

American Lyric-Epic of Identity: A Study of Walt Whitman's Song of Myself

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**ملحمة غنائية أمريكية عن الهوية
دراسة في قصيدة والت ويتمن "أغنية لنفسي"**

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ABSTRACT:-

Walt Whitman's longest and most successful poem Song of Myself, included in Leaves of Grass (1855), is credited as portraying Whitman's ultimate poetic visions. It followed many unsuccessful attempts during the eighteenth-and-nineteenth century at an epic that might satisfy the spirit of the modern era. This paper argues that Whitman succeeded in trying his hand at a long poem, resulting in a modern lyric-epic of identity. Whitman's success is because of his awareness of the fact that the conventional epic is anachronistic in the modern world of democracy. Most of the characteristics of traditional epics are replaced by the characteristic of the lyric. Thus, Whitman's interesting attempt resulted in an epithet "lyric-epic" entirely innovative and credible: a poet-hero and a dramatization of search for individuals' identities and the identity of the nation. Whitman reached his intention by merging the epic with the lyric, therefore, his utilization of the lyric within the epic should be differentiated from the anachronistic attempts at conventional epic proceeded his project. The paper judges Song of Myself primarily as a modern lyric-epic celebrating America and its structural identity.

Keywords: American epic, American identity, lyric-epic, national identity personal identity

المخلص:-

تنسب قصيدة والت ويتمن "أغنية لنفسي" الأطول والأكثر نجاحا والمدرجة ضمن (أوراق العشب) في عام ١٨٥٥ باعتبارها تصوير لرؤى ويتمن الشعرية النهائية. اعتبرت هذه القصيدة الكثير من المحاولات الفاشلة خلال القرنين الثامن عشر والتاسع عشر للمحمة قد ترضي روح العصر الحديث. تجادل هذه الورقة بأن ويتمن نجاح في تجربته بكتابة قصيدة طويلة، والتي نتجت بتكوين ملحمة غنائية حديثة عن الهوية. يرجع نجاح ويتمن إلى إدراكه لحقيقة أن الملحمة التقليدية عفا عليها الزمن في عالم الديمقراطية الحديث. لذا تم استبدال أغلب خصائص الملاحم التقليدية بخاصية القصائد الغنائية. أسفرت محاولة ويتمن المثيرة للأهتمام عن صفة "ملحمة غنائية" مبتكرة تماما و ذو مصداقية و المتمثلة بالشاعر البطل وإضفاء الطابع الدرامي على البحث عن هويات الأفراد وهوية الأمة. وصل ويتمن لمبتغاه عن طريق دمج الملحمة مع القصيدة الغنائية، وبالتالي يجب تمييز محاولته هذه عن المحاولات السابقة لكتابة ملحمة تقليدية والتي منطوية على مفارقة تاريخية. تحكم هذه الورقة على "أغنية لنفسي" على أنها ملحمة غنائية حديثة تحتفل بأمريكا وهويتها البنيوية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ملحمة أمريكية، هوية أمريكية، ملحمة تقليدية، ملحمة غنائية، هوية شخصية، هوية وطنية.

INTRODUCTION:-

In ancient Greece, there were three poetry genres—lyric, dramatic, and epic. Lyrical poetry expresses emotions of love, hate, pity, and fear and it depends on the powerful effect of the poet's chosen words. Dramatic poetry is concerned with actions, plots, and personages, therefore, there is no need for the poet to depend fully on words. Epic poetry tells a story, utilizing personages and heroic action and the poet's powerful skills as a narrator in addition to the subordinate power of words. These three ancient divisions are still practiced, but with a drastic development in the forms of some of them. Epic poem has been replaced by the novel or verse novel, while the dramatic poem has developed into films or plays. Lyrical poetry is perhaps the only exceptional kind of poetry kept unchanged (Burgess, 1958, p.10-11). Whitman (1819-1892), being aware of all poetry genres and the power on which poetry depends, composes Song of Myself, the longest poem included in his Leaves of Grass (1855), as a Lyric-Epic to dramatize the poet's personality and celebrate the whole culture of his people.

INTRODUCTION TO CONVENTIONAL EPIC

Epic poetry has been viewed as one of the most remarkable man's literary contributions in all the literary conventions of the world. It tells stories of heroic actions by a hero and relates them to the credence of his nation (Cuddon, 1979, p. 225). The origin of Western literature, especially the epic, has been traced back to Homeric epics. Merchant (1979) writes that the Sumerian Gilgamesh, and the Hebrew mythical stories of the Deluges have the same literary importance within their traditions (p. vii). The first traditional epics were oral transmission in nature, a practice that is still recognized in Serbian and Asian tradition (Cuddon, 1979, p. 226). Such traditional epics are Odyssey, Illiad, Mahabharata, and Ramayand. The epic is defined as a heroic tale that has beginning, continuation, and end of events of significant importance (Hall, 1927, p.126).

Besides, ancient epics are centering about a hero like Achilles or Beowulf, or about a whole culture like Roman Christendom (Merchant, 1971, p.vii). It is associated with a historical dilemma of a human civilization, drafted after a long term oral transmission (Kermode and Hollander. n.d., p. 507). Historically, "the popular" and

"the artistic" are the two types of the epic that have been distinguished. The former is anonymous, whereas the latter is of known authorship (Hall, 1927, p. 126). Merchant (1971) differentiates between two types of epic: "primary" or "oral" like *Odyssey*, *Illiad*, *Beowulf*, and *Song of Roland*; and "secondary" or "literary" like *Aeneid* and *Paradise Lost* (p. 1). The second type of epic, that is, literary epic, is principally composed by a one recognized poet who models his epic work basing on the antecedents. Such development of the epic is richer in allusions and language than its predecessors (Kermode and Hollander, n.d, p. 507). In both types, we are introduced into a supernatural hero, given a divine power, incorporates internal moral standards and there was a whole culture associated with him. Eeneas, in Virgil's epic, became the ancestor and representative of the whole Latin people (Hall, 1927, p. 27). An epic takes its setting from an earlier epic times, mixing details from the epic time and the actual time of its its artistic produccion as well (Kermode and Hollander, n.d., p. 507).

All-important requirements for the epic can be summarized as follows: its action is unified; its beginning is complemented by its middle; the utilization of the supernatural aspects and underworld prophecies; poetic devices and repetition of epithet; and most significantly, grandeur and integrity (Lucas, 1978, p. vii). The epic is a characteristic of both the real and the imaginative, and its composer, in most cases, is torn between his artistic imagination and the factual demands of reality. Traditional epic served as a "chronicle" or history of tradition, and a story for general amusement. Critics always agree that the epic originally existed and desired for the purpose of an established tradition (Merchant, 1971, p. 3). The epic then meant to register and hence preserve human history.

The epic in the Renaissance received much attention due to the innovative spirit of advancement and modern liberalism, where nationalistic and aristocratic thoughts are in constant conflict. While the nationalistic thought focused on establishing the vernacular as a medium for epic composition, the aristocratic thought carried on for keeping the styles and doctrines of appropriateness of behaviors and forms (Hall, 1963, p. 41). The epic is "grand, sustained, dignified," and projected "in heroic metres" (Hall, 1927, p.126), but the idea of

decorum became a must for the epic writer in order to give each character a proper tongue as they are of various ranks.

The Italian long poems, such as that of Ludovico Ariosto (1474-1533), has gained little attention because it lacks the quality of national epic as they take from the French Roland as their hero. In his *Defense and Illustration*, Du Bellay suggests that the French should follow the tradition of Virgil's Aeneid in Rome and try their hand at an epic to make their national language widespread. Whoever undertakes such a responsibility, will surely get the Greek glory and Roman grandeur as well as a public acknowledgement (qtd. in Hall, 1963, p. 42).

The English epic or heroic poem is given greater attention than tragic drama by William Webbe and Sir Philip Sidney, due to its ability of celebrating the nation, and serving a patriotic purpose. The national epic hero, believes Sidney, creates a sense of unification with him helping to teach men proper conduct and morals (qtd. in Hall, 1963, p.44). For Pearce (1961), for the epic to be conceived as a great artistic work, there should be and organic fusion of the poetic imagination and moral reality (p.59).

THE AMERICAN EPIC

The strong feeling for epic nation-building type is to be discovered in America, a nation in the process of being made. The importunate demands for the epic are always found in America whose history is full of heroic deeds, therefore, the idea of epic unavoidably comes into mind whenever one thinks of the nation. There is an emphasis on the relationship between the idea of the epic and American experience, an emphasis on something special about America which brings the idea of epic into mind, an idea to be convenient for America better than for other nations (Glazer, 2017, p. 4). The widespread cataclysm in the nineteenth century up to the present is that there is a need for art in the age of democracy and the epic is surely the noblest kind of art.

The most distinctive qualities of the New Republic period (1765-1829) were the politically stable and independent public organizations and the cultural and national identity that interpenetrated almost all areas of public life. With Stamp Act Congress of 1765, started the American national period, wherefore

the political power was first established, and ended in 1829 with the production of a new public leader, Andrew Jackson, an experience which suggested a triumph for the common man. Since epic poetry is the highest of all poetry divisions, the Americans purposed to compose epic poems comparable in splendor and scope to that traditional European epics (Blair, et al., 1974, p. 45). This spirit encouraged and caused the works of Royal Tyler, Philip Freneau, William Cullen Bryant, Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, and the Hartford Wits or Connecticut Wits, including Timothy Dwight, David Humphery, John Trumbull, Lemuel Hopkins, Richards Alsop, Theodore Dwight, and Joel Barlow (The Colombia Encyclopedia, 2017).

There was a problem with the literary form in the second stage of American history, made poets turn to tradition, particularly the English literary tradition. Westward expansion and experiences of the frontiers were themselves national epics to the Americans (Blair, et al., 1974, p. 159). "It was the epic form" that "immediately and automatically came in mind when the lately colonial American writers mediated the possibility of a truly national culture and literature" (Pearce, 1961, p. 61). In its nature, the epic alone could satisfy the increasing sense of national and personal identity and a native tradition.

However, American writers worked on composing native national epics that would distinguish them from the European traditional writings. They wanted the new works would stem naturally and essentially from the native American landscapes and culture. Finally, they came into conclusion: the conventional epic was not a suitable form for them to adhere and they had, therefore, to merge the epic with the lyric in order to create "lyric-epic", a native form that combines the characteristics of both genres (Allegrezza, 2017, p. 1). They were unsatisfied with traditional epic as a form used in the modern world, but they did not resort to the lyric form alone because the latter fail to fulfill the expectations. What the American poets did was they refigured the epic with the lyric to conduct their supreme project of identity, personal and national. Pearce (1961) believes that for the epic writer, an epic is able to incorporate the whole nation's culture. Epic poetry meant to give a whole nation a form and meaning. The American poet who aspires to make a native epic has

to explore national heroic examples that would take role in reserving a native tradition, therefore, it's a heavy task (p. 62). The American writers turned to the epic because it tackled events significant not only to the community but to an individual as well. The foremost intention of the epic is the founding of a national tradition and national identity as Virgil's Aeneid did in Rome and this explains that the epic form had been felt as a must in the making of America.

McWilliams (1990) made an account on many eighteenth-and-nineteenth century poets who tried their hands at a dissimilar and distinctive epic literature built on a new American grandeur events. Due to the literary, cultural and political advancement, the intention changed from Republican America to the traditional epic genre that incorporated supernaturalism and glory of grand men of heroic deeds. McWilliams points out that the American epic poets expanded their imitative poetry chronicles to be prose-writing native tradition as in the case of Washington Irving, romance fiction writing as in the case of J. F. Cooper and Herman Melville, and most importantly, lyric-epic genre as in the case of Walt Whitman.

AMERICAN NATIVE EPIC IN THE EIGHTEENTH-AND-NINETEENTH CENTURY

In the colonial England, there were various attempts to the treatment of the relationship between God and his American Chosen nation in heroic epics. One attempt worth noting was Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702). The work is a series of eminent lives in the New England history, portraying Mather's vision about the inevitable importance for directing the here and now and overseeing the forthcoming future. Several heroes are produced to be custom-fit for different popular exempars, and each is given his own distinctive features. *Magnalia* is not only an archetypal tale, but also an American epic in which the American poet captures, in poetic diction, what he sees the promise of the united states national quality assurance. With regard to the theme and style, it's obvious that the author intended to echo Virgil's Aeneid, in the hope of linking the story of American people to the ancestor epic migrations as an invitation for the Americans to think of themselves as superior to others and to travel to their guaranteed America. Mather presented both the imaginative (his beliefs) and the actual (history).

Before the eighteenth century, there was a vital interest in the theological-epic writing. Michael Wigglesworth's *The Day of Doom* is a horrible and frightening ecclesiastical epic portrayal of the Judgment Day. The Epic was the best-selling epic in Colonial America (Blair, et al., 1974, p.60). Being a deeply religious and a pruritan minister, Wigglesworth, who considered himself moralist, presents his beliefs through a medium of Messiah's disputation with sinners. Wigglesworth's didacticism is epitomized in his Dante's *Inferno's* epic diction and Biblical references, using an excellent method for communicating beliefs to the readers, having the characteristic of both moral and creative or aesthetic purposes (Hinriches, 2017). This latter fact might justify considering such magnificent epic project as still subject to anachronism, though its didacticism or morality and imagination or artistry to be involved in the development and search of true modern American epic poems.

The Harvard Wits also produced magnificent epic works which had much in common with the classical epics and much reverence for the traditional doctrine of decorum. They produced native American epic poems which are full of evidences of nationalistic epic sentiment at the epoch (Forester, 1957, p. 130). Such pioneer American epics are Timothy Dwight's *The Conquest of Canaan* (1785) and Joel Barlow's *The Columbiad* (1807) (Forester, 130). These latter poets also collaborated on *The Anarchiad* (1887), a mock-epic in which they invoked a disapproval against the national political identity disorder postdating the Revolution in the tradition of Alexander Pope's mock-heroic method (Blair, et al., 1974, pp. 45-7).

Long poems on Biblical subjects were developed successfully after the revolutionary war and came out in large numbers during the years (1780-1810). One semi-successful epic attempt worth noting is Dwight's *Conquest of Canaan* of heroic couplets. Its style and method adhere much to Homer, Virgil and Milton. Apart from the idea of anachronism, Dwight's epic project is undoubtedly nationalistic, unionizing the theological Canaanities and Connecticut Democrats, and its heavy use of allusive references to modern personages and subjects of native concern made it highly patriotic.

American writers also wrote long poems on aesthetical subjects in late eighteenth century, a time of many social, political and cultural advancements and dissatisfactions, a time when the Americans were

still in the process of searching for personal and national identities. As a result, philosophical poems alluding to Pope and John Dryden were produced. Such poems on philosophy are *The Charms of Fancy* by Richard Alsop and *The Triumph of Infidelity* by Timothy Dwight, which used satire as an instrument to reject the arguments of the infidels at the time (*The Columbia Encyclopedia*, 2017).

The real attempt during the process of American epic project, an attempt to break the certitudes of the past, was Joel Barlow's *The Columbiad* (1787-1807). Many critics considered the author of *Columbiad* as an epic writer who, to some extent, freed himself from the rules of traditional writing. Barlow wanted to try his hand at democratic or an anti-Homeric *Iliad*, envisaging past splendid potentialities both now and in the future. (Pearce, 1961, p. 60). Thus, by censuring the Homeric doctrines, Barlow aimed at proposing alternative doctrines, democratic doctrines that would replace the authoritarian traditional epis's heroic actions. Since the new American epic project is in the process of originating, Barlow's aim is fabricating a hero rather than exclusively honoring a hero, and processing American heroism rather than imitating conventional heroism (Gilman, 1956, p. 305). Such insight, didactic sensibility, and common sense, invade the poet's mind alone, making him feel responsible for discovering the potentials for heroic events in American people, "freedom sons." The poem exposes the progress of the American colonies, of the Revolution, of all battles and heroes, and of peace and freedom in the new land. Barlow wanted his *Columbiad* to be an argumentative epic about Christopher Columbus's transatlantic voyages to discover and explore the new land. Giving a panoramic representation of American history, Barlow implies that the discovery of America was important for the progress of mankind (Pearce, 1961, pp. 61-4). Though it is based on traditional epic models, Barlow's epic showed the way to the American culture and poetry and progressed toward achieving literary independence. But it is still not convenient to the "New World," because in America, the individual identity should be defined "before defining the national identity" (Allegrezza, 2017, p.8). Barlow's project is conceptualized as anachronistic not because of his new achievement, but rather because his failure to make his epic mimetically rather than archetypologically.

Some critics gave to Henry Wordsworth Longfellow's *Haiwatha* (1855) an epic status. This poem dealt with the inhabitants of the North America. However, it has the predominant characteristic of the lyric, therefore, neglected to be decidedly considered (Reeves, 1966, p. 72). The poem is "the story of the end of one culture, which saddens us, and the beginning of another one, which gladdens us." Longfellow's aim was to instruct the American individuals to accept misfortunes as well as joys, in other words, to bridge the old and the new and arouse national enthusiasm.

Apart from the importance of these great attempts of producing native American epic poems, their authors shared a successful establishment of the foundation for a real American epic. Later, the impulse to write an American epic and merging it with the lyric, to produce a lyric-epic, was not confined to Whitman—the major concern of this paper. Instead, it became a very powerful appetency as artists continued to struggle for self-realization.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) expressed, with urgent voice, the Americans' vain quest for real native bard in his rhetorical piece "The Poet" (1844), giving a detailed description of the required poet. For him, the Americans, with their special distinction or affectation and exceptional intelligence, they should not be unwilling to shape their political values which filled the day. Emerson acknowledged the considerable experience or as he called "incomparable materials" in the United States, however, he expressed his deep disappointment which brought him to criticize the American poets for not concentrating on that unique evidence. In addition, he blamed the poets of his time for their adherence to the European literary tradition (Essays by Emerson, 1883, p. 50). This Emerson's disappointment was later anticipated by Alexis de Tocqueville in 1855, the year in which Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* was published (Allegrezza, 2017, p.57). Thus, Whitman's project has its beginning in both Emerson and Tocqueville who had to wait for Whitman to volunteer the job in *Leaves of Grass*.

Attempts at epic poetry, with similar aims, continued in the twentieth century. Such attempts were Ezra Pound's *Cantos* (1915-1962), William Williams's *Paterson* (1946-1958), Hart Crane's *The Bridge* (1930) Archibald MacLeish's *Conquistador* (1932), Charles Olson's *The Maximus Poems* (1953-1968), among others. However,

twentieth century long poems are outside the box of this thesis. They invite a separate comprehensive study. For example, Olson's Maximus is a postmodern epic recalling the Epic of Gilgamesh in the third Millennium B.C.

MODERN AMERICAN POETS AND THE LYRIC

Such account of the history of epic presents the reader with understanding the American poet's continuous contemplation and his strong desire to compose an epic. But an account of the history of the lyric neither is possible in the present paper nor is consequential as that of epic. Allegrezza (2017) writes that Whitman was aware of "the lyric tradition" at the time, but "the lyric could not" reach his supreme project because it's not a "nation-building piece," "nor could the epic by itself" (p. 17). Jackson and Sprins (2004), give a good command of the lyric tradition and features. However, to consider a definition of the lyric is difficult, for this, Jackson and Sprins, trace the 20th century thinking about the lyric. A "lyric is a way to describe the essence of poetry, a poem at its most poetic." The aim of the anthology is to demonstrate how poetry is essentially lyric, a belief "starts in the nineteenth century became mainstream practice in the development of modern literary criticism in the twentieth century" (p. 1). Moreover, Jackson and Prins state that the lyric is a 19th century project and the 20th century criticism focused on this project (p. 2) to the extent that poetry became lyricized (p. 5). There are different view about the emergence and development of the lyric as a genre but the aim of Jackson and Prins is to focus how the lyric look like.

WHITMAN'S SONG OF MYSELF AS A LYRIC-EPIC OF IDENTITY

Whitman's Leaves of Grass belongs to the optimistic, humanistic note of hopeful future expectations defined by Emerson and Thoreau as well as the author of the poem, in which the poet speaks for all Americans (Spiller, 1957, p.77). Miller (1962) writes that Whitman felt the need to mold a national culture and native literature. His personal life was largely influenced by the Americans' national vision, he sensed a close intimacy between himself and America in terms of search of identity. Whitman wanted his poem, like his people, live architypologically. Whitman spoke of the Americans as truly the unrivalled epic (qtd. in Cowley, 1959, p. 5), while Emerson expected Whitman's task to be an illuminating discovery in the literary scene of

the time (qtd. in Spiller, 1957, p. 76). The poem made Emerson encourage Whitman in his project as it legitimates composition-wise in the American literary history (Murphy, 1969, p. 29).

Whitman felt the need for creating a grand native literature, functioning as a chronicle of America. He set himself as the poem bard to lead the American people into a new awareness. The adaptation of classical European epic in the American scene never succeeded in resolving satisfactorily, so he resolved to refigure it with the characteristic of the lyric to come up with the epithet "lyric-epic," harmonious in structure and content, a new endemic poem that could celebrate both his personal identity and the national or cultural identity.

Song of Myself is the largest and most typical archetypal poem of *Leaves of Grass*, perfectly representing the poet's democratic techniques and personal and national themes, the characteristic of both epic and lyric, which is intended to embody and help prevail national and individualistic ideals. It is likely Whitman's most important poem. It was the first poem in the 1855 edition, consisting of 1346 lines, and, as were the other poems, it was untitled. From 1856 to 1881, the poet was thinking of a suitable title for it: *A Poem of Whitman*, *an American to Walt Whitman*, and finally *Song of Myself* in its final edition 1881. During this same time, the poem was revised many times by the poet himself. Each poem can be studied alone and gives the same theme of the complete poem. Each poem can be considered as a lyric which presents a self-revelation. Still, each poem represents an individual's role within a democratic society. Whitman intended to place these lyrics together so as to enhance their meaning by the whole thematic and emotional structure and to satisfy his epic ambition. Allegrezza (2017) sees that Whitman's work has been misconceptualized in the tradition of the lyric since isolating the parts from the whole is outside the scope of Whitman's intention. These lyrics "are best read in context; moreover, the epic spirit and elements" permeate the lyric-epic (p. 223). For Miller (1992), *Song of Myself* is a "lyric-epic," a combination of lyric and epic elements, and Allegrezza (2017) sees it "a patchwork of lyrics that is pieced together to create an epic" (p. 15). For more than three decades Whitman was contemplating a large work, a lyric-epic, which he devoted his life to its completion.

Any discussion of Leaves of Grass should start with Song of myself as the latter is both central to Whitman's poetry and the ground of his Leaves of Grass. Carlisle (1973) states that Song of Myself is a dramatization of "the central action of Leaves of Grass, and it presents Whitman's drama of identity more fully and more coherently than any other poem or section in the book" (p. 177). The poem presents both Whitman's self-revelation, and his self-assurance and authoritativeness: "I celebrate myself, and sing myself, / And what I assume you shall assume, / For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you. (Song of Myself, 1, 1-3)

Whitman's poetic identity is assured and realized from the very beginning. Marki (1976) writes that the poet is addressing the reader. He commands rather than requests or pleads, and expects approval from the reader's side (p. 95). This is the oratory, elocution, and evangelism that the time of whitman was known for (Miller, 1962, p. 43). It is also a reflection of Emerson and Thoreau and their speeches of American identity that Whitman never ceased his regards and admiration. Traditionally, the lyric has been given the characteristic of addressing somebody or something indirectly. Culler (2015) shows how lyric address is ritualistic. The lyric is a voice in itself that calls the other into its presence and this call characteristically happens now and not then in the lyric's present tense.

The opening lines also can show the epic intention by means of utilizing the epic "I," propounding the poem's similarity to the traditional epics, but instead of singing the "supernatural heroes," Whitman is singing "the individual common man in a democratic society" (Allen, 1955, p. 4). Democracy, for Whitman, serves to sustain a myth in Leaves of Grass, particularly in Song of Myself, as a substitute for the certitudes of the traditional epics (gods and great supernatural heroes). The utilization of the epic "I" suggests a dissimilar and highly individual affirmation of personality. It's highly private and subjective. Yet, "Myself" is not merely a reference to Whitman's soul, but rather a national reference encompassing all individuals, eventually humanity at large. For Whitman, poets used to celebrate great men for their victories or love stories whether real or imaginative. In contrast, Whitman hails his natural affectations and senses a natural affinity with all Americans, therefore, he honors all.

Whitman's intention is celebrating his nation through celebrating his individual self. By utilizing the "I," Whitman dramatizes American identity, the identity of his fellow men. Beside celebrating himself, Whitman aspires to enjoy nature and unite the American individual selves poetically. "My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this air," (1,6). The unity or relationship between the self and nature often leads to self-realization and self-identity.

Moreover, the "I" and "Myself", which both appear in the same first line, are seen very different. The former is Whitman the man's self-awareness, whereas the latter is "the poet's ego," "The Real Me" in Whitman words. "The Real Me" is poetic self that came out the "ordinary self," the "I", to guide other men into their poetic selves (Middlebrook, 1974, p.18, pp. 79-102). Whitman seems to say that he has realized his personal identity and now his desire is to affirm the national identity by means of guiding his average common men to realize and affirm the real themselves, so to speak. Thus, "The Real Me" is the hero of Whitman's work, the modern hero to replace the traditional epic heroes. According the Hegelian historicization of epic poetry, says Moretti (1996), the epic in the pre-State era has huge action from which a totality that is active, being used and closely related to individuality, emerges. In contrast, there is no place for heroic action in the State era, therefore, epic is out of place in the modern world. In the modern age, an age of machinery, the very idea of violent heroic actions on the grand scale is an anachronistic and impossible (p. 12). This very idea of anachronism is also illustrated by Reeves (1966) who saw the idea of the epic as anachronistic because its original intention and ambition has been already achieved by "chronicle and narrative" (p. 72). But still, the modern poet is contemplating on a supreme project for several decades, sometimes devoting most of his life, trying to complete a work of a very grand ambitions where the hero is maundering all over the magnificent world with an earsplitting cry of desire to be at one in favor of all humanity. The modern epic hero is a 'spectator' who is not necessary and directly connected to action, but assures the possibility of the modern epic totality. Moretti (1996) argues that the contrast with the traditional epic is out of doubt. In classical epics, "even the hero's inactivity" is to produce "practical consequences of great importance," while the "hero's presence" in the modern epic "seems always to leave things as they were, in a kind of gigantic

spectacle" (p. 12). In Faust, Mephistopheles says: "You soon will see what I can do. / No man has ever known a spectacle so rare" (1673-74). The modern hero works as a spectator. While Hegel declares that the modern epic is impossible, Goethe's ambition is composing one in which the hero "ranges freely across the 'grand world', loudly proclaiming his desire to be at one with all humanity:

I tell you, the mere pleasure's not the point!
To dizzying, painful joy I dedicate
Myself, to refreshing frustration, loving hate!
I've purged the lust for knowledge from my soul;
Now the full range of suffering it shall face,
And in my inner self I will embrace
The experience allotted to the whole
Race of mankind, my mind shall grasp the heights
And depths, my heart know all their sorrows and delights.
Thus I'll expand myself, and their self I shall be,
And perish in the end, like all humanity.
(Faust, 1765-75)

Thus, the absence of activity and heroism is the only key for "the modern epic totality" (Moretti, 1996, pp. 12-16).

Song of Myself consists of fifty-two lyrics epic in strategy and ambition. Its material is built on the poet's artistry or imagination to redesign the world in which it is produced. It departs from the traditional narratives and their sequential structure. Chase (1955) writes that the theme of identity is the crux of Song of Myself. Man has natural and political identity at the same time. Man is both "unique and separate" and "equal as well as the same as everyone else" (pp. 60-66). Whitman aspires to live in a such unique and stable world. There was an oversimplification of the idea of individualism in the nineteenth century, therefore, Whitman resolved to celebrate the individual and national identity, in Song of Myself, the crux of Whitman's poetics.

Back to the opening lyric, Whitman says: "I loafe and invite my soul, / I learn and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass" (1, 4-5). For Miller (1962), "soul" represents the Whitman's self whereas "grass" represents the American selves. Whitman's "Democratic Vistas" (1871), a work of comparative letters and politics, represents a balance between the individual and community, recalling the intention of the epic. For Middlebrook (1974), "spear of summer grass" is the main metaphor of reality in Song of Myself (pp. 36-37), while Miller (1962) sees the grass as a symbol of Whitman's doctrine of democracy, a balance between the individual and community (p. 115). Allen (1955) sees the word "loafe" is central to the activity of imagination and contemplation which, in turn, brings hylomorphic unity (p. 13).

The question of what the grass means is raised in lyric 6: "A child said what is the grass? Fetching it to me with full hands; / how could I answer the child? I do not know what it is any more than he." (6, 99-100). Whitman guesses some meanings for the grass. It could be "flag of my disposition", "handkerchief of the Lord", "child", "uniform hieroglyphic" (6, 101-109). Gelpi (1975) points out that the "flag of my disposition" represents the individual, "handkerchief of the Lord" represents Deity, whereas "a uniform of hieroglyphic" suggests the American democracy (p. 183). Whitman has discovered his individual identity, "The Real Self", to become a new religion to guide the social order of the American democracy. The poet seems to be on a spiritual journey, and the grass, as a natural object helps to trigger this journey toward awakening the other, "I am the mate and companion of people" (7, 137). He identifies himself with sufferers, courageous, and dead people, especially those from his nation. There is a balance between personal and national crisis. Whitman sees his role is equal to the role of priests in the new world. The modern hero, the "Real Me", appears as a healer "gashes heal", not only physically but spiritually as well. Yet Whitman does not despise the priests and that he aspires to create a new religion, but celebrates the "Universal Self" – Emerson's "Overt Soul":

I do not despise you priests, all time, the world over,

My faith is the greatest of faiths and the least of faiths,

Enclosing worship ancient and modern and all the between
ancient and modern,

Relieving I shall come again upon the earth after five thousand
years,

Waiting responses from oracles, honoring the gods, saluting the
sun,

Making a fetish of the first rock or stump, powowing with sticks in
the circle of obis,

Helping the Ilama or Brahmin as he trims the lamps of the idols,

Dancing yet through the streets in a phallic procession, rapt and
austere in the woodsa gymnosophist,

Drinking mead from the skull-cup, to Shastas and Vedas
admirant, minding the Koran,

(43, 1096-1105)

Such a lyric is ritualistic, for this reason the lyrics of Leaves of Grass, especially the 52 lyrics epic of Song of Myself, have been recognized as charms, and that its events are supernatural. The fact that Whitman is not narrating events. Rather, he tries to invent events out of his imagination. The result is a poetic discourse and an event rather than a representation of events. Culler (2015) argues that lyrics are "characteristically ritualistics" (p. 10). One can see Whitman make use of the traditional technique of catalogue to work as a democratizing technique in Song of Myself to dramatize the democratic identity, unionizing the individual and communal identities.

The Western national cultures, says Mendelson (2017), felt themselves as separate entities and every one of these cultures aspires to have its "encyclopedia author" who produces a literary work or "sacred text" in Mendelson's terms that is "comparable" to "the Bible" (p. 1268). Instead of calling them encyclopedias, Moretti (1996) prefers the term "modern epic". For him, "A work can be the 'sacred text' of a culture if it is unique. Thirty Bibles do not enlarge the sphere of the sacred, but pulverize it. Not all the reproduce", are "at the same rate" (p.4). Whitman's Leaves of Grass, particularly

Song of myself as it is the major concern of the present paper, surely behaves like this.

Some critics assured the epic scope of Song of Myself. Marki (1976), for example, sees the evolution of "Real Me" is similar to the heroism of "Adam from Eden to the Apocalypse"(p.199). Yet, it departed from traditional narration. It is not a chronicle or history, but a procession of tropes, forms, and reoccurrent ideas which moves forward and backward in a symphonic way (Miller, 1962, p.76). But apart from the epic's lack of chronological structure, Song of Myself is made to have a structure.

Whitman's aim was to demonstrate a new doctrine that could solve the problem of multiplication and pluralization (out of the many one). Whitman's work appears at a time of progress and liberalism and he was not unconscious of the right form that suits such historical development. For Moretti (1996), the epic best suits the "ideology of progress", whereas the other forms, including the nineteenth century French and English novels, with the same elements but they "did not give us an 'epic progress'," therefore, the novel of liberalism, for example, did not exist (p. 45). Whitman says: "I am large—I contain multitudes" (51, 1327). This catalogue is an organizing principle or what Moretti (1996) calls it, an "organizing module: a 'symbolic form'", in which the voice is a "grid—a gaze. 'I see' or 'I look' are the most common locutions used to establish the list" (p. 66). The collection of things observed and seen refers to the 'democracy of things' stated in the 1855 Preface to Leaves of Grass.

The theme of personal and national identities is at the crux of Whitman's poem. In Lyric 20, Whitman asks while he witnesses his community: "What is a man anyhow? what am I? what are you?" (20, 391). Here, the bard searches for his identity as well as others' identities. Whitman always starts his quest with the personal "I", then the other than "I", (you, for example). He differentiates between the "I" and "you" in order to assure and define his identity. Back to lyric 4, the poet makes a distinction between the people and the "Me Myself":

Trippers and askers surround me,

People I meet, the effect upon me of my early life or the ward and city I live in, or the nation,

.....
These come to me days and nights and go from me again,
But they are not the Me Myself.

(4, 66-74)

Whitman, in order to define himself, he must differentiate himself from others. Kurraz (2015) argues that the existence of individual self-awareness can be felt in association with the communal selves (pp. 1588-89), while Lacan (1978) assures that the identity of self is only attained by means of working with others (p. 110).

Song of Myself is not a narrative representation of events but a set of events through which the poet observes and contemplates, taking their material from the fluctuation of imagination for defining his identity. Whitman cannot find his identity without observing and contemplating objects. Lyric 8 is a perfect example of Whitman's contemplation and struggling for defining himself. The poet is flying over a sleeping child, viewing a beautiful girl, witnessing all individuals from the top, et cetera. Not only observing and contemplating, but taking action as well. "In lyric 14, the poet not only observes people, but acts with them ,therefore, he can find his own image in these people (14, 252).

Here, as was mentioned earlier in this paper, Whitman tried his hand at a lyric-epic on the individual, but also on the people from a democratic perspective. Lyric 33 is a declaration of his courage and heroic action. Then his heroic identity is expanded to contain all men, average common men: "I understand the large hearts of heroes, / The courage of present times and all times," (33, 822-823). Moretti (1996) argues that there was an invention of an average man and a commonplace: "An average man, about whom single individuals oscillate; an average thought, about which single ideas oscillate" (p. 69). There is no real action like that of classical epic in which the rage kills the best man. The "Myself" is not made to be the hero of American people, rather it was made to include all American men, therefore, the hero becomes the modern man. Whitman makes use of his imagination to create an event which tells how he started from his "I", tells his experience and each one of the others should start

from his "I" and identifies with all other people and natural elements. The characteristic of the lyric is to pave the way for its readers to participate, nor the lyric is an overheard. What's more, the poet is not speaking to himself only but to the reader as well and for this reason he writes the lyric on page. Without writing the lyric down, any participation from the reader's side would be completely absent. Thus, by merging the epic with the lyric and writing down the lyric-epic, the readers' participation shifts from absence to primacy.

The last few lyrics serve as a farewell in which the "I" is fully expanded to include all American people, and humanity at large: "I contradict myself" and "I contain multitudes." (51, 1325-1327). Whitman's resort to rhetoric questions is part of his interest in oratory. There is a sense of dialogue but there couldn't be an actual communication. Whitman the orator, by the rhetorical questions, creates a new voice on the scene, a voice who is not able to speak to the poem but can speak the poem. This is the rhetoric and inclusiveness of the modern lyric-epic, so to speak. The reader cannot be a second orator who replies to the orator of the poem but he/she can be the orator of the poem.

Whitman started with two personal references (I and Myself) as different in order to assure that he has already perceived his personal identity by expanding his consciousness through a "perpetual journey" (46, 1202). While, as the poem is in progress, he uses different "I", a new "I" which includes mankind, including himself. The first "I" is separated from others while the second one includes the others. The different versions of the "I" serve as a modernistic technique and the poetic "I" is a democratic figure. Whitman wanted the "I" to be both individual and collective. The individual works in the union but still keeps being individual.

Here, Whitman creates an event out of his imagination to record his perpetual journey toward embracing all others. Culler (2015) believes that lyric is not real representation of event but it tries hard to be an event (p. 10). But this is only an example, and each one is required to follow his way of absorbing natural objects including his people because all are equal. In lyric 44, when the poet wanted to explain himself, he says: "I do not call one grater and one smaller, / That which fills its period and place is equal to any" (44, 1142-1143). In his quest for identity, both personal and national, Whitman

discovers his identity as a poet throughout his artistic journey. Whitman's poetic voice is made to impose upon the others, and the hero, the "Real Me," is made as a model of right and perpetual consciousness to instruct the others and awaken them to respond to reality in a different way.

CONCLUSION

Summarily, Song of Myself is intended to be different from the preceding attempts which were completely rewriting the traditional epics. Whitman is not unconscious of the fact that the traditional epic is an anachronism in the modern age as it does not satisfy the modern democratic spirit, a fact that was already well explained by Hegel. Whitman transcends most of the qualities of traditional epics such as gods and supernatural heroes and dangerous action, and adds features of the lyric such as giving observations of the world and ritual revelation. The efforts to mold a hero from history results in a poet-hero and a dramatization of his search for personal identity as well as communal and national identities. In fact, Whitman's lyric-epic is innovative. Whitman was well aware of the fact that the traditional epic would not come up with a native tradition; it was heavily loaded with traditional predecessors, but he resolved to make use of epic tradition in order to build his own tradition. To make use of the epic tradition in the sense that tradition imposes on Whitman's work. To reach such a goal, he merged the epic with the lyric. For him, a focus on the individual is a must as it's central to the idea of American identity, therefore, his decision of using the lyric within the epic should not be simply categorized as an anachronistic attempt. Song of Myself should be judged primarily as a modern lyric-epic celebrating America and its structural identity.

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