

July 9, 2020

I am reading about Walt Whitman in an effort to find another version of our country than the one we find ourselves in during this time of extraordinary tension and stress. I am not trying to bury my head in the sand but there are times when I wish I could, and it would all just go away.

But that is not to be.

So, I will tell you a bit about Walt Whitman in the hope that you might search out some of his poetry. His most famous work is a long book like poem called, *Leaves of Grass*. He sings the praises of this country in a manner that few can.

His praise is not self-aggrandizing, but it is very much “self” conscious, very much, indeed.

The entire following text is found at waltwhitman.com:

Regarded as one of America's greatest poets, **Walt Whitman** joins the ranks of Dante, Shakespeare, Virgil and Homer in terms of artistry and exceptional skill in the written words. One of Whitman's finest works - [Leaves of Grass](#), published in 1855, featured various themes including friendship, nature, democracy and love. It also presented much praises to the body and soul, as well as discovering reassurance, hope and beauty in death.

Whitman started his career in Brooklyn, where he pursued a job in the printing industry. As a child, he barely received sufficient formal education. However, this was not a hindrance to his cognitive development since he was rather well-read. At age 12, he was already exposed to the works of famous writers including Shakespeare and Dante. He also read the Bible, which expanded his

knowledge not only in literature, but also his faith.

Throughout his lifetime, he undertook different professions. Whitman was not only a printer, but he was also an editor, schoolteacher and reporter. His passion for writing and poetry motivated him to create and publish his first book entitled "Leaves of Grass". This book was written with the inspiration he received from Ralph Waldo Emerson and his vast experience during his travels to various parts of the United States.

It is also worth noting that this book had 8 editions, and Whitman revised and improved the content while adding several other poems. He also considered his first edition of the book as a remarkable literary piece in the history of America. Those who have read and discovered much artistry in this book agree with Whitman since his masterpiece was indeed a must-read because of its originality and immense appeal to poetry enthusiasts.

However, the book received mixed reviews from readers and critics alike. For instance, Whitman was noted to have received too little amount of praises from the public because his themes were "out of the ordinary" during that time. The Longman Anthology of Poetry commented that the poet used stylistic innovations and expressed his openness on sex as a theme in his works.

Other critics claimed that Whitman did not make use of the regular rhyme and meter in his works. There was also the use of rhetorics and long cadences, which are commonly found in the Bible.

After Whitman published his book, he found himself fired from his job as a clerk at the Department of Interior. This happened because the Secretary of Interior thought of his book as having inappropriate themes. Although he had quite a few critics in America, writers and literary analysts in England were astonished by his poetry. Algernon

Charles Swinburne and Dante Gabriel Rossetti were only some of the other writers in England who loved his masterpiece.

Aside from writing poetry, Whitman moved to Washington D.C and found employment as a clerk. It was the time of the Civil War, and his eyes were opened to the sufferings of numerous men and women. He was deeply moved after seeing their pain and suffering, that he decided to devote some of his precious time visiting soldiers who were injured because of the war. He also helped them by dressing their wounds and sending messages of peace and hope.

His experience in helping wounded soldiers was one of his inspirations for the poems he wrote in the book published in 1865. Several titles were included in the book such as the poem "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd", which was the poet's elegy dedicated to President Lincoln.

Whitman was also deeply affected by the slavery in New Orleans, which he discovered when he got a job as an editor in one of the local newspapers. This inspired him to create more poems that delved into the sufferings of these slaves, which also opened the eyes of his readers. However, his works were also criticized by others who were not quite in favor of his personal thoughts and feelings about this subject matter.

