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INTRODUCTION

“I will make a song for these States that no one State may
under any circumstances be subjected to another State,
And I will make a song that there shall be comity by day
by night between all the states and between any two of them”

(Whitman, 17)

When Walt Whitman wrote these lines in his famous poem, “Starting From Paumanok”, his beloved country was on the edge of one of the bloodiest conflicts in American history: Civil War was near. While the split between the Northern and Southern states was growing deeper and deeper because of the quarrel over slavery, Walt Whitman was calling Americans to gather around brotherhood, comradeship and national unity. In 1855, when he published Leaves of Grass, a collection of poems, he declared that “The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem” and it “most needs poets.” Whitman’s decision to fulfill this need is most probably the reason why he wrote poems. But why did he declare that the U.S needed poets? In Walt Whitman’s America David Reynolds, claims that the social conditions of the mid 1840’s affected Whitman and caused him to fear that America “was on the brink of collapse.”(Reynolds, 113) Reynolds is right in this observation.

The portrait of 1850’s America was chaotic and unpromising. The nation was about to drift apart as a result of the debates over slavery. The gap between the North and the South was widening day by day. Politicians were doing nothing but increasing the tension. The future of the Union was in the firing line since the present government failed to come up with

a solution and satisfy the needs of both sides. Every new law that they introduced to the Senate was the source of another conflict. For Whitman the country was in need of someone who would remind them of the values that they had once shared and had long forgotten.

In 1855 he offered his poetry as a remedy and he immediately announced that “All men ever born are also my brothers and the women my sister and lovers.”(Whitman 30) He aimed to touch the heart of American nation and unite them through his powerful and effective verse. He believed that his poetry could balance the two opposites. In Leaves of Grass he intentionally touched upon the conflict and stated his position with this declaration: /I am the poet of slaves and of the masters of slaves, / [...] / I go with the slaves of the earth equally with the masters. (Whitman 55)

Some people found Whitman’s attempt to get over such a serious conflict with poetry utopic. But for Whitman, it was the time for the nation to awake and get the initiative in their hands rather than leaving their future in the hands of few unsuccessful politicians and poetry was the best way to activate the nation. Just a few years before the publication of Leaves of Grass, a similar idea was emphasized by Stephen Pearl Andrews In the New York Tribune, Andrews declared that it was time for the nation to claim its own individuality and he called each individual to respect other individuals’ “sovereignty.” Three years later, beginning with individual to recognize the power in themselves and to take the control of their lives. Whitman’s style and medium was of course different from Andrews’. Whitman created a new model of self, a new identity in his poems. There was a very important name behind Whitman’s celebration of the individual self. He was Ralph Waldo Emerson who had a great influence on Whitman’s work. Emerson is considered to be one of the greatest thinkers of America. He played an indisputable role in the 19th century American literature with the doctrine of Individualism which came into being as a result of the movement of Transcendentalism. In his famous essay “The American Scholar” which was actually a speech

delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Cambridge in 1837, Emerson declared that it was time for the Americans to take action in all the aspects of life, from literature to science. He encouraged the American man to produce something new, instead of imitating the British or the European. For Emerson every individual self had enough power to make his dreams come true. He suggested Americans to trust themselves and to feel free and confident in order to make the American voice to be heard in all over the world. All these ideas that Emerson proclaimed in the early 1840's were put into practice in Whitman's Leaves of Grass in 1855.

Emerson claimed that there is a close relation between nature and the individual. In his famous work Nature he argued that: "In the presence of nature, a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows. Nature says,- he is my creature and maugre all his impertinent griefs, he shall be glad with me."(1042) For Emerson the individual is a part of nature and man finds truth and faith in nature. In the fifth chapter of Nature Emerson explains the essence of the movement of Transcendentalism by describing nature as a discipline. For Emerson nature educates "both the Understanding and the Reason... Nature is a discipline of the understanding in intellectual truths. Our dealing with sensible objects is a constant exercise in the necessary lessons of difference, of likeness, of order, of being and seeming, of progressive arrangement..." (Bradley 1055) In simpler words we perceive the universe and reach the truth through the intellect which is nurtured by nature. Finally as he himself put it "man and nature are indissolubly joined."(1061)

In all his essays written after Nature Emerson frequently emphasized the importance of the relation between nature and the individual. Since he claimed that nature is divine, each individual is also divine for Emerson. In his essay called "The Poet" (1844), he claimed that nature "makes a man; and having brought him to ripe age, she will no longer run the risk of losing this wonder at a blow, but she detaches from him a new self, that the kind maybe safe from accidents to which the individual is exposed."(Adams 562) So for Emerson a

new self is needed; a self; able to understand nature and is totally aware of its own capacity. This is where Emerson's individualism became important. He developed a new model of self who is American, who embraces nature, and who believes in himself. He even declared the age as "the age of the first person singular." (Ruland 139) and in "The American Scholar" he declared that "...each man shall feel the world is his and man shall treat with man as a sovereign state with a sovereign state... 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."(1091) With these lines he encouraged the American man to become aware of the power in himself. Finally in his other famous essay, "Self Reliance" he once more emphasized the importance of individualism and claimed that every man should rely on his own perceptions and came up with the following statement: "Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string... nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your mind. Absolve to you to yourself, and you shall have the suffrage of the world."(Blair 454-5)

So Emerson's motto of "Trust Thyself", and his attempt to develop a new model of American self influenced many important names in the 19th century American Literature. Among them, there were two people who were considered to be the disciples of Emerson. They were Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman. They both followed Emerson's footsteps by putting his theory into practice not only in their works but also in their lives and they portrayed their own understandings of the American self. Thoreau went to the woods to study nature and lived a simple life. He chose to live a secluded life for almost two years. As a result of these two years, he came out of the woods with Walden and published it in 1854. One year later, in 1855, another disciple of Emerson came onto the stage; Walt Whitman published the first edition of Leaves of Grass.

Thoreau made Emerson's motto of "Trust thyself" to come true in Walden. He presented a different self in Walden by surviving in nature and living with it in harmony. He built his house, baked his bread and even ploughed his field by himself. Like Emerson he also contributed to the American literature with his own individualism and especially with his theory of "the Majority of One".

For Henry David Thoreau "Every man is tasked to make his life." Like the way Emerson encouraged Americans to believe in themselves Thoreau listened to the voice in himself and chose to live a life in nature all alone and showed the courage to go after his own ideals. His aim was to live a life that is simplified out of all unnecessary details and to understand the "essential facts of life".

"I went to the woods because I wish to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die discover that I had not lived... I want to live deep and suck out of the morrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to road all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms..."(Thoreau 343-344)

The personality that Thoreau introduced to the American reader in these lines was exactly similar with Emerson's model of the new individual self in Nature. Thoreau was no doubt sure of himself when he went to the woods. He found the courage to challenge life and decided to live the life deliberately by absorbing every single moment of it. Similar to Emerson, Thoreau also believed that everything that an individual is looking for is in nature. "The universe constantly and obediently answers to our conceptions; whether we travel fast or slow, the track is laid for us. Let us spend our lives in conceiving then... Let us spend one day as deliberate Nature, and not be thrown off the track by every nutshell and mosquito's wing..." (Thoreau 350) Thoreau offered to observe nature carefully and understand the way it functions in our lives.

One of the most important contributions of Thoreau to American Literature is the doctrine of “Majority of One.” He introduced this doctrine in 1849, five years before the publication of Walden he wrote an essay called “Civil Disobedience to criticize the government’ political and social policies. For Thoreau government had failed to “keep the country free” and to “settle the West.”(110) The war against Mexico and the problem of slavery in the Western territories were the two important failures of the government. Throughout the essay he argued that the American people were also responsible for the current social and political problems that the country was dealing with. He accused the nation of not taking any action. He asked: “Unjust laws exist: shall we be content to obey them, or shall we endeavor to amend them...” (119) Through these sentences Thoreau encouraged the nation to wake up and take action against unjust and inequality. In the following paragraph, he related an instance from his life. In 1846, during the war against Mexico, Thoreau was put into jail because of rejecting to pay the tax bill. In the essay he expressed his resistance with these words: “I was not born to be forced. I will breathe after my own fashion. Let us see who is the strongest. What force a multitude? They only can force me who obey a higher law than I...If a plant can not live according to its nature, it dies: and so a man.”(Thoreau 127) Within these sentences it is possible to observe an idea similar to Emerson’s in essence.

Under the influence of Emerson’s “Trust Thyself” Thoreau came up with his own theory in these sentences. His message was simple. It does not matter whether you are alone in the society or you are doing something totally different from the norms of the society. If you know that you will be alone in the majority, you shouldn’t give up defending the ideas that you believe is true. By rejecting to pay his taxes Thoreau took an action against the unjust and resisted in his own way. His resistance gave birth to a new model of self who was stronger than the self that Emerson portrayed a decade earlier, who was a non conformist and who disobeyed when he believed it was necessary. Emerson’s “Trust Thyself” took a new

shape with Thoreau's "Majority of One" doctrine. Because his resistance proved the American nation the fact that a single individual's action was as valuable as the majority's action. He challenged the majority and never gave up defending what he believed.

After these two great artists and thinkers, in 1855, American public finally met Walt Whitman who came up with a different style of poetry in which he presented a new model of the American self. In the first poem of his book, Leaves of Grass, Whitman celebrated the American men in the same way that Emerson suggested in a speech delivered eighteen years ago. Emerson's quest that the American individual should "possess himself, must sometimes return from his own labor to embrace all the other laborers." (Bradley 1077) found its voice in Whitman's verse:

I celebrate myself and I sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good as belongs to you.

(Whitman 26)

Similar to Emerson's quotation above, Whitman also emphasized the same idea that man is no different from each other, we even share the same atom because we came into being from one divine whole. So his celebration of himself was in fact a celebration of the American men. Emerson's declaration of "Man is all" (1076) was put into practice by Whitman in the opening lines of the first poem, "Song of Myself". The art that Whitman introduced to American audience with Leaves of Grass was not only a simple copy of Emerson's ideas, of course. He formed a new model of individual self in his first work.

Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son,
Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding,
No sentimentalist, no stander above men and women or apart from them,
No more modest than immodest.

(Whitman 48-9)

Within these lines above one can observe the core of Whitman's poetry. He constructed a new identity and introduced himself as a common man, who is proud of the land he was born, living the life in its fullest sense, aware of the needs and desires of his body and most importantly he was not away from people, neither superior nor inferior to men. The individual self that Whitman portrayed in these lines was democratic. He embraced every single individual equally, without standing apart from them.

Whitman's equal treatment of the individual was the most important characteristics of his poetry. For Whitman every individual is equal no matter of what race, gender and color they are. In the preface to the first edition of Leaves of Grass he frequently emphasized his trust to the common man. "The genius of the United States is not best or most in its executives or legislatures, nor in its ambassadors or authors or colleges or churches or parlors, nor even in its newspapers or inventors- but always most in the common people, south, north, west, east, in all its states, through all its mighty amplitude."(Whitman 264)

This explanation was the sign of the transformation that he had gone through in that nine years time. As David Reynolds has noted in Walt Whitman's America "A decade earlier, he had been a dandyish Democratic journalist, sporting a vest and a polished cane, almost sheepishly loyal to political leaders and party principles. Now he was a roughly dressed carpenter who sneered at politicians and looked for redemption among common people."(Reynolds 307) So for Whitman the solution was within the common man of America. It was the nation itself who could save the country of what it had become.

In the Preface Whitman also declared his understanding of poetry as democratic: "The message of great poems to each man and woman are, Come to us on equal terms, only then can you understand us. We are no better than you, what we inclose, you inclose, what we enjoy you may enjoy. Did you suppose there could be only one Supreme? We affirm there can

be unnumber'd Supremes,..” (269) He also argued that the duty of American poet is to treat every individual equally: “The American bard shall delineate no class of persons, nor one or two out of the strata of interests, nor love most nor truth most, nor the soul most, nor the body most-and not be for the Eastern states more than the Western, or the Northern states more than the Southern.”(Whitman 269)

All the ideas that Whitman portrayed in the Preface to the first edition of Leaves of Grass were put into practice in his poems. In “Song of Myself” Whitman presented a democratic self that treats every American equally no matter of what occupation, race or color they are. But the point that draws one’s attention is Whitman’s frequent use of the first person singular “I”. In all the three Leaves of Grass editions, especially until the Civil War, Whitman frequently mentioned “I” in his poems. In other words the new democratic self was asserted through the first person singular “I”.

As it is mentioned above for Whitman equality of each individual was very important. In his poems he always portrayed scenes in which other individuals of different job, race, or color are treated equal by his “I”. For instance in “Song of Myself” he pointed out that a farmer was not different from a boatman. He portrayed himself, (through the frequent use of “I”) visiting a farm where farmers are picking the harvest and says: /I am there, I help, I came stretch’d atop of the load, / I felt its soft jolts, one leg reclined on the other, / (34) Next he goes to the mountains to hunt and there he falls asleep on “the gather’d leaves.” He was woken by the boatmen and clam-diggers: /The boatmen and the clam-diggers arose early and stopt for me, / I tuck’d my trowser-ends in my boots and went and had a good time /(34)

One of the interesting scenes that he portrayed in “Song of Myself” was the one that he helped a runaway slave. Slavery was accepted to be the biggest problem that America was dealing with in the 1850’s but for Whitman it was not that difficult to get over as long as

people of different color were treated equally. In these lines below he solved the conflict between the white man and the black man./ The runaway slave came to my house and stopt outside /... I saw him limpsy and weak, .../ brought water and fill'd a tub for his sweated body and bruis'd feet, ... gave him a room that enter'd from my own, / (35)

As the poem goes by Whitman's emphasis on equal self becomes evident when he says:
/I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as the wise, /Regardless of others, ever
regardful of others, /[...] /Of every hue and caste am I, of every rank and religion, /(42)

While Whitman's democratic, friendly and humanist aspect of the self continued in the other two editions of Leaves of Grass, he also introduced to the American audience another aspect of it. Along with its democratic portrayal, Whitman frequently emphasized the erotic side of it. The self that Whitman presented in his poems did not hesitate to express the needs and desires of the body. In one part of the poem he promised to become the "Voices of sexes and lusts..."

Through me forbidden voice,
Voices of sexes and lusts, voices veil'd and I remove the veil,
Voices indecent by me clarified and transfigur'd.

I believe in the flesh and the appetites, [...]
Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or am touch'd
From [...]
If I worship one thing, more than another
It shall be the spread of my own body, or any part of it, [...]
Firm masculine colter it shall be you!
Whatever goes to the tilth of me it shall be you! [...]
Breast that presses against other breasts it shall be you! [...]

Winds whose soft-tickling genitals rub against me it shall be you! [...]
Hands I have taken, face I have kissed, mortal I have ever touch'd, it shall be
you.

(Whitman, 50)

In these lines Whitman destroyed all the taboos over one's expression of sexuality and portrayed the body as divine and sacred. Today as M. Jimmie Killingsworth pointed out, these lines of Whitman are accepted as "a kind of archaeological record of the first gay writing in American literary history." (Reynolds 123) In the essay called "Whitman and the Gay American Ethos" Killingsworth, analyses Whitman's talent in unifying his homosexuality with art. But in those days Whitman's freedom and comfort in his expressions made many critics uncomfortable. After the publication of the first edition of Leaves of Grass he was criticized because of the frequent mention of the body and sexuality. A critic called R.W.Griswold called Whitman's poems "a mass of stupid filth" (Asselineau 72) and attacked him in his paper, the New York Criterion. Another critic in the Boston Intelligencer criticized Whitman by saying that "... the author should be kicked from all decent society as below the level of the brute." (Asselineau 72)

Whitman's frequent expression of sexuality was as important as his frequent expression of the democratic and equal self. What he had inspired from Emerson's doctrines was to "Trust Thyself" and to be brave and to be original in producing the American art. He may be different than Emerson and Thoreau because of his expression of sexuality so loudly but it was the part of the new model individual, the new self that he introduced to the American audience. An individual that never feels ashamed of himself and his desires.

When Whitman began this literary journey in 1855 he hoped that he could provide a reconstruction through his poetry and especially through the portrayal of the new, Democratic, American self. He really believed that he could unite the separate voices of

America, (the North and South, Master and Slave) in one national song but on April 12, 1861 when the Southern Confederate Army opened fire on the Northern harbor, he realized that it was too late for him to expect the nation to return good old days. After spending nine days on the front in search of his brother and three years in the military hospitals of Washington, nursing the wounded and dying soldiers, he was transformed into another man. Especially those three years in Washington was like a turning point in his life. He was not the same man any more who described himself as /Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son,/ Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding,/ but now he had become “the wound dresser” who declares; / Bearing the bandages, water and sponge, Straight and swift to my wounded I go,/ (284).

For almost six years he tried to unite the divided nation through his poetry. He constructed one single self that every individual of different races, class and gender could find a democratic and equal expression. In this way he aimed to provide a national unity in the country. But his experiences in the front line at Falmouth and his three year volunteered service in the military hospitals of Washington proved him one thing: Thousands of American men were fighting and dying for their country now. They may be on the opposite sides of the river but their aim was to provide a bright, secure future for America. The nation that Whitman had tried to unite with his poetry had now become united. The nation had finally taken the initiative in their hands and for Whitman there was no need of trying to unify separate individuals anymore, now it was time for him to become the voice of anonymous heroes who were sacrificing their lives. From then on, Whitman’s emphasis on the individual self changed and the frequent expression of the first person singular “I” and sexuality diminished their power. The new democratic American self that Whitman portrayed in Leaves of Grass became nationalistic in a real sense. This time it sometimes became the voice of a lonely soldier, sometimes a wound dresser and sometimes the voice of a mother who had lost

his son. In all these cases, this national self reflected the heroism of brave Americans who risked their lives for the future of their country. For the first time with Drum-Taps, a collection of war poems, Whitman's individual self transformed into national self and reflected all the suffering and pain that the nation had gone through for four years. From then on, pain and suffering were common to all classes and color. Death was on both sides. Differences, privileges, all the things that had divided the nation came to end now. As an American poet, Whitman blended them with his poetry.

So in this study, my ultimate objective is to examine the works of a poet who had never hesitated to use his art for the benefit of his country. Whitman's love for America and its people was so great that he refused to take any positions in the Civil War. The nation was severely drifting apart but Whitman was looking for a way to reconstruct the nation through his poetry. He was courageous enough to come out in the middle of a political and social chaos and reminded the whole nation that it was time to unite around values like brotherhood, equality, democracy and patriotism.

Thus in the first chapter of my study, a detailed information about the political and social situation of the 1850's America will be given, by referring to America and Its People and A People and A Nation - A History of the United States. The reason why I present the 1850's political agenda is that, it is extremely important in understanding and observing the transformation that Whitman went through. During the late 1840's Whitman was a journalist who believed that the future of the country was in the hands of politicians and their parties. But in the early 1850's his political beliefs had shattered as a result of a few events so severely that he was no longer the same man. In 1855 when he published Leaves of Grass, the transformation process had completed. He became a humanist poet who favored the common American men from different ranks, region, religion and color. He wasn't the old democratic journalist who had total faith in the political parties and politicians.

Moreover Whitman's response to these political and social events of the period will be explored especially in the light of a few reaction poems that he wrote in order to criticize the two dominant parties of his time, the Democratic and the Whig Party. In this way it would be easy to observe how seriously he was disillusioned and disappointed before the publication of the Leaves of Grass in 1855.

In the second chapter, Whitman's three editions of Leaves of Grass will be focused on and analyzed in order to show how he constructed a new identity which was democratic and erotic. This new identity was asserted through the frequent use of the first person singular "I". At this point Ralph Waldo Emerson and his doctrine of individualism which influenced Whitman's pre- Civil War poems a lot will be referred. As a disciple of Emerson, Henry David Thoreau will also be touched upon briefly to emphasize a few differences between Thoreau and Whitman. In the light of Emerson and Thoreau's doctrines and an analysis of the individual self that these two great artists portrayed in their works, Whitman's democratic self will be understood more clearly.

In the third chapter of my study, Whitman's response to the Civil War and how he gradually transformed into a new man as a result of his volunteered service in the military hospitals of Washington will be examined. Observing the horrors of the war closely and witnessing the bravery of American nation, he began to write more nationalistic poems in which the individual self had been replaced by the national self. The national self that he portrayed in Drum-Taps now began to reflect the real war and to share the pain and suffering of brave American soldiers whom Whitman praised and admired their courage. the first edition of Leaves of Grass in 1855, Whitman also invited every single American in

CHAPTER I:

AMERICAN POLITICS IN THE LATE 1840'S AND 1850'S

“The Americans of all nations at any time upon the earth have probably the fullest poetical nature. The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem.”

(Whitman 263)

When Walt Whitman made such a romantic and patriotic announcement in the “1855 Preface to *Leaves of Grass*”, the United States was like a dynamite ready to explode. The country was in the middle of a social and a political chaos. The nation was about to drift apart as a result of the never ending debates over slavery. There were some important major political issues that raised the question of slavery during the late 1840's and incited the nation to fight against each other. The Mexican War in 1846 was the starting point of the chaos because it reignited the problem of slavery in the western territories and caused the first severe divisions between the North and the South. After the Mexican War, David Wilmot came up with a proposal in which he argued that slavery should be excluded from the new settlement but the Democrat President James Polk opposed the idea. This was the starting point of the dispute between the North and the South. While the Northerners were supporting the Wilmot Proviso, the Southerners opposed it like James Polk.

The political agenda after 1846 was full of controversial laws. The Wilmot Proviso which was proposed for banning slavery from the territories acquired from Mexico, the Gold Rush in 1848, The Compromise of 1850 and the Fugitive Slave Act, The seizure of Anthony Burns in 1851, The Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854 and finally John Brown's raid at Harpers

Ferry in 1859 were the events that intensified the sectional conflicts between the North and the South and caused the Civil War. Throughout these fifteen years before the Civil War, Walt Whitman was among the ones who responded to the events in a literal way like his contemporaries, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Harriet Beecher Stowe and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. But there was one point that differentiated Walt Whitman from these names: Whitman's journalist background and his belief in democracy were the two factors that made him to involve the political events of the day actively than any of the names above. He served as the Democratic electioneer in 1840 and as a delegate in 1848 in Buffalo Convention to represent Brooklyn. But as the time went by, Whitman's trust to the Democratic Party and its party leaders was shaken and in the early 1850's as Kenneth Cmiel observes in his essay "Whitman the Democrat" Whitman "grew increasingly disenchanted with mainstream politicians, especially for their evasion of slavery."(Reynolds 216)

Thus in this first chapter of my study I am going to portray the political and social situation of the 1850's America, by referring to America and Its People and A People and A Nation - A History of the United States. The reason why I present the 1850's political agenda is that, it is extremely important in understanding and observing the transformation that Whitman had gone through. During the late 1840's and early 1850's Whitman's political beliefs had shattered so severely that he was no longer the same man. In 1855 when he published Leaves of Grass, the transformation process had completed. He became a humanist poet who favors the common American men from different ranks, region, religion and color. He wasn't the old democratic journalist who had total faith in the political parties and politicians. Through the end of the chapter I will also focus on four reaction poems in which he severely criticized the two opponent parties of the age, the Democratic and the Whig Party. Those four poems were his last works before the publication of Leaves of Grass and they were the proofs of how disillusioned and disappointed he became in the early 1850's.

THE MEXICAN WAR AND WALT WHITMAN, THE DEMOCRAT

The seeds of the major political issues that divided American nation and caused the Civil War were sown in the late 1840's. The Mexican War in 1846 in the name of acquiring new lands like: New Mexico, California, Nevada and Utah, was one of the most important events that affected the country's future. It can also be interpreted as the starting point of the conflict between the North and the South. After the outbreak of the war, "a new issue began to dominate American politics-the extension of slavery in the western territories."(Martin 430) During that period, Walt Whitman was the editor of the Brooklyn Daily Eagle which was known as an organ of the Democratic Party. As Gay Wilson Allen points out in The New Walt Whitman Handbook "Before the Civil War nearly all American newspapers were supported and controlled by political parties" (Allen 161) and as a journalist and editor Whitman "became embroiled in the political and social debates of the day."(Reynolds 22) says David S. Reynolds in "A Brief Biography" in A Historical Guide to Walt Whitman.

At this point it would be useful to know Walt Whitman's political stance in order to understand the articles and poems that he produced in that period. Walt Whitman was a democrat. He was a member of a working class family. His father was a carpenter and according to Roger Asselineau, he played an important role in the formation of Whitman's political views. In The Evolution of Walt Whitman, Asselineau informs the reader that his father Walter Whitman "was an ardent democrat of the old school who hated priests and kings and swore by the founders of the republic. The names which he gave to three of his sons declare clearly enough who were his favorite heroes: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson."(Asselineau 146) On the other hand, another scholar Kenneth Cmiel tells the reader in one of his essays entitled as "Whitman the Democrat", that Whitman's

interest in politics goes back to his youth: “He was active in Democratic party politics in his twenties, particularly close to its working class wing.” (Reynolds 205). At the age of 19, Whitman’s active career in journalism had begun. He first wrote articles for the Long Island Democrat.

The year 1840 was important for Whitman as well as America. Because while America was entering a new age which was “the age of popularly based political parties” (Norton 230), Walt Whitman was going to take part in this new political formation as an official democratic electioneer in 1840. In A People and A Nation - A History of the United States, it is stated that the 1840’s witnessed “the rise of political party competition [...] commonly called the Second Party System.”(Norton 230) There were two opponent parties in that period, the Democrats and the Whigs. The two parties were different from each other in terms of their political policies. “Although both favored economic expansion, the Whigs sought it through an activist government and the Democrats through limited central government. Thus the Whigs supported corporate characters, a national bank, and paper currency all of which the Democrats opposed.”(Norton 230) In Walt Whitman’s America-A Cultural Biography David Reynolds compares the Whigs and Whitman’s the Democrats and he argues that Whitman’s poetry was “directly linked to the economic and political realities of the time. He would become the most famous exponent of contemplative loafing.”(Reynolds 64) According to Reynolds “In terms of the party arrangement of the day, the Whigs were usually associated with the capitalist success ethic and the Democrats with loaferism.”(Reynolds 64) Reynolds draws the reader’s attention to an essay of Whitman dated November 1840. In this essay Whitman supports the Democrats’ “loaferism” by declaring that “I have sometimes amused myself with picturing out a nation of loafers, [...] only think of it! an entire loafer kingdom.” (Reynolds 65) For Reynolds “The political underpinnings of his

conception of loaferism were undeniable. (Reynolds 65) He exemplifies this argument with this quotation of Whitman:

“Give us the facilities of loafing, and you are welcome to all the benefits of your tariff system, your manufacturing privileges, and your cotton trade. For my part I had serious thoughts of getting up a regular ticket for President and Congress and Governor and so on, for the loafer community in general.”

(Reynolds 65)

According to Reynolds this was a criticism of the Whigs. Because by using expressions like “the supporters of the ‘tariff system’ and ‘manufacturing privileges’ Whitman was referring to the Whigs.”(Reynolds 65) He also argues that loaferism is also in the nature of Whitman’s poetry. He quotes these lines from Song of Myself: “I loafe and invite my soul / I lean and loaf at my ease observing a spear of summer grass./ (Whitman 26) For Reynolds Whitman’s poetry identifies with “the class of loafers.” “These were mainly working class men and women who had been impelled by hard times to reject normal capitalist pursuits and find other means of gratification and amusement.” (Reynolds 65)

This was exactly in those times that Whitman’s first active involvement in politics began. The elections of 1840 caused a hot competition between the Democratic candidate and also President Martin Van Buren and the Whig candidate General William Henry Harrison. As Reynolds has noted in the elections of 1840, Whitman “served in the fall as the official Democratic electioneer for Queen’s Country and entered political debates.”(Reynolds 67) Although Van Buren lost the election and Harrison won the popular vote, Whitman was not that very unhappy with the result. Because he believed that these kinds of political competitions and debates were for the benefit of America. As Reynolds points out, “the ongoing conflict between the Democrats and Whigs would seem to him a primary illustration of the strength and sounds of the American system which, he believed, would stand strong

and through all turbulence and disagreement.”(Reynolds 67) Reynolds quotes from Whitman’s *The Columbian’s Song* poem, written for the Democrat and argues that “Though parties sometimes rage; / And faction rears its form,” he wrote, still “this heart-prized Union band” would stay firm in the face of a foreign threat.”(Reynolds 67)

From 1841 to 1845 Whitman wrote for different papers. The common point in all these papers is that they are all the organs of the Democratic Party; like the *Democratic Review*, the *Daily Plebian*, the *Statesman*, the *New York Mirror*, and finally the Democrat “a daily morning paper that was supporting James Polk for president and Silas Wright for governor of New York.”(Reynolds 84) James Polk became President after the elections of 1844. He was a Democrat who is described as “a hard-money Jacksonian and an expansionist from Tennessee.” in *A People and A Nation*. (Norton, 233) The Whigs criticized James Polk severely and argued that Polk “had literary provoked an unnecessary war and usurped the power of Congress by making war upon Mexico.

In the 1840’s apart from the party competitions territorial expansion was one of the hottest issues. Americans had always been in search of new lands ever since the first colonies came to the New World. Their desire to acquire new western lands continued in the 1840’s. Thus in 1845, when John L. O’Sullivan, editor of the *Democratic review* came up with a new slogan called “Manifest Destiny” Americans did not hesitate for a minute to make it true. In *A People and A Nation* “Manifest Destiny” is described as “the belief that American expansion Westward was inevitable, divinely ordained.”(Norton 233) Manifest Destiny turned into an “explosive political issue” (Norton 233).

In 1846 President Polk “asked the Congress to acknowledge that a state of war already existed ‘by the act of Mexico herself... notwithstanding all our efforts to avoid it.”(Martin 426) There were two reasons for the war. One of the most important one was the annexation of Texas in 1845. In spite of the defeat at San Jacinto, Mexico “refused to recognize Texan

independence and [...] expelled the American ambassador and cut diplomatic relations.”(Martin 426) Another reason was “in the mid 1845 Polk had been led to believe that Britain was on the verge of making California a protectorate.”(Martin 426) On April 25, 1846, “a Mexican cavalry force crossed the Rio Grande and clashed with a small American squadron, forcing the Americans to surrender after the loss of several lives.”(Martin 426) President Polk used this as an excuse and told the Congress that “Mexico has passed the boundary of the United States, has invaded our territory and shed American blood upon the American soil. (Martin 426) The Whigs criticized James Polk severely and argued that Polk “had literary provoked an unnecessary war and usurped the power of Congress by making war upon Mexico.

In America and Its People the Mexican War is described as “extremely controversial”. Because the American public was divided into two: supporters of the war and opponents of the war. While the supporters argued that “the nation was destined to expand”; the opponents argued that “the war was an expansionist power play dictated by aggressive Southern slaveocracy intent on acquiring more land for cotton cultivation and more slave states to better balance the Northern free states in the U.S Senate.”(Martin 427) Thus the Mexican War brought the issue of slavery to the center stage. The aim of the war was territorial expansion but as it is noted in A People and A Nation each time the nation expanded, it confronted a thorny issue-whether new territories and states should be slave or free.”(Norton 238) So the slavery issue was soon about to drive the nation apart.

How did Whitman react to James Polk’s expansion policy and the Mexican War? Whitman describes James Polk as “a truly noble Magistrate, without fear and without reproach-whose name will shine with quite brightness for years to come in our most honored democratic galaxy.” (Reynolds 116) So after the outbreak of the war Whitman supported

Polk. Gay Wilson Allen informs the reader that in one of Whitman's editorials, dated on June 23, 1846 Whitman

“declared that expansion of the United States was natural and inevitable, ‘and for our part, we look on that increase of territory and power... with the faith which the Christian has in God’s mystery.-Over the rest of the world, the swelling impulse of freedom struggles, too; though we are ages ahead of them.

(Wilson 164)

Wilson named this declaration of Whitman as “an imperialist euphoria.” But he also mentioned that “Whitman maintained, however, that his nation “will tenderly regard human life, property and rights.”(Allen 164)

But as time went by, Whitman had begun to realize the facts. The public was divided because of the question of slavery. According to Gay Wilson Allen the reason of Whitman’s late awareness is because “Partisanship had temporarily blinded Whitman to the fact that Southern slave owners wanted Texas in order to extend slavery.”(Allen 164)

Whitman was always against slavery but according to Allen “he was slow to realize that the war with Mexico strengthened the slave owner’s interests. This was partly because he still believed that slavery could be abolished by peaceful means and he disliked the violent language of the Abolitionists, the chief critics of the Mexican War.” (Allen 164) Although he shared same concerns with the Abolitionists, there were things that he found extreme in their actions. In one of his articles, he describes them as “a few and foolish red hot fanatics.”(Reynolds 69). At this point both scholars Gay Wilson Allen and David Reynolds agree that the reason of Whitman’s reaction to Abolitionists and slave holders is that Whitman was afraid of a serious conflict between the North and South which may damage the Union. According to David Reynolds Whitman’s main concern in 1847 was

“the disruptions of American institutions posed by the South’s apparent effort to put its

own interests above those of nation. Party conflict, he believed, was healthy and cleansing. Sectional conflict, by contrast, was not, since it upset the delicate balance between state and national interests.”

(Reynolds 68)

Similarly, Gay Wilson Allen argues that “Whitman feared that confrontations over abolition might break up the Union, which he regarded as the greatest ‘political blessing on earth.’”(Allen 164)

THE WILMOT PROVISIO

In August 1846 when the Democratic congressman, David Wilmot proposed an offer which became known as The Wilmot Proviso that slavery should be excluded from the new settlement, Whitman supported it without hesitation. But President Polk opposed the idea firmly and declared that The Wilmot Proviso was “mischievous and foolish.”(Reynolds 116) David Reynolds has noted in his essay “Politics and Poetry: Leaves of Grass and the Social Crisis of the 1850’s” “The President’s opposition to the Wilmot Proviso troubled Whitman.”(Reynolds 68) Moreover Reynolds also argues that this also caused the first disappointment in Whitman’s opinions about the party. In an essay titled as “Politics and Poetry, Leaves of Grass and the Social Crisis of the 1840’s” David Reynolds argues that “Slowly Whitman began to sour on the party that had nurtured him and to ponder the institution that would rip apart the parties and lead to the war: slavery.”(Reynolds 68)

The southerners and Northerners were also divided into two. While Northerners were supporting the Proviso, Southerners opposed it. Because for southerners “Slavery was the foundation of white equality... and a government that failed to protect slavery seemed un-American and unworthy of their loyalty.”(Norton 238)

In 1847, Reynolds points out that Whitman’s “main concern as the disruptions of American institutions posed by the South’s apparent effort to put its own interest above those

of the nation.”(Reynolds 117) Reynolds believes that it was exactly in those times that Whitman “began what would become a long term strategy of his: resolving thorny political issues by linguistic fiat.”(Reynolds 69) For Reynolds poetry became “the greatest balancing agent” between the slave holders and Abolitionists that “took both sides.”(69) In the following paragraphs of his essay Reynolds exemplifies this argument by quoting from a few lines from Whitman’s notebooks:

“In a notebook dated 1847, there appeared his first truly Whitmanesque verses: /I am the poet of slaves and of the masters of slaves, / [...] / I go with the slaves of the earth equally with the masters.” (Reynolds 69) Through these lines, for the first time in his poetry, Whitman acts like a buffer between the two opposing groups.

Whitman himself was also affected by the debates over slavery. In January 4, 1848 “General Lewis Cass had written an open letter opposing the Wilmot Proviso,” but Whitman who was the editor of the Brooklyn Eagle at that time, “refused to print it” (Wilson 166) As a result the owner of the paper, Isaac Van Anden, fired him. This can be interpreted as a second shock or disappointment after Polk’s refusal of the Proviso. For the first time in his life Whitman was fired from an organ of the Democratic Party. He then went to New Orleans and wrote articles for the New Orleans and Daily Crescent. Three months later, when he came back to Brooklyn, he realized that in the presidential elections of 1848 the debates of the slavery had showed its effect on the Parties.

“The Democrats tried to avoid sectional conflict by nominating General Lewis Cass of Michigan for president... and he had devised the idea of popular sovereignty for the territories... His party’s platform declared that Congress did not have the power to interfere with slavery.”

(Norton 240)

On the other hand the Whigs “nominated General Zachary Taylor, who as a southern slaveholder, as well as a military hero... their convention similarly refused to assert that Congress had power over slavery in the territories. (Norton 241)

But there were people who were not happy with these nominations and their parties’ policies. As it is noted in A People and A Nation “

In the North, concern about slavery led to the formation of a new party. First New York Democrats devoted to the Wilmot Proviso rebelled and nominated former President Martin Van Buren. Anti slavery Whigs and former supporters of the Liberty Party then joined them to organize the Free Soil Party, with Van Buren as its candidate.”

(Norton 241)

Their slogan was “Free soil, free speech, free labor and free men” (Norton 241) Formation of the new party was also important for Whitman. Because after his return from New Orleans, he once more got engaged in politics. In 1848 Whitman was selected as one of fifteen delegates to represent Brooklyn at the Free Soil Convention in Buffalo.”(Reynolds 23) A month later, Whitman, encouraged by the Free Soil Democrats, (Wilson 166) founded the Brooklyn Freeman and supported the Free Soil candidate, Martin Van Buren. In one of his article he declared that “Our doctrine is the doctrine led down in the Buffalo convention.”(Reynolds 126) As Reynolds has noted also, “he warned the readers against voting for anyone who would add to the Union a single inch of slave land whether in the form of state or territory. (Reynolds 23) Unfortunately, a fire destroyed the Freeman office and Van Buren lost the election.

Although the war seemed to result with a victory for Americans, it gave birth to serious problems. Between 1846 and 1848, Americans had to deal with the threatening results of the war. In America Its People, it is stated that “The most significant result of the Mexican War was to reignite the question of slavery in the western territories.” (Martin 431) This result

gave the first signs of a division among Americans. Because “The war convinced a growing number of Northerners that Southern slave owners had precipitated the war in order to open new lands to slavery and acquire new slave states.”(Martin 431). Moreover it gave a serious damage to the Party system. As it is stated in America and its People “the war weakened the party system and made it increasingly difficult for congressional leaders to prevent the issue of slavery from dominating congressional activity.”(Martin 431)

In 1848, the news that gold was discovered in California, made thousands of men rush to the land. As a result of the Gold Rush, the problem of slavery got bigger and bigger. Because Gold Rush intensified “the sectional conflict between the North and South and raised the fateful and ultimately divisive question of whether slavery would be permitted in the Western territories.”(Martin 435) By the 1850’s slave owners from Texas arrived California with their slaves to work for gold. As a result of this, Californians applied admission to the Union in order to be a free state. In America and Its People, it’s stated that “California’s application for statehood... made slavery’s expansion an unavoidable political issue.”(Martin 442)

THE COMPROMISE OF 1850 and THE FUGITIVE SLAVE ACT

In 1850, Senator Henry Clay came up with a compromise in order to provide a balance between the North and South. He proposed that California should be a free state and “that territorial government be established in new Mexico and Utah without any restrictions on slavery... and that slavery continued to be permitted in the District of Columbia, but the slave trade be abolished.”(Martin 444). In A People and A Nation Compromise of 1850 is interpreted with these words: “The Compromise is at best an artful evasion of sectional disputes. It did not solve the problems but just postponed them.”(Norton 242) One of the most important laws in the Compromise of 1850 was the Fugitive Slave Law which allowed “any black man to be sent South “solely on the affidavit of anyone claiming to be his or her

owner.”(Martin 446) The Fugitive Slave Law caused protests in the North. As a reaction Northerners helped slaves through underground railway system and helped slaves to leave the Southern states. In A People and A Nation, the Fugitive Slave Law is described as one of the flaws of the Compromise 1850. It “empowered slave owners to go in to court in their own states and present evidence that a slave who owed them service had escaped. The transcript of such a proceeding, including a description of the fugitive, was to be taken as conclusive proof of a person’s slave status, even in free states and territories. Legal authorities had to decide only whether the black person brought before them was the person described, not whether he or she was indeed a slave.”(Norton 242)

The Fugitive Slave Law will later contribute to the division in 1854 when Anthony Burns, an escaping slave from Virginia was captured in Boston by the federal troops and ordered back to Virginia. Because his master was counting on “government enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Act” (Norton 237) Whitman later reacted to the seizure of Anthony Burns in a poem called A Boston Ballad and described the seizure by criticizing the government and making fun of the federal troops.

The question of slavery dominated American politics in the 1850’s. In America and its People, the tension between Northerners and Southerners is mentioned with these words: “By the 1850’s, a growing number of Northerners had come to believe that an aggressive Southern slave power had seized control of the federal government and threatened to subvert republican ideals of liberty, equality and self rule. At the same time, an increasing number of Southerners had begun to believe that antislavery radicals dominated Northern politics and would ‘rejoice’ in the ultimate consequences of abolition- race war, racial amalgamation, and, as one militant Southern leader put it, ‘the Africanization of the South.’”(Martin 441) Gradually the nation was moving towards secession. Moreover during the 1850’s, American party system was seriously damaged. “One major political party the Whigs collapsed. (After the elections of

1852) Another-the Democrats- split into Northern and Southern factions. With the break down of the party system, the issues raised by slavery exploded. The bonds that had bound the country for more than seven decades began to unravel.”(Martin 441)

The events that Whitman witnessed in the early 1850’s had begun to disillusion him; for one thing he was not happy with the current parties and their leaders. In his essay “Whitman the Democrat” Kenneth Cmiel observes that “In the early 1850’s, he grew increasingly disenchanted with mainstream politicians, especially for their evasion of slavery.”(Reynolds 216) After the Fugitive Slave Act was passed, he published four reactionary poems: Dough Face Song, Blood Money, A Boston Ballad and Wounded in the House of Friends. According to Reynolds these poems “were angry, agitated poems, erupting with rebellious ideas.” (Reynolds 127) The poems tell the reader a lot about how much Whitman was disappointed and furious. These poems were appeared in the New York Tribune.

In the elections of 1852 the Democrats nominated Franklin Pierce and the Whigs nominated General Winfield Scott. At the same time Whitman’s Free Soil Party was reorganized under the name of the Free Democratic Party. They were thinking about nominating John P. Hale who was indecisive about accepting the nomination. But his mind was changed by a letter from Walt Whitman. Reynolds has noted that Whitman was an admirer of Hale especially because of his opposition of slavery and because he was “a man of principle who embodied a spirit of togetherness and comradeship.”(Reynolds 135)

According to Reynolds Whitman’s letter to Hale “was an important transitional document revealing his growing disgust with the established parties and his turn toward humanistic alternatives to the party system.”(Reynolds 135) In this letter Whitman emphasized the need of a party and a leader who would recognize the importance of the common people and their rights. In his letter, he asked Hale “to make personal addresses

directly to the people, giving condensed embodiments of the principal ideas which distinguish our liberal faith from the drag-parties and their platforms.”(Reynolds 135) He also emphasized that “current legislators were out of touch with ‘the great mass of the common people.’”(Reynolds 135) He finally declared his trust in the common people and he claimed that he was aware of the power of the people in New York. “But I know the people. I know well (for I am practically in New York) the real heart of this mighty city-the tens of thousands of young men, the mechanics, the writers, &c. &c. In all this, under and behind all the bosh of the regular politicians, there burns, almost with fierceness, the divine fire which more or less, during all ages, has only waited a chance to leap forth and confound the calculations of tyrants, hunkers, and all their tribe.”(Reynolds 135)

Although Hale accepted the nomination after the letter of Whitman, he “got just 5 percent of the national vote” and lost the election. (Reynolds 135) Whitman’s last hope was destroyed. Now a new crisis was ahead of the country: The Kansas Nebraska Act.

THE KANSAS NEBRASKA ACT

The Kansas Nebraska Act was one of the most important political events of the 1850’s. On January 1854, Senator Stephen Douglas proposed that “the area west of Iowa and Missouri- which had been set aside as a permanent Indian reservation- be organized as the Nebraska territory and opened to White settlement.”(Martin 460) According to Douglas, people who settled a territory should decide by themselves whether slavery would be permitted or not. This proposal is the harbinger of the new conflicts between the North and South. Because as it is stated in A People A Nation The Kansas Nebraska Act “opened a Pandora’s box... and threw land open to slavery where it had been prohibited. (Norton 244) The northerners reacted against the Kansas Nebraska Act severely with the fear that slavery would soon spread across the Western territories. Whitman was among them. Reynolds points out that he “could not tolerate the bill Douglas introduced [...] the Democratic leadership for

whom Whitman may have retained some residual respect suddenly seemed to him corrupt and beyond redemption. Surveying all antebellum presidents, Whitman would call Pierce ‘the weakest,-the worst of the lot.’”(Reynolds 137)

The Kansas-Nebraska Act had a destructive impact on the country. Northerners and Southerners were now seriously divided. “Between 1854 and 1859, seven states, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Michigan, Maine, Ohio and Wisconsin- passed personal liberty laws. These laws interfered with the Fugitive Slave Act by providing counsel for alleged fugitives and requiring trial by jury. Southerners saw the liberty laws as sign of bad faith.”(Norton 245) Moreover the Act also damaged party system. The Whig Party was divided into two as northern and southern wings. “The Democrats survived, but their support in the North fell drastically in the 1854 elections.”(Norton 245)

The results of the Kansas Nebraska Act also gave birth to a new party. In the summer of 1854, “antislavery Whigs and Democrats, Free Soilers and other reformers throughout the Old Northwest” came together and formed a new party called the Republican Party. Their purpose was “to keep slavery out of the territories” (Norton 245) and they won a victory in the elections of 1854 “by capturing a majority of House seats in the North.”(Norton 245)

Soon after the Kansas Nebraska Act, an event known as “Bleeding Kansas” sharpened the conflict between Northerners and Southerners. Fights between the Abolitionist groups and Southerners “caused the bloodshed.” Between May and September 1856, “terrorism and guerilla warfare swept across Kansas, leaving 200 dead and \$ 2 million in property damage.”(Martin 464). In America and its People Bleeding Kansas is interpreted as “A rehearsal for Civil War” (463)

After writing the poem “A Boston Ballad”, Whitman (disappointed by the event very much,) attacked President Pierce severely by saying that “The President eats dirt and excrement for his daily meals, likes it, and tries to force it on The States. The cushions of the

Presidency are nothing but filth and blood. The pavements of Congress are also bloody.”(Reynolds 140) On July 4, 1855 when Whitman published “Leaves of Grass”, a collection of poems, he was no longer the same person who was once devoted to parties and party leaders, the political disillusionments had transformed him into a new man who was looking for a way out to national unity in poetry. According to Reynolds, “With the possibility of resolution through normal political channels now dead, all the more reason, he saw to forge a new resolution in his poetry.”(Reynolds 146)With this aim Whitman expressed his poetic mission in the Preface to the first issue of the Leaves of Grass and offered his poetry as a means to reunite the country again.

THE ELECTIONS OF 1856 AND WHITMAN’S “THE 18TH PRESIDENCY”

In the elections of 1856 the Democrats nominated James Buchanan who had served “as ambassador in Britain for four years.”(Norton 247) Buchanan won the election against the Republican nominee John C. Fremont who also “won eleven of sixteen free states; Republicans had become the dominant party in the North.” (Norton 247) According to Gay Wilson Allen Whitman was also “deeply concerned in the summer of 1856 with events growing out of slavery. His indignation with the political parties became almost frenetic when the Democrats nominated James Buchanan.”(Allen 170) Allen argues that “Buchanan represented the faction which had betrayed Whitman and the Free Soil Democrats in 1847-1848.”(Allen 170) In 1856, Walt Whitman wrote a political tract called The 18th Presidency which wasn’t published until Whitman’s death. This political tract was the evidence of his loss of faith in the current parties and their leaders. He severely criticized the government and its authorities and at the same time he emphasized the importance of the common American men again:

“At present, the personnel of the government of these thirty millions, in executives and elsewhere, is drawn from limber-tongued lawyers, very fluent but empty, feeble old

men, professional politicians... rarely drawn from the solid body of the people... I expect to see the day when the like of the present personnel of the governments, federal, state, municipal, military and naval will be looked upon with derision, and when qualified mechanics and young men will reach Congress and other official stations, sent in their working costumes, fresh from their benches and tools, and returning to them again with dignity.”

(Allen 171)

According to Allen “The main thesis of ‘The Eighteenth Presidency’ is that under the corrupt party system in the United States of that time when government has ceased to be representative, and the ideals of the founding fathers have been betrayed” (Allen 171) Whitman also criticizes the Parties and Presidential elections estranged from their own people and protecting Americans interests:

“Today of all the persons in public office in These States, not one in a thousand has been chosen by any spontaneous movement of the people, nor is attending to the interests of the people; all have been nominated and put through by great or small caucuses of the politicians...or appointed as rewards for electioneering; and all consign themselves to personal and party interests...” (Allen171)

Through the end of the tract Whitman also declares that he had no trust for any kind of parties and he sarcastically portrays a stereotype image that parties had soon after they became successful:

“I place no reliance upon any old party, nor upon any new party. Suppose one to be formed under the noblest auspices, and getting into power with the noblest intentions, how long with it remain so? ... As soon as it becomes successful, and there are offices to be bestowed, the politicians leave the unsuccessful parties and rush toward it, and it ripens and rots with the rest.”(Allen 172)

Whitman ends the tract with the necessity of a great leader and his duty to recognize American people.

“Whenever the day comes for him to appear, the man who shall be the Redeemer President of The States, is to be one that fullest realizes the rights of individuals signified by the impregnable rights of The States, the substratum of this Union.”(Allen 173)

Between 1857 and 1858 there were two important events that fastened the division. In 1857 a Missouri slave called Dred Scott “had sued his owner for his freedom. Scott based his suit on the fact that his former owner, an army surgeon, had taken him for several years into Illinois, a free state and into the Wisconsin territory, from which slavery had been barred by the Missouri Compromise. Scott first won and then lost his case...” (Norton247)

This event raised new questions about the rights of a black person to sue, “Had residence in free territory made him free?” and finally “Did the Congress have the power to prohibit slavery in a territory?”(Norton 247) When Chief Justice Roger B.Taney announced his answer, the conflict was deepened once more. Taney declared that “the residence in a territory did not make Scott free; and, most important, that Congress lacked the power to bar slavery from a territory...” (Norton 247) As it is stated in *A People and A Nation* “A storm of angry reaction broke in the North. The decision alarmed a wide variety of northerners-abolitionists... Every charge against the aggressive Slave Power seemed now to be confirmed.”(Norton 248) Among the protesters there was a man called Abraham Lincoln from Illinois Senate who made his famous

“House Divided” speech and declared that “ I do not expect the Union to be dissolved- I do not expect the House to fall-but I do expect it to cease to be divided...Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates will push it forward, till it shall become alike lawful in all the states, old as

well as new, North as well as South.”

(Norton 248)

The second event was the result of popular vote in Kansas about the permission of slavery. The popular vote showed that Kansas did not want slavery. But in spite of this result in 1858 President Buchanan asked members of the Congress to admit Kansas as a slave state. “Kansas voters” rejected slavery for the third time. But as it is stated in A People and A Nation Buchanan’s “action infuriated southern Democrats.”(Norton 248) The result caused a great disappointment in the North. In America and Its People, it is stated that “the nation would never be the same” especially after 1857. The nation was divided. In 1858, the New York Tribune declared that “We are not one people. We are two peoples. We are a people for freedom and a people for slavery. Between the two, conflict is inevitable.”

(Martin 469)

JOHN BROWN’S RAID AT HARPER’S FERRY AND SECESSIONS FROM THE UNION

In 1859 the sectional conflict between the North and South was intensified by John Brown’s raid at Harper’s Ferry. John Brown, the Kansas abolitionist, planned to capture the federal arsenal at Harper’s Ferry with his men. His aim was to “drive southward into Tennessee and Alabama, raiding federal arsenals and inciting slave insurrections... he hoped to ignite a sectional crisis that would destroy slavery.”(Martin 471)But he failed in this mission. He was captured by Robert Lee’s marines and was put on trial a week after his attack. Brown’s “attempted insurrection struck fear into the South. Then it came to light that Brown had financial backing from several prominent abolitionists and northern intellectuals praised him as a hero and a martyr. These disclosures and northern praise of Brown multiplied

southerners' fears and anger many times over. The unity of the nation was now in peril.”
(Norton 249)

In the elections of 1860 the Democratic Party broke into two. Because it presented two nominees: “Stephen E. Douglas for the northern wing and Vice President John. C Brekinridge of Kentucky for the southern. The Republicans nominated Abraham Lincoln” (Norton 249) Election of 1860 resulted with Lincoln’s victory. But his job was not easy because the country was boiling. In America Its People, it is stated that “The coming of the Civil War could be compared to o time bomb ready to explode.”(Martin 479) The first sign of explosion came soon after Lincoln’s elections. On December 20, 1860 South Carolina voted to secede from the Union, on February, 1861 Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas had also decided to secede from Union and “proclaimed a new nation, the Confederate States of America.”(Martin 481) They chose Jefferson Davis as their president and “they began to function independently of the United States.” (Norton 251)

On the other hand four states, Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee and Arkansas “rejected secession and did not join the Confederacy until after the fighting had started.”(Norton 251) In A People and A Nation it is stated that “The dilemma facing President Lincoln on his inauguration day in March 1861 was how to main the authority of the federal government without provoking war in the states that had left the Union.”(Norton 252) In his inaugural address Lincoln called the South with these words: “We are not enemies but friends.” But the South did not hear this calling and on April 12, 1861, the Confederate army opened fire on Fort Sumter and finally the Civil War had begun.

In conclusion, Americans started their journey with the aim of territorial expansion. They justified their attacks to foreign territories with the slogan of Manifest Destiny. They named the expansion as “inevitable.” In 1846 when they attacked Mexico probably no one was aware of the fact that they were giving a start to one of the bloodiest wars in the country’s

history. The ones who fought against the Mexicans side by side were now going to shoot each other. Slavery, an issue which was born in the late 1840's, was now swallowing the country. Its negative influence on the parties and present governments was just the one side of the coin. The result on the other side was more harsh and brutal. It caused a nation to be divided. "Their Manifest Destiny" turned them into tragic victims destined to kill each other.

WHITMAN'S REACTION POEMS IN THE 1850'S

Beginning from the late 1840's Walt Whitman went through a disappointing and discouraging process of rethinking his political beliefs and loyalties. At the end of this process, when he published Leaves of Grass, a collection of poems, in 1855 he was not the same Walt Whitman any more. There were obvious changes in his way of thinking and most importantly in the tone of his new poetry. From the beginning of his career as a journalist and editor Whitman had always been a loyal supporter of the Democratic Party and its leaders. The papers that he worked for at that period were the organs of the Democratic Party. He even served the party as an electioneer in 1840. In an essay called "Politics and Poetry: Leaves of Grass and The Social Crisis of the 1850's" David Reynolds describes Whitman as "a Democratic loyalist who had full faith in the party's leaders and in the soundness of the full party system." (Reynolds 67) For Walt Whitman democracy and the Democratic Party were inseparable parts of a whole. On June 19, 1846, in an article written for the Eagle, he expresses his loyalty to the party with these words:

"The struggles of those who have any faith in democracy at all, must be made in the frame and limits of our own party...As far as the Democrats of Brooklyn are concerned, they recognize but two great political divisions-themselves and the men who are not themselves. These are all. Those who work not for us, work against us."

(Reynolds 67-8)

Whitman was working for the Eagle during that period and in all his articles he was writing in favor of the Democratic Party and supporting its principles. In 1846, when President Polk, who was a Democrat, got the approval of the Congress to attack Mexico in the name of territorial expansion, Whitman supported him and called him as “a truly, noble Magistrate.” (Allen 164) But like many Americans, he was not aware of the fact that the war would soon have a devastating consequence: the question of slavery in the new territories. In order to prevent a probable problem, David Wilmot proposed to exclude slavery from the new territories. The first shock came to Whitman at this time. His “noble Magistrate” President Polk declared that Mr. Wilmot’s proposal was “foolish” (Reynolds 116) Unlike President Polk, Whitman supported the Wilmot Proviso. As Gay Wilson Allen points out in The New Walt Whitman Handbook Whitman “was opposed to slavery as an institution and had published editorials denouncing the slave trade...” (Allen 164) Similarly David Reynolds also has noted that “Whitman was an antiextensionist: one opposed to the extension of slavery into the western territories.”(Reynolds 68) He also believed that members of the Democratic Party also would share his opinions about slavery. But unfortunately they did not. In 1847, in the Democratic convention at Syracuse, “the New York Democrats refused to take a definite stand on the question. In the November elections the Democrats were solidly defeated in New York and Whitman thought it was because the Party had not been ‘sufficiently bold, open and radical [liberal], in its avowals of sentiment.’”(Allen 166) According to Gay Wilson Allen Whitman was blaming the Party “for not having taken firm honest stand on the Wilmot Proviso.”(Allen 166) Then Whitman wrote a warning message to the Party members and said that

“We must plan ourselves firmly on the side of freedom and openly espouse it. The late election is terrific warning of the folly of all half-way policy in such matters-of all compromises that neither receive or reject a great idea to which the people are once

fully awakened.”

(Allen 166)

The second shock came soon after Polk’s refusal of the Proviso. Whitman was fired from his job in the Eagle on January, 1848. Isaac Van Anden who was the owner of that paper, showed him the door when Whitman refused to publish an article written against the Wilmot Proviso. It’s not difficult to imagine what he felt that at that time. Most probably, he must have been disappointed and discouraged after a treatment like this. Because it was not only his pride and honor was damaged but also the political beliefs that had nurtured him for a long time were ignored. After spending three months in New Orleans, he returned to Manhattan and joined a new formation, The Free Soil Party, formed by the New York Democrats and anti slavery Whigs. He became “one of delegates from Brooklyn” in the first Free Soil convention at Buffalo. After his return he founded the Brooklyn “Freeman” paper and this time gave his full support to the Free Soil Party leaders and doctrines. But the Free Soilers lost the election and his Freeman office was destroyed by a fire.

As Reynolds has noted Whitman “was jarred back into political action in early 1850 by events on the national scene.”(Reynolds 73) One of the reasons for this was Henry Clay’s Compromise in which Clay offers California as a free state to calm down Northerners rage but on the other hand in order to please Southerners, the Compromise orders back any escaping slave to his master again. David Reynolds claims that

“Whitman saw that the Compromise threatened the political health of the American Republic. Conflict over principles between opposing parties, he had long believed, was essential to the nation’s health. But now principles and party differences were being tossed into a gray middle ground of compromise.”

(Reynolds 127)

It was exactly at that time that Whitman published four poems which are described by Reynolds as “angry, agitated poems, erupting with rebellious ideas and occasionally straining beyond normal rhythms toward free verse.”(Reynolds 127)

“THE DOUGH FACE SONG”

One of the first poems of the four is “Dough-Face Song.” It was published on March 2, 1850, in the Evening Post. In this poem Whitman severely criticizes Henry Clay and the Northern politicians who gave support to the Compromise. Whitman accused them of being like dough in the hands of Southerners. One can easily feel how angry and disappointed Whitman was:

We are all docile dough faces,
They knead us with the fist
They, the dashing Southern lords,
We labor as they list;
For them we speak-or hold our tongues,
For them we turn and twist.

(Whitman 339)

The following lines are like a call for peace and compromise. Whitman still believes that a compromise between the North and the South, between the master and slave is possible. Through these lines he shows a way to reach an agreement.

Beyond all such we know a term
Charming to ears and eyes,
With it we will stab young Freedom,
And do it in disguise;
Speak soft, ye wily dough faces
That term is ‘compromise.’

(Whitman 339)

Whitman's sensitivity for the continuation of the Union shows itself clearly in these lines and they are like warning for the whole nation:

Let's stop exciting clatter,
And pacify slave breeding wrath
By yielding all the matter;
For otherwise, as sure as guns,
The Union it will shatter.

(Whitman 340)

THE BLOOD MONEY

Another poem in which Whitman criticizes supporters of The Slave Act is "The Blood Money". It was published on March 22, in the New York Tribune. His anger in the "Dough Face Song" seemed to grow deeper and deeper and the tone of the poem becomes highly accusatory. The poem has a reference to the New Testament. He accuses the Northern politicians of betraying the Union and the ideals of the nation by comparing them with Judas who betrayed Christ.

Of olden time, when it came to pass
That the beautiful god, Jesus, should finish his work on earth,
Then went Judas, and sold divine youth,
And took pay for his body. [...]
And still goes one, saying,
"What will ye give me, and I will deliver this man unto you?"
And they make the covenant, and pay pieces of silver. [...]
Witness of anguish, brother of slaves,
Not with thy price closed the price of thine image;

And still Iscariot plies his trade.

(503)

WOUNDED IN THE HOUSE OF FRIENDS and RESURGEMUS

“Wounded in the House of Friends” has a more bitter tone than the “Blood Money” and “Dough Face Song.” It was published on June 14, in the Tribune. In the opening lines of the poem, Whitman tells the reader that an unexpected betrayal came from unexpected people; people whom are known as friends.

If thou art balk'd, O Freedom
The victory is not to thy manlier foes;
From the house of friends comes the death stabs.
Virginia, mother of greatness,
Blush not for being also mother of slaves;
You might have born deeper slaves-
Doughfaces, crawlers, lice of humanity-
Terrific screamers of freedom,
Who roar and bawl, and get hot i' the face, [...]
Arise, young North!
Our elder blood flows in the veins of cowards: [...]

(505)

In these lines Whitman seems to respect the South because he thinks that unlike Northerners they haven't betrayed what they believe. According to Reynolds in this poem, he declares that “Southern slave owners were far more admirable than Northern doughfaces.” (Reynolds 129) On the other hand he openly accuses Northerners of betraying their beliefs and calls them

“doughfaces, crawlers, lice of humanity.” Finally in the last lines he aims to awaken young Northerners and warns them against betrayers and cowards.

Two months later came the last poem of the four poems: “Resurgemus.” The poem is about European revolutions in 1848.

Suddenly, out of its stale and drowsy air, the air of slaves,
Like lightening Europe le'pt forth,
Sombre, superb and terrible,
As Ahimoth, brother of Death.
God, 't was delicious!
That brief tight, glorious grip
Upon the throaths of Kings.
You liars paid to defile the People,

(Whitman 505)

These lines show Whitman's excitement about the revolution and the slave power to take control of tyrant kings and rulers at last.

Mark you now:
Not for numberless agonies, murders, lusts,
For court thieving in its manifold mean forms,
Worming from its simplicity the poor man's wages;
For many a promise sworn by royal lips
And broken, and laughed at in the breaking;

[...]

In the third stanza, when the tyrant rulers are back, he warns them that the “oppressed classes would rise an eerie, vindictive procession behind the upper classes” (Reynolds 132) :

But the sweetness of mercy brewed bitter destruction,

And frightened rulers come back:
Each comes in state, with his train,
Hangman, priest and tax gatherer,
Soldier, lawyer and sycophant;
As appalling procession of locust,
And the king struts grandly again.

(505)

Finally Whitman ends the poem with a positive, “hopeful image of restoration” (Reynolds 132) that tyrants will loose again and the oppressed ones will revolt again through the seeds of martyrs:

Those corpses of young men,
Those martyrs that hang from the gibbets,
[...]
Live elsewhere with undying vitality;
[...]
They were purified by death,
They were taught and exalted.
Not a grave of those slaughtered ones,
But is growing its seed of freedom,
In its turn to bear seed,
Which the wind shall carry afar and resow,
And the rain nourish.

(Whitman 506)

Whitman is hoping that the wind will carry the “seed of freedom” and nurtured by the rain. According to Reynolds the poem was important in two ways. First of all with this poem he

argues that Whitman “was beginning to forge a humanistic, artistic reconstruction on the ruins of his shattered political beliefs.”(Reynolds 132) Secondly, “for the first time in print, he was using a form that approximated free verse. The seeds of *Leaves of Grass* were sown in the political crisis of 1850.” (Reynolds 132)

A BOSTON BALLAD

On May 24, 1854, just a year before the publication of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman wrote another cynical poem as a reaction to the seizure of Anthony Burns by the federal troops in Boston. The Poem is called “A Boston Ballad.” Although there is no mention of Burns’ name in the poem, the poem describes the day that Burns was ordered back to Virginia and dragged by the federal troops through the streets of Boston. As David Reynolds has noted “The poem was a vigorous, sarcastic protest against the state and federal authorities handled the Burns case. (Reynolds 137). For Whitman, the event is like a “show” which disturbs the old patriots so much that they came out of their graves.

To get betimes in Boston town I rose this morning early
Here’s a good place at the corner, I must stand and see the show.
Clear the way there Jonathan!
Way for the President’s marshal - way for the government cannon[...]
A fog follows, antiques of the same come limping,
Some appear wooden-legged, and some appear bandaged and bloodless.
Why this is indeed a show-it has called the dead out of the earth!
Phantoms! Phantoms countless by flank and rear! [...]

(244)

Whitman puts his own anger into the mouths of the phantoms and makes them ask:

What troubles you Yankee phantoms? What is this all chattering of bare gums?

Does the ague convulse your limbs? do you mistake your crutches for
firelocks and level them?

In the following lines, Whitman wants the phantoms to retreat. Because there is nothing they
can do.

Retreat then-pell-mell!

To your graves- back-back to the hills old limpers!

I do not think you belong here anyhow.

(245)

The poem ends in a sarcastic and bitter tone. Whitman asks the Mayor to sent a committee to
England and remove King George's body from his grave, put the pieces (bones) together and
bring it to Boston so that the "President's marshal" and "roars from" Congress can be happy
under the British rule again.

I will whisper it to the Mayor, he shall send a committee to England,

They shall get a grand from the Parliament, go with a cart to the royal vault,

Dig out King George's coffin, unwrap him quick from the grave-clothes, box
up his bones for a journey [...]

The committee open the box, set up the regal lips, glue those that will not stray
[...]

You have got your revenge, old buster-the crown is come to its own, and more
than its own.

(Whitman 244-246)

Thus in 1855, when he published Leaves of Grass Whitman was no longer as
Reynolds has noted "a dandyish Democrat journalist" who was "almost sheepishly loyal to
the political leaders and party principles." (Reynolds 307) All the political beliefs that he
believed and all the leaders that he trusted gave him nothing but disappointments. Democracy,

his ideal doctrine, was melting away in the hands of party leaders. He decided to take action and Poetry opened up a new way for him to remind the nation that they were the brothers and sisters of the same land, not enemies. In Leaves of Grass, readers came across with a different Walt Whitman rather than an angry democratic poet.; He learned his lesson and ready to teach it to the American nation. It wouldn't be wrong to say that Leaves of Grass is the result of a certain transformation that Whitman had gone through in the mid 1840's and early 1850's. The political disillusionments in those years led him to create a new humanist persona that differentiate no man but celebrated all.

CHAPTER II

THE EQUAL AND DEMOCRATIC “I” OF LEAVES OF GRASS

The political and social crisis that America had gone through in the 1850's can be best described as disheartening and demoralizing for American nation. The fugitive Slave Act, the seizure of Anthony Burns and the Kansas-Nebraska Act were the events that contributed the sectional conflict between the North and the South. There was hate, anger and hostility in the air. The Union was under a serious threat of destruction. According to David Reynolds “politically and socially America was in some ways close to chaos.”(Reynolds 306) Under these circumstances, on July 4, 1855 when a thin, green book appeared with leaves and flowers on its cover, nobody paid any attention. There was even no author's name or a title on it. As Asselineau has noted “It was necessary to turn the page in order to find in very small print the name of Walter Whitman in the copyright notice.”(Asselineau 47) Walt Whitman, who had been an editor and a journalist in an earlier decade, was on stage now but with a different role and mission. He was no longer a man of politics. He was a poet now, as Emerson described in his essay “The Poet” as the “representative of man” and as “the true and only doctor” (Adams 564). Actually it was exactly in those times that the country was in need of a doctor, a kind of healer who could be able to offer a remedy or a way out. Whitman writes the prescription in Leaves of Grass series. Although the American public failed to recognize its importance, Leaves of Grass was in fact a herald of what was to come.

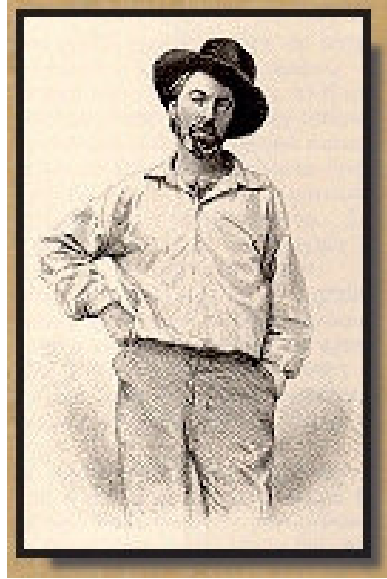
In this chapter the focus will be on the three editions of Leaves of Grass before the Civil War and the individual persona that Whitman created in his poems will be explored. In all the three editions of Leaves of Grass, Whitman frequently used the first person pronoun “I” and created an identity which is portrayed as equal, democratic and highly erotic. The self that Whitman introduced in his poetry had full faith in himself, never hesitated to voice what he believed, treat every single individual equally no matter of what religion, region and color they were and finally had great love and trust for his country and its people. The same model of an ideal American individual was portrayed a decade earlier by one of the greatest thinkers and philosophers in America. He was Ralph Waldo Emerson who inspired many important names in the 19th century American Literature with the movement of Transcendentalism and the doctrine of individualism. So in one part of this chapter Ralph Waldo Emerson and his influence on Whitman’s poetry will be discussed. On the other hand Emerson’s disciple, Henry David Thoreau who developed his own theory called “The Majority of One” will also be touched upon briefly to emphasize how he and Walt Whitman differ from each other as the two disciples of Emerson. In the light of Emerson and Thoreau’s doctrines and depiction of the individual self, Whitman’s “I” will be understood more clearly.

The political disillusionments and disappointments led Whitman to a period of gloomy pessimistic introspection between the years 1846 and 1855. Poems like “Dough Face Song”, “Blood Money”, “Wounded in the House of Friends”, “Resurgemus”, “A Boston Ballad” are the products of this period. In his essay “Whitman the Democrat” Kenneth Cmiel observes that “In the early 1850’s, he grew increasingly disenchanted with mainstream politicians, especially for their evasion of slavery.”(Reynolds 216) The work that he produced as a journalist and editor before Leaves of Grass was the work of a man who believes that the future of the country is in the hands of the parties and its leaders and democracy can only be fully absorbed by the nation if it is represented by the politicians. But the political

disillusionments turned him into a poet of angry disappointed poems. With Leaves of Grass he came to feel that the future of the country was not in the hands of a few party leaders but in the hands of American nation. In fact Leaves of Grass turned into a declaration of Whitman's faith in American nation. Especially, in the Preface to the first edition, he reminds the nation of its potential to get over all the conflicts and problems which were dividing the nation at that period. His pessimism and disillusionment in the pre 1855 poems now left its place to an optimistic, hopeful and most importantly nationalistic tone. Until the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, Whitman published three editions of Leaves of Grass and in every edition this optimism grew stronger.

THE 1855 EDITION OF LEAVES OF GRASS

The first edition of Leaves of Grass tells the reader a lot about Whitman and his poetry. The book consists of a Preface and 12 untitled poems. It is very interesting and unusual that on the cover of the book, there was no indication about the author. When a reader opened the first page, s/he saw a portrait of the poet. It showed Whitman, with a hat on his head, wearing an half opened shirt and one hand in his pocket, standing "in a careless attitude, without coat or vest, with a rough felt on his head, one hand thrust lazily into his pocket and the other resting on his hip... the picture of a perfect loafer; yet a thoughtful loafer, an amiable loafer, an able loafer." (Greenspan139) Ed Folsom quotes these lines in his essay called "Illustrations of the Self in Leaves of Grass" from James K. Wallace's "Whitman and life Illustrated: A Forgotten 1855 Review of Leaves" and he argued that this image of Whitman was "ideologically charged representation of himself" because the portrait "invites us to read this figure symbolically, to place it in a social context that makes sense of the figure, and in so doing to question traditional assumptions about what a poet can be, where a poet can come from, and how a poet can be portrayed."(Greenspan 139)



A lot has been said about the portrait of Whitman in the first edition. For instance according to Roger Asselineau “Whitman had not wanted to be a name, but a presence; he wished to be a man, rather than an author, and had therefore placed his portrait, at the beginning of the book facing the title page.” (Asselineau 47) Whitman’s choice of putting his portrait on the title page was no doubt innovative and inspiring. Ed Folsom emphasizes the importance of this portrait in the literary circles with these words: “Over the next century, the image would prove to be highly influential: It gradually worked to transform the way most American poets portrayed themselves on their book jackets and frontispieces. A growing number of poets traded their coats and ties and face portraits for al fresco body poses in informal clothes-poses that echoed, again and again, Whitman’s originating image of the poet as literal outsider.”(Greenspan 135) Although some of Whitman’s friends like William Sloane Kennedy criticized him and found his portrait “repulsive, loaferish, with it’s sensual mouth, and hoped that it would be dropped from future editions.”(Greenspan 136) Whitman gave him an answer in his own way and declared that he liked his portrait because “it is natural, honest, easy: as spontaneous as you are, as I am, this instant, as we talk together.”(Greenspan 136) Although Whitman is describing his portrait here, the persona that he constructs in the Leaves

of Grass series, is not different from what he said above. There is no difference between the Walt Whitman in the portrait and the Walt Whitman in the first edition of Leaves of Grass.

In Leaves of Grass, Whitman first welcomes the reader with a Preface. Preface to the first edition of Leaves is as important as the 12 poems in the book. It tells reader a lot about the nature of Whitman's poetry and his mission as an "American bard." In the Preface he announces that it's the duty of a poet to encourage the American nation to be aware of the opportunities that this land is offering for them and whatever happens Americans have the potential to get over the difficulties. Later in his Civil War poems this mission gains another dimension and this time the poet transforms himself as a unifier and a healer. In the Preface to the first edition of Leaves of Grass, Whitman purifies himself from all the political issues and announces his faith in America and its nation.

He begins the Preface with a very much quoted declaration that "The Americans of all nations at any time upon the earth have probably the fullest poetical nature. The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem." (Whitman 263) In the following sentences he states that America would "never be bankrupt while corn grows from the ground, or the orchard drop apples, or the bays contain fish, or men beget children upon women."(263) In the middle of a social and political crisis, these are brave words to indicate that there is still hope and a way out for the American nation. Walt Whitman claims that America with its people and fertile lands could overcome its problems. What he is trying to say is that American land can still take care of every single individual, either from the North or from the South as long as its productivity and fertility continues. He is as if trying to imply that all these conflicts and problems between the members of the same nation are futile.

In the following paragraph he argues that the key to solve all the problems is in the hands of the common man: "The genius of the United States is not best or most in its executives or legislatures, nor in its ambassadors or authors or colleges or churches or parlors,

nor even in its newspapers or inventors- but always most in the common people, south, north, west, east, in all its states, through all its mighty amplitude.”(Whitman 264)

This explanation is the sign of the transformation that he had gone through in that nine years time. As David Reynolds has noted in Walt Whitman’s America “A decade earlier, he had been a dandyish Democratic journalist, sporting a vest and a polished cane, almost sheepishly loyal to political leaders and party principles. Now he was a roughly dressed carpenter who sneered at politicians and looked for redemption among common people.”(Reynolds 307) So for Whitman the solution is within the common man of America. It is the nation itself who could save the country of what it had become.

In the beginning of the Preface Whitman’s proclamation that “The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem” is once more emphasized and becomes meaningful in the following paragraphs because he claims that “The message of great poems to each man and woman are, Come to us on equal terms, only then can you understand us. We are no better than you, what we inclose, you inclose, what we enjoy you may enjoy. Did you suppose there could be only one Supreme? We affirm there can be unnumber’d Supremes, and that one does not countervail another, any more than one eyesight countervails another- and that men can be good or grand only of the consciousness of their supremacy within them.”(Whitman 269) Here Whitman describes America as the land of equality and he is asking for his audience to realize the fact that, on this land, nobody is superior than the other and everyone has equal rights. Later in “Song of Myself” he promises the reader that he will “give the sign of democracy” and says that “By God! I will accept nothing which all cannot have their counterpart of on the same terms” (Whitman 49).

In the following paragraph, he explains that it is the duty of the American bard to treat every individual equally and argues that: “The American bard shall delineate no class of persons,... not be for the Eastern states more than the Western, or the Northern states more

than the Southern.”(Whitman 269) Whitman ends the Preface with another proclamation that “the soul of the American nation rejects none, it permits all.” (Whitman 275) In this final sentence Whitman reemphasizes his faith in the nation and implies that it is in the nature of the American nation to embrace and accept all. In From Puritanism to Postmodernism, A History of American Literature, it is stated that this “‘all’ feeling, the ideal of large embrace is the guiding principle of Leaves of Grass.” (Ruland 165) The book interprets Leaves of Grass and the Preface as a “work of cosmic inclusion which accepts the unity and beneficence of the All.”(Ruland 165)

All these claims in the preface have been put in to practice in the Leaves of Grass series. Whitman published six editions of Leaves of Grass; three of them were published before the Civil War and the other three editions came after the war. As Gay Wilson Allen has noted, “Walt Whitman began his first edition with the attempt to incarnate in his own person the whole range of life, geography, and national consciousness of nineteenth-century America.”(Allen 68) In other words, starting with the first edition Whitman composes poems of America which he described as “the greatest poem” in the Preface. The first edition of Leaves of Grass is a very short book of 95 pages. There were 12 untitled poems in it and the first poem which will later be named as “Song of Myself” undoubtedly plays a crucial role in his poetic career not only because it is the first and the longest poem of the first edition but also, it tells a lot about the nature of Whitman’s poetry and his perceptions of life.

America and American people had always been the major source of his poetry and in “Song of Myself” he successfully relates instances from American life with his own life. “Song of Myself” is dominated by the persona that Whitman created in the poem. He constructs an identity and describes himself as:

Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son,
Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding,

No sentimentalist, no stander above men and women or apart from them,

No more modest than immodest. (Whitman 48-9)

According to Roger Asselineau, through these lines “He introduces himself as the man of the people. He wished first of all to give an impression of physical vigor. The image he tries to impose is that of laborer, solidly built, proud of his strength and of his carnal appetites, whose sensual instincts are not paralyzed by any inhibition... He wears no mask. He gives free rein to his emotions; he is not ashamed of the needs of his body and above all, he does not stand apart from the other people” (Asselineau 65) This explanation of Asselineau indicates two sides of Whitman’s identity: an equal, democratic self which embraces all as sisters and brothers and the private self which is erotic and never hesitates to express the needs and the beauty of the body. Throughout the poem the reader will come across the two functions of the self as equal, democratic and erotic frequently.

The poem begins one of the most famous and most quoted lines:

I celebrate myself and I sing myself,

And what I assume you shall assume,

For every atom belonging to me as good as belongs to you.

I loafe and invite my soul,

I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.

My tongue, every atom of my blood, form’d from this soil, this air,

Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their parents the same,

I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health begin,

Hoping to cease not till death.

(Whitman 26)

Here in these opening lines, Whitman now begins to set for a model of individual who is equal and democratic. One can feel his powerful egotism and his control over the reader with the lines /What I assume you shall assume/ For every atom belonging to me as good as belongs to you /. Until the end of these lines he emphasizes his individuality through the frequent use of “I” He tries to establish a relation between himself and the other members of the society. He portrays himself as an individual who is confident and sure of himself and expects the same characteristics from the other people. Moreover with the following lines, / My tongue, every atom of my blood, form’d from this soil, this air, / Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their parents the same,/ he tells the reader that he is no different from the people who were born on the land of America and that he shares the same geographical roots with the other members of American society. In other words he is as American as any single individual on this land. So while he is announcing the private side of his “I” he at the same time emphasizes the equal side of it. In this way, I believe, he bridges the gap between himself and the reader.

Another characteristic of Whitman’s “I” is that it is too much authoritarian and controlling over the reader. By making the reader to assume what he assumes, Whitman expects not only an active involvement of the society but also of the reader. In ““As if I were with you’- The Performance of Whitman’s Poetry” Stephen Railton interprets the position of the reader in Whitman’s poetry with these words:

“We in the audience can choose to attend to the performance on its own terms, and admire or censure, in any case be amazed by Whitman’s egotism, his delight in himself, the sureness with which he exhibits that self to us”(Greenspan 9)

As Railton has noted, in one part of the poem he intentionally indicates that

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.

(Whitman 74)

His influence and control over the reader still continues in these lines. This time he captures the reader within the self that he has improved so far. After the celebration of himself, Whitman invites reader to a journey of the “I” and assures the reader to experience “the origin of all poems.”

Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems,

You shall possess the good of the earth and the sun, (there are millions of suns left,)

You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the specters in books

You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,

You shall listen to all sides and filter them from your self.

(Whitman 28)

His confidence in the beginning of the poem is now getting stronger. He guarantees the reader to “possess origins of all poems”. He offers to be a guide; a kind of teacher for the reader to teach them to see the world from the eyes of other individuals. But he is also aware of the fact that in order to do this, he should remove obstacles that divide people. This is the reason why he immediately announces that /all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the women my sisters and lovers/ (30) His celebration of the self in the beginning of the poem now turns into a brotherly embrace. Every individual is treated equally no matter what gender, what race and of what color they are. In this line Whitman destroys all the labels that attributed to humans. Then he takes this idea of equal treatment one step further and describes himself as the “mate and companion of people all, just as immortal and fathomless as myself” (32) Up to now, while he is trying to establish a relationship with the other individuals by

inviting them to “possess the origins of all poems”, he at the same time preserves his distance between himself and the others. He puts too much emphasis on the “I” and asks the other individuals to be a part of it.

As a proof of this companionship, he then begins to wander around people and portrays scenes from their life and participates in what they are doing. This is the first time that he builds a relationship between himself and the common man of America whom he highly praised in the Preface of the first edition of Leaves of Grass. He first visits a farm where farmers are picking the harvest and says

I am there, I help, I came stretch'd atop of the load,
I felt its soft jolts, one leg reclined on the other,
I jump from the cross- beams and seize the clover and timothy,
And roll head over heels and tangle my hair full of wisps

(34)

Next he goes to the mountains to hunt and there he falls asleep on “the gather'd leaves.” He was woken by the boatmen and clam-diggers:

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

(34)

Then Whitman comes across a runaway slave. If we think that slavery was the source of all conflicts in that time, by portraying a scene like this, Whitman intentionally aims to give a message.

The runaway slave came to my house and stopt outside
I heard his motions crackling the twigs of the woodpile,
Through the swung half-door of the kitchen I saw him limpsy and weak,

And went where he sat on a log and led him in and assured him,
And brought water and fill'd a tub for his sweated body and bruis'd feet,
And gave him a room that enter'd from my own, and gave him some coarse
clean clothes,

And remember perfectly well his revolting eyes and his awkwardness,
And remember putting plasters on the galls of his neck and ankles;
He staid with me a week before he was recuperated and pass'd north,
I had him next me at table, my fire-lock lean'd in the corner.

(35)

By portraying himself helping a runaway slave, he clearly indicates his position in this conflict. For Whitman, the runaway slave is also a part of the American soil like everybody else he welcomes him and destroys the distance between the white man and slaves. The equal treatment of the individuals through his "I" is once more emphasized.

Whitman continues to depict scenes from American life.

The butcher-boy puts off his killing-clothes, or sharpens his knife at the stall in
the market,

I loiter enjoying his repartee and his shuffle and breakdown.

He then watches the movements of blacksmiths:

From the cinder-strew'd threshold I follow their movements,
The lithe sheer of their waists plays even with their massive arms,
Overhand the hammers swing, overhand so slow, overhand so sure,
They do not hasten, each man hits in his place.

(36)

These are scenes from the lives of ordinary Americans. Each of the professions has its own art and Whitman enjoys to be a part of their job by observing what they are doing. The common

denominator among all these people that he portrayed up to now is that, they are all different members of the same society. They have different occupations and way of life and they come together in Whitman's song. Then in the following lines Whitman makes himself part of their lives and describes himself as the "caresser of life."

In me the caresser of life wherever moving, backward as well as forward
sluing,

To niches aside and junior bending, not a person object missing,

Absorbing all to myself and for this song. (37)

In his essay "Illustrations of the Self in Leaves of Grass" Ed Folsom draws the reader's attention to how powerfully absorptive can the self be in his poetry. After all these scenes from ordinary American life, Whitman openly declares that he absorbs everything that he sees and experiences. It is most probably because of this that, Folsom describes Whitman's poetry as "a poetry that defined the self as infinitely absorptive as it turned out to the world to embrace the vast contradictions of experience, then pulled that variety firmly into the self to hold it, contain it, caress it, and unify it." (Greenspan 158) In one of his interviews Whitman tells his friend, Horace Traubel that "It would be ridiculous to think of Leaves of Grass belonging to anyone person: at the most I am only the mouthpiece...I like the feeling of a general partnership-as if the Leaves was anybody's who chooses just as truly as mine." (Reynolds 324) Awakening "the feeling of general partnership" is exactly what Whitman does in "Song of Myself." All these people from different levels and jobs are portrayed in the poem but they are all parts of Whitman's self, through which they are treated equally.

As the poem goes by Whitman's emphasis on equal self becomes evident.

I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as the wise,

Regardless of others, ever regardful of others,

[...]

One of the nations of many nations, the smallest the same and the largest the same,

A Southerners soon as a Northerner, a planter nonchalant and hospitable down by the Oconee I live

[...]

Comrade of raftsmen and coalmen, comrade of all who shake hands and welcome to drink and meat, [...]

Of every hue and caste am I, of every rank and religion, (42)

Through these lines, he for the first time unifies all the opposite sides in American nation, from old to young, from foolish to wise, from low class to high class and most importantly from a Southerner to Northerner. Throughout the poem Whitman does not openly touch upon the conflict between the North and the South but it is possible to see this kind of understatement. He constantly points out the brotherhood and equality of the members of the nation. But in the next two editions of Leaves of Grass, readers will soon observe that Whitman's attitude to the conflict between the North and the South becomes apparent and he begins to declare his opposition openly.

In the following lines Whitman projects his own self to the other selves and declares:

In all people I see myself, none more and not one a barley corn less,

And the good or the bad I say of myself I say of them.

(44)

The idea of nobody is superior than the other and the American bard "shall delineate no class of persons" in the Preface now finds its voice in the lines above. In the next lines, Whitman emphasizes the democratic side of the "I" and declares that:

I speak the pass-word primeval, I give the sign of democracy,

By God! I will accept nothing which all cannot have their counterpart of on the same terms.

(Whitman 49)

Apart from the portrayal of the equal and democratic side of the self, Whitman now emphasizes another aspect of the self throughout the poem. As I have mentioned before this is the private self that he asserts throughout the poem. The private “I” now becomes erotic. Every reader can notice how frequently Whitman describes body and sex in his poems and “Song of Myself” is the starting point of these poems. He frankly and openly expresses the needs of the body and sexual desire of both men and women. Expression of sexual desire is very important in his poems. In the very beginning of “Song of Myself”, after introducing himself to the reader, he sets a scene where he is wandering around the houses. He begins to describe the feelings that have awakened in him by referring to five senses.

Houses and rooms full of perfumes, the shelves are crowded with perfumes,

I breathe the fragrance myself and know it and like it,

The distillation would intoxicate me also, but I shall not let it.

The atmosphere is not a perfume, it has no taste of the distillation, it is odorless

It is for my mouth forever, I am in love with it,

I will go to the bank by the wood, and become undisguised and naked,

I am mad for it to be in contact with me.

The smoke of my own breath,

[...]

My respiration and inspiration, the beating of my heart, the passing of blood and air through my lungs,

[...]

The sound of the belch'd words of my voice loos'd to the eddies of the wind,

A few light kisses, a few light embraces, a reaching around of arms.

(Whitman 27)

In these lines all the five senses that Whitman is portraying here has sexual connotations. In the third part of the poem, he relates this powerful sexual desire with life:

Urge and urge and urge,

Always the procreant urge of the world.

Out of the dimness opposite equals advance, always substance and increase,
always sex,

Always a knit of identity, always distinction, always a breed of life.

(Whitman 28)

These lines give the reader a wonderful summary of how important sex and the need of sexual desire are in his life. For him sexual activity itself is the medium that brings the opposites together. It is out of male and female unity that life becomes meaningful. In other words sex is the source of life.

Throughout the poem although Whitman gives importance to the sexual desires of both genders, we have enough clues which indicate that he is much more attracted to men than women. In an essay called “Whitman and the Gay American Ethos” M. Jimmie Killingsworth, argues that Whitman’s texts “constitute a kind of archaeological record of the first gay writing in American literary history.”(Reynolds 123) He argues that in the 19th century, texts dealing with sex and homosexuality were rare but starting with Whitman’s Leaves of Grass series, Killingsworth, claims that Whitman “participated in bringing gayness into history by developing a rhetoric with the resonant power of an established discursive formation.”(Reynolds 122)

According to Killingsworth, “Song of Myself” is a “key text” in which “the poet vows to bring forth ‘many long dumb’ and ‘forbidden voices’” (Reynolds 123) In the following

lines Whitman continues to surprise the audience and breaks all the social taboos by declaring himself as the poet who will soon “remove the veil” of established, traditional rules and taboos over one’s expression of sexuality. In other words his equal self this time becomes a filter of “forbidden voices”:

Through me forbidden voice,
Voices of sexes and lusts, voices veil’d and I remove the veil,
Voices indecent by me clarified and transfigur’d.

I believe in the flesh and the appetites, [...]
Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or am touch’d
From [...]
If I worship one thing, more than another
It shall be the spread of my own body, or any part of it, [...]
Firm masculine colter it shall be you!
Whatever goes to the tilth of me it shall be you! [...]
Breast that presses against other breasts it shall be you! [...]
Winds whose soft-tickling genitals rub against me it shall be you! [...]
Hands I have taken, face I have kissed, mortal I have ever touch’d, it shall be
you.

(Whitman, 50)

In these lines Whitman portrays the body as divine and sacred. He openly adores his body and other bodies. Even nature can arouse the sexual sensations in him. His sensuality actively arouses his senses of smell and touch. He desires to be in contact with another body. What Whitman had in mind at that time was not a woman’s body, most probably. But for Whitman it doesn’t matter whether he is describing a man’s body or a woman’s body. The most

important thing is the sexual desire that both genders have. In the second edition of Leaves of Grass, Whitman feels himself more comfortable in his declaration that “sex contains all, bodies, souls. [...] Without shame the man I like knows and avows the deliciousness of his sex, /Without shame the woman I like knows and avows hers” (Whitman 97)

In “Song of Myself” Whitman sets another scene where he describes a woman watching men bathing in the sea. Although he tries to hide behind the fake personality of a woman, it is still obvious for the reader to realize his admiration and desire of these men:

Twenty-eight young men bathe by the shore,
Twenty-eight young men and all so friendly;
Twenty-eight years of womanly life and all so lonesome.
She owns the fine house by the rise of the bank
She hides handsome and richly drest aft the blinds of the window.
Where are you off to, Lady? For I see you
You splash in the water there, yet stay stock still in your room.

After these lines Whitman depicts the woman as the “twenty-ninth bather”.

Dancing and laughing along the beach came twenty ninth bather,
The rest did not see her, but she saw them and loved them.
The beards of the young men glisten’d with wet, it ran from their long
hair,
Little streams pass’d over their bodies.
An unseen hand also pass’d over their bodies
It descended tremblingly from their temples and ribs.

(35-36)

Though Whitman tries to deceive the reader by making the woman to dream of joining them, it is obvious that the “unseen hand” belongs to Whitman.

In the first edition of Leaves of Grass, there are also other important poems. All these poems are in fact like a continuation of Song of Myself. For instance the second poem of the first edition is “A Song for Occupations” Whitman’s power of absorptive “I” continues in this poem also. He calls his readers that he is “neither a servant nor a master” and says:

I take no sooner a large price that a small price, I will have my own whoever
enjoys me,

I will be even with you and you shall be even with me.

If you stand at work in a shop I stand a night as the night in the same shop,

If you bestow gifts on your brother or dearest friend I demand as good as your
brother or dearest friend,

If your lover, husband, wife, is welcome by day or night, I must be personally
as welcome,

If you become degraded, criminal, ill, then I become so for your sake

[...]

(Whitman 196)

Another well known poem the “I Sing the Body Electric” is also from the first edition. In this poem Whitman repeats the importance of body once more and says:

The man’s body is sacred the woman’s body is sacred,

No matter who it is, it is sacred.

Through these lines Whitman develops his idea and takes the audience to an auction where the bodies of the slaves and women are sold. He emphasizes that they are as human as we are and their bodies are as valuable as ours. In the following scene a buyer examines the body of the slave:

Examine these limbs, red, black, or white, they are cunning in tendon and
nerve, [...]

Within there runs blood,
The same old blood! The same red-running blood!
There swell and jets a heart, there all passions desires, reaching aspirations,
(Do you think they are not there because they are not espress'd in parlors and
lecture rooms?)

(Whitman 94)

In the next scene this time he depicts an auction of woman's body and describes woman as "the teeming mothers of mothers / she is the bearer of them that shall grow and be mates to the mothers. (94)

In the other nine poems of the book, Whitman's emphasis on "I" preserves its power and finally at the end of Leaves of Grass the picture that Whitman had painted through his "I" is completed. Whitman is offering himself to sing a new American song in which he aims to unify different personalities, classes, gender and color in one single self of himself. The one and only question to ask at this moment is why? Why has he put so much emphasis on the self? What is it that he is trying to achieve? At this point it is time to talk about the doctrine of Individualism which totally and openly had affected Whitman in the early 1850's and reflected in Leaves of Grass.

First of all we should once more remember the disappointing and disheartening process that Whitman had gone through between 1846 and 1855. He was disillusioned because of the present policies of the parties and politicians. His hatred and reaction were all reflected in poems like "Blood Money", "Wounded in the House of Friends", "Dough Face Song" and "A Boston Ballad" that I have mentioned before. So he had no trust for the politicians any more. Like him there were people who were not happy with what was going on in their country. Among them there was one man called Stephen Pearl Andrews who emphasized that it was time for the individual to take action. In 1852 when he announced the

doctrine of Individualism in the New York Tribune, he found many supporters. He wrote: “This is preeminently the age of Individualism, the ‘Sovereignty of the Individual’ that is the right of everyone to nearly as he pleases...I claim individuality to be my own nation. I take this opportunity to declare my national independence, and to notify all other potentates, that they may respect my sovereignty.”(Reynolds 142) Actually Whitman’s celebration of himself in the beginning of “Song of Myself” is not very different from Andrews’ claim. Whitman’s respect other selves and their sovereignty fit into this explanation. Individualism was not something new for the American public. On the contrary it was a doctrine that had already been introduced to American nation by one of the greatest thinkers of America; Ralph Waldo Emerson who announced the age as “The age of the first person singular.” (Ruland 139)

THE TRIANGLE OF EMERSON-THOREAU AND WHITMAN

Ralph Waldo Emerson is one of the most influential figures in American literature. He had been an inspiration to many important writers, poets and thinkers who also played an important role in the 19th century American literature. Among his followers were Branson Alcott, George Ripley, Margaret Fuller, Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman. The list is long and full of many important names from different periods. Emerson’s main contribution to American Literature is his doctrine of individualism, his total faith in each individual self which came into being as a result of the movement of Transcendentalism. Among the names above two people, Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman are considered to be the disciples of Emerson today. They both followed Emerson’s path in their own way and put his theory into practice in their real life. Thoreau published Walden in 1854 and one year later, in 1855, another disciple of Emerson came onto the stage, with the first edition of Leaves of Grass. He was Walt Whitman. Unlike Thoreau, Whitman lived a life among the American people, sharing and observing their lives before and after the Civil War. Both figures contributed the

American literature in their own ways. So in this section, I will first examine Emerson's theory of the individual self and the movement of transcendentalism briefly by referring some of his major works such as Nature, "The American Scholar" and "Self Reliance". Another name that will be emphasized in this chapter is Henry David Thoreau. I will refer to Walden and his essay "Civil Disobedience" in order to portray his own understanding of Emerson's individual self. Finally, I will focus on Walt Whitman's "I" in Leaves of Grass and briefly mention the factors that Emerson and Whitman have in common and the factors that separate Whitman from Thoreau.

The main body of the movement of Transcendentalism depends on the relation between the individual and the universe. Emerson describes this relation in his major work Nature.

"Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchers of the fathers...The foregoing generations beheld God and Nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs?" (Bradley 1040)

In these opening lines of Nature, Emerson reminds the reader of the times when their ancestors perceive God and Nature together in a harmony. What he is offering here is to study nature in this way and develop a relation between ourselves and nature not only in our ordinary lives but also in the art that we produce. He then develops the foundation of his theory and argues that "the Universe is composed of nature and the Soul. Strictly speaking, therefore, all that is separate from us, all which Philosophy distinguishes as the NOT ME, that is, both nature and art, all other men and my own body, must be ranked under this name nature... Nature, in the common sense, refers to essences unchanged by man; space, the air,

the river, the leaf.” (Bradley 1041) In other words he states that nature is divine, because God exists in nature and in each individual.

Emerson claims that there is a close relation between nature and the individual. He says: “In the presence of nature, a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows. Nature says,- he is my creature and maugre all his impertinent griefs, he shall be glad with me.”(1042) So for Emerson the individual is a part of nature and every man needs to spend time alone in nature. Because he believes that “In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel nothing can befall me in life,- no disgrace, no calamity(leaving me my eyes,) which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground,- my head bathed by he blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,- all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball. I am nothing I see all. The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God.” (1043) As Emerson states, man finds truth and faith in nature because man is a part of nature. In the fifth chapter of Nature Emerson explains the essence of the movement of Transcendentalism by describing nature as a discipline. For Emerson nature educates “both the Understanding and the Reason... Nature is a discipline of the understanding in intellectual truths. Our dealing with sensible objects is a constant exercise in the necessary lessons of difference, of likeness, of order, of being and seeming, of progressive arrangement...” (Bradley 1055) In simpler words we perceive the universe and reach the truth through the intellect which is nurtured by nature. Finally as he himself put it “man and nature are indissolubly joined.”(1061)

In all his essays written after Nature Emerson frequently emphasized the importance of the relation between nature and the individual. Since he claimed that nature is divine, each individual is also divine for Emerson. In his essay called “The Poet” (1844), he claims that nature “makes a man; and having brought him to ripe age, she will no longer run the risk of losing this wonder at a blow, but she detaches from him a new self, that the kind maybe safe

from accidents to which the individual is exposed.”(Adams 562) So for Emerson a new self is needed; a self; able to understand nature and is totally aware of its own capacity. This is where Emerson’s individualism becomes important. He develops a new model of self who is American, who embraces nature, and who believes in himself especially in his two important essays, One is “The American Scholar”, which is actually a speech delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Cambridge in 1837 and the second one is “Self Reliance” (1841)

The main theme of his speech, later published under the title of “The American Scholar” is to awake the American scholars to create something new, something original to contribute modern life, art and literature, instead of being imitators of the British and European man. He says “Perhaps the time is already come, when it ought to be, and will be something else; when the sluggard intellect of this continent will look from under its iron lids and fill the postponed expectations of the world with something better than the exertions of mechanical skill.”(Bradley 1076) In other words he doesn’t want the American intellect to be lazy anymore. For Emerson Americans have to come up with new things rather than mechanical skills. In the beginning of his speech Emerson refers to a fable:

“the gods in the beginning divided Man into men, that he might be more helpful to himself; ... there is One Man,- present to all particular men only partially, or through one faculty; that you must take the whole society to find the whole man. Man is not farmer, or a professor, or an engineers but he is all. Man is priest, and scholar, and statesman and producer and soldier. In the divided or social state, these functions are parceled to individuals, each of whom aims to do his stint of the join work, whilst each other performs his. The fable implies that the individual to possess himself, must sometimes return from his own labor to embrace all the other laborers.” (Bradley 1076-77)

So for Emerson man is a part of the great whole which in this case is nature according to transcendentalist movement. In every society each man has different role but they should

not forget to embrace other men because they are all one. What Emerson had implied in these sentences is not different from what Whitman said eighteen years later in “Song of Myself”. There is a similar parallelism between Emerson’s sentences above and Whitman’s celebration of himself in the opening lines of Song of Myself “ ...What I assume, you shall assume/ for every atom belonging to me as good as belongs to you.” In the light of Emerson’s ideas, we see that Whitman also emphasizes the same idea that man is no different from each other, we even share the same atom because we came into being from one divine whole.

In the final part of the speech, Emerson describes the age which gives importance “to the single person. Everything that tends to insulate the individual... so that each man shall feel the world is his and man shall treat with man as a sovereign state with a sovereign state... 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.”(1091) With these lines he encourages the American man to become aware of the power in himself. Nature provides him what he needs, he has the intellect and it is time to be brave and take action. His final sentences are like a call to each American individual: “We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds...A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men.”(Bradley 1092) In other words, he encourages the nation to work hand in hand and to believe in himself. Actually he is offering a kind of reconstruction, an awakening in all the layers of the society. So that America and American nation can learn to stand on its own feet and form a new modern life with its own art, science and literature produced by the America mind.

In his other famous essay, “Self Reliance” he once more emphasizes the importance of individualism and claims that every man should rely on his own perceptions. Being self reliant is an important aspect of the individual in his understanding of the universe and

relations with the other individuals. Emerson argues that “We lie in the lap of immense intelligence, which makes us receivers of its truth and organs of its activity.”(Blair 453) In order to receive truth we should be self reliant and depend on our perceptions. It is the individual what really matters. “To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart” says Emerson “is true for all men,-that is genius.”(Blair 454) He then continues with his most quoted sentences, “Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string... nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your mind. Absolve to you to yourself, and you shall have the suffrage of the world.”(Blair 454-5)

Finally it is obvious that Ralph Waldo Emerson started a new era with the movement of transcendentalism and the doctrine of individualism. His contribution to American thought is indisputable. The works that he produced were the proof of the success of the American mind and inspired many American writers, poets and thinkers. Oliver Wendell Holmes wasn't no doubt wrong when he addressed “The American Scholar” as America's “intellectual Declaration of Independence.” (Blair 435) His works really taught American man a lot. His message is simple; be brave, believe in yourself and perceive the law of nature by heart so that you would never stumble and fall in life.

The first name who embraced Emerson's transcendentalist spirit and followed the path of Emerson's individualism is Henry David Thoreau who is also considered to be one of the most important literary figures in American literature. He proved himself to be a philosopher, a naturalist and an essayist especially with his success in Walden and “Civil Disobedience.” He was very much influenced by Emerson's ideas. In 1845 Thoreau built a cabin on Emerson's property at the Walden Pond and for the next two years he lived there and studied nature closely. He made Emerson's motto of “Trust thyself” to come true in Walden. He presents a different self in Walden by surviving in nature and living with it in a harmony. He built his house, baked his bread and even ploughed his field by himself. Like Emerson he also

contributed to the American literature with his own individualism and especially with his theory of “the Majority of One”.

For Henry David Thoreau “Every man is tasked to make his life.” Like the way Emerson encouraged Americans to believe in themselves Thoreau listened to the voice in himself and chose to live a life in nature all alone and showed the courage to go after his own ideals. His aim was to live a life that is simplified out of all unnecessary details and to understand the “essential facts of life”. So he explains the reason of going to the woods with these much quoted and famous sentences which also inspired even some of the directors of Hollywood. In the movie called Dead Poets Society, Robin Williams cites the same sentences below.

“I went to the woods because I wish to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die discover that I had not lived... I want to live deep and suck out of the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to road all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms...”(Bradley 1280)

In these lines it is possible to see the same frequent use of the first person singular “I” as Whitman did in his poems. The personality that Thoreau introduced to the American reader in these lines is exactly similar with Emerson’s model of the new individual self in Nature. Thoreau was no doubt sure of himself when he went to the woods. He found the courage to challenge life and decided to live the life deliberately by absorbing every single moment of it. It is possible to observe a connection between Thoreau’s Walden and Emerson’s Nature. Thoreau makes almost everything that Emerson had said in Nature to come true in Walden. Emerson encourages man to live in solitude in the woods because “In the woods we return to reason and faith.”(1043) and learn to live a life in harmony with nature.

Thoreau then goes to the woods and declares that he wants to live in simplicity. Similar to Emerson, Thoreau also believes that everything that an individual is looking for is in nature. “The universe constantly and obediently answers to our conceptions; whether we travel fast or slow, the track is laid for us. Let us spend out lives in conceiving then... Let us spend one day as deliberate Nature, and not be thrown off the track by every nutshell and mosquito’s wing...” (Thoreau 350) Thoreau offers to observe nature carefully and understand the way it functions in our lives.

In the next chapters, through the end of Walden, Thoreau seems to be satisfied with what he had found there, “I have my horizon bound by woods all to myself... I have my own sun and moon and stars and a little world to myself.”(381) In the final chapter of Walden, Thoreau explains the lesson that he had learned from nature, “I learned this, at least by experiment; that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours... In proportion as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty poverty, nor weakness weakness.”(562)

Emerson’s self reliance doctrine is the foundation of these ideas above. Thoreau believes that if you go after your dreams and be confident of yourself, nothing in your way can prevent you to become what you would like to become. What you need is courage, freedom and self trust. For Thoreau it doesn’t matter whether you are alone in the society or you are doing something totally different from the norms of the society. In Walden He asks “Why level downward to our dullest perception always, and praise that as common sense? The commonest sense is the sense of men asleep, which they express by snoring.” (564) Sometimes what we perceive as the common sense can misguide us. This is the reason why he says “If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears

a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears however measured or far away.” (564-5) These sentences were written five years after he introduced the doctrine of “the Majority of One” in an essay called “Civil Disobedience” (1849) He takes Emerson’s model of individual self one step further and transforms it into a new self who is stronger, a non conformist and who disobeys if he believes it is necessary. In the model of Thoreau’s self one should not be afraid of chasing after his/her own beliefs and dreams. One shouldn’t ignore what he/she feels just because it doesn’t go the same with the society. The message that he gives to Americans is that even if you know that you will be alone in the majority, you shouldn’t give up defending the ideas that you believe is true. In other words one can take a stand as a minority in the majority.

“Civil Disobedience” was the essay that gave birth to the motto of “the Majority of One.” It was written against the policy of the government, especially the war against Mexico and published in 1849. Thoreau begins the essay with another much quoted sentence: “I heartily accept the motto, -‘That government is the best which governs least;’ and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically.”(Thoreau 109) Throughout the essay Thoreau severely criticizes the ones especially southerners who supported the Mexican War just because of their own benefits, just to make the slavery spread into new territories. For Thoreau the American government was not just and fair to its citizens. He at the same time criticizes the American society and says “Unjust laws exist: shall we be content to obey them, or shall we endeavor to amend them... Men generally under such government as this, think that they ought to wait, until they have persuaded the majority to alter them...Why is it not more apt to anticipate and provide for reform? Why does it not cherish its wise minority?”(Thoreau 119) With these sentences, Thoreau is questioning why people are waiting for the majority to wake up? He calls Abolitionists to take actions against the supporters of slavery and he says that they should not “wait till they constitute a majority of

one... Moreover, any man more right than his neighbors constitutes a majority of one already.”(121)

The doctrine of “the Majority of One” introduces Thoreau’s new model of the individual. Inspired by Emerson, Thoreau develops his own theory in Walden and “Civil Disobedience”. He introduces Americans an individual self who never hesitates to say what he is supposed to say, to act on the ideals that he believes as true and right and as we see in the lines above an individual who encourages the society to take action against the unjust no matter the individual is in minority. Because a single individual’s action is as valuable as the majority’s action.

There are lots of similarities among Whitman, Emerson and Thoreau. Emerson was the one who inspired the two artists Thoreau and Whitman to produce something of their own, something which is totally American. In a way, Thoreau and Whitman made Emerson’s dreams and wishes to come true. For Whitman, Emerson’s influence on him was great. In the Preface of the second edition of Leaves of Grass, he called Emerson as “Master” and openly expressed his admiration. He claimed that Emerson’s contribution to America is crucial. “I say that none has ever done or can do, a greater deed for The States, than your deed... we know none before you, but the best following you; and that we demand to take your name into our keeping, and that we understand what you have indicated, and find the same indicated in ourselves, and that we will stick to it and enlarge upon it through These States.” (Wilson 263) In these sentences, Whitman was clearly stating his point that he was one of those who follow Emerson’s doctrines. In all the editions of Leaves of Grass it is possible to hear the echoes of Emerson.

First of all the central theme of Leaves of Grass is Whitman’s Emerson-like individualism. Of course there are differences in Whitman’s depiction and expression of the self as equal, democratic and erotic but Whitman’s self trust, his comfort and confidence in

expressing himself were all resulted from Emerson's doctrines. Like the way Emerson emphasized his faith in individual; Whitman also announced his faith and trust in the common of America in the very beginning of the Preface to the first edition of Leaves of Grass. This is the reason why that he says "The Genius of the United States" is "in the common people, south, north, west, east..."(Whitman 264) In The "American Scholar" Emerson expressed the need of creative, national scholars. Whitman repeats a similar idea and even brings a much more national and democratic understanding in the Preface by saying that "The American Bard shall delineate no class of persons..." (269) and "give the sign" of American democracy.

In "Song of Myself", Whitman is as if answering Emerson's quest of a true, creative American man in his famous essay called "The Poet". In that essay Emerson complained about lack of American geniuses who are aware of the value of the potential that the country has. He says:

We have yet had no genius in America, with tyrannous eye, which knew the value of our incomparable materials...our log-rolling, our stumps and their politics, our fishers, our Negroes and Indians...the northern trade, the Southern planting... are yet unsung. Yet America is a poem in our eyes..." (Adams 565)

Emerson prophesied a new American poet who had already absorbed all his ideas and ready to serve his country and its people in his own way. I strongly believe that Whitman became exactly what Emerson had described in these sentences above. In the Preface to the first edition of Leaves of Grass, Whitman brought the two factors that Emerson had always focused in his works, the American individual and the United States. He declares that "The Americans of all nations at any time upon the earth have probably the fullest poetical nature. The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem." (Whitman 263) These sentences are enough to observe how strongly Emerson had influenced Whitman and how truly and effectively Whitman had understood and absorbed Emerson's ideas.

On the other hand when one compares the two disciples of Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman, it can be seen that the individual self that Thoreau developed in Walden and “Civil Disobedience” is not different from Whitman’s portrayal of the self in essence but in Whitman’s works we see that the equality between all the individual of the society is much more emphasized. In many of his poems, Whitman frequently describes himself as the man of ordinary people. The self in that case becomes more democratic and equal. Whitman’s poems are full of lines that one can easily observe his equal and democratic utterances. For example,

Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son,
Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding,
No sentimentalist, no stander above men and women or apart from them,
No more modest than immodest.

(Whitman 48-9)

In these lines one can see the portrayal of a man who took pleasure in living among the American people, sharing the life with them and being sensitive to the problems that would soon about to divide the nation apart. In these lines above Whitman described himself as a common man who lived as the way an ordinary man used to live in that period.. Actually everything is open and clear in these lines. There is nothing that Whitman wants to hide. He is even so confident and comfortable of himself that he never hesitates to express his sexual needs, to share it with his readers. At this point it would be useful to remember Emerson’s ideas in “The American Scholar” in which he expresses the need to see the individual “to possess himself and sometimes return from his own labor to embrace all the other laborers.”(1076-77) This is exactly what Whitman is doing through these lines. He describes himself neither superior nor inferior to “men and women”.

These lines also indicated an important difference between Whitman and Thoreau; a difference that dominated Whitman’s poetry as much as his emphasis on equality and

democracy. It was Whitman's frequent emphasis on sexuality. One can easily notice how Whitman was comfortable in his expressions of the needs of the body and his sexual desires. As one can remember, "Song of Myself" has full of lines that Whitman successfully breaks all the social taboos over one's expression of sexuality. On the other hand, it is almost impossible to observe the same freedom and comfort when it comes to express one's sexuality in Thoreau's work. At this point one can argue that Thoreau did not need such expressions in his work, but what differentiates the two is that Whitman somehow made his audience to feel how sexuality was as important as equality and democracy in his life. One can ask, was that very necessary for Whitman to express his sexual desires in his poems so frequently? The answer is yes, it was. I believe it was the part of the new model individual, the new self that he introduced to the American audience. An individual that never feels ashamed of himself and his desires. He put the two doctrines, equality and democracy into the practice. He practiced them in his own life and as for the expression of sexuality; it was also an important part of his own self. What he had learned from Emerson was to "trust thyself" motto and it is still pretty obvious that he had trusted himself and his instincts, both moral and sexual, by heart.

In "Song of Myself" Whitman's individualism is asserted through the frequent use of "I". Whitman sometimes reflected the democratic and equal side of "I" in his relations to other individuals and he sometimes reflected the private side of it which is erotic because of his frequent emphasis that he adores his own body and other bodies as the most divine and sacred part of the individual. Throughout the poem Whitman never hesitates to express the needs of the body and its sexual contact with other bodies. But "Song of Myself" is not his only poem in which he emphasizes the importance of the individual self. In "By Blue Ontario's Shore" he even puts his "I" above America and says:

I swear I begin to see the meaning of these things,

It is not the earth, it is not America who is so great,

It is I who am great or to be great, it is You up there, or anyone,

(322)

In these lines Whitman openly explains that he is forming a new model of Individual, who is above the universe and countries but equal with other individuals. By calling “You” to the other members of the society, he makes his relation with the other people stronger than ever. He then continues, /Underneath all, individuals, I swear nothing is good to me now that ignores individuals/ [...] The whole theory of the universe is directed unerringly to one single individual-namely to You./ (Whitman 322) The relationship between “I” and “You” is retold again in a transcendental manner. He invites the other individuals to perceive the universe through their own intellect. He offers his own self as a guide for everyone. In the following lines he becomes rebellious and he rejects any kind of authority and says / I am for those that have never been master’d [...] / For those whom laws, theories, conventions, can never master./ (323)

In another poem, “Starting From Paumanok”, Whitman now portrays the equal and private “I” as two inseparable parts of the self.

I will effuse egotism and show it underlying all, and I will be the bard of personality,

And I will show of male and female that either is but the equal of the other,

And sexual organs and acts! Do you concentrate in me, for I am determin’d to tell you with courageous clear voice to prove you illustrious, [...]

(21)

In these lines while he is claiming to be the poet of other personalities, he promises to treat them equally by ignoring the gender differences and by breaking the taboos or in other words

as he himself puts it by “removing the veil.” With these lines he summarizes all the things that he has claimed so far.

Thus at the end of the first edition of Leaves of Grass, American public meet a new poet and his new model of individual who is confident of himself, treats other individuals in an equal and democratic manner and adores his body more than anything. If we think of the problems that America was trying to deal with at that time, Whitman’s individualism and offer of equality seem to be perfect in time. The nation was about to be separated by the conflict over slavery. Neither the North nor the South had enough tolerance for each other. Politicians proved themselves to be nothing but failures. They had failed to come up with a proper solution to conflict. America was economically and socially in the middle of a huge crisis. But out of this crisis, a poet was announcing that it was possible to get over this conflict if the members of the society recognize the power of their selves. Moreover he also reminds the nation that they are all brothers and sisters living on the same land; and they can overcome their problems if they respect each other’s equality.

David Reynolds interprets Leaves of Grass as an attempt to unify the nation through poetry. “Faced with fragmentation and what appeared to be impending social collapse, America might be saved, Whitman believed by poetry in which it saw its best and worst features creatively recombined...poetry just might help to restore the togetherness that politics and society had destroyed.” (Reynolds 309) He also comments on Whitman’s “I” and claims that “Both physical and psychological ills are challenged by the powerful ‘I’ of “Song of Myself” who is equipped with a full range of life-affirming, health giving restoratives from mid-nineteenth-century therapeutic thought.”(Reynolds 332)

Thus in the first edition of Leaves of Grass Whitman’s “I” becomes the dominant figure with its democratic, equal and erotic aspect. Whitman places “I” among the ordinary lives of Americans and while he is reflecting American experience from different classes and

levels, the “I” that he constructs in these poems, treats every individual as equal sisters and brothers. In the Preface of the first edition he swears not to differ any class of people, and he successfully puts this theory into practice by becoming the voice of all Americans and singing the song of every individual. It is so powerful that it captures the reader and as Folsom has put it, it is also “absorptive”. In all the poems of the first edition, he never sees himself superior to any individual or he never humiliates any human being no matter of what color they are, what region they are and of what class they are.

In an essay called “Walt Whitman: Precipitant of the Modern” Alan Trachtenberg has quoted from an essay of Robert Henri, a painter and a teacher, especially an important figure of the proto-Modernist Ashcan School. Henri says that “It seems to me that before a man tries to express anything to the world, he must recognize in himself an individual, a new one, distinct from others. Walt Whitman did this...” (Greenspan 197-98) As Henri has emphasized Walt Whitman had totally believed in individualism. In the middle of a social and political chaos, when the nation was about to be divided, he came to stage and declared that he is the mate of all people on the land of America and there is no need to fight for anything. If we think about activities of the politicians at that time, Walt Whitman had done a lot to remind the nation of the values that once they had shared. His poems were more powerful than the political speeches of certain party leaders of the time.

THE 1856 EDITION OF LEAVES OF GRASS

The second edition of Leaves of Grass was published in 1856. There were twenty new poems added to the first twelve poems of the first edition. One of the most important things about the second edition was Ralph Waldo Emerson’s letter to Whitman. After the publication of the first edition, reactions to Leaves of Grass were mainly negative. He was especially criticized by the frequent expression of himself and the frequent mention of the body and sexuality. A critic called R.W.Griswold in the New York Criterion wrote that “...it is

impossible to imagine how any man's fancy could have conceived such a mass of stupid filth, unless he were possessed of the soul of a sentimental donkey that had died of disappointed love." (Asselineau 72) Another critic in the Boston Intelligencer criticized Whitman by saying that "... the author should be kicked from all decent society as below the level of the brute. There is neither wit nor method in this disjointed babbling and it seems to us he must be escaped lunatic, raving in pitiable delirium." (Asselineau 72)

In the London Critic a reviewer said that Whitman knew nothing about art. He argues that "Whitman is as acquainted with art, as a hog is with mathematics,, his poems resemble so much as the war cry of the Red Indians... The depth of his indecencies will be the grave of his fame, or ought to be if all proper feelings is not extinct..." (Asselineau 72). There were of course positive criticisms. For instance Edward Everett Hale in the North American Review wrote that "...one reads and enjoys the freshness, simplicity, and reality of what he reads, just as the tired man, lying on the ground, lying on the hillside in summer, enjoys the leaves of grass around him,-enjoys the shadow,-enjoys the flecks of sunshine,-not for what they 'suggest to him', but for what they are."(Asselineau 74-5) One of the most important positive criticisms came from Ralph Waldo Emerson. In a letter dated 21 July, 1855, Emerson wrote these words to Whitman:

"Dear Sir- I am not blind to the worth of the wonderful gift of Leaves of Grass. I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed.... I give you joy of your free and brave thought.... I find incomparable things said incomparably well, as they must be. I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere, for such a start. I rubbed my eyes a little, to see if this sunbeam were no illusion; but the solid sense of the book is a sober certainty. It has the best merits, namely, of fortifying and encouraging."

(Wilson 247)

Receiving a letter from a master like Emerson, most probably made Whitman the happiest and proudest men on earth that, in the second edition of Leaves of Grass, he wished to share it with Americans. He published the letter without Emerson's permission. Moreover he wrote a reply to Emerson and printed it in the second edition. He addresses Emerson as Master and begins his reply with these words:

“Here are thirty-two poems, which I send you, dear Friend and Master, not having found how I could satisfy myself with sending any usual acknowledgement of your letter... I much enjoy making poems. Other work I have set for myself to do, to meet people and the States face to face, to confront them with an American rude tongue; but the work of my life is making poems... Every day I go among the people of Manhattan Island, Brooklyn, and other cities and among the young men, to discover the spirit of them, and to refresh myself...I pass coolly through those, understanding them perfectly well...”

(Wilson 253-4)

In those sentences Whitman expresses himself in the way that he expressed himself to the American audience in the first edition. The Walt Whitman in the second edition of Leaves of Grass is not different from the Walt Whitman in the first edition. The 1856 edition of Leaves of Grass was a 384 page volume. This time the poems had titles unlike the first edition. His sexually oriented poems were also stronger in this edition. Readers came across with a revised version of the “I Sing the Body Electric”. Moreover new poems are added in which Whitman continues to express the importance of the body like, “Poem of Procreation”, “Spontaneous Me” and “Poem of the Propositions of Nakedness” On the other hand Whitman's equal “I” begins to depend on a strong, powerful base. Especially in a poem like “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry”, reader is once more reminded that the “I” is still as absorptive and authoritarian as in the first edition. Moreover it now becomes more possessive. This time his “I” functions as a shadow behind the reader.

Flood-tide below me! I see you face to face! [...]

Crowds of men and women attired in the usual costumes, how curious you are
to me!

On the ferry-boats the hundreds and hundreds that cross, returning home, are
more curious to me than you suppose, (147)

In the poem Whitman destroys the time that separates himself from the next generations. He tells the audience whatever he experiences right now won't be different from whatever next generations will experience on that ferry. It is that moment and feelings that tie Whitman to the next generations.

Others will enter the gates of the ferry and cross from shore to shore

Others will watch the run of the flood-tide, [...]

Fifty years hence, others will see them as they cross, the sun half an hour high,

A hundred years hence, or ever so many hundreds years hence, others will see
them, [...]

It avails not, time nor place-distance avails not,

I am with you, you men and women of a generation, or ever so many
generations of hence,

Just as you feel when you look on the river and sky, so I felt,

Just as any of you is one of a living crowd, I was one of a crowd,

(Whitman 147-8)

This is exactly what makes Whitman's poetry so powerful and magical. He not only identifies himself with the people of his own time, but he somehow manages to hold the hands of the reader from the next generations. He shares the same moment that he had almost hundred and fifty years ago with the reader from different periods. He tells the reader that what he felt in 1856, will not be different from what he is feeling now. It is as if his shadow will remain on

that ferry and wait for us. While we are reading these lines, we become a part of his “I” and he becomes our old mate and companion too. He is also like a guide who knows the old feelings better than us. He tells us what we are going to see and feel.

In the fifth part of the poem he destroys the time and space between himself and the reader and finally asks: What is it between us? / What is the count of the scores or hundreds of years between us?/ (149)

The most powerful part of the poem comes now when he says:

Closer yet I approach you,

What thought you have of me now, I had as much of you-I laid in my stores in advance,

I consider'd long and seriously of you before you were born.

Any kind of reader who reads these lines cannot stop himself or herself to be absorbed in Whitman's “I” It is impossible to not to be affected by the power of these lines. He catches anyone who reads this poem and captures their selves within the poem. He is one step further before the generations coming after him. He had thought and said of the things long before the next generations. He in other words possesses all the different selves of the future. So anyone born after him was possessed and consumed by his absorptive self.

In another poem called “Salut Au Monde” Whitman's “I” now becomes embracive again, but this time he wanders around the world and filters from worldly, international selves. The poem begins:

O take my hand Walt Whitman!

Such gliding wonders! such sights and sounds!

Such join'd unended links, each hook'd to the next,

Each answering all, each sharing the earth with all.

(Whitman 126)

These lines obviously indicate that Whitman will soon connect himself to a large group of people. In the second part of the poem Whitman's journey of "I" begins. He travels around the world and continues to reflect this time experiences of different nationalities, religions races and geographies:

Within me latitude widens, longitude lengthens,

Asia, Africa, Europe, are to the east-America is provided for in the west.

Banding the bulge of the earth winds the hot equator,

Curiously north and south turn the axis ends,

Within me is the longest day, the sun wheels in slanting rings, it does not set for months (126)

In the third part of the poem he begins to filter from different selves:

What do you hear Walt Whitman?

I hear the workman singing and the farmers wife singing [...]

I hear the emulous shouts of Australians pursuing the wild horse, [...]

I hear the Italian boat-sculler the musical recitative of old poems [...]

I hear the Arab muezzin calling from the top of the mosque,

I hear the Christian priest at the altars of the churches [...] (127)

Throughout the poem Whitman wanders from Asia to Africa, from China to Europe and connects himself with the people of this land no matter what religion they have, what language they speak and what nationality they are. Thus his individualism in the first edition of Leaves of Grass now gains an international aspect in the second edition. It is the same equal, democratic "I" that reaches all parts the world and the same "I" that becomes more possessive and captures the selves of future generations.

THE 1860 EDITION OF LEAVES OF GRASS

The last edition before the Civil War was published in March 1860. Including the revised poems and the new ones, the third edition of Leaves of Grass consists of 146 poems and 456 pages. Unfortunately the first copy of the 1860 edition of Leaves of Grass has not survived. It is of course impossible to mention all the poems in the third edition here. But his erotic “I” finds his voice stronger than ever now especially in “Calamus” poems. As Gay Wilson Allen has noted “Calamus contains Whitman’s love poems.”(Allen 99) In these poems he openly expresses his love of the other men. In one of the poems called “Whoever you are holding me now in hand” he is looking for his real lover and asks:

Who is he that would become my follower?

Who would sign himself a candidate for my affections?

(Whitman 108)

In another wonderful poem, titled as “What Think You I Take My Pen In Hand?”, he explains the reason why he is writing poetry with these lines:

What think you I take my pen in hand to record?

[...] But merely of two simple men I saw today on the pier in the midst of the crowd,
parting the parting of dear friends,

The one to remain hung on the other’s neck and passionately kissed him,

While the other one to depart tightly prest the one to remain in his arms.”

(123)

“Calamus” is full of such intimate scenes between men. So Whitman’s erotic “I” never changes in the third edition, on the contrary it expresses itself more openly and comfortably.

On the other hand reader observes certain changes in the equal “I”. Most probably because of the increasing tension between the North and the South in 1860, Whitman’s “I” begins to act as a buffer between the two opposites; two sides of the conflict. In a poem called “On Journeys Through the States” Whitman travels around all the states of America and treats

each states equally: "... We pass through Kanada, the North-east, the vast valley of the Mississippi, and the Southern States, /We confer on equal terms with each of the States" (Whitman 10) In another poem called "I Hear America Singing", he portrays people of America, and of different professions. He makes them to sing the same common song and he himself becomes the mouthpiece:

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong,
The carpenter singing his as measure his plank or beam, [...]
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deck-hand singing on
the steamboat deck
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as he stands
[...] The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of the girl
sewing or washing.

(12)

Another important poem in the third edition that Whitman's "I" becomes a buffer again between the two sides of the conflict is "Starting from Paumanok." In this poem Whitman for the first time openly touches the visible division between the North and South. As a remedy he offers his poems and swears to treat everyone equally. He calls the Americans.

Take my leaves America, take them South and take them North,
Make welcome for them everywhere, for they are your own offspring,
Surround them East and West, for they would surround you,
And you precedents, connects lovingly with them, for they connect lovingly
with you. (16)

Whitman had never touched upon the conflict between the North and the South in such an open way. Most probably as the Civil War approaches, he got more anxious. In the next lines he promises to make an equal song that every state will soon join.

I will make a song for these States that no one state may under any circumstances be subjected to another state,

And I will make a song that there shall be comity by day and by night between all the States, and between any two of them [...]

I will sing the song of companionship, [...]

In the following parts of the poem, he salutes the man of different States:

The Pennsylvanian! The Virginian! The Double Carolinian!

O all and each well-loved by me! My intrepid nations! O I at any rate include you all with perfect love! [...]

The Louisianian, the Georgian as near to me, and as I near to him and her,

The Mississippian and Arkansian yet with me and I yet with any of them

(23-24)

In another poem called “For You O Democracy” he makes a last call for the Americans. It is in fact like a plea to end the conflict,

I will make the continent indissoluble,

I will make the most splendid race the sun ever shone upon [...]

With the love of comrades, [...]

I will plant companionship thick as trees along all the rivers of America, and along the shores of the great lakes, and all over the prairies

(110)

Whitman repeats his trust in the American nation. In spite of all the social and political chaos of the period he still describes the nation as “the most splendid race” For Whitman the nation

can still achieve democracy and it is still possible but its success is in the hands of his comrades.

In conclusion, as the time of Civil War approaches, Whitman's emphasis on brotherhood and comradeship becomes more frequent. In the first edition in 1855, he introduced himself to the American audience and sets for a new model of individual in his poems. His "I" in these poems is portrayed by two ways. One is the democratic, equal "I" who is confident of himself and aims to unify all the different personalities in American nation in his own self. The other one is the private "I" who is erotic and has great admiration for his body and other bodies. He frequently expresses his love of the other men. In many of the poems of the first edition like, "Song of Myself", "By Blue Ontario's Shore" and "Starting From Paumanok", readers hear the echoes of Emerson's individualist echoes. While he is asserting his individualism, the "I" in his poems is highly authoritarian and controlling. As Railton and Folsom have mentioned, the power of "I" on the reader is highly absorbing. In the second edition of Leaves of Grass in 1856, the "I" preserves its authoritarian aspect. Besides, it also becomes more possessive especially in poems like, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry". Moreover the "I" also gains an international aspect in "Salute Au Monde." and contacts with the people from different parts of the world. In the last edition in 1860, Whitman becomes very anxious because of the increasing tension between the North and the South. His "I" now becomes a buffer between the two opposites. "For You O Democracy" and "On Journey Through the States" were written to diminish this tension. In both poems Whitman treats every state and every single individual from the North and the South equally. The private side of "I" is still active in this edition also. Whitman is now more comfortable in expressing his love of men and in portraying intimate scenes between two men. In all the three editions of Leaves of Grass, Whitman's main source was always America and American people. He portrays scenes from daily American life and tries to replace his "I" among the common

American man. He builds a relationship between himself and different individuals. His aim was to show that he is one of them and his individual "I" also belongs to them as much as him. He wanted to remove differences between the two opposites. So until the outbreak of the Civil War, he believed that individualism is the only way out of national conflicts. A new kind of togetherness against the corrupted politicians and against all the problems can be provided by the power of individualism. He came to believe that if he could set for a new model of democratic and equal individual, a reconstruction in the divided nation would be possible. He thought that he could be successful if he could sing a unifying song of "I" but he would soon realize the fact that it was too late to have such optimistic thoughts and to look for a unity, or a way out in individualistic expressions. The two sides of the conflict, the North and the South had already become enemies.

CHAPTER III

THE NATIONAL SELF AND THE CIVIL WAR POEMS

The moon gives you light,
And the bugles and the drums give you music,
And my heart, O my soldiers, my veterans,
My heart gives you love.

(Whitman 289)

The poet of individualism in Leaves of Grass is now calling his readers from the pages of Drum Taps and this time it is not his own self that he is celebrating, his songs are for the courageous, brave and true soldiers of America now, which he describes as “the greatest poem” in the Preface to the 1855 edition of Leaves of Grass. With the start of the Civil War, the nation had entered a new phase; the phase of awakening and rebelling. After all the failures of the parties and politicians, American nation had finally taken the first step to take the initiative in dealing with the conflicts on their own. Like his beloved nation, Whitman himself had also gone through a metamorphosis, a kind of transmission in terms of his poetry and personality. In all the three editions of Leaves of Grass Whitman claimed to be the “bard of personality” and he treated every single individual equally and accepted them as his sisters and brothers. For Whitman the whole theory of the universe, as he himself put it in one of his poems, depends on “one single individual.” Through his own self he aimed to sing the song of these separate individuals of America. He believed that he could unite these separate voices in his poetry. It is because of this that he put very much emphasis on the first person singular, “I”. He sets a model of individual who respects democracy and equality of each person of different classes, gender and color. With the outbreak of the Civil War he first believed that

war could bring the nation to its senses. Like many people he was sure that it would be a very short war. But he was wrong. The war turned out to be one of the bloodiest periods of American history. After the first year of the war, he was shocked by the news that his brother, George Whitman's name was on the casualty list. He immediately left New York and went to Washington in search of his brother. His journey to Washington was the beginning of the transmission that he would soon go through. He stayed for almost three and a half years in there, spending his time in the military hospitals, nursing the wounded soldiers, giving them food, tobacco and some little presents and writing letters to their families. He had now seen the realities of the war. He had witnessed pain, suffering and death closely. From then on it was difficult to be the same "Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son / Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding" (48) but now he had become a new man who now sang "The idea of all...one and inseparable."(Whitman 260). His idea of individualism and the democratic "I" were destroyed by the horrors of the Civil War. His role as "the bard of personality" had now transformed into the role of "the Good Gray Poet." When he published Drum-Taps in 1865, the "I" still existed. But there was one difference. It wasn't identifying with separate individuals now but with "bold, cautious, true" soldiers of America. The "I" of the three editions of Leaves of Grass now became real and active with his visits to hospitals and by sharing pain and suffering of wounded soldiers. The "I" in those civil war poems had now become more national than ever because Whitman's identification of the nation and its brave, heroic soldiers was intensified by the Civil War. In his Civil War poems, the "I" is not trying to unite separate individuals but it is giving an identity to whole nation. In the three editions of Leaves of Grass, Whitman tried to bring these separate individuals together through the unifying song of the "I" but now in Drum-Taps there is no need of "I" because the nation had already become one and begun to compose their own song. Now it was the time for Whitman to join this national song. Throughout the war he did not only helped

the brave soldiers of America as “the wound dresser” of the military hospitals but he also voiced their bravery, heroism as well as their pain and suffering.

In this chapter Whitman’s response during the first year of the Civil War will be portrayed and a few recruiting poems such as “First O Songs For A Prelude”, “Song of the Banner at Daybreak” in which he glorifies the war for its unifying spirit will be analyzed. 1862 was a turning point in Whitman’s life because the news that his brother was on the list of regimental casualties, made Whitman to see the real face of the war closely. He immediately went to Washington to search his brother. Finally when he reached the front lines, his all thoughts and ideas about the war changed. So at this point I will also reflect some instances from those days that Whitman spent with his brother’s regiment in Falmouth. Those days would later play a very important role in the formation of his new war poems and the birth of Drum-Taps. After his return from Falmouth, Whitman did not go back to New York and stayed in Washington to visit the military hospitals. For almost two and a half year he visited the wounded soldiers, wrote their letters, gave them food and listened to their stories. He reflected his experiences at Falmouth and in the military hospitals of Washington to a new collection of war poems and published it under the title of Drum Taps in 1865. In the final part of this chapter I will also examine the war poems in Drum-Taps and explore the role of the “I” and how it functions differently from his early poetry before the Civil War. The individual self; which is described as “Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding” in Leaves of Grass transforms into a national, patriotic self which embodies all the suffering, pain, heroism and bravery of the American soldiers, dying for a cause that they believe in.

THE CIVIL WAR THROUGH THE EYES OF WHITMAN

On the evening of April 13, 1861, Whitman was returning from Verdi's opera, when he heard the news that Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor was bombarded by Southern forces. In Specimen Days Whitman recalls the scene with these words:

“I had been to the opera in the Fourteenth street that night and after the performance was walking down Broadway toward twelve o'clock, on my way to Brooklyn, when I heard in the distance the loud cries of the newsboys, who came presently tearing and yelling up the street, rushing from side to side even more furiously than usual. I bought an extra and cross'd to the Metropolitan Hotel (Niblo's) where the great lamps were still brightly blazing, and with a crowd of others, who gather'd impromptu, read the news which was evidently authentic. [...] No remark was made by any of the crowd, which had increas'd to thirty or forty, but all stood a minute or two, I remember, before they dispers'd. I can almost see them there now, under the lamps at midnight again.”

(Whitman 21)

For many people in the North, the war would not last too long. Whitman had also believed the same. As Roy Morris has noted in his book The Better Angel-Walt Whitman in the Civil War “The Mayor of Brooklyn airily assured Whitman that ‘ the Southern fire-eaters would... be at once so effectually squelch'd, we would never hear of secession again.” (Morris 41)

Whitman soon wrote a letter to his brother George who had already joined the Fifty-First New York Volunteers and assured him with these words “All of us here think the rebellion as good as broke no matter if the war does continue for some months yet.” (Morris 41)

The shock came three days later, on July 21, when the Union army was defeated by the Confederate Army in the Battle of Bull Run. Humiliated by this defeat, the Union troops

began to retreat. Whitman who was in Brooklyn at that time, shocked and most probably horrified by seeing soldiers retreating to Washington wrote these sentences in his notebook:

“The sun rises but shines not. The men appear, at first sparsely and shamed face enough, then thicker, in the streets of Washington... they came along in disorderly mobs, some in squads, stragglers, companies... During the forenoon Washington gets all over motley with these defeated soldiers...The dream of humanity, the vaunted Union we thought so strong, so impregnable-lo! It seems already smash’d like a china plate. One bitter, bitter hour,-perhaps proud America will never again know such an hour.” (Whitman 23-4)

Battle of Bull Run gave Whitman the inspiration of new recruiting poems. In these poems while he is reflecting the changes in the city and the lives of the New Yorkers during the first year of the war, he also glorifies the war with joy and enthusiasm. One of the first recruiting poems that he wrote in Washington was “First O Songs For A Prelude.” In this poem Whitman expresses his admiration for the city and its people because of their resistance in a crisis like war:

(O superb! O Manhattan, my own, my peerless!

O strongest you in the hour of danger, in crisis! O truer than steel!)

How you sprang-how you threw off the costumes of peace with indifferent hand,

How your soft opera-music changed and the drum and fife were heard in their stead,

How you led to the war, (that shall serve for our prelude, songs of soldiers)

How Manhattan drum-taps led. [...]

To the drum-taps prompt,

The young men falling in and arming,

The mechanics arming, (the trowel, the jack-plane, the blacksmith’s hammer,

tost aside with precipitation)

(257)

In the final lines of the poem, Whitman's enthusiasm and joy reaches its highest level. He openly welcomes the war and says

War! An arm'd race is advancing! the welcome for battle, no turning away;

War! Be it weeks, months, or years, an arm'd race is advancing to welcome it.

(258)

For some readers, it may be surprising and unusual to read these lines from the poet of brotherhood and comradeship but in fact this is exactly what Whitman had dreamed in the first three editions of Leaves of Grass. After his disenchantment with the political parties and politicians, Whitman declared that only the common man of America could get over the conflicts. American nation with its fertile and equal individuals have enough potential to solve the problems that were dividing them apart. The reason why Whitman welcomes the war with joy and such enthusiasm is most probably he must have thought that the nation had finally began to awake and take the control of their lives for better or worse. In other words American nation was now taking the initiative in dealing with the problems on their own and separating themselves from the influence of politicians. So for Whitman, the war was not something that divides the nation; on the contrary it had now become a medium to unite them. On the other hand, we shouldn't forget that he was still hoping the war would be a short one. According to David Reynolds "The powerful 'I' of his early poems that had tried to unify all cultural sections and levels was replaced by the totalitarian war spirit that he believed, took control of virtually all Americans, bringing purgation and cleansing. The social purgation his early poetry had attempted- sometimes through violent images, sometimes through utopian ones-seemed to be happening before his eyes." (Reynolds 418)

One can understand Reynolds' claims better by looking at two other recruiting poems of Walt Whitman. One of the most famous of them is "Beat! Beat! Drums!" In this poem Whitman continues to welcome the war with joy and describes the war as a "ruthless force." / Beat! beat! drums! – blow! bugles! blow! / Through the windows – through the doors- burst like a ruthless force./ (Whitman, 259)

The second recruiting poem is "Song of the Banner at Daybreak." In this poem, Whitman portrays war as a unifying object. According to Asselineau Whitman glorifies the war because it includes "his ideal, the cause of democracy which he had always placed above everything else. It was for him as we say today, an ideological war."(Asselineau 155) In the poem Whitman creates a scene where a poet, a banner, a child and a father are talking about the war. The poet describes the voice of the drums as a "new song, free song" and the pennant calls everybody around it and says "Come up here, bard, bard, / Come up here soul, soul, / Come up here, dear little child, / To fly in the clouds and winds with me, and play with the measureless light." (Whitman 261) Then the child asks to this father "Father what is that in the sky beckoning to me with long finger? / And what does it say to me all the while?"(261) but the father tries to ignore the importance of the war and draws the child's attention to as Reynolds has noted "materialistic things" (Reynolds 418)

Nothing my babe you see in the sky,
And nothing at all to you it says- but look you my babe,
Look at these dazzling things in the houses, and see you the money-shops
opening,

(262)

Then the banner and the pennant calls the poet together asks him to prevent the child from believing his father. "Speak to the child O bard out of Manhattan, / To our children all, or north or south of Manhattan, /Point this day, leaving all the rest, to us all over..." (263) When

the poet begins to call the child and explains what he sees, Whitman's "I" comes onto the stage again but this time as Reynolds has noted in his book, to reflect "the totalitarian war spirit."

I hear the tramp of armies, I hear the challenging sentry,
I hear the jubilant shouts millions of men, I hear liberty!
I hear the drums beat and the trumpets blowing [...]
I do not deny the precious results of peace, I see populous cities with wealth
incalculable, [...]
Runs swiftly up indicating war and defiance- [...]

(263-4)

Finally the child decides that he doesn't like houses or money but he would like to join the pennant and the banner.

O my father I like not the houses,
They will never to me be anything, nor do I like money,
But to mount up there I would like, O father dear, that banner I like,
That pennant I would be and must be.

(265)

Whitman ends the poem by clarifying his thought that the war is necessary for the nation to find itself and awake.

My limbs, my veins dilate, my theme is clear at last,
Banner so broad advancing out of the night, I sing you haughty and resolute...
I hear from above O pennant of war your ironical call and demand,
Insensate! Insensate [...]
O banner, not money so precious are you, not farm produce you, nor the
material good nutriment, [...]

Out of reach, an idea only, yet furiously fought for, risking bloody death,
loved by me,
So loved-

(266-7)

So the pennant is exactly what both Northerners and Southerners are fighting and for Whitman it is a unifying object that brings them together.

In another poem called “City of Ships” Whitman’s excitement of the war continues:

City of Ships!

(O the black ships! O the fierce ships!) [...]

Spring up O city-not for peace alone, but be indeed yourself, warlike! [...]

In peace I chanted peace, but now the drum of war is mine,

War, red war is my song through your streets, O city! (270)

While Whitman was celebrating and glorifying the war for its unifying spirit, December 16, 1862 put an end to Whitman’s enthusiasm and joy; because on the morning of December 16, he got the news that his brother’s name, George Whitman, was on the list of regimental casualties. Whitman immediately got on the first train to Washington to search for his brother.

In his essay called “Fratricide and Brotherly Love: Whitman and the Civil War” M. Wynn Thomas argues that it was through “George that Whitman was led to an intimate understanding of the real, hidden nature of the war.”(Greenspan 27) Similarly Reynolds has also noted that “It was mainly because of George that Walt got close to the war. Not only did George send home reports of his experiences, but his being wounded at Fredericksburg was what drew Walt to the front and then go Washington.”(Reynolds 411)

Unfortunately the journey began with another shock to Whitman. He was robbed and lost all his money. When he arrived in Washington, he was penniless and hopeless. In a letter

to his mother he wrote that his journey “was the greatest suffering” he had “ever experienced in” his “life”(Reynolds 411) He went from hospital to hospital with the hope of finding his George but after two days in another letter to his mother, he wrote that he was tired of “walking all day and night, unable to ride, trying to get information, trying to get access to big people...I could not get the least clue to anything.”(Morris 50) Luckily, on the third day, he found two friends from Boston. One was his old publisher Charles. W. Eldridge and the novelist William Douglas O’Connor. They gave him some money and helped him to get the information that his brother George was in Falmouth, Virginia “where his regiment was camped.”(Reynolds 411)

From the day that he reached Falmouth where his brother’s regiment was camping he began to see the real face of a battle field and the life of soldiers whom he accompanied them with his enthusiastic, joyful poems. In his notebook entry, dated December 21, 1862, he wrote his first impressions with these words:

“Begin my visits among he camp hospitals in the army of the Potomac. Spend a good part of the day in a large brick mansion on the banks of the Rappahannock, used as hospital since the battle-seems to have receiv’d only the worst cases. Out doors, at the front of a tree, within ten yards of the front of the house, I notice a heap of amputated feet, legs, arms, hands, &, a full load for one-horse cart. Several dead bodies lie near, each cover’d with its brown woolen blankets.”(Whitman 26)

After such a horrible and shocking scene, finding George alive with only minor wounds was most probably a great relief for Whitman. On December 19, he gave the happy news to his mother in a letter and wrote that “O you may imagine how trifling all my little cares and difficulties seemed-they vanished into nothing.”(Morris 52)

During his nine day visit at Falmouth he faced the torture and pain that the soldiers were going through closely. As Asselineau has noted “It was an unforgettable adventure. He

shared the hard life of the soldiers, subsisting like them on salt pork and sea biscuits and sleeping in the mud and snow, rolled up in a blanket. And above all for the first time, he saw the war close up, in all its horror.”(Asselineau 143)

In his notebook entries between December 23 to 31, he wrote these sentences to his notebook:

“I go around from one to case to another. I do not see that I do much good to these wounded and dying; but I cannot leave them. Once in a while some youngster holds on to me convulsively, and I do what I can for him; at any rate, stop with him and sit near him for hours, if he wishes it.”(Whitman 27)

On December 28, Whitman left Falmouth and returned to Washington with many wounded soldiers on “an open platform car.”(Whitman 27) At Aqua Landing when the convoy stopped for a few hours, Whitman wandered among the soldiers and as he himself has noted in his notebook “Several wanted word sent home to parents, brothers, views &c., which I did for them, (by mail the next day from Washington.) On the boat I had my hands full. One poor fellow died going up.”(Whitman 27)

Soon after his return to Washington, Whitman decided to stay there. As David Reynolds has noted in Walt Whitman’s America “His stay, interrupted by periodic visits home, would last ten years.”(Reynolds 411)

Whitman found a part-time job, as a copyist and began to stay at William Douglas O’Connor’s house until he found a house in October. He was now spending his days at hospitals, visiting soldiers and going from one ward to another. In his notebook entry dated January 1863, he wrote the mission that he had embraced voluntarily with these words:

“Today, Sunday afternoon and till nine in the evening, visited Campbell hospital; attended specially to one case in ward I, very sick with pleurisy and typhoid fever, young man, farmer’s son, D. F Russell, [...] wrote a letter to his mother, in Malone, Franklin

country, N.Y at his request; gave him some fruit and one or two other gifts; envelop'd and directed his letter, &c. Then went thoroughly through ward 6, observ'd every case in the ward, without, I think, missing one; gave perhaps from twenty to thirty persons, each one some little gift such as oranges, apples, sweet crackers, figs, &c." (Whitman 28)

In another visit on February 24, Whitman reflects an instance with a soldier from Connecticut:

"This young man in bed 25 is H.D.B, of the 27th Connecticut, company B. His folks live at Northford, near New Heaven... When I first saw him he was very sick, with no appetite. He declined offers of money-said he did not need anything. As I as quiet anxious to do something, he confess'd that he had a hankering for a good home-made rice pudding... At this time his stomach was very weak. (The doctor, whom I consulted, said nourishment would do him more good than anything... I soon procured B. his rice-pudding. A Washington lady, (Mrs.O'C.), hearing his wish, made the pudding herself, and I took it up to him the next day."(Whitman 32)

Whitman's notebooks are full of scenes like these ones above. From then until the end of the war, he never missed a day without visiting those wounded soldiers, and helping them as much as he could, sometimes by writing their letters, sometimes, giving them food, listening to their stories, comforting them with a few nice words. It was as a result of his volunteer service for almost three years that he got these two titles which perfectly suits what he had done in those hospitals. In that three years time Whitman made six hundred visits, seeing for almost about 100.000 soldiers. (Reynolds 425) One of the first title that stuck on him was "the Good Gray Poet", given by William Douglas O'Connor in 1865. In 1864 Whitman obtained a position in the Interior Department's Bureau of Indian Affairs as a clerk. It was his best friend William Douglas O'Connor who had found this job to him by

suggesting his name to a few friends. At that time Whitman was in need of money, for he was spending too much of it for the wounded soldiers and providing their needs. The job was exactly what Whitman was looking for, with its \$1200 salary.

After working there for less than a year, one day A Senator from Iowa, named James Harlan wrote a list of some eighty clerks and reported that they were immoral and disloyal for such an important position. Among the names in the list, was the name of Walt Whitman. As Asselineau has noted, “Harlan was a narrow and fanatical Methodist who could live only in an atmosphere of virtue and purity... he soon learned that Whitman had written an indecent book.”(Asselineau 178) This “indecent book” that Harlan had called at that time was Leaves of Grass . A few days later Whitman was fired from his job. When William Douglas O’Connor got the news, he immediately went to talk with the people in charge but the result did not change. As a reaction he wrote a pamphlet and called it “The Good Gray Poet.” In this pamphlet, he was criticizing Harlan with a severe tone and praising Walt Whitman of his success in Leaves of Grass and drawing the reader’s attention to Whitman’s volunteering service at the military hospitals. Since the pamphlet was published in 1866, it enhanced Whitman’s respectability and fame in two ways. It increased the popularity and sale of Whitman’s collection of poems, Drum Taps and secondly, as Asselineau has noted:

“It gave rise to a current of sympathy for Whitman. Even those who found O’Connor’s dithyrambic eulogies exaggerated were obliged to respect the work Whitman had done in the hospitals and to recognize the value of his war poems. It was impossible to henceforth to ignore him or to abuse him as certain critics had done before the war. The obscene author of Leaves of Grass had now become the ‘Good Gray Poet.’ He was no longer merely a poet but a legendary personage.”(Asselineau 179)

The second title, as popular as “The Good Gray Poet”, was “the Wound Dresser.” In The Evolution of Walt Whitman, Asselineau also mentions that “This is the title which

Richard M. Bucke gave in 1898 to a collection of letters sent by Whitman from Washington during the war.”(Asselineau 311) But the readers should not forget the fact that this title of “the Wound Dresser” had already been used by Whitman himself in one of his poems called “The Wound Dresser” in 1865, in Drum Taps.

Whitman’s experiences at Falmouth and in the military hospitals of Washington during the hottest years of the Civil War contributed Whitman and his poetry a lot. First of all, According to Roy Morris, “His hospital visits were god therapy- for him as much as the soldiers. The brave young men who were fighting and dying so uncomplainingly for the Union restored his belief in the inherit goodness of American people and his idealized concept of comradely love.” (Morris 100) It was most probably exactly in those times that his ideas about the importance of individualism had shaken. Seeing all those dying soldiers proved him the fact that individual had lost all independence and initiative. Many young soldiers were dying in front of his eyes and no power could prevent it.

In an interview with a friend, Horace Traubel, Whitman confirms the importance of those years with these words:

“There were years in my life-years there in New York- when I wondered if all was not going to bad with America- the tendency downwards- but the war saved me: what I saw in the war set me up for all time-the days in the hospitals.”(Morris 100)

It is of course difficult to guess what Whitman had in mind when he claimed that the war had saved him, but there is no doubt that the war had given the start of a transmission for Whitman. A few years ago, he came to believe that he could unify nation by a new model of an individual who is democratic and equal in his treatment of the other individuals. But now he was about to realize that his efforts of a healthy relation between the “I” and society” were futile. After witnessing all those suffering of young soldiers, he had to find another way to become their voice and to identify with them in a real way. As Reynolds has noted, the war

“pulled together virtually all Americans, North and South, in a common action and spirit of heroic sacrifice.”(Reynolds 414) Now the role that he played as “the wound dresser” was more nationalistic and patriotic. Because the self that he had created in Drum-Taps was actively participating in lives of those brave soldiers.

So at end of Civil War, when Whitman collected his war poems under the title of Drum Taps in 1865, it was difficult to observe the same “I” of the first three editions. First of all, its power on the reader was highly diminished. Second of all, it was not reflecting the relation between himself and the society. It was now reflecting real instances from the core of a nation. In 1865 as a result of Abraham Lincoln’s assassination, the publication of the book was a little bit delayed. Because he added a “Sequel When Lilacs Last in the Door-Yard Bloom’d and other Poems” to the book. In 1867, when he published the fourth edition of Leaves of Grass he put Drum Taps and Sequel to Drum Taps into this fourth edition.

DRUM-TAPS

Readers who have read Drum Taps can immediately take notice of the transformation that Whitman had gone through during the war years. His poems in Drum Taps can be divided into two as pre-Washington poems and afterwards. Before his visit to the front at Falmouth, Whitman glorified and welcomed war in his recruiting poems, like “First O Songs for a Prelude”, “Beat! Beat! Drums!”, “Song of the Banner at Daybreak”. But after his visit to the front, seeing the horrors of the war closely, the tone of the poems had begun to change and made Whitman to say that “I say stop this war, this horrible massacre of men!” (Asselineau 156-7) So from a poet of glorifying war poems, he had transformed into a poet who portrays the realities of the war which was full of suffering and pain. His poems written during his visits to the military hospitals reflect first hand experience that Whitman collected from the wounded soldiers. Whitman’s first 9 days at Falmouth also gave Whitman enough material

for the Drum Taps and caused destruction of some values that he had tried to communicate to his readers through the pages of the three editions of Leaves of Grass. The individual “I” of the Leaves of Grass had now transformed into the national self that projects heroism of a nation whose members were dying for their country.

One of the first poems written at Falmouth was “A Sight in Camp In the Daybreak Gray and Dim.” It is an early morning and Whitman, unable to sleep, is wandering around the camp. He sees three dead bodies, covered with blankets:

Curious I halt and silent stand,

Then with light fingers I from the face of the nearest the first just lift the
blanket;

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

Who are you my dear comrade?

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

Who are you sweet boy with cheeks yet blooming?

Then to the third- a face nor child nor old, very calm, as of beautiful yellow-
white ivory;

Young man I think I know you- I think this face is the face of the Christ
himself,

Dead and divine and brother of all, and here again he lies.

(282)

This is the first poem that Whitman stops glorifying the war and begins to write with a clear direct tone in which he reflects the real facts and scenes of the war. In this poem, the “I” does not have an individualistic function but just become a medium to make these anonymous

soldiers' name known to the world. The metaphor of Christ is the symbol of how sacred and holy they are for Whitman.

In another poem called "Vigil Strange I Kept On the Field One Night", Whitman comes across a dead soldier that he had seen once and on the night of the battle, he found his dead body.

Vigil strange I kept on the field one night;
When you my son and my comrade dropt at my side that day, [...]
Vigil final for you brave boy. (I could not save you, swift was your death
I faithfully loved you and cared for you living, I think we shall surely meet
again [...]
My comrade I wrapt in his blanket, envelop'd well his form,
Folded the blanket well, tucking it carefully over head and carefully under feet,
[...]
Ending my vigil strange with that, vigil of night and battlefield dim, [...]
I rose from the chill ground and folded my soldier well in his blanket,
And buried him where he fell.

(278-9)

In this poem the "I" praises the soldier for his bravery and makes its last service to a dead soldier by burying him.

Whitman's poems written after his return to Washington, reflects his experiences in the hospitals and the stories he had listened from the wounded soldiers. On his return to Washington, Whitman who described himself as the men of brotherhood and equality in the first three editions of Leaves of Grass was now embracing a new role as a helpful, caring, understanding "wound dresser". One of the most important poems that he wrote in Washington, during his visits to military hospitals is "The Wound Dresser" In the poem

Whitman portrays real scenes from the hospitals that he had been to and how he helped them to reduce their pain.

Bearing the bandages, water and sponge,
Straight and swift to my wounded I go,
Where they lie on the ground after the battle brought in,
Where their priceless blood reddens the grass the ground, [...]
I onward go, I stop,
With hinged knees and steady hand to dress wounds, [...]
One turns to me his appealing eyes-poor boy! I never knew you,
Yet I think I could not refuse this moment to die for you, if that would save
you. (284-5)

As maybe noticed, there has been a change in the tone of his poems in Drum Taps compared to the three editions of Leaves of Grass. Especially his “I” who described himself as “Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding” in Leaves of Grass is now going with the wounded, offering to die for them. In Drum Taps Whitman reflected the harsh realities of the war and heroism of a nation at the same time. So the “I” has embraced a more nationalistic aspect for it embodies all the suffering, pain, heroism and bravery of American man who are dying for a cause that they believe and the country that they are living in. The relation between the “I” and society in the three editions of Leaves of Grass had ended. Whitman’s focus was now on the anonymous members of the nation. With the first poem below, the “I” gives an identity to the anonymous soldiers, their fathers, mothers and wives. In all the poems in Drum Taps Whitman’s “I” assumes different roles and by doing so it had become the spokesman of a nation.

In “By the Bivouac’s Fitful Flame” the “I” becomes the voice of a lonely soldier, sitting in front of a camp fire and dreaming about his home and the loved ones he had left behind:

By the bivouac’s fitful flame,
A procession winding around me, solemn and sweet and slow-but first
note, [...]
Of life and dead, of home and the past and loved and of those that are far away,
A solemn and slow procession there as I sit on the ground,
By the bivouac’s fitful flame.

(276)

In another poem called “Come Up From the Fields Father”, while Whitman is portraying a sad, heart breaking instance which is familiar to many American families at that time, though never mentioned, the “I” becomes “a strange hand” which tells the news to the family that their son is dead.

Come up from the fields father, here’s a letter from our Pete,
And come to the front door mother, here’s a letter from thy dear son. [...]
Open the envelope quickly,
O this is not our son’s writing, yet his name is sign’d,
O a strange hand writes for our dear son, O stricken mother’s soul!
All swims before her eyes, flashes with black, she catches the main words only,
Sentences broken, *gunshot wound in the breast, cavalry skirmish, taken to
hospital*, [...]
While they stand at home at the door he is dead already,
The only son is dead.
But the mother needs to be better,

She with thin form presently drest in black,
By day her meals untouch'd, then at night fitfully sleeping, often waking,
In the midnight waking, weeping, longing with one deep longing,

(277-8)

This is exactly what makes the “I” nationalistic, even though it hasn’t mentioned openly, it becomes the voice of a nation, going through such a severe long suffering and pain. This scene had happened in many American families’ home. So the “I” of Whitman bridges the two sides in reflecting the suffering and pain: the ones who are fighting for the country and the ones who are left behind and waiting to hear from them.

In “A March In the Ranks Hard- Prest, and the Road Unknown”, Whitman’s “I” now becomes the voice of a soldier, marching in the night, feeling the breath of death in every single second. The soldier is walking toward an unknown road. The unknown road here symbolizes his death which is getting closer the more the soldier marches.

A March in the ranks hard-prest, and the road unknown,
A route through a heavy wood with muffles step in the darkness, [...]
We come to an open space in the woods, and halt by the dim-lighted building,
'Tis a large old church at the crossing roads, now an impromptu hospital,
[...] crowds, groups of forms vaguely I see on the floor, some in the pews laid
down,
Faces, varieties, postures beyond description, most in the obscurity, some of
them dead,
[...] I speed forth the darkness,
Resuming, marching, ever in darkness marching, on in the ranks,
The unknown road still marching.

(280-1)

In another poem, “As Toilsome I Wander’d Virginia’s Woods”, Whitman’s “I” now represents many anonymous brave soldiers of America.

As toilsome I wander’d Virginia’s woods,
To the music of rustic leaves kick’d by my feet, (for ‘twas autum)
I mark’d at the foot of a tree the grave of a soldier;
Mortally wounded he and buried on the retreat, (easily all could I understand,)
[...]On a tablet scrawl’d and nail’d on the tree by the grave,
Bold, cautious, true, and my loving comrade.

(282)

In “Over the Carnage Rose Prophetic A Voice” the “I” becomes the “prophetic voice” and prophecies that since they are “sons of the Mother All”, they will all be the winners. In the following lines he sets a scene where he unites the comrades from Massachusetts to Missouri, Maine to Carolina and tells them that they are “precious to each other”. In the final lines of the poem they are all tied by Whitman’s “I”.

Over the carnage rose prophetic a voice [...]
Those who love each other shall become invincible
[...] Sons of the Mother of All, you shall yet be victorious [...]
One from Massachusetts shall be a Missourian’s comrade,
From Maine and from hot Carolina, and another an Oregonese, shall be friends
triune,
[...] I ecstatic, O partners! O lands, with the love of lovers tie you.

(289-90)

In “Reconciliation” the reader sees Whitman’s “I” in mourning for his comrade. The “I” is obviously not taking any sides:

[...] 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.” (294)

In all these poems Whitman avoids putting too much emphasis on the “I”. Because he sang the song of the members of nation who had gone through a long painful period of war. The “I” still exists but just to tell Americans about those suffering and pain. In all these poems Whitman portrayed individuals as helpless, not in control of their lives. They were not independent like the individuals of Leaves of Grass poems. They did not have the initiative of their lives in their hands. They were surrounded by death. Single personalities were not important anymore, because they had become one. The individual self of Leaves of Grass had now become the national self because what Whitman had tried to do was to project one national self that was composed of the members of a nation who experienced the same suffering and pain. The “I” was not the voice of different personalities in the same nation as it was in the three editions of Leaves. Now, pain and suffering were common to all classes and color. Death was on both sides. Whitman’s “I” could not function as a unifying object anymore. It was too late to do that. So it participated the nation’s war and embraced the role of “the Wound Dresser” or “the Good Gray Poet” The self that he portrayed in Leaves of Grass filtered through the nation’s common self throughout the war. In the Leaves of Grass editions before the war, Whitman’s model of individual was a combination of different imaginary selves created by Whitman himself but in Drum-Taps the self was a natural combination of the real members of the nation. It is because of this that it became national in a real sense.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that Whitman’s experiences in the military hospitals played an important role in the changing tone of his poetry. While he voluntarily served in these hospitals, he also served his beloved country through his war poems. By filtering all anonymous voices through his self, the “I” in his war poetry has embraced a nationalistic role.

It sometimes becomes the voice of a lonely soldier, sometimes a wound dresser and sometimes the voice of a mother who had lost his son. In all these cases, this nationalistic “I” has reflected the heroism of brave Americans who risked their lives for the future of their country and Whitman has sung their song in Drum Taps. In 1860, in a poem called “Starting from Paumanok” he swears that he “will report all heroism from an American point of view.”(17) Civil War gave him this chance and he as “the poet of comrades”, he did this without taking any sides. In fact it is Walt Whitman himself who summarizes what he had done in those long years in one of the last poems of Drum Taps:

I have nourish'd the wounded and sooth's many a dying soldier,
And at intervals waiting or in the midst of camp,
Composed these songs.

(293)

With these lines Whitman removes the importance of individual” I”. He tells us that those soldiers were the same individuals who were dying for their country at that time and as “the wound dresser” he fulfilled his national responsibility by nourishing and soothing them. In the limited intervals, he united them in one common national song. His strong emphasis on the individual self of the first three editions of Leaves of Grass transforms into a national self in Drum-Taps .Because the divided member of the nation had finally united during the Civil War.

CONCLUSION

Ezra Pound was right when he declared that Walt Whitman is “America.” From the beginning of his literary career until the end of his life, Whitman successfully presented a poetry in which he reflected American culture and its people very well. Starting with the 1855 edition of Leaves of Grass Whitman always expressed his love of the country. He was so proud that he even described America as “the greatest poem.” He made this declaration to come true in his works. In his poems one can find a real portrayal of 19th century American culture as well as his personal life. He carefully blended instances from his own life with the lives of the common man. His love and trust for the American people was great. In his poems, variety of people; from a carpenter to a boatman, from a Northerner to a Southerner, from a black man to a white man found their voice and were appreciated. For Whitman every single individual was equal and valuable. This is the reason why that in one part of his famous poem “Song of Myself”, he described himself as “Of every hue and caste am I, of every rank and religion.” (Whitman 42) Whitman’s humanist and equal embrace in his poems gave an optimistic tone to his poetry. In 1855 when he published Leaves of Grass he was still hoping a reconstruction in the America nation.

In the early 1840’s Whitman had a great faith in the parties and the politicians. But the disillusionments and disappointments that he experienced in the 1850’s forced him to rethink his political beliefs. President Polk’s policies about slavery and his attitude towards the Wilmot Proviso destroyed Whitman’s faith in the current parties and their leaders. Finally when Whitman began to take a stand on the side of the common man, instead of the politicians, his whole perception of life was changed. He came to believe that a real

democracy could only come true as long as long as it was practiced by the nation. From then on he aimed to make it true in his poems. He created scenes in which people were treated equally. He took himself as a model to construct a new identity by asserting it through the first person singular “I” In all the three editions of Leaves of Grass, until the Civil War, “I” was the main character in his poetry. The identity that he portrayed in his poems was proud of his country, a humanist who embraced every single individual, and who had a self respect and self trust. Through this “I” while Whitman was touching upon the current conflicts that the country was dealing with at that time such as slavery, the division between the North and South. On the other hand he was also challenging the taboo subjects like the expression of one’s sexuality. He wrote poems in which he expressed his sexual desires openly. Finally at the end of the first edition of Leaves of Grass the audience met a new model of the individual self who was democratic, equal and sensual. In all the three editions of Leaves of Grass he hoped that “I” could become a medium to leave all the source of conflicts behind.

Day by day things were going bad for America and its people. Until the outbreak of the Civil War he hoped that he could bring the nation to its senses. He published more than two hundred poems in which he emphasized the importance of brotherhood and equality. But April 12, 1861 was the year that changed both America and Whitman. On December 16, 1862 Whitman got the news that his bother, George was wounded. He immediately went to Washington in order to find his brother. Those days were the turning point in his life. When he reached Falmouth where his brother’s regiment was camping he began to see the real face of a battle field. After spending nine days at Falmouth, witnessing the pain and torture that those soldiers were experiencing he realized that he too should do something. So he returned to Washington and spent his days at the military hospitals, visiting soldiers and going from one ward to another. Throughout his three and a half year stay in Washington he helped those

wounded soldiers as much as he could, sometimes by writing their letters, sometimes, giving them food, listening to their stories, comforting them with a few nice words.

Those years changed Whitman and his poetry a lot. He was not the same “Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son / Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding” (48) In 1865 when he published new war poems under the title of Drum-Taps the first person singular “I” had lost its effect and function in his poetry. In his pre-Civil War poems he had created scenes in which he portrayed himself identified with the lives of the American men. But now his identification of the nation and its brave, heroic soldiers was much more intensified by the Civil War and it became real. The characters and stories that he was portraying in his war poems were now real. There was no need to present the same old “I” in his poems, because the American individual was composing his own poem now. As the first person singular faded away, a new national self was constructed; not by Whitman this time, but by the American nation. The American men finally took part in a common action and their heroic self sacrifice found its voice in the poems of Walt Whitman.

From then on a new national self came into being in Whitman’s Civil War poems. As Emerson had proclaimed, “We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds...” (Bradley 1092), the nation began to stand on its own feet for a brighter future. The new national self that Whitman portrayed in Drum-Taps embodied all the suffering, pain, heroism and bravery of American man who were dying for a cause that they believed and the country that they were living in. When one compared the self that he presented in his pre-war poems and the Civil War poems, s/he can easily notice the differences. In the three editions of Leaves of Grass Whitman offered his own persona while he was reflecting the lives of the American individual. For instance his famous poem “Song of Myself” was dominated by the identity that Whitman constructed for himself. Throughout the poem he indicated the two sides of it: an equal, democratic self that embraced all

individuals as sisters and brothers and the private self that was erotic and never hesitated to express the needs and the beauty of the body. The “I” was also a medium to establish a relationship between himself and the other individuals. He portrayed scenes in which he treated people of different race, religion, occupation and color. In this way he aimed to give a message that differences were not important, they were all living on the same land and sharing the same culture. Most importantly they were all American. This was the reason why that at the very beginning of the poem he informed the audience that he shared the same geographical roots with the other members of American society. “My tongue, every atom of my blood, form’d from this soil, this air, / Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their parents the same,” (26)

Whitman was always proud to be an American and proud of its people as well. But on the other hand he was also aware of the problems that the nation was dealing with. The conflict between the white and the black man, the tension between the North and the South were dividing the country. This was not the kind of country that Whitman was dreaming. So in his poems he aimed to create an ideal country where its people were all equal, living in love and peace. Through the persona that he created in all those poems he showed the nation that it is possible to do this as long as people respect each other’s right and embrace each individual as sisters and brothers.

In the three editions of Leaves of Grass he was hopeful and optimistic. The outbreak of the Civil War changed everything. He was partly happy because he saw that the American men finally took control of their lives and put an end to all the conflicts. In the first year of the war he wrote recruiting poems in which he celebrated the war spirit. He was also sure that the war would not last too long. But as the time went by, things did not go as he planned or dreamed. Thousands of American people were dying, injuring every day. Those years that he spent in the military hospitals of Washington affected Whitman very much. He observed pain

and suffering of the soldiers closely. So in 1865, when he published Drum-Taps, the picture that he portrayed in Leaves of Grass series was changed. The nation had finally taken the first step to be a nation. Both sides of the conflict got together around a common action, but unfortunately the results were bloody and deadly. So portraying an imaginary peace, equality and democracy as he did in Leaves of Grass was not necessary anymore. The nation had learned its lesson but everybody paid high prices. The result was destruction, pain, suffering and death. In Drum-Taps Whitman presented the real story from a first hand experience. Characters were real, incidents were real and death was real. In other words it the members of the nation that were playing the game. So the persona that Whitman presented in Drum-Taps functioned only to reflect the stories of the brave, heroic men of America. When those real stories combined with Whitman's talent and poetic presentation, a wonderful work of art came into being. In other words, out of heroism, bravery, pain, death and suffering, Whitman created a guide book in which Americans can still learn a lot about the most important periods of their history.

Whitman did not fight in the war but did as much as he could by actively taking part in the lives of many soldiers. Instead of going back to New York, he chose to stay in Washington and observed the war closely. He served his beloved country in two ways, one as a conscious, sensitive American who nursed the wounded and dying soldiers through his regular visits to military hospitals and the second one was as a poet who had created a bitter but national work of art. By portraying real and vivid pictures of the Civil War in his poetry, Whitman deserves to be appreciated as the one and only national poet ever born on the American land. Spending three and a half years among the wounded and dying soldiers was not something easy that everybody can succeed. But Whitman did without hesitation.

His contribution to American literature is undisputable. He had written from the core of his heart and never once hesitated to express his great love for the country and its people. I believe that America has still a lot to learn from his humanism, his understanding of democracy and equality. Today if the country has taken the title of the United States of America, it owes a lot to artists like Walt Whitman who offered his poetry to provide a balance in the social picture of the 1850's and 60's by at least destroying the classes, gender and race in his poems. Whitman has brought Americans the real meaning of nationality. Even in the middle of a political chaos, he never stopped to believe in the power of the nation. American nation was the main source of his work of art. Thus Walt Whitman was not only an ordinary literary figure stuck in the 19th century American literature but he is one of the geniuses ever born on the American land.

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