

The Exhilaration of Death in Walt Whitman's Poetry

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By

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بهجة

يعد الشاعر واثق وتمان (-) هم شعراء الأدب الأمريكي في القرن التاسع عشر. تميزت قصائده التي ضمها ديوان وريقات العشب بالجرأة والحداثة من حيث الشكل والمضمون. حيث استقطبت الكثير من النقاد وأثرت في اتجاه شعر القرن العشرين. المثير في الأمر إن اهتمام النقاد الحديثين تركز على الجانب السياسي والوطني في شعره على الرغم من أن له آراء مهمة في قضايا فلسفية وإنسانية أساسية مثل قضية الموت. حيث إن البحث يسلط الضوء على آراء وتمان في هذه القضية المهمة من حيث المنطلق والمضمون والأهداف.

تميزت قصائد وريقات العشب بتركيزها على قضية الموت حيث حاول الشاعر تغيير الفكرة التقليدية للموت على أنه فناء ابدى وحزن وخسارة إلى فكرة أكثر تفاؤلاً وإيجابية. حيث أنه يرى الموت على أنه حقيقة وجودية جميلة لا تستوجب الحزن أو الخوف بل التفاؤل والترحيب ذلك لأن الموت يجلب حرية الروح من سجن الجسد وحرية الجسد من الألمه وأوجاعه. حيث أن الروح ستطوف حرة طليقة في الفضاء مهما كان صاحبها فقيراً أو غنياً شريراً أو طيباً فالموت فيه مساواة وعدالة. أما الجسد فسيتحول بفعل الطبيعة إلى كائن آخر سيساهم من وجهة نظر الشاعر في استمرار الخليقة.

يجب الإشارة إلى أن آراء وتمان في الموت هي ليست نتاج لأفكار تقليدية أو الدراسة الأكاديمية بل أنها نتاج لسببين أساسيين هما: ارتفاع نسبة الموت في القرن التاسع عشر سواء كان موتاً مفاجئاً بسبب الأمراض أو بسبب الحروب الأهلية وثانياً: تجربة الشاعر الشخصية في هذه المجال حيث أنه فقد أعز أفراد عائلته وأصدقائه. كذلك مرور الشاعر بفترات من التعب الجسدي بسبب كبر سنه مما جعله يفكر ملياً في هذه القضية الحساسة.

Introduction

Walt Whitman, the American poet, journalist and essayist, is one of the most prominent figures of the modern literature and the proclaimed poet of American democracy. Known as the "paterfamilias of the tribe of American poets,"¹ he is one of the most influential poets, nationally and internationally. Harold Bloom has stated in *The Western Canon* that "no Western poet, in the past century and half, not even Browning, or Leopardi or Baudelaire, overshadows Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson."² He affected the twentieth century poetry and poets such as Ezra Pound, Allen Ginsberg, William Carlos Williams, and Carlos Sandberg and others.

So far, Whitman's popularity lied largely on his interest in the political and national issues, yet he has marvelous views on larger cosmic issues and mystic truth like life

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and death. The “ultimate democrat” is equally the “bard of death;”³ a fact that has been overshadowed by most of his modern critics. For modern critics, Whitman is a poet of democracy and joys of life; however, a reader of his work can easily recognize his interest in the idea of death, which he considers as “the real reality” behind “the shifting forms of life,” (Scented Herbage of My Breast; p.211-13).⁴ Whitman believes that modern poets must write about death as he has stated in the *Democratic Vistas*: “In the future of these States must arise poets immenser far, and make great poems of death.”⁵

The Real Reality: Death Motif in Whitman's Poetry

To get better understanding of Whitman's perspective of death, it is far important to high light the backgrounds and the factors that shaped his attitude of that idea. In reality, Whitman's perception of death is not a matter of tradition or education; but that of the American milieu along with his personal experience. During the nineteenth century, death seemed to be omnipresent and pivotal to the people of the United States. Mortality rate was very high in that age for many reasons; among which is the epidemic tuberculosis, the plague of the century, which ceased the lives of man as well as children. The Civil War (1861-1864) is another factor behind the high mortality rate during Whitman's age.⁶ Additionally, there was a tendency to commit suicide among slaves who thought that death may bring them freedom. Russ Castronovo stated that “The citizenship in nineteenth-century America was governed by an insidious ‘necro ideology’ ” which he defines as

... a set of deathly effects specific to the nineteenth-century United States [which] eternalizes sociohistorical relations as neither social historical by conceptualizing the unmarked soul as refuge from the politicized body, idealizing the afterlife as a perfected social order, and representing passivity and somnolence as democratic virtues.⁷

Nineteenth century Americans never kept death silent. People were highly sensual that a sort of exaggeration appeared in their mourning. In his *Western Attitudes toward Death*, Philippe Ariès, a French medievalist and historian, described the nineteenth century as an “era of mourning” that the modern psychologists call “hysterical mourning.”⁸ Part of the nineteenth century rituals were the “funeral processions, mourning clothes, the spread of cemeteries and of their surface area, visits and pilgrimages to tombs,” and “the cult of memory.”⁹ This led to the emergence of numerous “discourses dedicated to understanding and accepting the inevitability of death”¹⁰ in the

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United States during the nineteenth century. Eventually, there were serious cultural attempts to face and heal the public fear of death during that turbulent age. So, Whitman's milieu was shadowed by death. His writings manifested serious attempts in expressing and redirecting people's attitude towards death.

Besides the general milieu he lived in, Whitman had a practical familiarity with death. In the personal level, he suffered great sorrows for the death of his grandmother, father, brother, sister-in-law, and the death of his mother, which he described as "the great dark cloud of my life."¹¹ He also shared the nation's grieve over the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln; for whose death, Whitman had presented a series of lectures under the title "The Death of Abraham Lincoln," which were presented in front of a crowd of people including famous names like Andrew Carnegie, James Russell Lowell, and Mark Twain.²

Being inspired by his old age and illness, Whitman has devoted his work to reflect and interpret the notion of death. He even prepared himself for death by buying a lot in the city's cemetery with a big tomb stone, carrying his name. Furthermore, he added some poems to the 1881 edition of *leaves of Grass* which is eventually called the deathbed edition.¹³ Based on this, Whitman lived so close to death whether personally or nationally; Havelock Ellis said that Whitman "aspires to reveal the loveliness of death" and "speaks not only from the standpoint of the most intense and vivid delight in the actual world, but possesses a practical familiarity with disease and death which has perhaps never fallen to the lot of a great writer."¹⁴

According to what is mentioned earlier, Whitman became naturally "a bard of death" in the literary criterion. Actually, he was aware of that, as he declared to Horace Traubel: "I say better things about death than orthodoxy with all its boasts is say."¹⁵ He also expresses his interest in death in his poem "*Scented Herbage of My Breast*": "Through me shall the words be said to make death exhilarating."

Whitman's genuine interpretation of death draws the attention of critics as well as the public opinion. Many of his contemporaries apprehend his interest in the idea of death. Daniel G. Brinton confirmed that Whitman's poems are essentially songs of death; and that death is an essential part of the universe for him. Brinton, also, touched upon some factors that shaped Whitman's concept of death:

Saturated as they are with the zest of life, marvelously sensitive as they are to every passing thrill of pleasure, to every glad sound or sight, they are essential paeans of Death. Whatever is, is of worth as part of the I, and only of worth as that I is immortal, is the defiant conqueror of Death

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and Time. This was no matter of tradition or education with Walt. It was the inevitable product of his genius, the logical result of his conception of man and the universe. Both, to him, were futile and worthless without the continuance of the mortal life hereafter. This alone, to his mind, offered a rational cause for existence. Unless the individual survives the mutation of matter, the universe is purposeless. . . . To Walt it was the positive conclusion to the severest ratiocination. It is only with this thought constantly in mind that we can read the poems intelligently or sympathize with his acute love of life.¹⁶

D. H. Lawrence believes that Whitman's greatness as a poet emerged from his deep recognition of death. In his essay "Whitman," Lawrence states that Whitman "would not have been the great poet he is if he had not taken the last steps and looked over into death;"¹⁶ he adds that Whitman "was a very great poet, of the end of life. A very great postmortem poet, of the transition of the soul as it loses its integrity."¹⁷

Modern critics, however, paid little attention to Whitman's interest in death. The modernists' attention was focused on his enthusiasm for democracy, freedom and equality in the uprising America. The most interesting study on Whitman's concentration of death is Harold Aspiz study *So Long! Walt Whitman's Poetry of Death* (2004). Other references, found in some critical essays, are only by products of analyzing some of his poems.

Critics agree that *Leaves of Grass* is a good representative of Whitman's perception of mortality; Horace Traubel says that "if 'Leaves of Grass' is remarkable for anything, it is its celebration of death."¹⁸ It is worth noting that the word death with its compounds is repeated over two hundred times in *Leaves of Grass*. Passageways, roads, gates, embouchures, twilight, autumn, leafless trees, and voyages across uncharted seas are some of the images that Whitman employs to represent Death. *Leaves of Grass* affords us an insight into Whitman's interpretation of the issue that dominates the American thinking during the nineteenth century.

Whitman intended to mend the Americans' black vision of death. He endeavors to convince people to accept death as an inevitable factor of the universe; he wrote "I feel and know that death is not the ending, as was thought, but rather the real beginning."¹⁹ So, death is depicted as a part of a natural process or cycle rather than an end in his poetry. He believes that death must be welcomed and not to be feared because it represents a transition or a passageway from one state to another in an ongoing process of spiritual evolution.²⁰ Accordingly, death is very important to the continuity of life.

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In most of his poems, Whitman argues and eventually revises the masses' fear of death as an eternal nothingness. He wants to prove the immortality of soul and body after death. His poem "To Think of Time"²¹ discusses the probable immortality of the spirit after death and the freedom that death brings to soul. Rituals adopted in funerals during the nineteenth century are represented in the setting of the poem. The poem starts in a room where a dead person laid on a bed with his family gathered around his corpse; this is a familiar scene during nineteenth century. The poet starts his argument, about peoples' beliefs, by raising the following questions:

Have you guess'd you yourself would not continue?
 Have you dreaded these earth-beetles?
 Have you fear'd the future would be nothing to you?
 (sec.1)

These questions, as a matter of fact, represent the fears that Whitman wants people to give up. The answer is that as long as there is death there must be new life: "Not a day passes, not a minute or second without an accouchement, Not a day passes, not a minute or second without a corpse." (sec.1)

Actually, he equates life and death; the speaker in the poem suggests that although "The breath ceases and the pulse of the heart ceases,"(sec.1) yet, the deceased man is "palpable as the living are palpable."(sec.1) He becomes "a different living," (sec.1) whose spirit is depicted as a vague, incorporeal entity who "looks curiously on the corpse,"(sec.1) like the living people sitting around the corpse. A sort of freedom occurs with the approach of death; the soul is no longer imprisoned inside the corporeal body, it rather floats in the air freely.

Whitman asserts that death is not an end; and that there is a life after death where a person may get rid of the corporeal worries but keep his personality and entity:

You are not thrown to the winds . . you gather certainly and
 safely around yourself,
 Yourself! Yourself! Yourself forever and ever!
 (sec.6)

He also shows that "the purpose and essence of the known life, the transient" is "to form and decide identity for the unknown life, the permanent."(sec.8) The speaker's argument is ended by stating what he considers a fact; he swears that "...everything without exception has an eternal soul! The trees have, rooted in the ground! The weeds

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of the sea have! The animals.” People’s fear that "death may be only [an] eternal nothingness,” (sec 9) is revised by the speaker’s affirmation:

I swear I think there is nothing but immortality!
That the exquisite scheme is for it, and the nebulous float is
for it, and the cohering is for it!
And all preparation is for it—and identity is for it—and life
and materials are altogether for it!
(sec.9)

In the latter poems, this affirmation or proposal has “become sublimated into a faith in an afterlife during which the elements of conscious (mortal) identity are somehow preserved.”²² By reflecting the positive side of death, Whitman attempts to console the living that death is a beginning of a new state.

The poems “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d” and "This Compost" can be considered as a manifestation to the idea that death is part and parcel of the cycle of life. Whitman argued that death does not only equate life, but also a new life comes out of death; therefore, it plays an essential role in the continuity of the universe.

Originally titled “Poem of the Wonder of The Resurrection of the Wheat,” “This Compost,” depicts Whitman’s belief in the cycle of life and death. The poet also portrayed the fate of the soul and the body after death in an attempt to eliminate the fear of obliteration and decay. The poem displays his ongoing struggle to wrest a faith in immortality and the possibility of reincarnation from his latent. In “This Compost,” Whitman charged up the cycle of life and death with an important element; namely, nature. The argument is based on the Nature's role in transferring deaths to new lives, as it is shown in the course of the poem.

The poem starts with an expression of suspect around "nature" that he used to love and trust:

SOMETHING startles me where I thought I was safest;
I withdraw from the still woods I loved;
I will not go now on the pastures to walk;
I will not strip the clothes from my body to meet my lover the sea;
I will not touch my flesh to the earth, as to other flesh, to renew me.
(ll.1-5)

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The fear and doubt, Whitman expressing, is related to death and mortality. In the first section, Whitman wonders: "How can it be that the ground does not sicken? / How can you be alive, you growths of spring? / How can you furnish health, you blood of herbs, roots, orchards, grain?"(ll.7-8) The three queries are related to nature which he fears that it is infected with the "distemper'dcorpses" and the "sour dead." The speaker continued wondering about the place of these generations of dead people in nature:

Where have you disposed of their carcasses?
 Those drunkards and gluttons of so many generations;
 Where have you drawn off all the foul liquid and meat?
 I do not see any of it upon you to-day—or perhaps I am deceiv'd;
 I will run a furrow with my plough—I will press my spade through the sod,
 and turn it up underneath;
 I am sure I shall expose some of the foul meat.
 (ll.11-16)

While attempting to find an answer to his logical inquiries, the poet's attention is attracted by some other fact. It is the beautiful and healthy production of earth which is pictured as a pile of compost:

Behold this compost! behold it well!
 Perhaps every mite has once form'd part of a sick person—yet
 behold!
 The grass of spring covers the prairies,
 The bean bursts noiselessly through the mould in the garden,
 The delicate spear of the onion pierces upward,
 The apple-buds cluster together on the apple-branches,
 The resurrection of the wheat appears with pale visage out of its graves,
 (ll.17-25)

The poet concludes that "The summer growth is innocent and disdainful above all those strata of sour dead."(L.30)

The answer to the fear of annihilation lies in the chemistry of nature, which can be considered as the reason behind the growth of living things. Nature chemistry, the poet assumes, "conflates human and natural histories."²⁴ Hence, He is "terrified at the Earth! It is that calm and patient,/ It grows such sweet things out of such corruptions."(ll.42-3) Eventually, each death contributes to life "through its process of decay;" and earth is "the symbol and guarantor of the never aging cycle of life, death, and rebirth."²⁵

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The idea of regeneration is also mentioned in "The Song of Myself" when the poet says: "And as to you Life I reckon you are the leavings of many deaths,/ (No doubt I have died myself ten thousand times before.) (sec49: ll.9-10) So, to erase and revise the fear of obliteration after death, Whitman insists that death is a "vital phase in the perpetual renewal of life;"²⁶ and there is a sort of reincarnation enacted by Mother Nature that "remains forever the undiminished acceptor of mortal leavings and the perpetual source of abundant life."²⁷ Nature is, then, an essential part of the process of regeneration. It also plays an important role in "When Lilacs Last in Dooryard Bloom'd;" for almost all the images used in this poem are drawn from nature.

Written two weeks after Lincoln's assassination (1865), "When Lilacs Last in Dooryard Bloom'd" is one of the most important elegiac poems written in the nineteenth century. Whitman takes the nation's loss of its hero as a starting point to a further meditation on death and dying. Though the poem is dedicated for Lincoln, Whitman never mentions Lincoln's name in the sixteen sections of the poem. In her essay "Poetry and the Mediation of Value: Whitman on Lincoln," Helen Vendler argued that

While other poems about Lincoln's death mostly contented themselves with abstractions of praise and grief, Whitman render the very scenes of mourning in present participial form, making them unroll before our eyes in what seems real time.²⁸

"The Lilacs," Helen added "values showing over telling, and the senses over abstraction; it emphasizes the contribution of each individual act to the tally of mourning gestures."²⁹

Aside from the ever returning spring, representing the cycle of life and death, two main nature symbols are presented in the opening section. They are the lilacs, representing love; and the western star, representing the president who came from the west. Hence, the poet mourns with the ever returning spring, suggesting that he will never forget the loss of Lincoln.

The poet who used to "accept Reality and dare not question it" (Song Of Myself; l.483) is very sad over the disappearance of the "great star" that the "black murk" hides:

O powerful western fallen star!
O shades of night—O moody, tearful night!
O great star disappear'd—O the black murk that hides the star!
O cruel hands that hold me powerless—O helpless soul of me!

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O harsh surrounding cloud that will not free my soul.

(ll.7-11)

In these lines, the national grief or the “black murk” covers the western star, making it like waning far away; the same murk surrounded his helpless soul. However, the poet searches for something that may break the “harsh surrounding cloud.” Eventually, two solutions are suggested to this crisis. The first is represented by breaking “A sprig with its flower,”(l.17) which represents his ever renewed love for Lincoln. The other outlet of grief is presented in the fifth section; it is the hermit thrush that sings a song of “bleeding throat,/Death’s outlet song of life” (ll.23-4). To him, it is very important to give vent to one’s grief otherwise he would die: “(for well dear brother I know, If thou wast not granted to sing, thou would'st surely die.)”(ll.24-5)

The poet's message is that one can immortalize the person he loved by songs instead of grieve and mourning which leads for nothing. John Burroughs explained that the attitude of the poem is not:

.....that of being bowed down, and weeping hopeless tears,
but of singing a commemorative hymn in which the voices of
Nature join, and [the music] fits that exalted condition of the soul
which serious events and the presence of death induce. There are
no words of mere eulogy, no statistics, and no story or narrative,
but there are pictures, processions, and a strange mingling of
darkness and light, of grief and triumph, now the voice of the
bird, or the drooping lustrous star....³⁰

The song of the thrush accompanied the coffin throughout its long journey in America. Furthermore, to elevate the grieve over the death of someone we love the poet hints at the idea of resurrection after death;³¹ this idea is presented in the picture of the “yellow-spear’d wheat” that “uprisen” from “its shroud in the dark-brown fields.”(l.29) Here, the poet is not only referring to the death of Lincoln, but also to the death of common people and the soldiers of the civil war.

For that, when the coffin arrived, in section six, he puts the sprig of the lilac on the coffin. The lilac, however, is not intended “for one alone” but for all those who died during the civil war. Eventually, he brings plenty of lilac and put them on the coffin:

Copious I break, I break the sprigs from the bushes,
With loaded arms I come, pouring for you,
For you and the coffins all of you, O death.

(ll.53-5)

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After that, the coffin journey went in its own way, leaving the poet-speaker in his meditation on death asking himself about chanting his sadness: "shall I warble myself for the dead one there I loved?" (L.72) He seeks away to "adorn the burial-house of him I love?" (L.81) To express his deep feeling for the dead person, the speaker reflects on what to hang on the chamber and the walls.³² Thereupon, he suggested a catalogue of pictures of idyllic American landscape and daily life like the "growing springs, and farms," and the "workshops and the workmen homeward returning." (ll.82-89)

In the midst of the joyful life, the poet sees the "cloud, appear'd" with "the long black trail;" (L.119) for that, he goes to the swamp to listen to the song of the hermit thrush. But, this time he is not alone; for, as if in a dream or vision, he finds himself walking between two companions: the knowledge of death, representing "his conviction that death is a necessary element of the cosmic plan;" and its thought, representing "the grief and loss experienced by death's living survivors."³³ He waits for the "the hiding receiving night" (L.124) that may offer him peace of mind, which may help him to experience the "Death's outlet song of life," sung by the hermit thrush.

The speaker of the poem seems to be fallen under the spell of the "Death Carol," and the voice of his spirit is now united with song of the thrush: "And the charm of the carol rapt me,/As I held as if by their hands my comrades in the night,/And the voice of my spirit tallied the song of the bird." (ll.133-5) The carol, as a matter of fact, can be seen as a hymn to death, which is described as "lovely and soothing," (L.136)* that peacefully moved around the world and arrived to any person. Not only that, the song states that death is much more better than many good things in the universe like joys, knowledge and even love:

*Prais'd be the fathomless universe,
For life and joy, and for objects and knowledge curious,
And for love, sweet love—but praise! praise! praise!
For the sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding death.*
(ll.140-3)

Furthermore, death is described as "Dark Mother" that must be welcomed. He also glorifies death above all and asks her to come as fast as possible, i.e., without pain:

*Dark mother always gliding near with soft feet,
Have none chanted for thee a chant of fullest welcome?
Then I chant it for thee, I glorify thee above all,
I bring thee a song that when thou must indeed come, come
unfalteringly.*
(ll.144-47)

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Another trait is added to "Death;" she is, as it were, the "*strong Deliveress*" that can emancipate man from pains and worries of life into her bliss:

*Approach strong deliveress,
When it is so, when thou hast taken them I joyously sing the
dead,
Lost in the loving floating ocean of thee,
Laved in the flood of thy bliss O death.*
(ll.148-51)

*The lines that are taken from the "Death Carol" are written in italics as they appear in the original text.

Consequently, one must celebrate death's coming with joy and dancing not with weeping:

*From me to thee glad serenades,
Dances for thee I propose, saluting thee—adornments and feastings for thee;
And the sights of the open landscape, and the high-spread sky, are fitting,
And life and the fields, and the huge and thoughtful night.*
(ll.152-5)

However, Whitman never forgets the fate of soul and body when dark mother, that dwells in waters, the source of life, approaches. The poet declares that the soul is "*turning to thee, O vast and well-veil'd Death,*"(L.158)and the body is "*gratefully nestling close to thee*"(L.159).

The song of the hermit thrush, Ted Genoways explains, does not provide Whitman merely with the words to memorialize Lincoln; instead, it brings to his mind the four long years of national anguish, i.e., the civil war: ³⁴

And I saw askant the armies,
And I saw as in noiseless dreams hundreds of battle-flags,
Borne through the smoke of the battles and pierc'd with missiles I saw them,
And carried hither and yon through the smoke, and torn and bloody,
And at last but a few shreds left on the staffs, (and all in silence,)
And the staffs all splinter'd and broken.
I saw battle-corpses, myriads of them,
And the white skeletons of young men, I saw them,
I saw the debris and debris of all the dead soldiers of the war . . .
(ll. 169–78)

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So, the poet turns from a specific death to a more general one represented by “myriads” of “battle-corpses” that he had seen during the civil war. Through his understanding of death, the poet-speaker finds out an important shred of comfort; it is that the dead are in peace, the relatives and the friends are the ones who suffer:³⁵

They themselves were fully at rest—they suffer'd not;
The living remain'd and suffer'd—the mother suffer'd,
And the wife and the child, and the musing comrade suffer'd,
And the armies that remain'd suffer'd
(ll.182-5)

Then, people must not over grief a person who is in full rest and peace and must accept death as necessary and parcel of whole cycle of life like spring among other seasons, death brings new life.

Conclusion

Though overshadowed by his enthusiasm in nationality, democracy and the joys of life, Whitman's concept of death is an interesting and a unique one. His work is immense in its scope, yet his treatment of death may give a clear idea about him as a poet and a thinker.

Whitman's opinions of death are original, stimulating and provocative. He does not depend on old views or clichés. Two main factors provoked Whitman's interest in the death issue: firstly, the spirit of the nineteenth century; and secondly, his personal encountering with death.

Leave of grass covers most of Whitman's views of death. Death, to him, must be freed from the religious hierarchy that has divided people to good or evil; religious as well as political hierarchy is diminished with death. He thinks that death is not an end but a reality or phase which is encapsulated in the cosmic plan; and hence it is an important and natural part in our lives. Death must not be feared or over grieved but rather it must be welcomed pleasantly because it frees the soul from the body and the body from its pain. It also brings equality as well as eternity for the soul. And it's his duty to popularize the positive side of death.

Thus, Whitman's perspective of death is essentially different from the nineteenth century trends and the traditional ones in which death is seen as an end to a nothingness or annihilation. He beautifies death by giving it a new form stained with freedom, eternity, and equality.

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Notes

¹Donald D. Kummings ed. *A Companion to Walt Whitman* (UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006), 1.

²Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (United States of America: Harcourt Brace, 1994), 264.

³Kummings, *Companion to Walt Whitman*, p.1.

⁴All extracts from Whitman's work are taken from Michael Warner, ed., *The Portable Walt Whitman* (New York: Penguin Books Ltd, 2004). Subsequent extracts from poems are followed by line or section number(s). The page number is mentioned in the first mentioning of the poem only.

⁵Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas*, edited by Ed Folsom (United States of America: University of Iowa Press, 2010), 68.

⁶PatJalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (New York: Oxford University Press,1996), 284-99.

⁷Russ Castronovo, *Necro Citizenship: Death, Eroticism, and the Public Sphere in the Nineteenth Century United States*(United States Of America: Duke University Press, 2001),13.

⁸PhilippeAriès, *Western Attitudes toward Death: From The Middle Ages to The Present*, trans. by Patricia M. Ranum(Britain: Marion Boyars Publishers Ltd,1976), 67.

⁹Ibid., 106.

¹⁰Lucy E. Frank,ed., "Curious Dreams: Representations of Death in Nineteenth-Century US Writing and Culture," in *Representations of Death in Nineteenth-Century US Writing and Culture*, ed. Lucy E. Frank (Britain: University of Warwick,2007), 5.

¹¹Quated in Charles M. Oliver, *Critical Companion to Walt Whitman: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work* (New York, Charles M. Oliver, 2006), 5.

¹² David S. Reynolds, "Walt Whitman 1819-1892: A Brief Biography," in *A Historical Guide To Walt Whitman*, ed. David S. Reynolds (America: Oxford University Press, Inc, 2000), 15-45.

¹³Ibid., 39

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¹⁴Havelock Ellis, *The New Spirit* (1890; repr., London: Adamant Media Corporation, 2005),115.

¹⁵Horace Traubel, comp., *The Book of Heavenly Death by Walt Whitman* (Portland: Thomas B. Mosher, 1907), xix-xxiii.

¹⁶Quated in Harold Aspiz, *So Long! Walt Whitman's Poetry of Death* (United States of America: The University of Alabama Press, 2004), 2.

¹⁷D. H. Lawrence, "Whitman," in *Whitman: A Collection of Essays*, ed. RoyHarvey Pearce (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 17-23.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹Jeanne Chapman and Robert MacIsaac., *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, vol. 8 (Oregon House, Calif.: W. L. Bentley, 1996)., 8:334

²⁰Warner, 456.

²¹Harold Aspiz, *So Long!*,p.1.

²²Ibid.,209.

²³George B. Handley*New World Poetics:Nature and the Adamic Imagination of Whitman, Neruda, and Walcott*(America:The University of Georgia Press,2007),142.

²⁴ Harold Aspiz, *So Long!*,102.

²⁵Ibid. 101.

²⁶Ibid.,102.

²⁸Helen Vendler, "Poetry and the Mediation of Value: Whitman on Lincoln," in Harold Bloom,ed., *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Walt Whitman*(updated edition, New York: Chelsea House Publisher, 2006), 191-206.

²⁹ Ibid., 200.

³⁰ John Burroughs, *Notes on Walt Whitman, Poet and Person* (1867; repr. New York: Haskell House Ltd., 1971),102.

³¹ Bloom,*Modern Critical Views*, 199.

³² Charles M. Oliver, *Critical Companion to Walt Whitman: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work* (United States of America:Facts On File Inc. ,2006) 237. He derived the idea of hanging pictures on the walls of tombs is based on Whitman's interest in the ancient Egyptian traditions of decorating the tombs of the leaders with pictures of daily life, thinking that the dead leaders might comforted in the afterlife by artifacts of their life and nation.

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³³Harold Aspiz, *So Long!*, 199.

³⁴Ted Genoways "Civil War Poems in 'Drum-Taps' and 'Memories of President Lincoln,'" in Kummings, *A Companion to Walt Whitman*, pp.222-238.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 237.

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Abstract

This paper tackles Walt Whitman (1819-1892) as a celebrator of death and immortality. His *Leaves of Grass* is the main evidence of this approach. It contains more than two hundred words and synonyms of death and mortality. Hence, to show Whitman's appreciation of this issue, light is shed on a handful of his poems. Moreover, factors that shaped and enhanced his interest in death will be stated and manifested.