

Chapter I: Introduction

1.1 Walt Whitman and His works

Whitman was born on May 31, 1919 in West Hills, Long Island. He spent his childhood in alternation between the farm on Long Island and the streets of the neighboring city of Brooklyn. His dreaminess and restlessness, made it difficult for him to stick to any one place for a long time. He left school at the age of eleven and worked at a variety of jobs- as an office boy, as printer, as a rural school-teacher. Clearly he was unqualified for school-teaching not only because of the meagerness of his academic background but also because of his dreamy and speculative temperament. For a period of some three years, from the age of about seventeen to twenty, Whitman drifted from one rural school to another. He must soon have come to the realization that he had not yet found his destined work.

Soon the poet drifted into journalism, a profession which could make some demands on his natural abilities. As in school-teaching, he did not remain long in any one job. From the age of twenty to thirty-six Whitman worked on various newspapers in and out of Brooklyn, including The Long Islander, The New York Aurora and the Brooklyn Evening Star. At the age of twenty-seven, he became the editor of the Brooklyn Daily Eagle, a position of importance. The job did not last beyond two years, because of his politics. He was a democrat and so was the paper, but Whitman was a supporter of the Free Soil party which was opposed to slavery.

In accepting a job as the staff of a newspaper in New Orleans in 1848, Whitman made it possible for the first time to see the vast stretches and varied landscapes of America that he was later to celebrate with such vigour in his songs. Whitman had to be something of a vagabond traveling the open roads and crossing the rivers of America just to get to New Orleans. He traveled extensively and his

imagination was permanently liberated from the provincialism of the narrow Long Island world. His vision of America was enlarged to embrace its vast prairies, its treacherous and rapid rivers, its raw frontiers and its refined metropolises. What he did not see of the lands that lay west of the brown continental river, he was now prepared to conceive through the restless energy of his vigorous imagination. It was once thought that Whitman experienced some intense love affair or passionate friendship in New Orleans that became the seed that was to flower forth after seven years of gestation as *Leaves of Grass*. However now we know that such conjectures are baseless. If he has any love, it was America – the America of his dreams.

Upon his return to Brooklyn in June 1848, Whitman turned to journalism once again, but his political beliefs against the extension of slavery caused difficulty and he finally turned to his father's work as a carpenter. Just how extensively Whitman worked with his hands is open to question. But it seems clear enough that he did know carpentry intimately and that he was engaged in the building trade, much as his father before him.

Whitman worked for a time even as printer, he taught briefly, and also served as a reporter and editor for numerous New York periodicals. In 1855, Whitman anonymously published the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, which contained 12 untitled poems in free verse, including works later called "I Sing the Body Electric" and even later "Song of Myself." The personal tone of these poems startled many readers. In 1860, he published the third and greatly expanded edition of *Leaves of Grass*, which included more than 120 new poems, including "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking". During 1862-1864 he traveled to Virginia to care for his wounded brother and also help other soldiers wounded in battle. In 1865, he published *Drum-Taps*, a book of poetry based on his Civil War experiences, which was later

folded into *Leaves of Grass*. In 1873, he suffered a stroke that caused partial paralysis, and moved to Camden, New Jersey, to be closer to his brother; then he stayed in New Jersey and continued to refine *Leaves of Grass* and other works until his death in 1892, before he had published the final edition of *Leaves of Grass*, known as the "deathbed edition". Though he received little formal education, spent time studying great works of literature in the libraries of New York City. Though the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* was not well received by the public, it was praised by American poets and writers. In 1865, Whitman was fired from a government job with the Department of the Interior after he was discovered to be the author of *Leaves of Grass*.

The opening lines of "Song of Myself" announce Walt Whitman's American idealism and exuberant trust in the innate value of the individual. The very second line, "And what I assume you shall assume," creates an imperative relationship between reader and poet which is to last the 1336 lines of the poem. Whitman's bold poetry is written in nontraditional, free-flowing verse and celebrates all things and peoples. In a long preface he announced a new democratic literature, "Commensurate with a people," simple and unconquerable, written by a new kind of poet who was affectionate, brawny, and heroic and who would lead by the force of his magnetic personality. The sensual "Song of Myself", which appeared under another title in the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1855), is by far Walt Whitman's best-known poem. At the time of publication, the free verse and frank sexual content of the poem boldly distinguished Whitman's work from that of others in mid 19th century America. The poem, an American epic, is a fine example of Whitman's distinctive philosophy of nature and the individual, ideas based in part on the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau.

The 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* contained 12 untitled poems, written in long cadenced lines that resemble the unrhymed verse of the King James Version of the Bible. The (originally numbered, but title-less) poem we now read as "Song of Myself", was a vision of a symbolic "I" enraptured by the senses, vicariously embracing all people and places from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans. No other poem in the first edition has the power of this poem, although "The Sleepers," another visionary flight, symbolizing life, death, and rebirth, comes nearest.

The most significant poem in the 1856 (second) edition of *Song of Myself* is "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," in which the poet vicariously joins his readers and all past and future ferry passengers. In the third edition (1860), Whitman began to give his poetry a more allegorical structure. *Drum-Taps* (1865, later added to the 1867 edition of *Song of Myself*) reflects Whitman's deepening awareness of the significance of American Civil War (1861-1865) and the hope for reconciliation between North and South. Sequel to *Drum-Taps* (1866) contains "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," the great elegy for President Abraham Lincoln used modern communications and transportation as symbols for its transcendent vision of the union of the individual soul with the universal (or world) soul.

In his later years Whitman also wrote some prose of lasting value. The essays in "Democratic Vistas" (1871) are now considered a classic discussion of the theory of democracy and its possibilities. With the novelty and vitality of both their form and content, the writings of Walt Whitman reshaped poetry with unrhymed, unmetred and free verse in the United States in the 19th century, and were a tremendous influence on 20th century American poets. In the following quotation, a Senior Editor Joseph Gustaitis mentions the impact of Whitman's work on American literature, commenting on him, on the 100th anniversary of Whitman's death: "Whitman, who is

perhaps the most original, powerful poet the United States has produced, will still work the magic that captivated, overwhelmed, and shocked his readers over a century ago." Today, Whitman's poetry has been translated into every major language. It is widely recognized as a formative influence on the work of such American writers as Hart Crane, William Carlos Williams, and Wallace Stevens. Allen Ginsberg in particular was inspired by Whitman's bold treatment of sexuality.

When Whitman was writing his major poetry, with the exception of Edgar Allan Poe, American poetry was dominated by New Englander – William Cullen Bryant, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, John Green Leaf Whittier – who were practitioners of a British influenced verse that was knowing, genteel, and middle-class, with an occasional nod to American subject matter and colloquial language. The debut of Whitman, "... an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos, / Disorderly fleshy and sensual ... eating, drinking and breeding," as he described himself, was like the entrance of a mongrel at a purebred dog show. With its rambling, unrhymed, unmetered lines, its defiance of convention, its egotism, sexuality, and vitality, *Leaves of Grass* was the most brilliant and original poetry yet written in the New World, at once the fulfillment of American literary romanticism and the beginnings of American literary modernism. Whitman's romanticism is indeed unique: it is a true romanticism of common things, sights and people; it is the adventure of daring declarations of the common truths of ordinary experience; it is also in the most truly common language; it initiated not only an indelible romantic tendency in American poetry forever, it also started many other modernist trends like what we now call confessionalism, expressionism, imagism and the like. He declared, "I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world". All the appetites people possess- for adventure, nature, action, friendship, sex – he celebrated: "Copulation is

no more rank to me than death is. / I believe in the flesh and the appetites." Such frankness, not surprisingly, met with some hostility. *Leaves of Grass* did not sell and acquired an unsavory reputation. One who did recognize its worth was the eminent essayist and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson. Though his book was an ode to sensation, Whitman's own life was by no means spectacularly adventurous. His schooling ended when he was around 11, and he learned the printing trade, taught school on Long Island, and worked as a journalist and house builder. He became editor of the *Brooklyn Eagle* in 1846, lost the job over politics two years later, and for three months was an editor on a New Orleans newspaper.

The Civil War brought forth *Drum-Taps*, a book of war poems, and Lincoln's death inspired the great elegy "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" and the famous poem "O Captain! My Captain!" Whitman was too old to serve in the war, but his brother George volunteered. When George was wounded in 1862, Whitman journeyed south to visit him. He remained in Washington D.C., working first as a volunteer nurse in military hospitals, later as a government clerk. After suffering a stroke in 1873, he went to live with George in Camden.

By the time of his death, translations and articles had appeared in Germany, Denmark, Italy, France, and the Netherlands, and Whitman was well on his way to becoming the world poet he is today. Whitman's contribution to the development of free verse, his incantatory rhetoric, his lust for life, his vision of democracy, his prophetic voice—all continued to resonate, and poets like Ezra Pound, Hart Crane, William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, and Allen Ginsberg built upon the framework he constructed. Though his style may slip in and out of fashion, the free spirited, somewhat subversive, bard who sang the "Song of the Open Road" seems sure to retain a universal appeal. As Whitman once explained "Leaves of Grass" to an

uncomprehending comrade, It makes (tries to make) every fellow see himself, & see that he has got to work out his salvation himself-has got to pull the oars & hold the plough, or swing the axe himself-& that the real blessings of life are not the fictions generally supposed, but are real, & are mostly within reach of all.

Whitman is destined to become a legend in American history. Like one of his heroes, George Washington, the poet of democracy has assumed some of the qualities of myth. He articulated and gave an enduring life in the imagination to the American dream of a continent where the people should escape from the injustices of the past and establish new and better life in which everyone would share. He best defined for the imagination the democratic faith which was and is the only binding national force in the United States. He established an ideal for international democracy which has proved to be as prophetic of danger as it is shrewd and noble in its ideas. Next, speaking for hearty physical man, workers, lovers, eaters, and drinkers, he burst through the inhibitions of the genteel age and put sex back into literature as a partner with spirit. Also, he broke with the timidities of the intellectuals of the Eastern seaboard, who were still colonial and imitative of England in their culture, and tried to speak for a new and still inarticulate America. Furthermore, he is the pivot in American history on which we swing from the sectional and the provincial to national and continental in literature. And he did what only really great writers have done, he made a great style to express himself and his country in poetry—although, unfortunately, he by no means always used it.

It is found that he believed with all his strength that a fresh culture must be made for democracy, based, of course, upon the past, but rich and broad and simple and hearty enough to civilize the American breed. This culture was already present, but inarticulate except for its crudest wants, and inarticulate particularly in its loves,

its faiths, and its dreams. He determined to learn how to speak for it, and painfully, crudely set to work, with too little taste to know when, or even how, he failed, and too great a passion to be discouraged by what, for years, was an almost complete unsuccessful with the general reader. Yet he did make himself the mouthpiece of a new language about, if not for, the common man, finding subject matter new to literature in the full-blooded, largely illiterate, yet intensely ambitious masses of America.

Whitman became able to break the speed of traditional and superstitious society of mid-nineteenth century America. Everything or every person had the belief upon the puritan type of culture. People used to believe upon the culture shaped by white supremacy, the so-called higher class people, and they had great faith on religious doctrine. Whatever norms were spread by the church and mythical stories had great importance in the society. In such period, Walt Whitman showed his bravery by writing *Leaves of Grass*. He pinched to the continuous tradition giving high-level priority to the suppressed group of people. He gave more priority to the earthly matters but before that time, people were made to believe upon heavenly affairs by church and biblical doctrines.

Because of the publication of "Song of Myself", America got changed its culture and social values. Whitman democratized the soil of America. He shouted against white supremacy, blind religious faith, superstitious culture etc. He became the eye of blind people, ear of the deaf and words of the dumb. He behaved equally between rich and poor, black and white, men and women child and adult, priest and prostitute etc. He used his pen for the sake of marginalized groups. He wrote the words of unwritten subjects. He did not hesitate to deal with trivial matters. He

prepared this poem with democratic norms and values. Because of his such quality of writing he is well known as the bard of Democracy.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Whitman sings for the orphans, he sings for the prisoners, but he hesitates to sing for the Lord, God, he finds divinity in himself or in other people. He takes minor people, minor objects like leaves of grass and made them the subject matter of his poetry. These logically lead us to the questions; why does he sing for common people? Why doesn't he sing for God? Why does he celebrate for materialism ignoring magical power and ethos of spiritualism?

1.3 Hypothesis

Whitman is a true democrat, he believes in material world instead of spiritual world. He behaves equally to all people without ranking as superior and inferior. Furthermore, he gives more priority to this visible world.

1.4 Significance of Study

This research is an inquiry into Walt Whitman; one of the representative poets of America considered as the Bard of Democracy. Various researches have been done on the life and works of Walt Whitman but the celebration of materialism is not considered as the basic aspect. This research is forwarded from new historicism point of view which supports how Whitman influenced the American society specially for the growth of democracy, besides, he has been influenced by the then existing social and religious trends. This study definitely helps to unfold new dimension of his writing and personality.

1.5 Methodology

The dissertation on Whitman's "Song of Myself" will be studied from new historicist perspective developed by Stephen J. Greenblatt, Michael Foucault and Raymond Williams. Primary focus of the study will be on the textual analysis of the "Song of Myself". This study will be accomplished along the library consultations, literary commentaries, journals and internet source. Besides these, the instruction and suggestions from the faculty of English Department will be taken as guiding source.

1.6 Delimitation

Due to the limitations of this thesis, I focus on Whitman's celebration of materiality in his masterpiece "Song of Myself" from new historical perspective though other aspects also are dealt if they contribute to my study. It will not even discuss the figurative and stylistic aspects of the text either.

1.7 Review of Literature

Since the first publication of *Leaves of Grass*, many critics have commented Whitman as a mystic, others a pantheist, still others an atheist etc. Some of them prefer to call him to be the Bard of Democracy. Others have seen him as the spokesperson of America, believing that he had immensely contributed in shaping the American mind. Many have spoken of him as a great romantic for his compassion to nature and the common man. The following are the brief reviews of previous studies.

Relating with Vedantic mysticism, Yugeswor Prasad Verma advocates:

Whitman's mysticism is Vedantic in the sense that the expansive and dynamic self, realizing it's all inclusive nature after a mystical vision embraces the world and identifies with it. Thus it negates the distinction, dualism, between

the self and not-self. 'Leaves of Grass' contains an inverted mystical experience. (155-156)

For Ezra Pound, Whitman is a representative poet of America. He praises, "He is America. His crudity is an exceeding great stench, but it is America. He is the hollow place in the rock that echoes with his time." (Pearce 8)

Various critics have viewed his treatment of sex in his poetry differently. Mostly, critics opposed his frank sexuality but Van Wyck Brooks opines, "Whitman's attitude toward sex was part of a general point of view that was deeply concerned with the continuance and perfection of the species, the feeling of "cosmic continuity" that was much in the air of the time and largely inspired the sociology of Lester F. Ward." (188)

The estimate of Whitman by D.H. Lawrence is, "Whitman was the first to break the mental allegiance. He was the first to smash the old moral conception, that the soul of man is something "superior" and above the flesh." (Pearce 18)

Commenting on Leaves of Grass Whitman himself said,

Leaves of Grass ... has mainly been ... an attempt ... to put a person a human being (myself in the later half of the nineteenth century in America) freely, fully and truly on record. I could not find any similar personal record in current literature that satisfied me. (Spiller 477)

Whitman's personal opinion in the recent literature disillusioned critics. Their inability to find a structure in "song of myself" has resulted from a failure to find a center of relevancy, an informing idea to which incoherent working parts may be justified. Finally, James E. Miller, jr. succeeded to bring out a structure – a dramatic structure of the poem. In the first article of 'A Critical Guide to Leaves of Grass' he commented "Song of Myself" is the dramatic representation of a mystical experience.

The term "dramatic representation" indicates an important distinction, "the poem is not necessarily a transcript of an actual mystical experience but rather a work of art in which such an experience conceived in the imagination represented dramatically, with the author assuming the main role." (6-7)

In "Leaves of Grass and the American Culture" Denis Donoghue highlights the way of writing of Whitman and states:

I can well believe that he remains highly vital for many people. The poems in which he collects large numbers of concrete things, particularly things each of which is poetic in itself or as part of the collection, have a validity which, for many people, must be enough and must seem to them all opulence and élan.(348)

Whitman published *Leaves of Grass* in 1855. It was edited many times with some other parts or poems in accordance of his improvement, maturity and skills in writing. Whitman was not perfect in his writing in the year of publication of "Leaves of Grass", 1855. Only after about 10 years, he became able to bring great development in his writing quality. It can be proved with the criticism of Floyd Stovall in "Main Drifts in Whitman's Poetry". He states:

It is a mistake to suppose, as some do, that Whitman had reached his full stature as a poet in 1855. On the contrary, he was at that time, notwithstanding his thirty-six years, relatively immature. His experiences during the next decade developed his character and his poetic faculties enormously."(3)

Whitman is characterized from different perspective, somewhere he is highly admired and somewhere taken as a unique creature who went against the social trends. Mark Doty writes: "He is a splendid animal, but little more. Obviously, then, Whitman had not yet given full expression to his personality."(8)

The style of writing in Whitman is quite different. The trend of writing poem is quite different from other writers. Stating these views, Scullery Bradley writes:

Yet as a rule these writers have confined themselves either to generalizations or to a study of Whitman's obvious use of logical balance and parallelism. No explanation of the rhythmical regularity in his verse, except that accompanied by logical recurrence, has been attempted. (438)

Whitman exposed different style in his writing did not care to rhyme, meter, and length of the lines. He differed from others and broke the traditional style of writing.

To conclude, though other critics have judged Whitman from their own perspective, but here, it is dealt with his democratic practices in his poem "Song of Myself". He focuses on every matter, equality in every subject, which is a great blow to the traditional & orthodox society. He has written for the sake of suppressed and marginalized group. He helped to change the concept of American people from puritan to modern and democratic minded.

Chapter II: Theoretical Modality

2.1 New Historicism

Victor Shea has pointed out that Wesley Morris used the term 'New Historicism' in 1972 'to designate a mode of literary criticism derived from German historicists such as Leopold von Ranke and Wilhelm Dilthey, and American historians such as Vernon L. Parrington and Van Wyck Brooks'. Kiernan Ryan has suggested that the term is foreshadowed even earlier, in the title of Roy Harvey Pearce's 1969 book, *historicism Once More*, but he concedes that 'it is Stephen J. Greenblatt who gets the credit for slipping the term into circulation in its current sense in his Introduction to "The Forms of Power and the Power of Forms in the Renaissance", a special issue of *Genre* devoted to what was already billed as a fresh departure in critical practice'.

Nowadays the term is restricted to this later usage stemming from Greenblatt, and describing groupings of critics and theorists who have rejected the synchronic approaches to Culture and literature associated with Structuralism who have attempted to provide more adequate answers to various problems associated with the tensions between aesthetic, cultural, and historical approaches to the study of a range of different sorts of text. Most of those known as New Historicists (some of whom have gone on record with their preference for the term 'cultural poetics') are from North America, while cultural materialism is by and large a British phenomenon. On occasions, however, New Historicism is used as an umbrella term to include members of both groupings. The writing of Michel Foucault and Raymond Williams constitute a major influence on the New Historicists, who have succeeded in defining (or suggesting) new objects of historical study, with a particular emphasis upon the way

in which causal influences are mediated through discursive practices. Stephen J. Greenblatt is certainly a key figure in the rise of the New Historicism, and in his collection of essays *Learning to Curse* (1990) he admits that for him the term describes not so much a set of beliefs as 'a trajectory that led from American literary formalism through the political and theoretical ferment of the 1970s to a fascination with what one of the best new historicist critics [Louis A. Montrose] calls "the historicity of text and the textuality of history" '(1990,3). Elsewhere he describes the New Historicism as a practice rather than a doctrine (1990, 146). Greenblatt sees the New Historicism's creation of 'an intensified willingness to read all of the textual traces of the past with the attention traditionally conferred only on literary texts' (1990, 14) to be central to its value. Thus in a study of a design by Durer for a monument to commemorate the defeat of peasants involved in protest and rebellion, Greenblatt notes that intention, genre and historical situation all have to be taken into account, as all are social and Ideological and must be involved in any 'reading' of the design. He continues:

The production and consumption of such works are not unitary to begin with; they always involve a multiplicity of interests, however well organized, for the crucial reason that art is social and hence presumes more than one consciousness. And in response to the art of the past we inevitably register, whether we wish to or not the shifts in value and interest that are produced in the struggles of social and political life. (112)

The New Historicist, in other words, has as much to say about the reading of texts as about their composition.

For those who like negative definitions, Greenblatt cites three definitions of the word 'historicism' from *The American Heritage Dictionary*, all of which he sees to be counter to the practice of New Historicists:

1. The belief that processes are at work in history that man can do little to alter.
2. The theory that the historian must avoid all value judgments in his study of past periods or former cultures.
3. Veneration of the past or of tradition. (164)

Although Greenblatt and other New Historicists pay tribute to the work of various poststructuralists, the anti-formalist element in their work clearly distances them from important aspects of post-structuralism.

The term 'historicist' is sometimes used in a pejorative sense which is unconnected with New Historicism. Historicist in this sense implies the view that human, social or cultural characteristics are determined in an absolute sense by historical situation; historicism in this sense is thus a form of reductionism as the human, the social and the cultural are collapsed back into the historical. Thus the title of an essay by Louis Althusser "Marxism is not a historicism", rests on such a definition of historicism.

New historicists, in contrast, don't believe we have clear access to any but the most basic facts of history. We can know, for example, that George Washington was the first American president and that Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo. But our understanding of what such facts mean, of how they fit within the complex web of competing ideologies and conflicting social, political and cultural agendas of the time and place in which they occurred is, for new historicists, strictly a matter of interpretation, not fact. Even when traditional historians believe they are sticking to

the facts, the way they contextualize those facts determines what story those facts will tell. From this perspective, there is no such thing as a presentation of facts; there is only interpretation. Furthermore, new historicists argue that reliable interpretations are, for a number of reasons, difficult to produce.

The first and most important reason for this difficulty, new historicists believe, is the impossibility of objective analysis. Like all human beings, historians live in a particular time and place, and their views of both current and past events are influenced in innumerable conscious and unconscious ways by their own experience within their own culture. Historians may believe they're being objective, but their own views of what is right and wrong, what is civilized and uncivilized, what is important and unimportant and the like, will strongly influence the ways in which they interpret events. For example, the traditional view that history is progressive is based on the belief, held in the past by many Anglo-European historians, that the so-called "primitive" cultures of native people are less evolved than, and therefore inferior to, the so-called "civilized" Anglo-European cultures. As a result, ancient cultures with highly developed art form, ethical codes, and spiritual philosophies, such as the tribal cultures of Native Americans and Africans, were often misrepresented as lawless, superstitious, and savage.

Another reason for the difficulty in producing reliable interpretations of history is its complexity. For New Historicists, history cannot be understood simply as a linear progression of events. At any given point in history, any given culture may be progressing in some areas and regressing in others. And any two historians may disagree about what constitutes progress and what doesn't, for these terms are matters of definition. That is, history isn't an orderly parade into a continually improving future, as many traditional historians have believed. It's more like an improvised

dance consisting of an infinite variety of steps, following any new route at any given moment, and having no particular goal or destination. Individuals and groups of people may have goals, but human history does not.

Similarly, while events certainly have causes, new historicists argue that those causes are usually multiple, complex, and difficult to analyze. One cannot or is not a one-way street from cause to effect. Any given event—whether it is a political election or a children's cartoon show— is a product of its culture, but it also affects that culture in return. In other words, all events— including everything from the creation of an art work, to a televised murder trial, to the persistence of or change in the condition of the poor— are shaped by and shape the culture in which they emerge.

In a similar manner, our subjectivity, or selfhood, is shaped by and shapes the culture into which we were born. For most new historicists, our individual identity is not merely a product of society. Neither is it merely a product of our own individual will and desire. Instead, individual identity and its cultural milieu inhabit, reflect, and define each other. Their relationship is mutually constitutive (they create each other) and dynamically unstable. Thus, the old argument between determinism and free will can't be settled because it rests on the wrong question: "Is human identity socially determined or are human beings free agents?" For new historicism, this question cannot be answered because it involves a choice between two entities that are not wholly separate. Rather, the proper question is, "what are the processes by which individual identity and social formations— such as political, educational, legal, and religions and ideologies— create, promote, or change each other?" For every society constraints individual tenuously enables individuals to think and act. Our subjectivity, then, is a lifelong process of negotiating our way, consciously and unconsciously,

among the constraints and freedoms offered, at any given moment in time, by the society in which we live.

Thus, according to new historicists, power does not emanate only from the top of the political and socio-economic structure. According to French philosopher Michael Foucault, whose ideas have strongly influenced the development of new historicism, power circulates in all directions, to and from all social levels, at all times. And the vehicle by which power circulates is a never-ending proliferation of exchange: (1) the exchange of material goods through such practices as buying and selling, bartering, gambling, taxation, charity, and various forms of theft; (2) the exchange of people through such institutions as marriage, adoption, kidnapping, and slavery; and (3) the exchange of ideas through the various discourse a culture produces.

2.2 A Brief Study of Literary and Non-literary Text

The term 'new historicism' was coined by the American Critic Stephen J. Greenblatt whose book *Renaissance Self Fashioning: from more to Shakespeare* (1980) is usually regarded as its beginning. However, similar tendencies can be identified in work by various critics published during the 1970s; a good example being J.W. Lever's *The Tragedy of State: A study of Jacobean Drama* (1971). This brief and epoch-making book challenged conservative critical views about Jacobean theatre and linked the plays much more closely with the political events of their era than previous critics had done.

A simple definition of the new historicism is that it is a method based on the parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts, usually of the same historical period. That is to say, new historicism refuses to 'privilege' the literary text; instead of a

literary foreground and a historical background it envisages and practices a mode of study in which literary and non-literary texts are given equal weight. This equal weighting is suggested in the definition of new historicism offered by the American critic Louis Montrose: he defines it as a combined interest in 'the textuality of history, the historicity of texts'. It involves an intensified willingness to read all of the textual traces of the past with the attention traditionally conferred only on literary texts. So, new historicism embodies a paradox; it is an approach to literature in which there is no privileging of the literary text.

Typically, a new historical essay will place the literary text within the frame of a non-literary text. Thus Greenblatt's main innovation, from the view point of literary study, was to juxtapose the plays of the Renaissance period with 'the horrifying colonialist policies pursued by all the major European powers of the era'. He draws attention to the marginalization and dehumanizing of suppressed others' usually by starting an essay with an analysis of a contemporary historical document which overlaps in some way with the subject matter of the text. Greenblatt himself refers to the appropriate historical document as the 'anecdote' and the typical new historicist essay omits the customary academic preliminaries about previously published interpretations of the play in question, and begins with a powerful and dramatic anecdote, as signaled, for instance, by Louis Montrose, in the first sentence of the essay: I would like to recount an Elizabethan dream-not Shakespeare's 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' but one dreamt by Simon Forman on 23 January 1597'. These dramatic openings often cite date and place and have all the force of the documentary, eyewitness account, strongly evoking the quality of lived experience rather than history. Since these historical documents are not subordinated as contexts, but are analyzed in their own right, we should perhaps call them 'co-texts' rather than

'contexts'. The text and co-text used will be seen as expression of the same historical moment and interpreted accordingly.

New historicism involves the parallel study of literary and non-literary texts, the word 'parallel' encapsulates the essential difference between this and earlier approaches to literature which had made some of historical data. These earlier approaches made a hierarchical separation between the literary text, which was the object of value, the jewel, as it were, and the historical background which was merely the setting and by definition of lesser worth.

Comparing new historicism and Old historicism Peter Barry Writes:

The practice of giving 'equal weighting' to literary and non-literary material is the first and major difference between the 'new' and the 'old historicism. As representative of the old historicism we could cite E.M.W. Tillyard's. The Elizabethan World Picture (1943) and Shakespeare History plays (1994), books against which new historicism frequently defines itself. These books described the set of conservative mental attitudes (to society, to the deity, to the created universe, etc.) which Tillyard saw as typifying the Elizabethan outlook and reflected in Shakespeare's plays. The traditional approach to Shakespeare (through the 1970s) was characterized by the combination of this historical frame work, with the practice of close reading, and the analysis of patterns of imagery. (174)

We can find difference between new and old historicism, new historicism is indeed a historicist rather than a historical movement. That is, it is interested in history as represented and recorded in written documents, in history-as-text. Historical events as such, it would argue, are irrecoverably lost. This emphasis bears the influence of the long familiar view in literary studies that the actual thoughts, or

feelings, or intentions of a writer can never be recovered or reconstructed, so that the real living individual is now entirely superseded by the literary text which has come down to us. As it were, the word of the past replaces the world of the past. Since, for the new historicist, the events and attitudes of the past now exist solely as writing, it makes sense to subject that writing to the kind of close analysis for merely reserved for literary texts.

Incorporated into this preference for the textual record of the past is the influence of deconstruction. New historicism accepts Derrida's view that there is nothing outside the text, in the special sense that everything about the past is only available to us in textual form: it is thrice processed, first through the ideology, or outlook, or discursive practices of its own time, then through those of ours, and finally through the distorting web of language itself. Whatever is represented in a text is thereby remade. New historicist essays always themselves constitute another remaking, another permutation of the past, as the play or poem under discussion is juxtaposed with a chosen document, so that a new entity is formed. In this sense the objection that the documents selected may not really be 'relevant' to the play is disarmed, for the aim is not to represent the past as it really was, but to present a new reality by re-situating it.

2.3 Concept of New and Traditional Historians

History, in the traditional way, would read an account of a Revolutionary War battle written by an American historian in 1944 and ask, if we asked anything at all, "Is this account accurate?" or what does this battle tell us about the 'spirit of the age' in which it was fought?" In contrast, a new historicist would read the same account of that battle and ask, "What does this account tell us about the political agendas and

ideological conflicts of the culture that produced and read the account in 1944?” New historical interest in the battle itself would produce such questions as, “At the time in which it was fought, how was this battle represented (in newspapers, magazines, tracts, government documents, stories, speeches, drawing, and photographs) by the American colonies or by Britain (or by European countries), and what do these representations tell us about how the American Revolution shaped and was shaped by the cultures that represented it?”

The questions asked by traditional historians and by new historicists are quite different, and that’s because these two approaches to history are based on very different views of what history is and how we can know it. Traditional historians ask, “What happened?” and “what does the event tell us about history?” In contrast, new historicists ask, “How has the event been interpreted?” and “What do the interpretations tell us about the interpreters?” For most traditional historians, history is a series of events that have a linear, causal relationship: event A caused event B: event B caused event C: and so on. Furthermore, they believe we are perfectly capable, through objective analysis, of uncovering the facts about historical events, and those facts can sometimes reveal the spirit of the age, that is, the world view held by the culture to which those facts refer. Indeed, some of the most popular traditional historical accounts have offered a key concept that would explain the world view of a given historical population, such as the Renaissance notion of the Great Chain of Being—the cosmic hierarchy of creation, with God at the top of the ladder, human beings at the middle, and the lowliest creatures at the bottom—which has been used to argue that the guiding spirit of Elizabethan culture was a belief in the importance of order in all domains of human life. We can see this aspect of traditional approaches that study past events in terms of the spirit of an age, such as the Age of Reason or the

Age of Enlightenment, and we can see it in literary classes that study literary works in terms of historical periods, such as the Neoclassical, Romantic, or Modernist periods. Finally, traditional historians generally believe that history is 'progressive' that the human species is improving over the course of time advancing in its moral, cultural, and technological accomplishments.

Lois Tyson, in his book *Critical Theory Today*, clarifies what discourse is and states:

A discourse is a social language created by particular cultural conditions at a particular time and place, and it expresses a particular way of understanding human experience. For example, you may be familiar with the discourse of white supremacy, the discourse of modern science, discourse of liberal humanism, the discourse of ecological awareness, the discourse of Christian fundamentalism, and the like. (281)

Although the word discourse has roughly the same meaning as the word ideology, and the two terms are often used interchangeably, the word discourse draws attention to the role of language as the vehicle of ideology. From a new historical perspective, no discourse, by itself, can adequately explain the complex cultural dynamics of social power. For there is no monolithic (single, unified, universal) spirit of an age, and there is no adequate totalizing explanation of history. There is instead, a dynamic, unstable interplay among discourses: they are always in a state of flux, overlapping and competing with one another in any number of ways at any given point in time. Furthermore, no discourse is permanent. Discourses wield power for those in charge, but they also stimulate opposition to that power. This is one reason why new historicists believe that the relationship between individual identity and society is mutually constitutive: On the whole, human beings are never merely

victims of an oppressive society, for they can find various ways to oppose authority in their personal and public lives.

Just as definitions, according to Michel Foucault, of social and anti-social behavior promote the power of certain individuals and groups, so do particular versions of historical events. Certainly, the whitewashing of General Custer's now-infamous military campaigns against Native Americans served the desire of the white American power structure of his day to obliterate Native American peoples so that the government could seize their lands. And that same whitewashing continued to serve the white American power structure for many a decade beyond Custer's time, for even those who had knowledge of Custer's misdeeds deemed it unwise to air America's dirty historical laundry, even in front of Americans. Analogously, had the Nazis won World War II. We would all be reading a very different account of the war, and of the genocide of millions of Jews, than the accounts we read in American history books today. Thus, new historicism views historical accounts as narratives, as stories, that are inevitably biased according to the point of view, conscious or unconscious, of those who write them. The more unaware historians are of their biases—that is, the more objective they think they are—the more those biases are able to control their narratives.

So far, we have seen new historicism's claims about what historical analysis cannot do. Historical analysis cannot be objective, cannot adequately demonstrate that a particular spirit of the times or world view accounts for the complexities of any given culture, and cannot adequately demonstrate that history is linear, causal, or progressive. We cannot understand a historical event, object, or person in isolation from the web of discourses in which it was represented because we cannot understand it in isolation from the meanings it carried at that time. The more we isolate it, the

more we will tend to view it through the meanings of our own time and place and, perhaps, our own desire to believe that the human race is improving with the passage of time.

Given these limitations, what can historical analysis accomplish? What approaches to historical understanding can be developed, and, most important for our purposes, What kinds of analysis can new historical literary critics attempt? A good deal of new historical practice incorporates deconstructive insights about human language and experience. For example, we might say that new historicism deconstructs the traditional opposition between history and literature. For new historicism considers history a text that can be interpreted the same way literary critics interpret literary texts, and conversely, it considers literary texts cultural artifacts that can tell us something about the interplay of discourse, the web of social meaning, operating in the time and place in which those texts were written. Let's take a closer look at each of these claims by discussing, first, the key elements of new historical practice and, then, the implication of new historicism for literary criticism.

In other words, new historicists consider both primary and secondary sources of historical information forms of narrative. Both tell some kind of story, and therefore those stories can be analyzed using the tools of literary criticism. Indeed, we might say that in bringing to the fore-ground the suppressed historical narratives of marginalized groups-such as woman, people of color, the poor, the working class, gay men and lesbians, prisoners, the inhabitants of mental institutions, and so on- new historicism has deconstructed the white, male, Anglo-European historical narrative to reveal its disturbing, hidden sub-text: the experiences of those peoples it has oppressed in order to maintain the dominance that allowed it to control what most Americans know about history.

In fact, a focus on the historical narratives of marginalized peoples has been such an important feature of new historicism that some theorists have asked how new historicists can accept narratives from oppressed peoples any more readily than they have accepted narratives from the patriarchal Anglo-European power structure. One answer to this question is that a plurality of voices, including an equal representation of historical narratives from all groups, helps insure that a master narrative—a narrative told from a single cultural point in time, we still do not have an equal representation of historical narratives from all groups. And even as the historical narratives of some groups are becoming more and more numerous, such as those of women and people of color, those narratives generally do not receive the same kind of attention as patriarchal Anglo-European narratives do in the classroom, where most of us learn about history. Therefore, new historicism tries to promote the development of and gain attention for the histories of marginalized peoples.

In addition to its focus on marginalized historical narratives, new historical analysis involves what is called thick description, a term borrowed from anthropology. Thick description attempts, through close, detailed examination of a given cultural production—such as birthing practices, ritual ceremonies, games, penal codes, works of art, copyright laws, and the like to discover the meanings that particular cultural production listed above illustrate, thick description focuses on the personal side of history—the history of the family dynamics, of leisure activities, of sexual practices, of childrearing customs—as much as or more than on such traditional historical topics as military campaigns and the passage of laws. Indeed, because traditional historicism tended to ignore or marginalize private life as subjective and irrelevant, new historicism tries to compensate for this omission by bringing issues concerned with private life into the foreground of historical enquiry.

Finally, new historicism claims that historical analysis is unavoidably subjective is not an attempt to legitimize a self indulgent, "anything goes" attitude toward the writing of history. Rather, the inevitability of personal bias makes it imperative that new historicists be as aware of and as forth right as possible about their own psychological and ideological positions relative to the material they analyze so that their readers can have some idea of the human "lens" through which they are viewing the historical issues at hand. This practice is called self positioning.

Chapter III: Celebration of Materiality in Whitman's "Song of Myself"

Walt Whitman, whose ears were attuned to the time and whose eyes were visualizing the fully democratic America, felt the interest of the time and reflected the need of the people democratically in the free verse in his poem "Song of Myself". He helped to enter democratic air in the American through his poems, he took the sidelined aspects of the society and extolled them highly which concretized the dream of fully democratic America. If we ponder in any of his poems, we get the essence of democracy, somewhere appeal and somewhere declaration. He liberalized himself in his form and content and wrote freely with democratic themes.

3.1 Whitman's Celebration of Materiality

"Song of Myself", a large volume of short poems, truly comprises all of Whitman's beliefs and principles, the norms and values of his society and his view towards materialism. It is doubtless that the contemporary society was a traditional society, people had extreme faith on God, on superpower but he took a different visionary path and wrote something awkward for the people of the time, which in turn became the true spirit of democratic America. His rough verse, liberal subject matter, astoundingly minor subjects shocked the critics and different critics criticized him at the time but when they felt the change in time, they appreciated Whitman's style of writing in his poetry.

Ezra Pound, the most popular poet of 20th century praises Whitman and states:

"He is America. His crudity is an exceeding great stench, but it is America. He is the hollow place in the rock that echoes with his time. He does "chant the

crucial stage" and he is the "voice triumphant." He is disgusting. He is an exceedingly nauseating pill, but he accomplishes his mission.(8)

Entirely free from the renaissance humanist ideal of the complete man or from the Greek idealism, he is content to be what he is, and he is his time and his people. He is a genius because he has vision of what he is and of his function. He knows that he is a beginning and not a classically finished work.

Moreover, Nick Aaron Ford states, "For him man-made standards are oppressive". He believes that nature is perfect and man could be so too if he were similarly free. In "Song of Myself" he opines, "I permit to speak at every Hazard, nature without check with original energy." Again he expresses his love of uninhibited freedom in the following manner: "I wear my hat as I please indoors or out. Why should I pray? Why should I venerate and be ceremonious?"

Whitman stands himself as a hard-core materialist in his creations and celebrates materialism highly. For him, there is spirit in matter, so it is holy in every atom he senses the divine power. He does not take any illusory or unseen force as divine or supreme but he seems confident of his divinity, of the other people's divinity. He totally avoids biased perspective, for him a priest and a prostitute both are holy and pious. He sings of not only the great people but also of minor people like orphans, conductor, prisoners, drug addict etc.

"I am the poet of the body and I am the poet of the soul,
The pleasures of heaven are with me and the pains of hell are with me,
The first I graft and increase upon myself,...
I am the poet of the woman the same as the man." (65)

His interest and inclination towards materialism is the byproduct of his democratic nature as he loves everything, and everybody. He confesses, he not only

likes soul but also he likes the body too. This is his radical aspect, in his time people used to eulogize and extol soul relegating the body at backside. But Whitman took them equally and declared himself a poet of both soul and body.

He, as a human being possesses mixed feelings and attitudes: the heavenly joy and the hellish sorrow. Quite surprising to his time he respects women equally as men and expresses he is the poet of the women too. Here he exhibits his universal love and unprejudiced attitude. The contemporary society, where Whitman lived was a patriarchal male dominated society, but he does not have such a biased attitude he labels women as equal to the men and sings for them also. Moreover, he does not like artificiality and showy manner, if someone has loving attitude towards other, if someone respects other's existence then it is a prayer for him. "I wear my hat as I please indoors or out. Why should I pray? Why should I venerate and be ceremonious?" (64). He hates officious and ceremonious sort of behavior, no one can get divinity easily in the temple or praying the god. To make god happy one need to respect other's existence, other's dignity. Here, we can feel his total inclination towards the matter, he believes what he can see or perceive and he respects their existence. Every creature of this world exhibit divine power through their existence so for Whitman nothing is less and weak. "I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the Journey-work of stars. And the pismire is equally perfect and a grain of sand, and the egg of Wren" (72). A grain of sand, leaf of grass, and everything of this world are powerful and exhibit divine energy. No one can devolve their power for him since he believes the divine spirit dwells in their existence.

He is fond of the armpit aroma instead of the scent from the temple and he finds beauty in the object which is considered worthless, this is all due to his materialistic perspective. Spiritualism, for him is not something divine, unseen force

but the things around him, but the people nearby him. He loves people no matter who they are by profession, no matter what they do; he never sings for the superpower, for the unseen God, it is all because of his materialistic perspective and attitude which see equality amidst people and the objects.

His privileging of materialism ignoring the spiritual aspect helped America develop a lot, people began to respect each other, value each other, see divinity in each other. The underlying aspect of Whitman's poetry is celebration of the things that we have, and the appeal for freedom which ultimately let America become the first and superb democratic country.

However the roughness and sensuality of "Song of Myself" offended and frightened many of Whitman's early readers. It has the power to surprise and even shock, as when Whitman opines in section 24, "The Scent of these arm-pits aroma finer than Prayer" words that still dismay some reader. Sexuality is the common denominator of human beings, and Whitman wants to strip away pretense (represented by clothing) to reveal the naked body, which is also the naked soul, for soul and body are one: "Behold," he says in starting from Pavonoke, "the body includes and is ... the soul."

Whitman begins "Song of Myself" in a tone of boastful authority that seems to point a finger and turn the listeners complacent attention directly toward, the poet and states: "I celebrate myself and sing myself, And what I assume you shall assume, for every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you." (49)

Whitman is once again asserting the notion of self and its identification with all selves, as well as emphasizing his belief in the interrelationship of all beings and matter. Whitman's notion of life and death does not follow the more orthodox religions in which a conscious and purely spiritual existence is lived after a mortal life

span. We have seen that spirit and matter are identical for Whitman, death for him does not represent any break or halting in the flow of life. If matter goes on, then life and the spirit go on. Whitman is "the poet of wickedness also" but what is wicked to the world is not evil to him. He had vowed to "translate into new tongue" and this he does with the traditional representations of evil. "Through me forbidden voices, Voices of sexes and lusts, voices veil's and I remove the evil, voices indecent by me clarified and transfigured." (22)

Whitman reaffirms his belief in the essential integrity and goodness of all acts, sensations and responses. The body is not to be denied, for it is equal to identifiable with the spirit: "I do not press my finger across my mouth . . . , I believe in the flesh and the appetites" (23).

Whitman implies that the greatness and capacity of "self" must be taken on faith, for trivialities are swallowed up in its vastness. He maintains a supreme confidence in the orderly relationship of spirit, matter and man.

Furthermore, in Whitman's eyes people create and invent things because it is our nature to do so. What we do is not artificial, but natural, and therefore every bit is as divine as the rivers, rocks or tree. People are driven to creation, whether it be to build a skyscraper, create a painting or a poem, or to bring a child into the world poems, novels, buildings are as much our legacy as are our children. There is no need to talk of beginning or end because there is no such thing. The world is in a perpetual, cyclical state of renewal.

Because in Whitman's eyes all humanity is part of the natural world, his is truly the poetry of inclusion. Robert C. Sickels estimates, "His is truly the poetry of inclusion. His poetry does not merely sing the song of beautiful, for not everything in

the natural world is attractive; because prostitution and vice exist, they must be considered an inherent condition of humanity." (20)

Whitman is, of course, an ardent humanist who respects all human beings. Daine Kepner writes, "My starting point for sorting out Whitman's theory of nature in "Song of Myself" is his announcement about the importance of materialism to his view of reality, I accept reality and dare not question it materialism first and last imbuing." (483)

This statement certainly seems to imply that Whitman considers himself a materialist. Moreover, the vocabulary of materialism runs through his poem. He speaks of matter and its properties of atoms of energy and electricity and of the immutable laws of nature. His overwhelming emphasis on particular objects and his obvious respect for scientific inquiry are consistent with a materialist outlook.

In *Walt Whitman Poet of Science*, Joseph Beavor has shown that Whitman's interest in science was not casual: that his language of science and nature is always extraordinarily precise and not just mythical metaphor. Whitman was according to Beavor, "the first (American) to embody modern scientific concepts in his work in a poetic manner." (180)

All science has one aim, namely, to find a theory of nature. We have theories of races and functions, but scarcely yet a remote approach to an idea of creation. We are now so far from the road to the truth that religious teachers' dispute and hate each other, and speculative men are as timid, unsound and frivolous. But to a sound judgment, the most abstract truth is the most practical. Whenever a true theory appears, it will be its own evidence. Its test is that it will explain all phenomena. Whitman's conception of nature aims to reconcile materialism and idealism by

rejecting some fundamental assumption shared by various schools of philosophy.

"And what I assume you shall assume ... Creeds and Schools in abeyance ..." (2-10)

He thinks both scientists, as practitioners of materialism and priest, as practitioners of idealism, have made erroneous assumptions about the truth of our being (i.e. what is permanent and changeless, or "immortal" about ourselves) and about its relation to the visible world. Theology and religious doctrine have assumed that we must ignore or deny the truth of our doing. They have taught us that what is permanent and changeless in the universe is God or spirit. In this regard, Jerome Loving has recollected the words of Whitman and states that: "They have said that God is not directly accessible to our sense. We learn that God exists in our souls but that we cannot see soul and we cannot see god. We can find through logic or prayer or ritual, but direct observations of the visible world will not show us the truth of our being, God". (186)

Whitman rejects the assumption of creeds and school that the visible world cannot show us what is permanent and changeless about ourselves. He thinks that teaching based on this assumption has confused ordinary man and led them to believe that they can not find the meaning of life through their own observation and experiences. Many think they must depend on the logic or sermons of specialists, priests and scientists to lead them to the truth they cannot see. Others not the contradictions between the truth of the priests and the truth of scientists and decide that truth is not only unseeable but unknowable. Whitman's view, on the contrary is that the truth of being knowable and the direct observation of the visible world can give each of us a mere accurate and personally meaningful sense of that truth than all the logic and sermons of priests, scientists and philosophers whatever unseen truths

exist can be proved by our own observations and experiences. "... the unseen is proved by the seen ..." (52)

Whitman's extreme faith on his own body and mind inspired the contemporary people and the succeeding generation to have faith on themselves. He emphasized the importance of everyone's own body higher than the anything other. Why should we substitute our value, divinity by unseen forces? For him human power is not less than divine power. "Divine am I inside and out, I make holy whatever I touch or am touch's from, ... If I worship one thing more than another it shall be the spread of my own body, or any part of it." (68)

3.2 Whitman's Principle of Democracy

Whitman tacitly urged through his verses that divinity is not something beyond our grasp but it lies within us. Whitman's celebration of materiality is his real quest of human freedom and democracy. He respects every part, every organ of his body. He worships every creature of this world since he believes in matter or divinity in matter. Only entering into the temple, chanting some words and offering something very precious to the lord is not a true and real way to the truth. We can reach to the god by serving humanity also. As divine power is spread everywhere in the every atom he believes in the divine energy on matter so he worships matter. He can feel the torture of a wounded person, he can feel the mental agony of a prisoner, he can think how a hounded slave thinks, above all he finds within himself a large world, a cosmos, it is not his arrogant declaration but it is his universal love which can bind all people in the thread of love. "Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself, (I am large, I contain multitudes.) (96).

His universal love and his democratic belief is further strengthened when he compares himself with a grass. The grass is rather symbolic here as it goes on forever with an everlasting existence. "I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love, if you want me again look for me under your boot-soles." (96)

There is no "death" for Whitman no ultimate "dissolution". He will fuse with the pantheistic "grass", the symbol of eternal and reincarnating life. "Song of Myself" ends with this promise by Whitman of an eternal pattern of reincarnation and immortality, and contentment in it. Whitman implies that the greatness and capacity of "self" must be taken on faith, for trivialities are swallowed up in its vastness. He maintains a supreme confidence in the orderly relationship of spirit, matter and man.

Whitman is preeminently a poet of Joy and of the intersection of body and soul and he adds: "I and this mystery here we stand." Individual identity therefore becomes at once fragile and transcendent. The individual dies and life goes on. By recognizing and absorbing this knowledge, Whitman says, all may feel unity with life and see triumph over death.

At the core of all his poetry, Whitman hints materialism as his real quest and desire. When Whitman was writing his major poetry most of the other poets were merely imitating the British poets and their artistic carpentry. The British influenced verse was knowing, genteel and middle-class, with an occasional nod to American subject matter and colloquial language, Whitman differed vehemently with the flow of writing and started rambling, unrhymed, unmetered lines, with its defiance of convention, its egotism, sexuality and vitality. It also pioneered for the new American Romanticism. Indeed, Whitman's romanticism is unique: it is a true romanticism of common things, sights and people; it is the adventure of during declarations of the common truths of ordinary experience.

Whitman, doubtlessly has spent much of his ink in writing about common people, empathizing them and portraying the grassroots people as his main personals commenting on this issue Edwin Haviland Miller States: Sometimes Whitman transcribes an everyday scene with extreme simplicity and the great transparence: "The little one sleeps in its cradle/I lift the gauze and look a longtime/ and silently brush away flies with my hand." (37)

His language is so simple and understandable that even common reader can perceive the message and benefit themselves. He never prioritized the flowery and decorated language; he permitted natural tone and language in his poetry, which helped him to be highly popular among the common people in a short span of time.

He roamed the island in all directions from Brooklyn to Mantauk, where one looked out over the Atlantic from the bluff by the lighthouse. He fraternized with fisherman and farmers, bay-men pilots, and with dancing Negroes and boys with flutter like those of William Sidney Mount, who was painting his long scenes at just this time. He went to the prisoners, orphans, prostitutes, slaves, doctors and everywhere, he felt them and their pains and sufferings and expressed in his poetry.

All historical analysis is unavoidably subjective. Historians must therefore reveal the ways in which they have been positioned, by their own cultural experience to interpret history. Looking through the lens of New Historicism, Walt Whitman is not only a literary figure but also a historian. We can get the reflection of the society by going through his poetry.

3.3 Whitman and His Society

Walt Whitman, a famous poet of nineteenth century, was also the product of the contemporary American society. He saw vulnerable groups or marginalized

peoples of the mid-nineteenth century discriminated by the so called higher class people. Moreover, he got literature influenced by the then society. There was discrimination between black and white, rich and poor, higher class and lower class, superior and inferior, priest and common people (more in prostitute). Importance was on the basis of economic and socio-cultural status. He got unseen forces worshipped much and these unseen forces had been guiding human existence. These all were the hindrances to socio-economic development.

Considering the facts of the then society, Whitman showed his keen interest to alter the social values. Due to his democratic concept, he behaved equally to all the people even in his writing. He found similarity in the blood of black and white people, he found equal range of satisfaction in rich and poor people. Whitman prepared the image of equality which is poured in his work *Leaves of Grass* in 1855. His work surprised the contemporary writers. He focused on visible world, real things rather than the unseen or spiritual aspects. It was the main formula of his work which modified not only the mind of readers but also of the contemporary writers. American society which was guided by religious doctrines slightly got changed into physicality, equality or divinity in every matter. In general, this work has helped to bring equality, fraternity and modernity in America.

A plurality of historical voices also tends to raise issues that new historicism considers important, such as new ideology operates in the formation of personal and group identity, how a culture is perception of itself and influences it's political, legal and social policies and customs, and how power circulates in a given culture. No doubt, Whitman saw the discrimination between black and white, the gap between haves or haves not so his humanist poems with celebration of materiality empathizes the marginalized people and their pitiable conditions. He is a true human being with a

loving heart as he affirms, "I have no chair, no church, no philosophy" (46). He just loved other, he just empathized other's feelings and tried to rupture the discrimination and tried to fill the abyss by love, opining that we all people are equal, we are linked each other and dependent on each other. His celebration of materiality is a strong step to a new world, to the democratic America. His inclination towards matter brought common people, common things at fore and ultimately helped to herald America of today, country of equality.

In a nutshell, Whitman highlighting the common people, common things and relegating the unseen force or so-called divine power helped America to progress a lot in economic, science and socio-cultural sectors. His celebration of materiality is driven by his humanist heart and democratic attitude. He placed himself; he placed common people at the center of cosmic drama showing the omnipotence and omnipresence of Godhead. He spoke for all through his poetry and appealed for equality.

Whitman set out upon his self-explorations from a good and friendly harbor. He was a happy familiar of streets and market places, and a spokesman for society. Whitman was dealing neither with creeds nor schools nor with the primitive gods either, but with common men and women in a democracy, the rising class in history, no longer primitive, not susceptible to the literary incantations of the past.

Thus, in his way Whitman was one of those proponents of the idea that nations have missions, roles of their own to perform for the good of mankind. He was convinced that America was one of these nations and the greatest of them, the custodian of the future of humanity. D.H. Lawrence has correctly esteemed Whitman, "Whitman's essential message was the open Road. The leaving of the soul free into

herself, the leaving of his fate to her and to the loom of the open road, which is the bravest doctrine man, has ever proposed to himself ..." (20).

Differing from the ethos of his time and belief of his society, as his society was a traditional society having profound belief in spiritualism, he dared to celebrate materialism in his poetry, which in course of time became a strong vehicle to welcome a full-fledged democracy in America.

Whitman was the man to look all the aspects of the society equally. Even the vulnerable aspects are also closely viewed from his side. He was able to encirculate not only great and famous features but also the minorities of the society. Indian writer Ambika Sharma also accepts these opinions upon Whitman and she expresses in her writing "The Influence of Bhagvatgeeta on Walt Whitman" that:

Whitman was a loving, all embracing, rugged, voluminous nature. He had in his heart atoms of affection, sympathy and brotherhood that drew him to the high and low; noble and ignoble, their, drunkard and prostitute. He had some of his friends from among New York's bus drivers and ferry-boat crews. All this goes to show his magnanimity sincerity and large heartedness. "Leaves of Grass" was the result of these phenomena. (72)

Similarly, Harace Howard Furness opines the contribution of Whitman to make modern America and states:

Whitman paved the genuine ways for the modern American through his poetry, he dreamt for the developed and democratic America avoiding all the racial discriminations, whole America is in Whitman and Whitman is America. He took materialistic path spiritually and brought at fore to the sidelined aspects and notion of his society. (120)

Truly, Whitman always taught for democracy, he tried to transcend racial discrimination and eradicate the misbehavior of the "haves" upon the "haves not". His extolling of common people, common places and minor incidents indicate his respective nature as he loves everything and respects everything. He had a heart full of the atoms of affection, sympathy and brotherhood towards other human beings. His celebration of materiality has genuine quest for the equality, brotherhood and fraternity. He never wanted to see things compared in the so-called scale of superior and inferior, so he celebrated the matter, the atom, which links all of us, people of every generation.

His new sort of romanticism and spiritualism emerged as strong blow to the traditionally orthodox and hypocritical people, who used to cheat common people in the name of unseen divine force. But Whitman perceived divinity in the leaves of grass, in the face of prisoners, orphans etc and encouraged other people to feel his feeling and assimilate his thinking. In this way, Whitman's writing is the byproduct of his universal love, humanist heart and the vision of democratic America.

Chapter IV: Conclusion

The opening lines of "Song of Myself" announce Walt Whitman's American idealism and materialism boldly. The very second line "And what I assume you shall assume" creates an imperative relationship between reader and poet which is to last the 1336 lines of the poem. Whitman's bold poetry is written in nontraditional, free-flowing verse and celebrates all things and people. He announced a new democratic literature "commensurate with a people", simple and unconquerable, written by a new kind of poet who was affectionate, brawny and heroic and who would lead by the force of his magnetic personality. The free verse and frank sexual content of the poem boldly distinguished Whitman's work from that of the other on mid 19th century American. Taking a unique path of materialism he embedded spiritualism in it and blurs the boundaries between materialism and spiritualism.

The poem "song of myself", was a vision of symbolic 'I' enraptured by the senses, vicariously embracing all people and places from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. With the novelty and vitality of the both their form and content, the writings of Walt Whitman reshaped poetry in the united states in the 19th century, and were a tremendous influence on 20th century American poets. When Whitman was writing his major poetry, with the exception of Edger Allan Poe, American poetry was dominated by the New Englanders William Cullen Bryant, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, John Green Leaf Whittler- who were practitioners of a British influenced verse that was knowing, genteel and middle-class, with an accessional nod to American subject matter and colloquial language. The debut of Whitman, "... an American, one of rough, a kosmos Disorderly fleshy and sensual ... eating drinking and breeding ", as he described himself was like the entrance of a mongrel at a purebred dog show. With its rambling, unrhymed, unmetred lines, its

defiance of convention its egotism, sexuality, and vitality, leaves of Grass, was the most brilliant and original poetry yet written in the new world, at once the fulfillment of American literary romanticisms is induced unique : it is true romanticism and the beginning of American literary modernism Whitman's romanticism of common things, sights and people, it is also the adventure of daring declaration of common truth of ordinary experience; it is also in the most truly common language; it indicated not only an indelible romantic tendency in American poetry forever. Whitman dared to pioneer a new style inducing common people, their vision so he plays a vital role to the development of free verse his incantatory rhetoric, his just for life, his vision of democracy, his prophetic voice all continued to resonate, and poets like Ezra Pound, Hart Crane, William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens and Allen Ginsberg built upon the framework he constructed.

As Stephen J. Greenblatt, Michael Foucault and Raymond Williams propounded and described the theory New Historicism, “Song of Myself” of Walt Whitman is also analyzed from the same point of view, through which , the then existing Socio-cultural aspects, discrimination, traditional norms and values influenced Whitman to go against and create “Song of Myself”. Later on, the poem influenced the society and planted the seed of equality, fraternity, self respect, and materiality; and democratized whole America.

Whitman’s poetry possesses Universal appeal because they are real, celebrate the common people giving them equal space. He always showed sympathy over grass root people urges them to come at fore and wrote for their fundamental rights and liberty. He ruptured the boundary between God and Man, between Spiritualism and materialism, between seen and unseen force, because for him everything is divine, every matter is divine. He spoke for all people's voices: orphans, prisoners, slaves,

prostitutes etc because he had an all embracing of democracy in his poetry hints his respect towards materialism, he wanted to celebrate everything, all people and every place.

In a nutshell, sidelining himself from the mainstream literature and their content Whitman trailed a new subject matter rupturing the so-called great and divine force by bringing everything all common people at fore highlighting the matter and celebrating their divinity. For Whitman all the creatures (living or non-living) possess divine power, so there is nothing high as spiritualism, and low as materialism, they are all matter and are equal, in this way Whitman celebrates materiality in his poetry.

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