

The Theme of Patriotism in the Poetry of Walt Whitman

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ABSTRACT

Walt Whitman is undoubtedly one of the greatest poets of America. He has been called “the organ voice of America. He is deeply patriotic. He is proud of America, its physical vastness, its ever expanding boundaries, its infinite natural riches and such achievement. To celebrate men and to celebrate his country were two dominant ambitions of Walt Whitman. He thought of glorifying his country. His long catalogues express his desires and he is striving to do justice to every bit of America, every individual that forms the great people of America.

The poem “I Hear America Singing” the profound national sorrow caused by the death of Abraham Lincoln finds expression in the two great elegies of Whitman “O Captain” and “When Lilacs last in the Dooryard Bloomed”. In the number of poems Whitman extols his countrymen to stay united. A significant factor in Whitman’s poetic philosophy is his glorification of individual. The Title of Whitman’s Book of verse “Leaves of Grass” is in itself an excellent evidence of the democratic spirit of the poet. Whitman identifies himself with the common man and considers himself as a singer of greatness and glory of the common man.

Key Words: Patriotic feelings, Whitman’s True love for American people and America

Introduction:

Whitman’s burning individualism, his passionate love of liberty, his dedication to democracy are the very features of American temperament. Whitman was accepted as a great supporter of radicalism. He was considered a poet and poetic seer. More than any other English or American Poet Whitman has sung in praise of democracy hailing it in ecstatic terms. A

significant factor in Whitman’s poetic philosophy is his glorification of individual. He was “the first great man to write in the language of the people”. Like Dante he wrote in vulgar tongue. Like Wordsworth, Burns and the Romantics he chose for his poetry the common and humble people.

In “O Captain! My Captain!” Whitman expresses the patriotic feeling between the

average citizens and leader of the people. The captain is portrayed as a patriot who has risked his life in some mission for the people on shore. The masses on shore celebrate the captain's success.

"Song of Myself" taken from Whitman's collection Leaves of Grass is one of the best known and most influential poems ever written by an American. "Song of Myself" consists of 70 pages and divided into 52 sections takes the readers on an epic journey. He used "Song of Myself" to explore those ideas while preaching self knowledge, liberty and acceptance for all.

Whitman often referred to current events in his work. He wrote the patriotic poem Beat! Beat! Drum! During the civil war. "O Captain! My Captain" is about the death of Abraham Lincoln is one of Whitman's famous piece. In 1865, Whitman published another section of Leaves of Grass titled Drum-Taps which focused heavily on themes of war and patriotism. Shortly after the civil war ended, Whitman revised and published two new editions of Leaves of Grass as well as a new collection entitled poems of Walt Whitman.

Despite his varied interests, there are many recurring themes in Whitman's poetry.

Whitman often wrote about the human body, celebrating its beauty and its capabilities. He believed that the body was sacred because it enabled the soul to experience the world. The poems in Whitman's collections also contain many natural images and symbols, some of which are unexpected - like rotting leaves or tufts of straw. Democracy is also a hugely important theme in Whitman's work. Whitman frequently celebrated the idea of democracy because it emphasizes the individual.

Individualism:

The ideology of individualism is very prevalent in Whitman's work. This concept thrived in America during the early nineteenth century- a democratic response to the new class of industrial wage- workers. Whitman's poetry often addresses the role of the individual within a collective society while simultaneously emphasizing the importance of self expression.

Democratic Nature of Poets:

He frequently points out the democratic power of poetry. He used the medium to celebrate the struggles of the common man. He felt that both the form and the content of his work could saw the democratic spirit in his reader's hearts and minds.

The Body and Soul:

Whitman emphasizes the connection between the body and the soul repeatedly in his poetry.

According to Whitman, the human soul consists of two parts-mind and body. The body is the vessel through which the soul experiences the world and is therefore sacred. Whitman finds God in nature and in the human body.

WAR:

Whitman's career coincided with the civil War. Therefore, many of his poems address themes

Of war and the loss of humanity that results from physical conflicts. Although Whitman was a patriotic man yet he was also a pacifist. He believed that war was useless

Conclusion:

Thus Whitman is a great American poet of democracy, a poet of average people, a poet of mysticism, a poet of fusion of body and soul and above all a technical innovator in the use of common language and rhythm for poetic purposes.

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and that fighting was never an effective solution. He worked as a nurse during the civil war and during that time he developed many personal relationships with wounded soldiers. He felt that it was his personal responsibility to humanize these brave individuals and honour their sacrifice.

Whitman had several works of literature that focused on Americans, political leaders and the spirit of America itself. He wrote over 50 poems involving this theme and they are collected in Walt Whitman's Patriotic poems which were compiled several years after his death.

Whitman had true love and admiration for his country.