

Song of myself part 3

Whitman cherishes outdoor life, tough people and people who do not conform to norm. The following phrases reveal such a personality: "He most honors my style who learns under it to destroy the teacher."

He appreciates knowledge acquired in real life and not through books or school. He also thinks that his teaching on wisdom has no price. The following phrase summarizes all the thoughts:

"The boy I love, the same becomes a man not through derived power, but in his own right, Wicked rather than virtuous out of conformity or fear".

For him lessons acquired from and through nature are worthier than knowledge acquired through books. Remember that in this era the American continent remains to be discovered. American culture still struggled to find a place under the sun. Men that grew and matured through tough physical condition are appreciated. In Europe at that time, scars from swords

were sign of manhood. He is proud of this wisdom as shown in those phrases and thinks of its uncontested value:

“I teach straying from me, yet who can stray from me?”

He continues to teach this wisdom until people grasp his wisdom’s meaning:

“I follow you whoever you are from the present hour,
My words itch at your ears till you understand them.”

Besides persisting on its valor he is convinced of its value:

“I do not say these things for a dollar or to fill up the time while I wait for a boat,

(It is you talking just as much as myself; I act as the tongue of you, Tied in your mouth, in mine it begins to be loosen’d.)”

Only things acquired in real life shape man’s value: “I swear I will never again mention love or death inside a house, And I swear I will never translate myself at all, only to him or her who privately stays with me in the open air.

If you would understand me go to the heights or water-shore, The nearest gnat is an explanation, and a drop or motion of waves a key, The maul, the oar, the hand-saw, second my words. No shutter'd room or school can commune with me, But roughs and little children better than they."

For him his teaching is worth more than gold and constitutes the "gold standard" as stated in the following phrase:

"I teach straying from me, yet who can stray from me? I follow you whoever you are from the present hour, My words itch at your ears till you understand them."

No wonder his poems are not popular in this period people may find him too pretentious. (His works are censored and ignored for a time). And where does he preach his wisdom? He preaches at harbor's stops. At that time rivers and ocean ports are the main traffic hubs. And those noisy areas are not an ideal place for your voice to be heard. It is a perfect model of "nature schooling" home schooling or unconventional

education. We see here the “teacher knows nothing” mentality. But does the image of a man teaching wisdom at a busy traffic intersection (port) carry another meaning? You are at times undecided in life, lost in life like lost in busy traffic. At that moment you probably welcome and appreciate any guidance that helps you out.

The next section 48 shows his grandiose ideas or even sacrilegious ideas for some religious people! He compares himself to God or divine Creation. He represents God. His soul and body represent God as suggested by the following lines:

“I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not in the least, Nor do I understand who there can be more wonderful than myself.”

The phrases that follow may lead us to interpret his concept of God as the “creation” or “divine creation”, concept taken by nowadays by hardcore religious people:

“In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own face in the glass,” but with Whitman he means that everybody is a creation of God and therefore is equal. This phrase may show a subtle attack against slavery.

Section 49 reveals his favorite poetic technique: juxtaposition. Existence is described at two extremes: death and life. The two first stanzas describe the circle of life: when you die your body turns to ashes and it becomes manure to grow roses: “ Corpse, manure, roses and leafy lips”: death begets voluptuous life. The last phrases of chapter 49 describe the supreme circle of life: stars, Heaven and grave. As the Bible says: “ For you’re dust and to dust you shall return.”

The last three sections show his uncertainty after dealing with the existential issue: life and death. He begins to question his existence: who am I really as suggested by the following phrase: “ I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable”. The journey ends when his body becomes dust that feeds the sensuous flower: this act represents the natural biologic circle or circuit.

He may be dead physically but his spirit lives forever and somewhere in the universe he will be waiting for those who truly understand his poetry or spirit. Pablo Neruda wrote “ An Ode to Walt Whitman” and he called Whitman as “his comrade from Manhattan”. A famous French proverb once said: “big spirits meet and think alike”.

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<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/174745>

http://www.cairn.info/zen.php?ID_ARTICLE=RFEA_108_0047