

Natural Images-Homoerotic Expressions: Analysing Walt Whitman's Selected Poems

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The present paper analyses the selected poems of Whitman by focusing how he used natural images to express homoerotic desires. Walt Whitman (1819-92) is a famous and well known poet, not only in his own country America, but throughout the world. Whitman is considered to be the first original American poet and the poet of the new world. Whitman became famous due to the publication of his masterpiece *Leaves of Grass* in 1855. One of the main themes of Whitman's poetry is the concern for the natural world of America. The title of *Leaves of Grass* itself connotes the affinity between the poet and the nature which surrounds him and the people around him. Whitman expresses his impressions of the American landscape very beautifully and aesthetically. Whitman is also considered to be a regional poet who appreciates the natural prosperity of his region with a keen observation, "An ecopoetical rethinking of such categories favors the view of Walt Whitman as an island poet of the northeastern coastline of America, a poet belonging to a special location, for him a sacred place" (Killingsworth, *Walt Whitman and the Earth* 12). As can be seen in these lines from his poem "Starting from Paumanoak":

Starting from fish-shape Paumanoak where I was born,

.....

Aware of the fresh free giver the flowing Missouri, aware of mighty Niagara,

Aware of the buffalo herds grazing the plains, the hirsute and strong-breasted bull,

Of earth, rocks, Fifth-month flowers experienced, stars, rain, snow, my amaze, (1,

9-11)

What is remarkable about *Leaves of Grass* is the depiction of American scenario with specific attention to its regional, social, cultural, religious, biological and natural diversities. And Whitman is doing nothing except celebrating these diversities. Celebration of his own individuality, as well as the larger human and non-human beings, is the major concern of his poetry from the very beginning, "'Celebrate" was, after all, the first verb used in the opening

poem of Whitman's first edition of *Leaves of Grass*. It was also one of the most fundamental concept terms in Whitman's poetry generally: His poetry articulated and performed a celebration of life” (Greenspan 2).

It is also an expression of the transcendentalist philosophy which is the inspiration and power behind Whitman's poetry. Transcendentalism believes in the equality of human beings, affinity between human beings and nature, and the strength of body and mind / soul. The concept of 'inherent goodness' of all human and non-human beings is also important in this regard. That's why Whitman's poetry is for all and sundry. As far the depiction of nature is concerned Whitman not only describes the physical and human nature but celebrates and participates in it. His poetry is the celebration of the new found land of America. He joyfully sings about the existence as a whole where everything is bound to one another in “Song of Myself”:

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.
I loafe and invite my soul,
I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass. (1-5)

Here Whitman hints directly and indirectly towards his major concerns which he further explores in his poetic and prosaic works. The celebration of the soul and the body, the spirit and the matter, the spiritual and the material, the abstract and the concrete and all such binaries are what differentiate Whitman from other poets.

Throughout his poetry Whitman is trying to explore the various layers of the self, the 'I', the identity, the subjectivity and individuality. Although he primarily tries to talk about his own self, but the collective whole of which his self is a small part, is the main concern behind this particular one. In this way he moves from known to unknown, particular to general, personal to universal, subjective to objective, self to other, and from part to the whole.

The idea of social unity clearly resonated with his conception of cosmic integration. It was also the thing that made democratic cooperation possible – and life in general rewarding. For a democratic society to thrive, then, it needed some mechanism for counterbalancing the fragmenting effects of the same individualism it necessarily cultivates. (Mack 147)

In this way Whitman's democratic ideas also involve the same theory. The democratic system is one where each part is given its due place, status, recognition, and identity. But the part and whole reside in a reciprocal relationship. The part cannot stand without the whole, and the whole cannot be the whole if it is not comprised by different parts. Whitman's transcendentalist philosophy and romantic outlook link him to the democratic ideas. He is against the institution of slavery and support the view that people should join hands in order to get rid of the evils of society. The comradeship, companionship, unity, harmony, and wholeness of the common people can change the world for better, which Whitman tries to do.

Same are the lessons which religions taught people –to connect oneself to the bigger and larger order of things. In the case of transcendentalism, it is the concept of 'oversoul' of which the individual souls are part of and to which they strive to join and connect with. This mystic philosophy is the result of Eastern religious influence upon Whitman and others of his friends like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. When Whitman talks about the concepts of soul, oversoul, spirit, and spirituality, he sounds like a mystic who is talking about the relationship between humans and the Divine, between mortals and the God, between individual and Divine power as:

To understand Whitman's religious epistemology, it is crucial to recognize that for him the "soul" provides the human body with a deep layer of consciousness that allows the knowing subject to intuit the spiritual essence of the objects of the natural world. Accordingly, we can say that Whitman believed humans could know the world in two ways: in a secular manner that involves the senses and intellect or in a mystical manner that involves the senses and intellect *plus the soul*. (Kuebrich 206)

So the two ways to know the world are proposed by Whitman's philosophical outlook. But both the ways try to make the soul (and hence the possessor of the soul) free from the restrictions, boundaries, constraints, and limits of the world. The deep mystical and spiritual experiences can be gained when the soul is free to wander far off, far deep, and far across the normal, the usual, and the common.

One way of expressing the freedom of the soul (and the possessor of the soul) is eroticism. The sexual energy flows from one source to another, from one person to another, and ultimately connects the sources of love, energy, and affection. The sexual passions express the

desire for freedom, emancipation, and the desire of power. The power circulates in the world in different forms and sexual power is one of them. But the issue is to connect it with the power of spirituality:

Regardless of whether Whitman's love arises out of homosexual experience, as most critics believe, or from homosocial friendships, as Whitman claimed in his old age, there is an important religious theme in "Scented Herbage" and throughout "Calamus": namely that the love celebrated in these poems is the highest form of spiritual love and the experiential foundation of Whitman's faith. (Kuebrich 209)

In this way Whitman is a poet whose range goes so far as the usual distinction between the subjects, concerns, and themes dissolve, mix up, and blend in order to give a new structure where every single issue or theme is bound, stimulated, and intensified by one another. Spiritual integrity is enhanced with integrity, unity, harmony, and wholeness of the human and non-human natural world, with a democratic vision, with a liberal social-cultural order, with erotic and mystical experiences. Whitman proves to be a spiritual poet, a nature poet, a democratic poet, a poet of the body and soul, and a reformist in the field of social, cultural, and educational systems. Walt Whitman's views regarding the interconnections between natural world and different sexual desires can be seen in his famous poem "Song of Myself". The range of this poem surpasses everything thought or written. It tries to go beyond the limits of human beings, material world and mundane issues. Yet the poem is too close to everyday life and common issues. "Song of Myself" is not about the self of the persona alone. Rather the self / soul of the persona is a big vacuum cleaner which sucks up everything whatever comes its way, "And these one and all tend inward to me, and I tend outward to them, / And such as it is to be of these more or less I am" (324-325). Nothing is left behind –be it the citizens or the villagers, the body or the soul / spirit, the white or the black, the free or the bound, the heterosexual or homosexual, the master or the slave, the man or the woman, the learned or the unlearned, "Of every hue and trade and rank, of every cast and religion, / Not merely of the New World but of Africa Europe or Asia, a wandering savage, / A farmer, mechanic, or artist, a gentleman, sailor, lover or quaker, / A prisoner, fancy-man, rowdy, lawyer, physician or priest" (343-346). Everything and everyone is presented in this beautiful poem and it is as much a 'melting pot' as the nation, to which it represents, is. It is the American epic and represents as much diversity as there is in America, "I

resist anything better than my own diversity” (347). In this epic the quest is for the boundaries of the self which, according to the transcendentalist philosophy, are nowhere. The self or the soul is as wide and large as the universe, to which it ultimately belongs. The poet has loosened his mind to wander everywhere or anywhere and he is observing its workings. What can it do? How far can it go? Where can it go?

I am not an earth nor an adjunct of an earth,

I am the mate and companion of people, all just as immortal and fathomless as myself,

They do not know how immortal, but I know. (127-129)

The American thinking always rests upon the self and the individual. So the poem “Song of Myself” is about ‘Me’, ‘Myself’, and ‘I’. Self-trust, self-reliance, self-respect, and self-realization are the fundamental notions and beliefs of transcendentalism, “I believe in you my soul, the other I am must not abase itself to you, / And you must not be abased to the other” (73-74). The poem talks about the equality of human and non-human beings, “So they show their relation to me and I accept them; / They bring me tokens of myself, they evince them plainly in their possession” (692-693); about the omnipresence of truth, “All truth wait in all things” (647); about the invisible connection between human beings and nature, “I visit the orchards of God and look at the spheric product, / And look at quintillions ripened, and look at quintillions green” (797-798); about the concept of death, “Copulation is no more rank to me than death is” (524). In brief the poem “Song of Myself” talks about the liberation of human beings from all sorts of moors and shackles be it social, cultural, linguistic, religious, gendered, sexual, economic and racial. So the poem is about liberation, freedom, and emancipation of humanity from narrow boundaries of discrimination and prejudices,

Through me many long dumb voices,

Voices of interminable generations of slaves,

Voices of prostitutes and of deformed persons,

Voices of diseased and despairing, and of thieves and dwarfs, (509-512)

But the poet uses nature, natural space, natural beings and species in order to depict a queer view of the world. The very construction of queerness and homosexuality is a nineteenth century phenomenon which begins with the emergence of scientific, biological, and medical discourses. Earlier there is no such thing as queer or homosexual. Although same-sex tendencies

and activities are there and it is a silent agreement among people to accept it secretly. But the process of labeling some people as queer and others as straight begins in the late nineteenth century. It is then that one's sexual orientation is naturalized by linking it with one's body, biological system, and genetic structure. Now same-sex no more is a choice rather it becomes one's inherent self and identity. And from that point onwards, such activities or tendencies are considered to be deviant and perverse:

While undoubtedly same-sex desiring individuals throughout history (even those in rural and sparsely populated areas) had always had erotic contact with each other, only in the 'modern', or post-medieval, era could those individuals encounter sufficient numbers of other, similarly desiring people to self-identify as a group, as something other than an aberration or individual sinner. (Hall 109)

In order to cure or treat such deviance or perversion, a whole body of sexology emerges and along with this body of discourse another view about sexual perversion and the possibilities of its treatment comes into being. All of this is based on a patriarchal-heterosexual discourse which uses to dominate and govern everything especially those who prove to be opposing and challenging its ideology. That's why homophobia is a source of anxiety and fear in such social-cultural systems. The task of Queer Ecologists is to denaturalize such wrong concepts and present a fair view of the existing things.

Whitman's "Song of Myself" starts with celebration of the persona's own personality and the diversity of his land and the people who dwell there:

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you. (1-3)

Now what the poet is celebrating at the very beginning of this song? Whitman is celebrating a large diversity of every sort in this world, especially in America. And through his song, he is democratizing everything whatever comes into his focus. His main purpose could be anything, but the notable thing is that Whitman is a man of new thinking which tries to surpass and transcend everything which becomes a hurdle in the way of the progression of soul.

Another remarkable thing regarding this song is that, time and again, Whitman celebrates none other than his own personality and the large diversity that is there in nature. And he explores whatever is there in store for him. As he said:

It is for my mouth forever, I am in love with it,
I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked,
I am mad for it to be in contact with me. (18-20)

And more than anything else “Song of Myself” is the celebration of one’s sexuality and physicality. Whitman is celebrating himself by sitting in the lap of nature, that’s why he is alluding to the ongoing movements in the nature as the flowing river, smell of grass, sweet fragrance of flowers, buzzed whispers of insects etc. This close connection between sexuality and nature is very clearly visible in Whitman’s poem. “Echoes, ripples, and buzzed whispers, loveroot, silkthread, crotch and vine, / My respiration and inspiration, the beating of my heart, the passing of blood and air through my lungs” (14-15). Nature provides a space to experiment and explore other forms of physical-pleasure which may not be possible somewhere else. Natural diversity provides a chance for the sexual diversity and complements it by placing it in its lap, “The delight alone or in the rush of the streets, or along the fields and hillsides” (20). That’s why the queer gaze on nature is different from straight gaze. Whereas straight gaze usually tries to impose its hetero-normative principles on natural space, here queer gaze is trying to liberate nature from such imposition of a dominant ideology and celebrates the diversity of nature so that all these diverse species and living beings may feel at peace and ease. As Donna Haraway’s concept of ‘naturecultures’ describes the mutually-constituted relationship between “nature and culture, nature and human, human and animal, and human and machine” (qtd. in Gaard 118).

Now it can be said that the poet is trying to get from nature what is prohibited in cultivated society, “I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked, / I am mad for it to be in contact with me” (11-12). Nature can be helpful because it provides space for everyone. The question is to secure a space for one’s existence and acceptance. This question of natural or cultural space is very crucial to queer-ecologies. Space of every sort is dominated by hetero-patriarchal ideology, “Space and identity are entangled, and while eco-queer activism often takes place in interstitial spaces, it also publically challenges dominant modes and forms of thinking, behaving, and organization” (Sbicca 38).

This security and protection of diverse sexualities among human and non-human beings and the security of environment, nature, and ecology are at stake in the growing industrialization, urbanization and materialization. In order to achieve such goals queer-ecology provides a way through which sexual as well as natural diversity can be secured and protected by diminishing

the threats faced by them. At the same time it opposes the underlying ideologies which are working for over-materialization of the world. As Sbicca articulates this in these words:

At a time when sexual oppression was visibly being challenged, ecological problems were part of the mainstream discourse, and a war was raging against Vietnam, many lesbians felt the need to leave urban spaces, believed to be patriarchal spaces where sexual and environmental rights were not highly valued.
(39)

So the violation of sexual diversity is linked to the violation of natural or environmental spaces. And the solution is easy to find if these two approaches may be linked. The main causes of all these dangers are male greed, egocentrism, heteronormativity, and anthropocentrism.

Whitman's "Song of Myself" deals with nature, God, and the poet himself. Here the poet is celebrating the existence of everything in this world as well as in the whole universe. Everything is part of larger structures made by God or the power which is working behind everything. So nobody is different from the other when everyone's fate is bound to others, "I do not call one greater and one smaller, / That which fills its period and place is equal to any" (1142-1143). The diversity of human nature is the strength of humanity as well as of America. Whitman is appreciating the natural diversity so that the diverse human natures (like homosexuals, blacks, native-Americans etc.) may be appreciated instead of condemned, "Not an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile, and none shall be less familiar than the rest" (50).

"Song of Myself" is regarded as the epic of new found land of America. And it is expected to show as much diversity as the land, to which it is celebrating, has. That's why Whitman is talking about everyone. He is appreciating everything and everyone. And he is either imposing his personality upon others or accepting others' influence over himself. Actually he is doing the both. As he said, "And these tend inward to me, and I tend outward to them," (327). This allows Whitman to be a part of the whole of America (or the world to which America is representing for Whitman) and celebrates its diverse ethnicities, localities, communities, religions, social classes, and other differences.

I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as the wise,
Regardless of others, ever regardful of others,
Maternal as well as paternal, a child as well as a man,

Stuffed with the stuff that is coarse, and stuffed with the stuff that is fine, (326-329)

One more salient feature of this epic poem is the celebration of diverse sexual natures or orientations. Sexuality is not a matter of fight and discrimination, but something which is a matter of celebration for him, “Through me forbidden voices, / Voices of sexes and lusts, voices veiled and I remove the veil” (519-520). In a way, the poem is celebrating the sexual awakening and sexual liberation as is supposed to be gained in a liberal and democratic country. America is a melting pot where everyone has a place to go and live according to their personal choices and preferences. So all the differences, dissimilarities and divisions are dissolved in America as well as in “Song of Myself”. As:

Its centrality to *Leaves of Grass* involves, among other accomplishments, its experimentation in form and style, its development of a fluid persona embodying Whitman’s theories of the self within a democratic union, its celebration of a mystical experience that merges spirituality with the experience of sexuality and the body, its use of catalogues of images and expanded vignettes to explore the range of experience within modern life, and its exploration of the limits of human knowledge and language. (Killingsworth 26)

In this way “Song of Myself” is actually a song of each and every self. And celebration of one self means the celebration of all other selves. But the celebration can only happen if the other selves have been accepted as an inevitable and essential part of one social order. America presents a panorama or a model of such social, cultural, political, religious, and national orders. The diversity becomes an important feature of this country which provides space to all forms of differences. As Whitman sings:

Of every hue and caste am I, of every rank and religion,
A farmer, mechanic, artist, gentleman, sailor, quaker,
Prisoner, fancy-man, rowdy, lawyer, physician, priest. (346-348)

Whitman not only feels affinity with Americans but with all of the humanity. For him what is essential is the basic human nature. And such nature is not bound to a region, religion, ethnicity, community, gender, or caste. It can be found everywhere and in everyone. So everyone is a part of the order of life or existence. And each life is important to complete the order. The importance of individual, in the web of whole, is beautifully depicted and described by Whitman

in this poem. And the idea of self is given another meaning by converting or altering its previous negative connotation. Now self is connected to self-respect, self-trust, self-reliance, and self-realization. All these positive meanings give new directions to the idea of self. And a self is some total of the body as well as the soul. Neither body, nor soul alone can be a proper self in itself. Both should be connected and merged in order to create a unified and harmonious self. And Whitman sings for the both- the body as well as the soul –in these lines:

I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul,

The pleasures of heaven are with me and the pains of hell are with me, (422-423)

This idea of soul is further connected to the innermost desires of human beings. And sexual satisfaction is the primary desire which is called ‘Libido’ in psychological terminology. Here the question of one’s getting or acquiring one’s gender and sexual identity emerges because desire is ultimately connected to our gender or sexual identity. Whether one’s gender and sex are inherent or not? Whether they are connected to the body, mind, or soul? And how does one learn one’s gender or sexual roles? All these questions emerge when Whitman starts appreciating and celebrating his sexuality. Sometimes he is entirely in the guise of a heterosexual male, at others he is a homosexual person and somewhere else he behaves like a bisexual man. So all this indicates that neither the desire nor the self is the same at all the times. Either it keeps changing with everyone or it may be the peculiar quality of Whitman’s persona alone. But we know that Whitman is not talking about a single person or a single self in this poem. He is depicting all of humanity and all of the individual human beings. So this changing sexual orientation or nature is a characteristic of everyone, not only of human beings alone but of the non-human beings as well. That’s why Whitman uses many natural beings to put forth this idea of sexual diversity as an inherent and essential part of biodiversity. Whitman says:

I am the poet of the woman the same as the man,

And I say it is as great to be a woman as to be a man,

And I say there is nothing greater than the mother of men. (425-427)

Whitman appreciates all the living beings like animals, plants, flowers, and human beings. He appreciates the beauty of horses. Horses are traditional symbols of sexual desire and passion. And through them Whitman gives voice to his own passion. When Whitman sings, “I think I could turn and live awhile with the animals, they are so placid and self-contain’d,” (684) may be he means to say that there is much liberty among animals regarding their expression and

the acceptance of sexual diversity. May be animals can provide a much emancipated environment where one can live and enjoy his or her life as he or she wishes. This affinity with animals and plants is not used without any reason. Here Whitman is giving voice to the queerness of nature and natural beings. Homosexuality is the part of the nature. Neither is it a disease nor a sin as it is condemned by patriarchal and heterosexual discourses. Here Whitman is trying to naturalize homosexual desire. That's why he describes the overtly homosexual part of the poem in the lap of the nature where twenty eight young men are enjoying the intimacy felt by them in each other's company. But its setting is a slippery and fluid space of seashore which is far away from civilized areas, As:

Twenty-eight young men bathe by the shore,

Twenty-eight young men, and all so friendly;

Twenty-eight years of womanly life and all so lonesome. (199-201)

This stanza of "Song of Myself" reveals the inner desire of the persona of the poem. Although the scene is presented through the eyes of a woman, but the male persona, who is singing this poem, is the subject behind all the manifestation of erotic and sexual desire. Hence the persona expresses his desire to be close to the swimmers at the shore. The sea-shore is a perfect place due to its being neither too solid nor too fluid. Here the connections between the solidity and fluidity of identities (gendered, racial, class, sexual etc.) can be elaborated more beautifully as Whitman has done. Sea-shores, wetlands, forests, and wilderness are the places where civilization losses its strong grip and where natural order begins incorporating all sorts of differences.

The next poem is "I Sing the Body Electric" where the poet talks about the relationship between body and soul / psyche. He also praises the physical beauty of male and female bodies. He admires the "swimmers", "rowers", riders, "wrestlers", "firemen", and all other manual workers. These are the people he is in love with. He eulogizes "a common farmer" and his sons for their manly strength and charm. The persona expresses his desire for physical attachment to the father in these lines, "You would wish long and long to be with him, and you would wish to sit by him in the boat that you and he might touch each other." (44). The closeness of bodies gives pleasure and the poet sings the play of flesh and erotic desire. The naturalness of physical bodies and the nurturing effects, derived from them, nurtures the soul and the body:

As I see my soul reflected in Nature,

As I see through a mist, One with inexpressible completeness, sanity, beauty,

See the bent head and arms folded over the breast, the Female I see. (72-74)

For the persona his soul is “Female” who gets reflected in all the natural world of flora and fauna. Further the persona expresses his bisexual desire for both the male and female and in that way proves to be a person whose sexuality is as diverse as is the natural and biodiversity, “And in man or woman a clean, strong, firm-fibered body, is more beautiful than the most beautiful face.” (126). The persona, in the next part, talks about the pricelessness of human and non-human bodies. Although the bodies (human and non-human) are being bought and sold, but their preciousness can never be achieved by money or any other form of payment.

Just like “I Sing the Body Electric” another of Whitman’s poem which concentrates upon the earthly connections of human and non-human bodies is “Spontaneous Me”. A pastoral depiction of natural world and male-bonding is the main focus of the poem. He begins the poem with these lines:

Spontaneous me, Nature,
The loving day, the mounting sun, the friend I am happy with,
The arm of my friend hanging idly over my shoulder, (1-3)

These starting lines hint to the pastoral tradition of shepherds and peaceful of natural surroundings. Further he concentrates the beauty of “hillside”, “mountain ash”, “late autumn”, “grass”, “animals and birds”, “bank”, “apples”, “pebble-stones”, and “beautiful dripping fragments”. Focusing on the real essence of male bodies (the semen) the persona refers to its being the “real poems”, “The experience of identity with the earth begins with a contemplation of the body, particularly the penis, metaphorically conceived as the “poem” that “all men carry” in a scene of autoerotic fantasy” (Killingsworth 93). The Love of the poet engulfs everything – the male and female bodies, the earthly and spiritual phenomena, the concrete bodily pleasures and abstract experiences of love.

Earth of chaste love –life that is only life after love,
The body of my love –the body of the woman I love –the body of the man –the
body of the earth, (14-15)

For the persona the differences between male / female bodies and the earth are dissolved because he feels the same passion for all. The close attachment in the form of passionate physical love nourishes the persona just as the earth nourishes the lives of human and non-human beings. The nurturing effects of nature and sex are presented in this poem. The emotion of love is manifested

in the entire natural world by correlating the passion for a natural harmony with the harmony of lovers and comrades. The erotic imagery of the “wild bee” and “lady flower” is remarkable in this regard:

The hairy wild-bee that murmurs and hankers up and down,
that gripes the full-grown lady-flower, curves upon her
with amorous firm legs, takes his will of her, and holds
himself tremulous and tight till he is satisfied; (17)

Here again the nurturing and nourishing effects of nature and sexual intercourse are presented with the use of natural imagery. This imagery stands for itself for the depiction of both phenomena. The references to masturbation, intense erotic desire, strong passion and amorous natural images are the salient features of the poem. Whereas these features hint toward the sexual desire which is reflected in nature, at the same time they also refer to the desire for natural surrounding which is reflected through sexual images. These reciprocal collaborations and mutual interconnections make the poem to talk on two major grounds –the environmental / natural and sexual. On the one hand this connects human beings to one another and on the other to that of the natural world of flora and fauna.

The implication is that men and women who live close to the earth already enjoy a complete integration, a soulful life. The function of the poet is to “show”, not to create anew (the human genitalia being the “real” poem, “what we call poems being merely pictures,” as he says in “Spontaneous Me”). The poet cannot exceed people’s capacity for creativity or create a poem beautiful enough to compete with nature but must be content with reminding people of their close connections among themselves and with the earth, or reinforcing natural trends. (Killingsworth 95)

In the same way the Calamus cluster of poems is also well known for its pastoral and homoerotic expressions, “Whitman's ‘Calamus’ is an esoteric pastoral, a narrowing of the genre of the pastoral text toward the problematic of its fundamental motive, knowledge of other minds, or more precisely, instruction in the knowledge of other minds” (qtd. in Vicent 37). The poet begins this cluster with the poem entitled “In Paths Untrodden”. The first thing to note about the poem is the natural imagery of the margin areas on a pond. The margins do not describe the natural space alone but the space which is held by non-normative sexualities. And the growth of

the moss or grass on margins of the ponds further refers to the growth of non-conformist sexualities. He sings:

In paths untrodden,
In the growth by margins of pond-water,
Escaped from the life that exhibit itself,
From all the standards hitherto publish'd, from the pleasures, profits,
conformities, (1-4)

Rather than the pond itself, the margin on the pond is centralized in this poem. Then the poet moves toward the motive of his entire cluster, saying that at a secluded space he is free to sing his desire for the love of comrades. Nowhere else can he be open about his different or non-normative desire but at a place or space which has pastoral surroundings; and a literary tradition where male bonding dominates the scene from the time immemorial. These poems can be defined as nature poems depicting the same-sex eroticism or homoerotic poems depicting natural world:

No longer abash'd, (for in this secluded spot I can respond as I would not dare
elsewhere,)
Strong upon me the life that does not exhibit itself, yet contains all the rest,
Resolv'd to sing no songs to-day but those of manly attachment, (10-12)

The remote spaces provide the freedom to experiment with and search for the hidden dimensions of one's sexuality. The politics of natural space and sexual identities regulates human and non-human lives. Natural world is manipulated and controlled for propagating certain sexual forms and negating others. These others are having non-conformist desires and produce their own standards of life. As can be seen in the poem "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hands". In this poem the persona is warning his friend for holding his hand because it can lead to dangerous consequences. Their affair requires its own standards or norms and they have to give up all previous established ones. And with these new ways of life they have to search for a liberal space to accept their deviant desires openly. In open environment their non-normative desires can appear and flourish abundantly:

Or else by stealth in some wood for trial,
Or back of a rock in the open air,
(For in any roof'd room of a house I emerge not, nor in company,

And in libraries I lie as one dumb, a gawk, or unborn, or dead,)
But just possibly with you on a high hill, first watching lest any person for miles
around approach unaware,
Or possibly with you sailing at sea, or on the beach of the sea or some quiet
island, (13-18)

So the persona is looking for a place far away from social, cultural, religious, political, and other rules and regulations. The wilderness is the space which can provide refuge to the people like the persona. Wilderness as an uncultivated and uncivilized sphere has always been a threat to the normative standards of social cultural systems. Homophobia and ecophobia connect these two grounds to one another to build up a coalition in order to resist the anthropocentrism and heteronormativity.

Just like Derozio and Rossetti, Whitman's poems also present eco-queer or eco-sexual resistance. It can be seen in his poem "Song of Myself". In this poem the poet presents queer desire in a natural space where it becomes a defense strategy for protecting the rights of natural world and non-normative sexualities. In part six of the poem his love for the grass (vegetation) and young men is equated with one another and the distinction between erotic desire for the natural surrounding and young men is blurred:

Tenderly will I use you curling grass,
It may be you transpire from the breasts of young men,
It may be if I had known them I would have loved them,
It may be you are from old people, or from offspring taken soon out of their
mothers' laps. (111-114)

Similarly the eleventh part is important where the poet is paying attention to the twenty eight young men who are bathing on the seashore. The seashores, wetlands, wilderness, and forests are the place where the sexual and natural regulations, established by anthropocentric and heteronormative discourses, do not work and the dominant power structure loses its strength. The instable and fluid space enhances the instable nature of sexualities and desires, "This section thus at once gives expression to female heterosexual desire, autoerotic desire, and male homosexual desire, but also demonstrates the fluidity of desire and sexuality" (Mullins 167). The male persona expresses his own homoerotic desire by expressing the desire of female for the young men. Here the solidity meets and dissolves into fluidity.

The young men float on their backs, their white bellies bulge to the sun, they do not ask who seizes fast to them,
They do not know who puffs and declines with pendant and bending arch,
They do not think whom they souse with spray. (214-216)

Whitman in this poem democratizes everything from natural world to sexual desire, material things to ideas, living to non-living, human to non-human, and all other forms of differences, “I speak the password primeval, I give the sign of democracy” (507). The democratic impulse of the entire poetry of Whitman and particularly “Song of Myself” provide a strong and persistent form of resistance to ideological, hegemonic, and discursive power structure which posits any threat to the freedom of the subjects of his country and ultimately the entire world, “But if the safest thing we can say about Whitman’s own ‘kosmic’ identity is that it really means everything, then perhaps the most important thing we can say about that everything is that it defines – and is defined by – democracy” (Mack 136).

His democratic views are not limited to the human subjects of a particular sexuality but encompass all differences and diversities. In the sixteenth part of the poem he sings:

I resist any thing better than my own diversity,
Breathe the air but leave plenty after me,
And am not stuck up, and am in my place. (349-351)

This diverse desires, natures, behaviours, and expressions are expressed through many voices which erupt through the persona of “Song of Myself”. Raising the voice and expressing the feelings and emotions of different entities allow the poet to resist their suppression, negation, repression, and marginalization. In a society, highly dominated by white middle class male subjects, the voice of different people and entities are oppressed. The poet is contributing in subverting this system by raising their voices and combining different marginalized and suppressed entities. This provides a joint approach to view the world and existence.

Through me forbidden voices,
Voices of sexes and lusts, voices veil’d and I remove the veil,
Voices indecent by me clarified and transfigur’d. (516-518)

When these repressed voices and the desires erupt from the persona they try to shatter and dismantle the regulatory bodies of socio-cultural systems. By transgressing the norms, the persona feels at ease not with the civilized world but the uncivilized and uncultivated world of

flora and fauna where everything is dominated by impulse not by rules and regulations. He identifies himself with non-human living beings that are free to express themselves in different ways which is not possible in regulated social system:

They do not sweat and whine about their condition,
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins,
They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God,
Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with the mania of owning things,
Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived thousands of years ago,
Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth. (686-691)

So the freedom from unnecessary regularities is what links the persona to animals and other living beings. This freedom is a challenge, not only to the anthropocentric and heteronormative world views, but all sorts of discursive limitations and prohibitions which are imposed upon human and non-human beings.

In his poem “For You O Democracy” from the ‘Calamus’ cluster, Whitman expresses his view regarding a democratic system just like “Song of Myself”. For him democracy is a system where all different entities and identities are accepted and recognized. So he tries to make a country, through the help of his ‘comrades’, where such liberties are enjoyed and shared by all and sundry.

I will plant companionship thick as trees along all the rivers of America, and
along the shores of the great lakes, and all over the prairies,
I will make inseparable cities with their arms about each other’s necks,
By the love of comrades,
By the manly love of comrades. (6-9)

Here he is trying to democratize not only the socio-cultural spaces of urban areas but the natural world of flora and fauna so that the non-conformist and non-normative desires of the persona as well as his ‘comrades’ may look normal. The oppressive systems of organized natural and sexual spheres can be the reason behind Whitman’s democratizing everything, “While it is true that the hegemonic pairing of heterosexuality and ecology has had a generally oppressive impact on both queers and nature, the fact is that queers have also used ideas of nature and natural spaces as sites of resistance” (Sandilands 20).

The sexual politics of natural space and how it is resisted by Whitman can be seen in his poem “These I Singing in Spring” from ‘Calamus’. In this poem he is talking about the love of comrades and how he finds it everywhere from the regulated natural spaces of urban areas like parks and the wild forest. Whereas the scenario is depicted as encouraging the different forms of desire, at the same time it also presents the lush flora and fauna for their own sake. The participation of the persona and his “comrades” in the flourishing natural world enhances the growth of both simultaneously.

Another important point to note about the poem is that the persona transgresses the organized urban natural places like the parks and gardens. He does not want to manifest his desires, which do not conform to the normal standards of the socio-cultural world, in regulated and organized space. So he moves towards “the forest” which provides security to all diversities and resistance to the social, cultural, political and other forms of regulations. “Gay men, lesbians, and others identified as “against nature” have historically used ideas of nature, natural spaces, and ecological practices as sites of resistance and exploration” (Sandilands and Erickson 22). Whitman’s stance in this regard can be seen in the entire ‘Calamus’ cluster and particularly in this poem:

Far, far in the forest, or sauntering later in summer, before I think where I go,
Solitary, smelling the earthy smell, stopping now and then in the silence;
Alone I had thought, yet soon a troop gathers around me,
Some walk by my side and some behind, and some embrace my arms or neck, (8-11)

Further the poet uses abundant flower images in the poem. The diversity of the flowers not only presents the richness of the natural world but also the plenteousness of diverse forms of life. The persona finds, in this luxuriant surrounding, the token of his love for the comrades. This token is the plant of calamus which stands for the natural world as well as for the deviant desires:

(O here I last saw him that tenderly loves me, and returns again never to separate from me,
And this, O this shall henceforth be the token of comrades, this calamus-root shall,
Interchange it youths with each other! let none render it back!) (19-21)

In this way the poet is deploying the natural spaces, paces, and vegetation for the presentation of queer desires and resistance to the growing intervention and devastating effects of anthropocentric and heteronormative ways of the civilized world. “But like much else that goes on in the name of nature, desire is always surpassing the frames established for it, and a queer politics of desire allows us to become open to what exists beyond the discursive frameworks that have been established for these experiences” (Sandilands and Erickson 37).

Another of the ‘Calamus’ poems is “I Hear It Was Charged against Me”. The poet is responding to the accusation charged against him that he is trying “to destroy institutions”. Now which institutions is he trying to destroy? How can he destroy institutions? What implies in destroying something? And in what way his actions are threat to the world? And what are ways in which his actions can be helpful to the world? These questions emerge once the poem is read. The poet does not specify anything about the institutions but the tone of his cluster can illustrate the established forms of major institutions which control, manipulate, and regulate the world. These institutions can be –capitalism, colonialism, hetero-patriarchy, racism, classism, anthropocentrism, industrialism, and materialism. The poet is raising his voice, throughout his poetry, against the oppressive ways of these institutions. And in the ‘Calamus’ cluster he talks about the homoerotic desire of his persona (himself) and other young men (his comrade friends). At the same time ‘Calamus’ are the poems depicting a pastoral natural world. The growth of industrial and material things eradicates the free and independent form of natural vegetation. Hence the poet is defending both the homoerotic desire (diverse forms of sexualities) and natural diversity from the destructive institutions of anthropocentric and hetero-patriarchal system. The persona responds to the accusations charged against him in these lines:

Only I will establish in the Mannahatta and in every city of these States inland
and seaboard,
And in the fields and woods, and above every keel little or large that dents the
water,
Without edifices or rules or trustees or any argument,
The institution of the dear love of comrades. (4-7)

So the persona is not destroying anything because destructing something is not the way of the poet-persona. Rather he is trying to save the diversity in all its forms by establishing new institutions. In this way he is subverting the status quo by challenging the already establishes

institutions. The regulatory bodies of the world describe and manipulate things in a limited way. The poet on the other hand is trying to reach to the widest range of possibilities by establishing new forms of world views. Hence his poetry is doing this task, “And yet, as has been amply detailed in recent arguments, *Leaves of Grass* had a profound impact on post- “homosexual” generations of American and English men and has been credited with playing a central role in the formation of modern gay subjectivities and identities” (Bertolini 1049). The freedom provided to nature and non-normative sexualities, by his poetry, are vital in this cluster.

Similarly the next poem “The Prairie-Grass Dividing” presents a firm and strong form of resistance to the threats confronting the natural world of “prairie-grass” and to the sexual minorities. The poem begins by demanding a mutual cooperation from the prairie vegetation and the male lovers. The persona further encourages them to rise against the dangers and threats confronting their freedom and growth.

The prairie-grass dividing, its special odor breathing,
I demand of it the spiritual corresponding,
Demand the most copious and close companionship of men,
Demand the blades to rise of words, acts, beings, (1-4)

The “blades” here refer to both –the weapons of warfare and the blades of grass. The weapons can be used for the safety or defense of natural world and sexual non-normatives. It also works on a metaphorical level where it connotes a strong and active defense of something. The poet’s concern for these two entities presents a joint form of resistance and a coalition building on environmental and sexual grounds. “Although Whitman may capitulate to the pressures of the closet, he also surveys the anguished terrain of the space, particularly the rift between the public and the private” (Metzer 245).

After analyzing some of his selected poems, it can be said that Whitman expressed his concern for sexual diversity through and by referring to the natural diversity. His poetry is full of celebration of life in all its forms. This aspect of his poetry where he expresses homoerotic desires by using the natural symbols, like calamus, is significant while discussing his nature poetry on the one hand and homoerotic expressions on the other.

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