be." 29

He tells the people that they must not be discouraged by temporary set-backs.

But then it is with America as it is with nature: I believe our institutions can digest, absorb, all elements, good or bad, godlike or devilish, that come along; it seems impossible for nature to fail to make good in the processes peculiar to her; in the same way it is impossible for America to fail to turn the worst luck into best - curses into blessings.

Foreign critics, too, such as Tennyson and Carlyle, must not dismay the people. Democracy will rise above all "Shooting Niagara's." It does not matter that they cannot stomach the high-life-below-stairs coloring all our poetic and genteel social status so far - the measureless viciousness of the great radical Republic, with its ruffianly nominations and elections; its loud, ill-pitch'd voice, utterly regardless whether the verb agrees with the nominative; its fights, errors, eructations, repulsions, dishonesties, audacities; those fearful and varied and long-continu'd storm and stress stages (so offensive to the well-regulated college-bred mind) wherewith Nature, history, and time block out nationalities more powerful than the past, and to upturn it and press on to the future; - that they cannot understand and fathom all this, I say, is it to be wonder'd at?

A positive Hegelian philosophy is called for as a moral necessity.

"Not to exclude or demarcate, or pick out evils from their formidable masses (even to expose them,)

But add, fuse, complete, extend - and celebrate the

30 Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, I, 81.
31 Whitman, "Poetry To-day in America," Complete Works, V, 211.
immortal and the good."

We have seen that our subject was the recipient and expre-
ser of numerous opposite forces and influences. He was at once
urban and rustic. He was fascinated by Brooklyn but would retreat
to the rusticity of Long Island. He was social, yet a solitary.
He was self-taught in the classic tradition; but the tradition to
which he belonged and which infused him with high hopes was the
romantic one. As a romanticist, he faced and pictured the Amer­
ican scene realistically. An acclaimer of the material, he became
increasingly transcendental and mystic. An heir of the rational­
ism of the Enlightenment, he became a convert to the idealism of the
naturistic, Emerson and the transcendentalists, and Hegel and the
German idealists.

He was a yea-sayer and a rebel, says Arvin, a condition
which led to a dualism of thought.

It was true that he was too large and contained
too much to be satisfied with the tight and sterile
consistencies of mediocre minds, but in another in-
tellectual setting he might have been forced to con­sider the heavy obligations of a prophetic writer to
be consistent in a richer sense, and there was much
foolish complacency in the way he accepted his own
contrarieties. "You give us no consistent philo­sophy," his friend Brinton, the archaeologist, said to
him one day. "I guess I don't," responded Whitman
with something like smugness - "I should not desire
to do so." 33

Still Whitman was, essentially, a person of large sympa-
thetic and intellectual capacities. A forward thinker, he has
not yet been displaced as the foremost poet of democracy.

33 Whitman, 219.
Whitman did not believe his democracy to be a thing achieved. Positive as we have seen him to be, he could distinguish between a hope and an actuality. Although democracy was to him an inevitable development, he realized its potentialities as a way of living had not been realized.

It has been and is carried on by all the moral forces, and by trade, finance, machinery, inter-communications, and, in fact, by all the developments of history, and can no more be stopp'd than the tides, or the earth in its orbit. Doubtless, also, it resides, crude and latent, well down in the hearts of the fair average of the American born people, mainly in the agricultural regions. But it is not yet, there or anywhere, the fully-received, the fervid, the absolute faith.

I submit, therefore, that the fruition of democracy, on aught like a grand scale, resides altogether in the future. 34

"Thus we presume to write, as it were, upon things that exist not, and travel by maps yet unmade, and a blank. But the throes of birth are upon us; ..." 35

Whitman, primarily a prophet and inspirer, was also a severe and realistic critic and challenger. In unequivocal terms he tells the people wherein their defects lie.

One of the author's "Notes on the Meaning and Intention of

35 Ibid., 93.
"Leaves of Grass" reads:

"Tell the American people their faults - the departments of their character where they are most liable to break down - speak to them with unsparing tongue - carefully systematize beforehand their faults." 36

He had searched the contemporary scene and found it sadly wanting. "Democratic Vistas," published in 1871, carries a scathing dissection.

Society, in these States, is canker'd, crude, superstitious, and rotten. ... In any vigor, the element of the moral conscience, the most important, the verteber to State or man, seems to me either entirely lacking, or seriously enfeebled or ungrown. ... Never was there, perhaps, more hollowness at heart than at present, and here in the United States. ... The underlying principles of the States are not honestly believed in (for all this hectic glow, and these melodramatic screamings), nor is humanity itself believed in. ... The spectacle is appalling. ... A scornful superciliousness rules in literature. ... Money-making is our magician's serpent, remaining to-day sole master of the field. ... It is as if we were somehow being endowed with a vast and more and more thoroughly-appointed body, and then left with little or no soul. 37

Among other menaces to democracy are listed in this essay:

Pride, competition, segregation, vicious wilfulness, and license beyond example ... incredible flippancy, and blind fury of parties, infidelity, entire lack of first-class captains and leaders, ... the plentiful meanness and vulgarity of the ostensible masses ... the labor question ... the fossil-like lethargy ... 38

36 Whitman, Complete Works, IX, 5-6.
37 Ibid., V, 61-63.
Whitman conversed frequently with Traubel in this same vein. An entry for April 10, 1888, reads:

Go on, my dear Americans, whip your horses to the utmost - Excitement: money! politics!- open all your valves and let her go - going, whirl with the rest - you will soon get under such momentum you can't stop if you would. Only make provision between times, old States, and new States, for several thousand insane asylums. You are in a fair way to create a nation of lunatics.

In the same year on April 16, he said of the competitive system:

"Every man is trying to outdo every other man - giving up modesty, giving up honesty, giving up generosity, to do it: creating a war, every man against every man: the whole wretched business falsely keyed by money ideals, money politics, money religions, money meh." 40

Super-materialism was a constant threat to the moral fibre. Especially did this seem so to Whitman in the years of industrialization and expansion following the Civil War. Whitman gloried in the natural resources of his great country, and held such materialistic wealth to be the sub-stratum of democracy.

Fecund America - to-day,
Thou art all over set in births and joys!
Thou groan'st with riches, thy wealth clothes thee as a garment,
Thou laughest loud with ache of great possessions ...
Thou envy of the globe! thou miracle!
Thou, bathed, choked, swimming in plenty,

40 Ibid., 42.
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.) 41

But such materialism, he tells the people in "Democratic
Vistas," is but a step. It must lead to the moral and creative
idea.

Another worm in the social structure was politics as prac-
ticed. As was shown in the biographical facts, Whitman had been
immersed in several political parties and campaigns and had
emerged skeptical of partisanship. He also places upon corrupt
politics a large portion of the blame for the war of secession.

Whitman did not consider the South more guilty for the
Civil War than the North. The absence of sectional and partisan
feeling in "Leaves of Grass," Burroughs considers remarkable.
"Reconciliation" is a lesson in magnanimity.

"For my enemy is dead, a man divine as myself is dead,
I look where he lies white-faced and still in the
coffin - I draw near,
Bend down and touch lightly with my lips the white face
in the coffin." 42

In the "Collect," published in 1882, Whitman gives his
ideas of the "Origins of Attempted Secession," "Not the Whole
Matter, but Some Side Facts Worth Conning To-day and Any Day." 41
The Northern States were considered just as responsible for the war as the Southern. The blame is put on the villainous terms of the presidency – the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth – especially the administrations of Fillmore and Buchanan. It was then that corrupt political influences in the North were flaunting the superiority of slavery.

On April 6, 1888, four years before his death, Traubel had this entry:

"He cares less for politics and more for the people," he explains: "I see that the real work of democracy is done underneath its politics: this is especially so now, when the conventional parties have both thrown their heritage away, starting from nothing good and going to nothing good: the Republican party positively, the Democratic party negatively, the apologists of the plutocracy."

"You see I am not looking to politics to renovate politics: I am looking to forces outside – the great moral, spiritual forces – and these stick to their work, through thick and thin, through the mire and the mirage, until the proper time, and then assume control." Finally he said: "The best politics that could happen for our republic would be the abolition of politics." 43

In his social criticism, was Whitman a rebel? He says he was. In this connection, it must be remembered that he lived in a century of radical change. The Jacksonian and Lincolnian administrations were revolutionary, as was also the outcome of the Civil War in the South.

In "To a Foil'd European Revolutionaire," Whitman avows himself:

(Not songs of loyalty alone are these,
But songs of insurrection also,
For I am the sworn poet of every dauntless rebel
  the world over,
    And he going with me leaves peace and routine behind
      him,
        And stakes his life to be lost at any moment.) 44

Reformers and revolutionists have their function. They
are a national necessity. Democracy will blend the radicals and
reactionaries.

The eager and often inconsiderate appeals of
reformers and revolutionists are indispensable, to
counterbalance the inertness and fossilism making
so large a part of human institutions. The latter
will always take care of themselves — the danger
being that they rapidly tend to ossify us. The
former is to be treated with indulgence, and even
with respect. As circulation to air, so is agita-
tion and a plentiful degree of speculative license
to political and moral sanity. Indirectly, but
surely, goodness, virtue, law (of the very best),
follow freedom. These, to democracy, are what the
keel is to the ship, or saltiness to the ocean. 45

Two inscriptions to "Leaves of Grass" proclaim the need
and right to resist.

To the States or any one of them, or any city of
the States, Resist much, obey little,
Once unquestioning obedience, once fully enslaved,
Once fully enslaved, no nation, state, city of this
earth, afterward resumes its liberty. 46

Still though the one I sing,
(One, yet of contradictions made,) I dedicate to
Nationality,
I leave in him revolt, (0 latent right of insurrec-
tion! 0 quenchless, indispensable fire!) 47

44 Complete Works, II, 143.
45 Whitman, "Democratic Vistas," Complete Works, V, 82.
46 Whitman, "To the States," Complete Works, I, 10.
The people must not only resist; but they must be vigilant and ever on the defensive. They must not rely on government for the defense of vital rights.

There is no week nor day nor hour when tyranny may not enter upon this country, if the people lose their supreme confidence in themselves, — and lose their roughness and spirit of defiance — Tyranny may always enter — there is no charm no bar against it — the only bar against it is a large resolute breed of men. 48

In criticizing his American scene, Whitman attacked no specific institution. Even plutocracy, he contends, has a right to exist, although he would modify it.

Traubel has this entry for April 6, 1888:

You think I am sore on the plutocracy? Not at all: I am out to fight but not to insult it: the plutocracy has as much reason for being as poverty — and perhaps when we get rid of the one we will get rid of the other. 49

He is not against any institution. He wishes to establish but one institution.

I hear it was charged against me that I sought to destroy institutions, But really I am neither for nor against institutions, (What indeed have I in common with them? or what with the destruction of them?) Only I will establish in the Mannahatta and in every city of these States inland and seaboard, And in the fields and woods, and above every keel little or large that dents the water, Without edifices or rules or trustees or any argument, The institution of the dear love of comrades. 50

49 With *Walt Whitman in Camden,* I, 14.
50 Whitman, "I Hear It was Charged against Me," *Complete Works,* I, 154.
True comradeship does not exist with poverty. Although Whitman did not espouse the idea of class distinction, he was aware of the schism between poverty and wealth and of the dangers of the former.

In "Notes Left Over," from "Collect," he writes:

"If the United States, like the countries of the Old World, are also to grow vast crops of poor, desperate, dissatisfied, nomadic, miserably-waged populations, such as we see looming upon us of late years - steadily, even if slowly, eating into them like a cancer of lungs or stomach - then our republican experiment, notwithstanding all its surface-successes, is at heart an unhealthy failure."

In a conversation noted by Traubel, May 7, 1888, Whitman said:

"Against the things we call successes I see other, counter tendencies working - an increased indisposition of certain classes to do the honest labor of the world, and the solidification of the money powers against the fraternity of the masses. Either one of these might, both of them are sure, to ruin the republic if nothing appears to contravene them."

While realistically facing the evils of democracy, Whitman retains his positive philosophy and can speak of the values of all he denounces. His Hegelian philosophy dominates this critical strain.

Political democracy, as it exists and practically works in America, with all its threatening evils, supplies a training-school for making first-class men. It is life's gymnasium, not of good

51 Complete Works, V, 286.
52 With Walt Whitman in Camden, I, 113.
only, but of all. We try often, though we fall back often. A brave delight, fit for freedom's athletes, fills these arenas, and fully satisfies, out of the action in them, irrespective of success. Whatever we do not attain, we at any rate attain the experiences of the fight, the hardening of the strong campaign, and throb with currents of attempt at least. Time is ample. Let the victors come after us. Not for nothing does evil play its part among us. Judging from the main portions of the history of the world, so far, justice is always in jeopardy, peace walks amid hourly pitfalls, and of slavery, misery, meanness, the craft of tyrants and the credulity of the populace, in some of their protean forms, no voice can at any time say, They are not. The clouds break a little, and the sun shines out - but soon and certain the lowering darkness falls again, as if to last forever. Yet is there an immortal courage and prophecy in every sane soul that cannot, must not, under any circumstances, capitulate, - Vive, the attack - the perennial assault! Vive, the unpopular cause - the spirit that audaciously aims - the never-abandon'd efforts, pursuéd the same amid opposing proofs and precedents. 53

In the group of poems titled "Old Age Echoes," he still affirms, in "Nay, Tell Me Not To-day the Publish'd Shame," that he is much more interested in singing of positive than of negative values. He would turn to the blessings of health, security, industry and goodness.

Again and again and again, Whitman held before the people the positive constituents of democracy. First came the franchise, one of the strongest weapons of the bulk people. The sight and thought of election day thrilled him more than Niagara, Yellowstone or the canons of Colorado. It is

... the still small voice vibrating - America's choosing day,
(The heart of it not in the chosen - the act itself the main, the quadrennial choosing,)
The stretch of North and South arous'd - sea-board and inland - Texas to Maine - the Prairie States - Vermont, Virginia, California,
The final ballot-shower from East to West - the paradox and conflict,
The countless snow-flakes falling - (a swordless conflict, Yet more than all Rome's wars of old, or modern Napoleon's:
the peaceful choice of all,
Or good or ill humanity - welcoming the darker odds,
the dross:-
Foams and ferments the wine? it serves to purify - while the heart pants, life glows:
These stormy gusts and winds waft precious ships,
Swell'd Washington's, Jefferson's, Lincoln's sails. 54

In balloting, every man is equal. Also, every man is a judge of the successful candidate who is taken on trial. This judging gives the people a great power, that of awakened public opinion.

"Of public opinion,
Of a calm and cool fiat sooner or later, (how impassive! how certain and final!)
Of the President with pale face asking secretly to himself, What will the people say at last?" 55

Whitman's picture of the franchise is enlarged to include women, whom Emerson and Greeley before him had both championed. Whitman announces "the perfect equality of female with the male" in "By Blue Ontario's Shore." To him, the place where a great

city stands was the place "Where women walk in public processions in the streets the same as the men, ..." 36

Whitman prophesies woman suffrage.

Then there are mutterings (we will not now stop to heed them here, but they must be heeded) of something more revolutionary. The day is coming when the deep questions of woman's entrance amid the arenas of practical life, politics, the suffrage, etc., will not only be argued all around us, but may be put to decision, and real experiment. 37

The second positive constituent of democracy is its legal authority. The people might evolve to self government; but, until they reach the state of required perfection, authority is necessary.

Law is the unshakable order of the universe forever; and the law over all, and law of laws, is the law of successions; that of the superior law, in time, gradually supplanting and overwhelming the inferior one. (While, for myself, I would cheerfully agree - first covenanting that the formative tendencies shall be administer'd in favor, or at least not against it, and that this reservation be closely construed - that until the individual or community show due signs, or be so minor and fractional as not to endanger the State, the condition of authoritative tutelage may continue, and self-government must abide its time.) Nor is the aesthetic point, always an important one, without fascination for highest aiming souls. The common ambition strains for elevations, to become some privileged exclusive. The master sees greatness and health in being part of the mass; nothing will do as well as common ground. Would you have in yourself the divine, vast, general law? Then merge yourself in it. 38

58. Ibid., 79-80.
Equality is a third positive constituent of democracy. It is tied up with the franchise and law, already presented, and the attribute which will succeed it in our thesis, namely, liberty.

The personification of equality is the Answerer, who knows no class distinction.

He says indifferently and alike How are you friend? to the President at his levee,
And he says Good-day my brother, to Cudge that hoes in the sugar-field,
And both understand him and know that his speech is right.
He walks with perfect ease in the capitol,
He walks among the Congress, and one Representative says to another, Here is our equal appearing and new. 59

The "whoever you are" and "wherever you are" which recurs in Whitman's poems is a part of his all-embracing feeling of equality toward mankind. We have thousands of pictures of middle-class common peoples in their joys, sorrows and occupations. All of them are, to Whitman, "on equal terms." This, of course, is the idea imbedded in our Constitution and which our poet incorporated into his own living to an extraordinary degree.

The fourth positive constituent is liberty, one of Whitman's "realities," his "most solid announcements of any." 60

When liberty goes out of a place it is not the first to go, nor the second or third to go, It waits for all the rest to go, it is the last.

When there are no more memories of heroes and martyrs, And when all life and all the souls of men and women are discharged from any part of the earth, Then only shall liberty or the idea of liberty be discharged from that part of the earth, And the infidel come into full possession. 61

Spirituality, the fifth constituent, is the highest peak in the evolutionary development of democracy. Says Granville Hicks in his *The Great Tradition*,

The doctrine of manifest destiny, in its popular form so grossly imperialistic, became in his poetry a theory of spiritual evolution whose climax would be reached upon these shores:

"And thou America,
For the scheme's culmination, its thought and its reality,
For these (not for thyself) thou hast arrived."62

This leads from and is the fruition of the material.

Here first the duties of to-day, the lessons of the concrete,
Wealth, order, travel, shelter, products, plenty;
As of the building of some varied, vast, perpetual edifice, Whence to arise inevitable in time, the towering roofs, the lamps, The solid-planted spires tall shooting to the stars. 63

Whitman's spirituality is synonymous with love.

Love, democracy and religion stand, in "Starting from Pau-
manok," as the three greatnesses. Religion, however, is "rising inclusive and more resplendent." It is "the real and permanent grandeur of the States." All religions are recognized.

Religion is not only a constituent, but an indirect, mystical and transcendental purpose of democracy.

The purpose is not altogether direct; perhaps it is more indirect. For it is not that democracy is of exhaustive account, in itself. Perhaps, indeed, it is (like Nature) of no account in itself. It is that, as we see, it is the best, perhaps only, fit and full means, formulator, general caller-forth, trainer, for the million, not for grand material personalities only, but for immortal souls. 64

The pattern of this spirituality is not uniform. It presupposes the loneness of the individual, and is a composite of the spirituality of the great average identity.

What is this average identity? It possesses the five positive constituents of democracy but is four other things, also.

In the first place, the average identity is the starting point of all types. He was even the source of the aristocrat or feudalist to whom he may seem mean and bestial.

Mathew Arnold "always gives you the notion that he hates to touch the dirt - the dirt is so dirty! But everything comes out of the dirt - everything: everything comes out of the people ... not university people, not F. F. V. people: people, people, just people!" In the rude, vital, natural man is the inexhaustible wellspring of good and evil; "He's got it all ... not only the cruel, beastly, hoggish, cheating, bedbug qualities, but also the spiritual - the noble - the high-born; ... " 65

64 Whitman, "Democratic Vistas," Complete Works, V, 78.
In the second place, he is conscious of his powers.

"Never was average man, his soul, more energetic, more like a God.

Lo, how he urges and urges, leaving the masses no rest!"

In the third place, he is heroic. Whitman found undeniable proof of the heroism of the rank and file during his hospital visitations. These he narrates in "Specimen Days." The day-by-day, non-military acts of heroism were also the subject of talks with Traubel.

In the fourth place, all occupations, all commonplaces and all toil go to make up this "divine" average.

"Whatever forms the average, strong, complete, sweet-blooded man or woman, the perfect longeved personality,

And helps its present life to health and happiness, and shapes its soul,

For the eternal real life to come." 67

In fact, most of his catalogues are an expansion of the interests and activities of the average man or woman. As Edward Dowden says, these "delightful enumerations" are an idealization of the average.

One can perceive at a glance that these characteristics of Whitman's work proceed directly from the democratic tendencies of the world of thought and feeling in which he moves. It is curious to find De Tocqueville, before there existed properly any native American literature, describing in the spirit of philosophical prophecy what we find realized in Whitman's

"Leaves of Grass"; -

"He who inhabits a democratic country sees around him, on every hand, men differing but little from each other; he cannot turn his mind to any one portion of mankind without expanding and dilating his thought till it embraces the whole world ... The poets of democratic ages can never take any man in particular as the subject of a piece, for an object of slender importance, which is distinctly seen on all sides, will never lend itself to an ideal conception ...

As all the citizens who compose a democratic community are nearly equal and alike, the poet cannot dwell upon any one of them; but the nation itself invites the exercise of his powers. The general similitude of individuals which renders any one of them, taken separately, an improper subject of poetry, allows poets to include them all in the same imagery, and to take a general survey of the people itself. Democratic nations have a clearer perception than any other of their own aspect; and an aspect so imposing is admirably fitted to the delineation of the ideal."

Whitman emphasized both the idealized average man and the individual. What is the relationship of these two? Which is the higher? Whitman clearly answers:

So much contributed, to be comm'd well, to help prepare and brace our edifice, our plan'd Idea - we still proceed to give it in another of its aspects - perhaps the main, the high facade of all. For to democracy, the leveler, the unyielding principle of the average, is surely join'd another principle, equally unyielding, closely tracking the first, indispensable to it, opposite (as the sexes are opposite), and whose existence, confronting and ever modifying the other, often clashing, paradoxical, yet neither of highest avail without the other, plainly supplies to these grand cosmic politics of ours, and to the launch'd forth mortal dangers of republicanism, to-day or any day, the counterpart and offset whereby Nature restrains the deadly orig-

Dowden, Studies in Literature, 495
inal relentlessness of all her first-class laws. This second principle is individuality, the pride and centripetal isolation of a human being in himself - identity - personalism. Whatever the name, its acceptance and thorough infusion through the organizations of political commonalty now shooting Aurora-like about the world, are of utmost importance, as the principle itself is needed for very life's sake. It forms, in a sort, or is to form, the compensating balance-wheel of the successful working machinery of aggregate America.

Thus we see the highest facet is the individual which must be produced from the divine average. It is the "superb persons" who will justify Whitman. They will balance the leveling tendency of democracy.

In turn an aggregate of courageous and lofty individuals will form a great nation. Such free expression of personalism will be aided by democracy and science.

What personal qualities will be paramount in this individual?

Firstly, this individual, like the average man, will be proud in the consciousness of his powers. Man should ever be aware of his own greatness, how own identity, his personal ownership, his body and soul.

"Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else." 70

Secondly, Whitman's individual is independent. He can look carelessly in the face of Presidents and governors, as to

Who are you?"  

This independence Whitman later defines in "Democratic Vistas."

The old men, I remember as a boy, were always talking of American independence. What is independence? Freedom from all laws or bonds except those of one's own being, controlled by the universal ones. To lands, to man, to woman, what is there at last to each, but the inherent soul, nativity, idiocracy, free, highest-poised, soaring in its own flight, following out itself?  

This lack of restraint is similar to "The audacity and sublime turbulence of the States."  

Thirdly, Whitman's individual is self-reliant, even to a degree where he is the supreme law.

Where outside authority enters always after the precedence of inside authority,
Where the citizen is always the head and ideal, and President, Mayor, Governor and what not, are agents for pay,
Where children are taught to be laws to themselves, and to depend on themselves, ...  

Fourthly, the government exists for him.

The sum of all known reverence I add up in you whoever you are,
The President is there in the White House for you, it is not you who are here for him,
The Secretaries act in their bureaus for you, not you here for them,
The Congress convenes every Twelfth-month for you Laws, courts, forming of States, the characters of cities, the going and coming of commerce and mails, are all for you.  

In truth, he is the centre of the government.
"The American compact is altogether with individuals,
The only government is that which makes minute of
individuals,
The whole theory of the universe is directed unerringly
to one single individual - namely to You." 76

Whitman indulges in an Anglo-Saxon-like custom of kenning
to describe his individuals. They are "great Persons," "the
great Idea," "the meaning of things," "the ultimate human prob-
lem," "the centre of all," "the embodiment of the quality of the
states," and "the theory of the universe."

This was Whitman's individual, the step beyond the average
man. Did Whitman assimilate him with the group? How did he
solve the problem, ever present, of reconciling a free, indivi-
dual personality with the "Necessities and benefits of associa-
tion?"

Says Vida Scudder:

Nor is this mystically exalted idea of the in-
dividual by any means consciously opposed to the
idea of the social whole. Revolutionary idealism,
from the days of Rousseau down, not only held the
two thoughts in solution, but believed that each
implied the other; that as the welfare of the one
man was shadow except as it could be shared by
many, so the many could never gain it until it was
possessed by the one. 77

Whitman realized this dualism. In "Democratic Vistas,"

77 Social Ideals in English Letters, 203-4.
he puts the question squarely, and sets about the task of reconcil- 
ciation. He believes that eventually individualism and patrio-
tism will merge. He saw their opposition as "a serious prob-
lem and paradox."

The first poem in "Leaves of Grass" resolves the problem.
"One's-self I sing, a simple separate person,
Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse." 78

Again:
"Small the theme of my Chant, yet the greatest - namely,
One's-Self - a simple, separate person. That, for
the use of the New World, I sing.

... Nor cease at the theme of One's-Self. I speak the
word of the modern, the word En-Masse." 79

The word "En-Masse" was the people, one of "the precious
immortal values" of the "stablest, solidest-based government of
the world." 80

The powers of the people are an aggregate of the powers
of the average man and individual. As a group, however, they
have further strengths. They have a continuity and permanence
that the individual does not have. They are a more enduring
factor of society, the unbroken chain of life.

In their sociological potentialities, the people fascin-

ated our poet. He would have them knit together in security through home ownership, bank accounts and a literary culture. He considered farming and farm occupation the most purifying and honest of all means of livelihood.

He believed that the welfare of the people was threatened by the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few. To Whitman, the spread of wealth among the bulk of the people was the only natural consequence of a democratic government.

The final culmination of this vast and varied Republic will be the production and perennial establishment of millions of comfortable city homes, and moderate-sized farms, healthy and independent, single separate ownership, fee simple, life in them complete but cheap, within reach of all. Exceptional wealth, splendor, countless manufactures, excess of exports, immense capital and capitalists, the five-dollar-a-day hotels well filled, artificial improvements, even books, colleges, and the suffrage - all, in many respects, in themselves, (hard as it is to say so, and sharp as a surgeon's lance,) form, more or less, a sort of anti-democratic disease and monstrosity, except as they contribute by curious indirections to that culmination - seem to me mainly of value, or worth consideration, only with reference to it. 81

From such a bulk of financially secure citizens Whitman would have the governmental personnel come.

I would be much pleas'd to see some heroic, shrewd, fully-inform'd, healthy-bodied, middle-aged, beard-faced American blacksmith or boatman come down from the West across the Alleghanies, and walk into the Presidency, dress'd in a clean suit of working attire, and with the tan all over his face, breast, and arms; I would certainly vote for

that sort of man, possessing the due requirements, before any other candidate.

(The facts of rank-and-file workingmen, mechanics, Lincoln, Johnson, Grant, Garfield, brought forward from the masses and placed in the Presidency, and swaying its mighty powers with firm hand - really with more sway than any king in history, and with better capacity in using that sway - can we not see that these facts have bearings far, far beyond their political or party ones?)

Whitman's middle class ideology irked many. In 1885, Edmund Clarence Stedman opened an attack upon it. He contended that Whitman did no more than to assume to include all classes in his sympathy and brotherhood.

Again, in this poet's specification of the objects of his sympathy, the members of every class, the lofty and the lowly, are duly named; yet there always is an implication that the employer is inferior to the employed, - that the man of training, the "civilizee," is less manly than the rough, the pioneer. He suspects those who, by chance or ability, rise above the crowd. What attention he pays them is felt to be in the nature of patronage, and insufferable. Other things being equal, a good scholar is as good as an ignoramus, a rich man as a poor man, a civilizee as a boor. Great champions of democracy - poets like Byron, Shelley, Landor, Swinburne, Hugo - often have come from the ranks of long descent. It would be easy to cite verses from Whitman that apparently refute this statement of his feeling, but the spirit of his whole work confirms it.

Whitman directly answered this charge of Stedman in "An Old Man's Rejoinder."

Then E. C. Stedman finds (or found) mark'd fault with me because while celebrating the common people en masse, I do not allow enough hero-

83Stedman, Poets of America, 384-5.
ism and moral merit and good intentions to the choicer classes, the college-bred, the etat-major. It is quite probable that S. is right in the matter. In the main I myself look, and have from the first look'd, to the bulky democratic torso of the United States even for esthetic and moral attributes of serious account - and refused to aim or accept anything less. If America is only for the rule and fashion and small typicality of other lands (the rule of the etat-major) it is not the land I take it for, and should today feel that my literary aim and theory had been blanks and misdirections. Strictly judged, most modern poems are but larger or smaller lumps of sugar, or slices of toothsome sweetmeat - even the banqueters dwelling on those glucose flavors as a main part of the dish. Which perhaps leads to something: to have great heroic poetry we need great readers - a heroic appetite and audience. Have we at present any such?

Perhaps Whitman's championing of the lowly was a reaction away from the contemporary prudishness, snobbishness and cold intellectualism. It must be remembered that Whitman also consciously attempted to break down middle-class prejudices and pettinesses.

In an effort to attain solidarity, he hit at defects in the people which Symonds lists as having to be "steadily rejected - an unwillingness to fraternize, an incapacity for comradeship, a habit of looking down on so-called inferiors, and a contempt for hand-labour." 85

To counter-act such taints, Whitman ever strove to inculcate in his beloved middle-class group positive, unifying values,
such as pride in its status and a respect for and joy in manual labor.

Just as the people were a cohesive force in the Republic, so they have in themselves cohesive forces.

The first of these forces is called, variously, "friendship," "comradeship," "love," "solidarity."

I believe the main purport of these States is to found a superb friendship, exalte, previously unknown,
Because I perceive it waits, and has been always waiting, latent in all men. 86

This love shares with pride its place in the American soul.

"Encircling all, vast-darting up and wide, the American Soul, with equal hemispheres, one Love, one Dilation or Pride;" 87

It shall also go hand, as a unifying agent, with the two constituents of democracy, of the average, of the individual and of the people, which Whitman desired to make more meaningful in his country - liberty and equality.

It shall be customary in the houses and streets to see manly affection,
The most dauntless and rude shall touch face to face lightly,
The dependence of Liberty shall be lovers,
The continuance of Equality shall be comrades.
These shall tie you and band you stronger than hoops of iron,
I, ecstatic, 0 partners! O lands! with love of lovers like you.

86 Whitman, "To the East and to the West," Complete Works, I, 159.
87 Whitman, "Our Old Feuillage," Complete Works, I, 159.
(Were you looking to be held together by lawyers? Or by an agreement on a paper? or by arms? Nay, nor the world, nor any living thing, will so cohere.) 88

It is the half complimentary to individualism. Individualism, alone, isolates; fear, jealousy and hate keep men apart. Adhesiveness or love, on the other hand, "fuses, ties and aggregates, making the races comrades, and fraternizing all." 89

Arvin sees Whitman's interpretation of solidarity as a social and cultural program.

Out of our nineteenth-century past, out of our American past, we inherit nothing potentially more fruitful than the vision Walt Whitman had of an all-embracing human solidarity - a solidarity lifted above the level of rational conviction and political convenience to the level of sensibility, of social practice, of culture in its largest sense. 90

The national will, following solidarity, or comradeship or love, is a second shaping and binding force of the people.

"You that, sometimes known, oftener unknown, really shape and mould the New World, adjusting it to Time and Space,

You hidden national will lying in your abysms, conceal'd but ever alert." 91

In "Autumn Rivulets," the nation is apostrophized as "the Mother of All," "O Maternal," and "O Powerful;" and in the poem

88 Whitman, "Over the Carnage Rose Prophetic a Voice," Complete Works, II, 82.
90 Whitman, 282.
"Spain," the nation is "Columbia."

Closely related to the national will is the third coherence among the people, "the preserver of the States," the Union. To the "transcendental Union" is dedicated "Thou Mother with Thy Equal Brood."

Thou Mother with thy equal brood,
Thou varied chain of different States, yet one identity only,
A special song before I go I'd sing o'er all the rest,
For thee, the future.

I'd sow a seed for thee of endless Nationality,
I'd fashion thy ensemble including body and soul,
I'd show away ahead thy real Union, and how it may be accomplish'd.

Elsewhere the Union is "the continent indissoluble," "my ever-united lands," "ONE IDENTITY," and "holding all, fusing absorbing, tolerating all."

It is inherent in our constitution.

"Have you consider'd the organic compact of the first day of the first year of Independence, sign'd by the Commissioners, ratified by the States, and read by Washington at the head of the army?

Have you possess'd yourself of the Federal Constitution?"

During the Civil War, Whitman suffered profound solicitude for his beloved Union. It was Lincoln, his great democratic hero, who was the conservator.

92Whitman, Complete Works, II, 235.
April 16, '65. - I find in my notes of the time, this passage on the death of Abraham Lincoln: He leaves for America's history and biography, so far, not only its most dramatic reminiscence - he leaves, in my opinion, the greatest, best, most characteristic, artistic, moral personality. Not but that he had faults, and showed them in the Presidency; but honesty, goodness, shrewdness, conscience, and (a new virtue, unknown to other lands, and hardly yet really known here, but the foundation and tie of all, as the future will grandly develop,) UNIONISM, in its truest and amplest sense, formed the hard-pan of his character. These he sealed with his life. The tragic splendor of his death, purging, illuminating all, throws round his form, his head, an aureole that will remain and will grow brighter through time, while history lives, and love of country lasts. By many has this Union been help'd; but if one name, one man, must be picked out, he, most of all, is the conservator of it, to the future. He was assassinated - but the Union is not assassinated - Can it! One falls and another falls. The soldier drops, sinks like a wave - but the ranks of the ocean eternally press on. Death does its work, obliterates a hundred, a thousand, President, general, captain, private, - but the Nation is immortal.

A country, made firm by love, a strong national will and union, would become a living principle, a real democracy.

One year before his death he wrote in "The Old Man Himself - A Postscript": "One of the dearest objects in my poetic expression has been to combine these Forty-Four United States into One Identity, fused, equal, and independent." 95

As his years progressed, Whitman's early narrow patriotism developed into a broad, universal spirit. He begins to use the word "democracy" more extensively. Emerson's world soul is given

94Whitman, "Death of President Lincoln," "Specimen Days," Complete Works, IV, 118.
95"The Old Man Himself - A Postscript," Lippincott's, 47, March, 1891.
concrete, political meaning. Democracy becomes international. Solidarity is seen as universal. All men are to be bound into a brotherhood. All people will be linked in solidarity around the globe. There will be

... tremendous entrances and exits, new combinations, the solidarity of races,
... What whispers are these 0 lands, running ahead of you, passing under the seas?
Are all nations communing? is there going to be but one heart to the globe?
Is humanity forming en-masse? for 18, tyrants tremble, crowns grow dim ...

The leader and guide will be America.

"Any period one nation must lead,
One land must be the promise and reliance of the future."

Where is this country which is to be the apex of governments to find its model? The answer is a transcendentalist one - in nature. The nature element is vital to democracy.

Democracy most of all affiliates with the open air, is sunny and hardy and sane only with Nature - just as much as Art is. Something is required to temper both - to check them, restrain them from excess, morbidity. I have wanted, before departure, to bear special testimony to a very old lesson and requisite. American Democracy, in its myriad personalities, in factories, work-shops, stores, offices - through the dense streets and houses of cities, and all their manifold sophisticated life - must either be fibred, vitalized, by regular contact with outdoor light and air and growths, farm-scenes, animals, fields, trees, birds, sun-warmth and free skies, or it will certainly dwindle and pale. We

cannot have grand races of mechanics, work people, and commonalty (the only specific purpose of America) on any less terms; I conceive of no flourishing and heroic elements of Democracy in the United States, or of Democracy maintaining itself at all, without the Nature-element forming a main part — to be its health-element and beauty-element — to really underlie the whole politics, sanity, religion and art of the New World. 98

To his tired workmen and workwomen Whitman says, "Restore your equilibrium in the sanitary, creative force of nature. Nature braces. It is the supreme teacher, although there are those who do not heed it."

Superb men and women, copying nature, would excel it.

"The new society at last, proportionate to Nature,

In man of you, more than your mountain peaks or stalwart trees imperial,

In woman more, far more, than all your gold or vines, or even vital air. 99

Such were Whitman's ideas of the meanings of democracy.

In what form did he convey them?

First, his manner of both living and writing was highly egotistical. Emory Holloway says that even his attire was in keeping with the national bard of democracy en masse.

Says Whitman:

"I know perfectly well my own egotism,

Know my omnivorous lines and must not write any less,
And would fetch you whoever you are flush with myself."

Burroughs analyzes this egotism in terms of Whitman's philosophy of the individual man.

Under close scrutiny his egotism turns out to be a kind of altru-egotism, which is vicarious and all-inclusive of his fellows. It is one phase of his democracy, and is vital and radical in his pages. It is a high, imperturbable pride in his manhood and in the humanity which he shares with all. It is the exultant and sometimes almost arrogant expression of the feeling which underlies and is shaping the whole modern world - the feeling and conviction that the individual man is above all forms, laws, institutions, conventions, bible, religions - that the divinity of kings, and the sacredness of priests of the old order, pertains to the humblest person. 101

Second, he relied upon emotional values to convey his message. Van Wyck Brooks compares the emotional appeal to Whitman's materials and personality. Democracy has a decided emotional aspect.

The social ideal of Whitman is essentially a collection of raw materials, molten and malleable, which take shape only in an emotional form. This emotional form is at bottom the attitude of a perfectly free personality, naturally affirmative, naturally creative; the rude material of right personal instinct, which is, however, antecedent to the direction personality is to adopt and to the ideas that are to inform it. 102

Thomas Mann pays tribute to Whitman's emotional appeal.

100 "Song of Myself," Complete Works, I, 94.
101 Whitman A Study, 96.
102 Brooks, America's Coming-of-Age, 121.
It was your American statesmen and poets such as Lincoln and Whitman who proclaimed to the world democratic thought and feeling, and the democratic way of life, in imperishable words. The world has probably never produced a master of words who has known so well as Whitman how to elevate and translate a social principle such as democracy into intoxicating song, or how to endow it with such powerful emotional content, representing a magnificent fusion of spirituality and sensuousness. 103

An important testimonial by the author himself appears in Lippincott's Magazine, Volume 47, March, 1891, "The Old Man - A Postscript."

Walt Whitman has a way of putting in his own special word of thanks, his own way, for kindly demonstrations, and may now be considered as appearing on the scene, wheeled at last in his invalid chair, and saying, propría persona, Thank you, thank you, my friends all. The living face and voice and emotional pulse only at last hold humanity together; even old poets and their listeners and critics, too. One of the dearest objects in my poetic expression has been to combine these Forty-Four United States into One Identity, fused, equal, and independent. My attempt has been mainly of suggestion, atmosphere, reminder, the native and common spirit of all, and perennial heroism. 104

Third, Whitman's poetic form was a suitable one, corresponding with his content in a number of ways.

There is the cataloguing which is, in itself, a part of the democratic treatment. It is a synthesis of democracy. The items, for the most part, are middle-class, plebian. They are comprehensive and limitless in their sympathy. Although perhaps inartistic poetically, they convey democracy's vastness, ampli-

103 Mann, The Coming Victory of Democracy, 8.
104 P. 389.
tude, movement, and variety. They are symbolic overtones of large and impalpable things, of strengths.

Granville Hicks, in The Great Tradition, traces the correspondence between poetic form and content as follows:

His poems are chaos, built out of the most heterogeneous materials, built out of bare facts often, untouched by any imaginative effort. But what else was possible? If he had carefully excluded from his poems everything that could not be absorbed into some imaginative integration, he could scarcely have written the poetry of contemporary life. That life was chaos, chaos beyond the power of any imagination to order and control it, and Whitman chose to reflect it accurately rather than to exclude grotesque and inharmonious elements for the sake of an artificial symmetry.

...It was precisely the broad, uniform mind of a Whitman, undiscriminatingly affirmative, unhesitatingly hospitable, sharply perceptive of concrete detail, that could plunge into the wild jungle of a national life without political, economic, racial, religious or social homogeneity. 105
Part IV

NEED OF NEW LITERATURE

Heterogeneous as such a national life was, it had to be expressed. Whitman was concerned over the reaction in the late nineteenth century, the worship of the past and the distrust of the present. He presents a substitute philosophy for the growth of the country. The American people in all their multiplicity must be mirrored in an American national literature.

While Whitman recognized our indebtedness to the poetry of the past, such poetical inheritance was not expressive of our new nation and its spirit.

There must be new forms to express the New World and the vitality of its democratic bulk.

Think of the United States to-day - the facts of these thirty-eight or forty empires solidar'ed in one - sixty or seventy millions of equals, with their lives, their passions, their future - these incalculable, modern, American, seething multitudes around us, of which we are inseparable parts! Think, in comparison, of the petty environage and limited area of the poets of past or present Europe, no matter how great their genius. Think of the absence and ignorance in all cases hitherto, of the multitudinousness, vitality, and the unprecedented stimulants of to-day and here. It almost seems as if a poetry with cosmic and dynamic features of magnitude and limitlessness suitable to the human soul, were never possible before. It is certain that a poetry of absolute faith and equality for
the use of the democratic masses never was. 106

Whitman does not claim to be the best poet of his time. He acknowledges that dozens transcend him in the poetic art; but they belong to or are influenced by Old World models, and do not meet the standards of democratic personality. He will interpret Democracy and the Modern. He will hold men together in a living principle.

"What is this you bring my America? Is it uniform with my country? ...
... Is it not a mere tale? a rhyme? a prettiness?
- is the good old cause in it?" 107

The real national bard, says Whitman in "Democratic Vis-tas," is lacking.

I say I have not seen a single writer, artist, lecturer, or whatnot, that has confronted the voiceless but ever erect and active, pervading, under-lying will and typic aspiration of the land, in a spirit kindred to itself. Do you call those genteel little creatures American poets? Do you term that perpetual, pistareen, paste-pot work, American art, American drama, taste, verse? I think I hear, echoed as from some mountain-top afar in the West, the scornful laugh of the Genius of these States. 108

The need for a real American poet is urgent. It is he who must effect the third stage in the democratic process. The

107 Whitman, "By Blue Ontario's Shore," Complete Works, II, 118.
108 Complete Works, V, 90.
first is named by Whitman as "the planning and putting on record, the political foundation rights of immense masses of people — indeed all the people — in the organization of republican National, State, and municipal governments, all constructed with reference to each, and each to all." 109

The second relates to material prosperity.

The third stage, without which the other two are considered useless, is presented in the following sentence:

The Third stage, rising out of the previous ones, to make them and all illustrious, I, now, for one, promulge, announcing a native expression-spirit, getting into form, adult, and through mentality, for these States, self-contain'd, different from others, more expansive, more rich and free, to be evidenced by original authors and poets to come, by American personalities, plenty of them, male and female, traversing the States, none excepted — and by native superber tableaux and growths of language, songs, operas, orations, lectures, architecture — and by a sublime and serious Religious Democracy sternly taking command, dissolving the old, sloughing off surfaces, and from its own interior and vital principles, reconstructing, democratizing society. 110

Such a "native-expression" spirit would create "an American stock-personality, with literatures and arts for outlets and return-expressions, and, of course, to correspond, within outlines common to all. To these, the main affair, the thinkers of the United States, in general so acute, have either given feeblest attention, or have remained, and remain, in a state of

110 Whitman, ibid.
The new poetry created by the "native-expression" spirit, must be just what Whitman would have the people be.

... bold, modern, and all-surrounding and kosmical, as she is herself. It must in no respect ignore science or the modern, but inspire itself with science and the modern. It must bend its vision toward the future, more than the past. Like America, it must extricate itself even from the greatest models of the past, and, while courteous to them, must have entire faith in itself, and the products of its own democratic spirit only. Like her, it must place in the van, and hold up at all hazards, the banner of the divine pride of man in himself (the radical foundation of the new religion). Long enough have the people been listening to poems in which common humanity, deferential, bends low, humiliated, acknowledging superiors. But America listens to no such poems. Erect, inflated, and fully self-esteeming be the chant; and then America will listen with pleased ears. 112

The problem and hope of a national literature which should interpret, stimulate and inspire his beloved democracy remained in Whitman's mind until the very end of his life. In an essay appearing in the North American Review in March, 1892, titled "American National Literature: Is There Any Such Thing - Or Can There Ever Be?", the writer lists eleven requisites of such an ideal literature. They are offered as "thoughts and suggestions, of good and ambitious intent enough anyhow."

First is Ensemble.

Ensemble is the tap-root of National Literature. America is become already a huge world of

peoples, rounded and orbic climates, idiocrasies, and geographies - forty-four Nations curiously and irresistibly blent and aggregated in ONE NATION, with one imperial language, and one unitary set of social and legal standards over all - and (I predict) a yet to be National Literature. (In my mind this last, if it ever comes, is to prove grander and more important for the Commonwealth than its politics and material wealth and trade, vast and indispensable as those are.) 113

The second, third and fourth traits he lists as Good-Nature, Decorum and Intelligence.

(I make Good-Nature first, as it deserves to be - it is a splendid resultant of all the rest, like health or fine weather.) Essentially these lead the inherent list of the high average personal born and bred qualities of the young fellows everywhere through the United States, as any sharp observer can find out for himself. Surely these make the vertebral stock of superb and noblest nations! May the destinies show it so forthcoming. I mainly confide the whole future of our Commonwealth to the fact of these three bases. Need I say I demand the same in the elements, and spirit and fruitage of National Literature? 114

The fifth,

... perhaps a born root or branch, comes under the words Noblesse Oblige, even for a national rule or motto. My opinion is that this foregoing phrase, and its spirit, should influence and permeate official America and its representatives in Congress, the Executive Departments, the Presidency, and the individual States - should be one of their chiefest mottoes, and be carried out practically. 115

A sixth "grave," "deep" point is a Deific identity.

114 Ibid., 7.
115 Ibid., 7.
... Then the expanded scientific and democratic and truly philosophic and poetic quality of modernism demands a Deific identity and scope superior to all limitations, and essentially including just as well the so-call'd evil and crime and criminals - all the malformations, the defective and abortions of the universe. 116

A seventh characteristic of the perfect national literature would be allusions or faint indications.

... Sometimes the bulk of the common people (who are far more 'cute than the critics suppose) relish a well-hidden allusion or hint carelessly dropt, faintly indicated, and left to be disinterred or not. ... It is always a capital compliment from author to reader, and worthy the peer-ing brains of America. 117

The eighth want, radical emotion-facts, would satisfy the States, not in a "bawling and braggadocio" manner, but as "the fervor and perennial fructifying spirit at fountain-head." These emotion-facts are in contradistinction to Puritanism, whose "standards are constipated, narrow, and non-philosophic." 118

The ninth vital need is autochthonic song.

... for a really great people there can be no complete and glorious Name, short of emerging out of and even rais'd on such born poetic expressions, coming from its own soil and soul, its area, spread, idiosyncrasies, and (like showers of rain, originally rising impalpably, distill'd from land and sea) duly returning there again. 119

117 Ibid., 8-9.
118 Ibid., 9.
119 Ibid., 11.
The tenth and eleventh disiderati of a national literature are "first-class power, and simple, natural health, flourishing and produced at first hand, typifying our own era." 120

Such a literature, unifying and motivating the spirit of the American people, will challenge and develop the individual readers. Reading, in a revivified democracy, will increase.

Books are to be call'd for, and supplied, on the assumption that the process of reading is not a half-sleep, but, in highest sense, an exercise, a gymnast's struggle; that the reader is to do something for himself, must be on the alert, must himself or herself construct indeed the poem, argument, history, metaphysical essay - the text furnishing the hints, the clue, the start or frame-work. Not the book needs so much to be the complete thing, but the reader of the book does. That were to make a nation of supple and athletic minds, well-train'd, intuitive, used to depend on themselves, and not on a few coteries of writers. 121

Such books would bring to their readers new words, new forms and new contents.

Whitman's innovations in words are set forth in An American Primer, a group of notes and fragments, incoherent in structure, which were published posthumously in 1904, with a foreword by Horace Traubel. The author had originally penned An American Primer as notes for a prospective lecture. Although the Primer was discarded by Whitman as material for publication, he admitted to Traubel that the best of it had leaked into his

other work.

In the Primer, Whitman bespeaks a new vigor of language, with a literary independence from England and all foreign tongues. While he, himself, affected foreign forms, he saw that new words would creep into and change language. A new American peoples would evolve new words to express the new times. The development of individual American types would result in the coming of new words to express new human characteristics, e.g., "Bowery" boy. Such new words, he believed, would be welcomed by American authors.

The main specific contentions of the Primer were:

American political life must be stated in words to express the new experience, e.g., Western states, and "presidentiads." "Presidentiads" appears in "Specimen Days" and numerous times in "Leaves of Grass," notably in "Apostrophe," "O Sun of Real Peace," "So Far and So Far, and On Toward the End," "To the States," and "Years of Meteors."

Aboriginal names should be preferred, e.g., Ohio, Monongahela, and Mississippi.

There are appropriate and inappropriate proper names for the United States. Belonging to its genius are appropriate names for the months, not those perpetuating old myths.

In speaking of the months, Whitman used the following self-coined terms: "Third month lambs" ("There Was a Child Went Forth"); "Fourth-month eve," ("When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard

Appropriate names for days, contends Whitman, will not follow the nomenclature of Teutonic and Greek gous; nor will college societies adopt Greek letters.

All names should show national identity and not be borrowed from other nations. Listed as inappropriate are: such newspaper usage as "aegis," etc.; and Californian, Texan, New Mexican, and Arizonian names of Spanish culture.

To show the national identity Whitman lists years in numerals, dating from the birth of the States. "Year One" is used in "By Blue Ontario's Shores"; "the 18th year of these States," in "France"; "the 72nd and 73rd years," in "Europe"; and "the eighty-third year," in "Full of Life Now."

Such were Whitman's innovations in words.

We have already spoken of the correspondence between the form and content of his works, in so far as cataloguing and heterogeneity are concerned.

Just as the Western frontier broke down restraints heretofore placed upon the people, Whitman's poetic form freed itself from prevailing artistic dictates. In this new, free country, our poet created a new, free form. In the "Preface, 1855," he states:
The great poet has less a marked style, and
is more the channel of thoughts and things increase
or diminution, and is the free channel of himself.

... The old red blood and stainless gentility
of great poets will be proved by their unconstraint.
A heroic person walks at his ease through and out
of that custom or precedent or authority that suits
him not. Of the traits of the brotherhood of first-
class writers, savans, musicians, inventors and art-
tists, nothing is finer than silent defiance advan-
cing from new free forms. In the need of poems,
philosophy, politics, mechanism, science, behavior,
the craft of art, an appropriate native grand opera,
shipcraft, or any craft, he is greatest for ever and
ever who contributes the greatest original practical
example. The cleanest expression is that which
finds no sphere worthy of itself, and makes one. 122

Whitman perceived that the conventionalized Victorian
metrical forms made no appeal to the American masses. They were
not for the new nation, - chaotic, growing, the riff-raff, the
masses, the prosaic, as seen in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry"; for
them he created a chant or oratorical prose, a free verse.

Just as the ideal democratic literature would have its
peculiar form and its own words, it would find its content in
a hitherto unrecorded field, - the People.

Literature, strictly consider'd, has never
recognized the People, and, whatever may be said,
does not to-day. Speaking generally, the tenden-
cies of literature, as hitherto pursued, have
been to make mostly critical and querulous men.
It seems as if, so far, there were some natural
repugnance between a literary and professional life
and the rude rank spirit of the democracies. There
is, in later literature, a treatment of benevolence,
a charity business, rife enough it is true; but I

122 Whitman, Complete Prose Works, 268.
know nothing more rare, even in this country, than a fit scientific estimate and reverent appreciation of the People - of their measureless wealth of latent power and capacity, their vast, artistic contrasts of light and shades - with, in America, their entire reliability in emergencies, and a certain breadth of historic grandeur, of peace or war, far surpassing all the vaunted samples of book-heroes, or any haut ton coteries, in all the records of the world.

Part V

CONCLUSION

Whitman's ideas of democracy grew from an active life, intertwined with almost half of the historical development of our country. His egotism enlarged into a much more extensively formulated system of democratic comradeship and sympathy than in any preceding American literature of freedom. Freneau had sentimentalized on rural communities; Crevecoeur claimed the farmer to be the embodiment of his social conception; Jefferson saw populous cities as detrimental to the liberty of man. Whitman merged all - the back-woodsman, the frontiersman, the homesteader, the farmer and the urbanite into a republican tradition. Born of the middle class, Whitman presented a middle class doctrine inclusive of all, to be sure, but directed mainly to the middle class, en masse and individually.

His attempt to revitalize democracy was directed at the source - the people, the composite of the average men developed into worthy individuals.

Whitman was at once the challenger, the critic and the prophet of democracy.

He challenged in a strident voice. Writing in 1876, he states that he attempted to give his ideas "positive place,
identity - saturating them with the vehemence of pride and audacity of freedom necessary to loosen the mind of still-to-be-form'd America from the folds, the superstitions, and all the long, tenacious and stifling anti-democratic authorities of Asiatic and European past." 124

He challenged the people to a realization that they are "The main thing - on which all the superstructures of the future are to rest. 125 He exhorts them to exercise their power through the registration of judgments in the ballot box. He urges them to bind the nation through the cohesive force of love, the creation of a national will and the perpetuation of the Union.

As a critic, Whitman inveighed against materialism, political partisanship and all tendencies toward social friction and distinction.

His leading role, however, is that of the prophet of democracy. He is its affirmer.

"We must march, my darlings, we must bear,

All the rest on us depend!" 126

In his early years a revolutionist, he evolved, in later years, an evolutionary and organic concept of democracy. The twin factors in his ideal democracy are the perfect individual and the perfect state or solidarity. This solidarity of love makes,

125Walt Whitman, "Democratic Vistas," Complete Works, V, 150.
126Walt Whitman, "Pioneers, O Pioneers!", Complete Works, I, 279.
practically, for a co-operative and classless society and the assumption of social responsibility on the part of the people. Such a democracy would be more than a form of government. It would be an enthusiasm, a potentiality, a way of living, an aspirational rising above materialistic achievement.

He was the first to elevate his own grouping, the average man. The commonplace was one of his recurring themes.

The commonplace I sing;  
How cheap is health! how cheap nobility!  
... The common day and night - the common earth and waters,  
Your farm - your work, trade, occupation,  
The democratic wisdom underneath, like solid ground for all.  

People had not yet been fittingly represented in literature. "With dejection and amazement," Whitman felt that they had so far remained "uncelebrated, unexpress'd."

Yet this same average man whom Whitman idealized did not, contemporaneously, accept him.

Jeffersonian and Jacksonian philosophy translated to verse did not appeal to the book buying public and the Eastern critics. To them, Whitman was a rough rebel. Whittier was much more understood and accepted by the common people than was Whitman, says Stedman, writing in 1880.

Calverton tells us that Whitman's national consciousness was much in advance of his times.

137Walt Whitman, Complete Works, III, 22-23.
... it was not until the Spanish-American War that the country as a whole became national-minded and interested in a national tradition. Not until then did Whitman, as was stated before, win the national recognition and respect that is his today. 128

Thus, the prophet in his lifetime was without proper recognition by his beloved average and his country. Why?

In the first place, we do not know how much the democratic bulk of Whitman's time knew of his message to them. Perhaps the critics, terrified by his "barbaric yawp," in turn frightened their readers away from his pages. His concepts, perhaps, were too general for their comprehension. Whitman spoke in large, abstract terms - "solidarity," "national will," "the unyielding principle of the average," "grand cosmic politics of ours," "American Soul," "transcendental Union," "perfect long-eve personality," "centripetal isolation of a human being." He generalized upon democracy in the manner of a philosopher. Then, too, Whitman is so generally enthusiastic. The people may not have been able to grasp his superlatives. Many and diverse are the things which are "the best," "the most important," "the highest," "the scheme's culmination," "stablest, solidest-based."

Did Whitman place his hopes of the people and democracy too high? Norman Foerester believes the essential of his prophecy have been belied by events. Even so, Whitman has high value.

128 The Liberation of American Literature, 286-7.
It is after all no great matter to predict the special assumptions and partial interests of the next age - the particular form of temporal provincialism that happens to be next in order. The true concern of the critic is not with any type of aberration, but with enduring values that have been gradually illuminated by the secular aberrations of mankind. 129

And Parrington says:

"Yet in a time of huge infidelities, in the dun breakdown and disintegration of all faiths, it is not wholly useless to recall the large proportions of Walt Whitman, his tenderness, his heartiness, his faith, his hope. 130"

Granville Hicks points out that although Whitman inveighed against the mechanization and industrialization of society, he gave no techniques for controlling these two forces.

"It is true that, though in time he realized the necessity for a second step, though he saw that beyond the acceptance and the understanding of the new forces must come a resolute attempt to control them, he did not give a clear account of how that second step was to be taken. He could only take his generation so far; but that was farther than any other writer had taken it. 131"

Are not brotherhood and sharing methods? Surely Whitman advocated these.

Whitman did not believe his answers to be final. His pronouncements, too, were in the flux of things. In the Foreward of the Primer, Whitman had said,

129 American Criticism, 222.
130 The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America, 85.
131 The Great Tradition, 28-29.
It's only a sketch-piece anyway, a few rough touches here and there, not rounding up the theme - rather showing what may be made of it. I often think the Leaves themselves are much the same sort of thing: a passage way to something rather than a thing in itself concluded: not the best that might be done but the best it is necessary to do for the present, to break the ground. 132

To us and for our time, one of Whitman's greatest values is his suggestiveness. His hints and vistas stimulate. Following him, we might more widely use our democratic traditions and symbols as a fortification against present malign internal forces.

Any national belief in democracy is the sum of the perceptions and feelings of the individuals. There must be a daily and individual awareness of the fundamentals of freedom inherent in our democratic institutions. This means, in a democracy, that the thinking of the mass of common men, "the divine average, is basic to survival.

A present need exists for a widespread hearing of Whitman's words and voice. His democratic IDEA should be more generally and deeply understood at this hour. America and the world, in this crisis, have need of "the fully-received, the fervid, the absolute faith."

"He cannot soon be left behind - he has gone so far before." 133

132 p. vii.

Bibliography

for

THE SOURCES OF DEMOCRACY:

A Study in the Meaning and Idea of Democracy in the Works of Walt Whitman.

(Books)


(Periodicals)


The thesis, "The Sources of Democracy: A Study in the Meaning and Idea of Democracy in the Works of Walt Whitman", written by Frances R. Paine, has been accepted by the Graduate School with reference to form, and by the readers whose names appear below, with reference to content. It is, therefore, accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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March 17, 1940

April 1, 1940