

The Heroic Role of the Poet in Whitman's Works in Light of Martin Heidegger

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Purpose: The current article is to explore Whitman's concept of the hero and to scrutinize poets as suitable models of heroes depending on Heidegger's thoughts reflected in his works. It will show Whitman's ideas regarding the function of poetry in the modern societies that poets are the vanguard of humanity who can lead people to a new understanding of being especially in the time of destitution where there is a steady longing for a security and a need for authenticity.

Methodology: Various lines and texts from Whitman's literary works, namely *Leaves of Grass* and *Democratic Vistas*, will be examined to extract Whitman's concept of the heroic role of the poet. This concept will be read through Heidegger's lenses. The study will consult different texts from Heidegger's literature to explain his theory of the hero and the role of the poet in the modern nations. Literature from other critics and scholars will be consulted to enrich the topic.

Implications: Because people engage in the inauthentic materialistic world, subjugated to subjectivism, live in the mystery of being, perish in the mystery of everyday life, and lose the way towards truth, poets can lead people to an authentic life and unconcealed truth of being through their authentic poetic language according to Heidegger.

Findings: The study concludes that we can read Whitman's perspective through Heidegger's lenses and conclude that poets are the only mortals who can take the place of the priests and politicians in the modern societies and leads people to find the reality of life.

Key words: *Hero, Heidegger, The role of the poet, Whitman.*

Introduction

Walt Whitman is an American transcendental poet whose works inaugurate a new era in the literary scene in America and his works have affected many writers and thinkers. In 1855, Whitman published his book entitled *Leaves of Grass* in the new form and content of poetry,

wherein he produced his own poetic theory in this book. Many scholars and researchers have investigated and explored Whitman's literary work using different methods and approaches, (e.g., Padgett, 1980) studies the value of war in poetry, (e.g., Longolius2004) makes a comparison between the poet's role in Whitman's preface of *Leaves of Grass* and his *Democratic Vistas*, (e.g., Frank, 2007) deals with the political aspect of poetry and (G. C. Cristo 2007) discusses Thomas Carlyle's influence on Whitman. However, since previous researches have not focused on reading Whitman's thoughts about the heroic role of the poet in light of Martin Heidegger, the present study aims to fill the lacuna. It tries to show the heroic role of the poet in revealing the truth and leading a society to understand its being via art. According to Heidegger, poetic language can lead people to a new openness. Heidegger states, "poetry is the inaugural naming of being and of the essence of all things- not just any speech, but that particular kind which for the first time bring into the open all that which we then discuss and deal with in everyday language" (Existential Psychoanalysis 282). In this sense, Heidegger opposes Hegel who, in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, believes that art has lost its high vocation that it once had in classical and middle ages. Hegel states, "art is and remains for us, from the side of its highest vocation, something past"(11). Michel Zimmerman remarks "Postwar Heidegger continued to meditate on the possibility that art, particularly poetry, could help to initiate the 'turning' necessary for moving beyond the one-dimensional technological understanding of things" (222). In this sense, poetry is given a higher prestige than the idle talk of the everydayness.

In his works, notably *Leaves of Grass* and *Democratic Vistas*, Whitman tries to illustrate the right role for poet in a modern nation. In addition, he shows the existential function of poetry. Starting from this common point between Whitman and Heidegger, an attempt will be made to read Whitman's poetic theory through Heidegger's thoughts.

Heidegger's Theory of the Heroic Role of the Poet

After publishing *being and Time*, Heidegger turned from studying being into studying the essence of language and the function of art. He has ample ideas about language and poetry, for him, "Language is the precinct...the house of being...It is because language is the house of being, that we reach what is by constantly going through this house" (Heidegger, Poetry 197). Through this house man can conduct his life. People who use the poetic language will conduct this "house" more successfully than people who use the idle talk because poetry is "the saying of truth"(Heidegger, Poetry 73). In this way, poets have a prominent position in the utopian world of Heidegger. Accordingly, one can say that poets can be heroes. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger mingles the authentic form of life with following a hero in relation to the resoluteness in life; Heidegger writes, "The authentic repetition of a possibility of existence that has been – the possibility that Dasein may choose its hero – is grounded existentially in anticipatory resoluteness; for it is in resoluteness that one first chooses the



choice which makes one free for the struggle of loyally following in the footsteps of that which can be repeated (*Being and Time*: 437).

According to Heidegger's concept of hero, one can copy the authentic life of a hero; following a hero comes in a form of "repetition" of the original deeds and entails following his/her thoughts. As Dasein lives a short life, he/she can copy the successful possibilities of a "Dasein who came before" (*Being and Time*: 437). In *Philosophy and Politics*, Michael Zimmerman comments, "For people to be authentic, they had to choose a hero who would allow them to renew their heritage" (8). In the same vein, Charles B. Guignon, in his "Authenticity, Moral Values, and Psychotherapy," remarks that the concept of the hero in Heidegger's thoughts "suggests that to be authentic is to find guidance for the conduct of one's own life in terms of the lives of models or exemplars drawn from history"(234). Slavoj Zizek also notices that Heidegger "passes from the individual to the societal level by means of the notion of repetition. The authentic repetition of a possibility of existence that has been the possibility that Dasein may choose its hero is grounded existentially in anticipatory resoluteness"(17). Zizek considers this notion as a new version of the kierkegaardian idea relating the repletion of the mode of Christ, the most Christian hero (17). In his essay "Deconstructing the Hero," Iain Thomson remarks that according to Heidegger deconstruction of the concept of hero, "individuals and social groups constitute fundamental aspects of their own identities by 'choosing their heroes'"(115).

Heidegger presents the hero as the human being who can act authentically and be a model for others who want to be authentic. To live authentically, to perform resolutely, and to faithfully track "the footsteps of that which can be repeated," Heidegger assures, "Dasein may choose its hero"(*Being and time*, 437). In the same vein, Heidegger, in his late works, calls to follow the thinkers and poets where the world lives in a destitute of time (Poetry 92). For Heidegger, "The voice of thought must be poetic because poetry is the saying of truth, the saying of the unconcealedness of beings" (Poetry 73). As poetry discloses truth, the poet, as an artist, plays a great role in leading a nation. Accordingly, one can conclude that Heidegger hails poets as leaders whose works disclose the reality, expose the being of things, and disclose the truth, because poetry is the "saying of truth". Our individual and communal life is then shaped by the deeds of the poets who guide our senses to the most significant points in life. What poets discover when they use their language is almost holy if it is gauged in the scale of divinity because of that, Heidegger writes, "to dwell poetically on earth is to find in the simple and homely things of every-day experience the divine and the holy" (Gray 420).

As a great form of art, poetry has this great ability of revealing truth. The poet is responsible to "retrieve truth from the void of forgetfulness" and bring it to light by seeing things in themselves (Gray 418). Heidegger thinks that the poet is the best competent to reach into the abyss because he "entrenches himself in purposeful self-assertion, and by means of absolute

objectification installs himself in the parting against the Open, then he himself promotes his own unshieldedness" (Poetry 117). In his essay "What are poets for?" Heidegger shapes the way for the poets' role in the destitute time. Heidegger does not rely on the religious solutions anymore; he does not believe in the effective role of gods on earth because "the evening of the world's age has been declining toward its night. The era is defined by the god's failure to arrive, or the "default of God" (Heidegger, Poetry 89). Instead, he relies on the power of the imagination of the poetic language. According to Heidegger, "Being can be discovered" and as J. Gleen Gray notes "through the investigation of, the listening to, and meditating upon the language of genuine thinkers and poets" (417). It seems that the objects in the universe are not easily revealed to man and the value of the objects still hidden unless someone reveals its reality. Man has to see things as they are not as they appear to him. Because of the forgetfulness of man to the default of god in the destitute age as gods (of all religions) are the ultimate givers of truth to things, there will be only the thinkers and poets who are able to reveal truth of things to the man (Poetry 92).

In the last phase of his life, Heidegger loses his faith in the ability of the political leaders and their *techne* to conduct a nation in the best way. Instead, he comes to realise that "it was not the *phronimôs* who is the voice of being in our times but the poet "(Gillespie 541). Thus, the great works of writers, such as the poetry of Whitman, the plays and sonnets of Shakespeare, or the tales of Mark Twain are not simply aesthetically pleasing ornamentations of a life form. Rather, they create an authoritative and definitive awareness of a people's form of life. Therefore, it is the poets, not the philosopher, the priests, political leaders, or the scientists who are the vanguard of humanity and the hope of some new understanding of being because they are the vanguard who can change the false conception of being.

Interviewed by *Der Spiegel*, Heidegger reinsures that only God and poetry can save the nation, poetry is the sole route to reveal the truth. Heidegger thinks that neither philosophy nor the individuals influenced by philosophy can change the fateful miserable conditions of the world (The Interview 77). J. Gleen Gray notes, "It is the never-ending task of poets and thinkers to retrieve truth from the void of forgetfulness, to bring it again into the light of the word (418). Commenting on Heidegger's thought, Majka gives an ontological or existential role to the poet. Majka writes, "The poet ...should celebrate being in its everydayness and ordinariness; in other words, s/he should raise everyday life to the level of poetic expression and in doing so unconceal the ontological idiom that contributes to a given paradigmaticization of the world"(57). Hence, Poets will replace gods in revealing the hidden nature of things and there is strong necessity from the side of poets to project themselves to leading the societies. Heidegger admires the viewpoint of the French poet Rene Char that the best way to stop the uprooting of the humanity is when poetry and thinking regain its usual role. (Heidegger, the Reader, 325). Heidegger believes in the power of poetry and thinking in leading the society more than the political systems.



What can poetry and thinking do to reconstruct the crucial circumstances of the world's problems? Heidegger thinks that neither philosophy nor the individuals affected by philosophy can change the fateful miserable conditions of the world. Heidegger believes first in the power of God, then in the ability of people to "awaken the readiness" to bring God forth to their thinking. The only possibility to stimulate this readiness for the appearance of the God "is that by thinking and poetizing" (Heidegger, *The Interview* 58). Heidegger praised the poetry of the German poet Holderlin because it has specific features that enable Heidegger to understand the relationship between thought and technology. The features of Holderlin's poetry are not something simple that "the historians of literature may take as a theme [for study]." Rather, for Heidegger, "Hölderlin is the poet who points into the future, who waits for a god, and who, consequently, should not remain merely an object of research according to the canons of literary history"(The Interview 61). A poet should foresee the future like the prophet who reveals the truth of being.

In his essay "What are Poets For," Heidegger indicates the role of the poet. Poets are there to restore order. Heidegger produces his ideas about the role of the poet as an answer to a question mentioned in Holderlin's elegiac poem entitled "Bread and wine" (Holderlin 7). The question was "for what use are poets in times of need?" (Holderlin 13). So poetry has a great role as a way of understanding the objects of nature. Heidegger quotes some of Holderlin's lines and ideas in his works such as "The Origin of the Work of Art" (Poetry, 76). This fact leads him to hail the role of poetry in the human existence. Alexandra J. Pell in *Truth and Being: Heidegger's Turn to Poetry*, indicates that Heidegger's "reading of Hölderlin's poetry illustrates his belief that an instrumental approach to language will fail to communicate being in the truthful way that the language of poetry can communicate being"(5). Heidegger believes in the power of the poetic language and the role of the poetry in revealing truth. Alexandra J. Pell states, "Heidegger's theory of language places an emphasis on poetry and calls for a complete illumination of man's existence through the revealing of inherent meaning that poetry allows"(5). Pell notices that Heidegger relies largely on poets to guide humanity to the authentic being.

Although the meaninglessness and the absurdity of life, as all the existentialists believe, restoring the order is possible. Mortals can trace the remains of gods to restore the order and heal the destitute of time. However, not every mortal is able to restore the order and fill the gap of the abyss, only poets can do this function (Heidegger, Poetry 91). Poets are the only mortals who can trace the remains of the divinity and reach the abyss because they can reach into the abyss sooner than the heavenly powers (Heidegger, Poetry 91). The other mortals have a complementary role because they must learn to listen to what these poets say (Heidegger, Poetry 92). People have to be receptive because "man is man only because he is granted the promise of language, because he is needful to language, that he may speak it" (Heidegger, *On the Way* 90). Thus, the role of the poet as Heidegger writes is to dwell on the

strand, in that borderland between the human world and "the fateful source of speech" (Heidegger, *On the Way* 67). For Heidegger, although man finds himself thrown in a specific existential situation, it does not mean that the fate of the self is determined and human being cannot change his existence. The existential situation and position of the man can be modified in the world according to the self's existential possibilities (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 86- 87). Heidegger notes that man can transfer from inauthentic to the authentic life. Throughout language and by the help of the poets, people can get the authentic life.

Applying Heidegger's thought to Whitman's Oeuvres

Earlier in his works, Whitman presents his poetic theory and marks the role of the poet in building up the nation and curing the miseries and the social diseases in his society. Robert Louis Stevenson frequently presents Whitman as a poetic theorist for he sees that Whitman's poems entails "theories about poetry and American society than it does traditional poems" (Bloom 53). Throughout this poetic theory, Whitman, Stevenson beliefs, has put the foundations for the future poets. Thus, Whitman "has not made the poetry, but he flatters himself he has done something toward making the poets" (Stevenson 89-90). The central point in his theory is not the style of the poetry, but the poets themselves. Focusing on the important literature that deals with "democratic ideal of humanity," Stevenson thinks, Whitman helps focusing on the human experience regardless of the education, class, or gender differences. For Whitman, bard's role surpasses the president's one. In section 9 of his poem "By Blue Ontario's Shore," Whitman writes, "Their Presidents shall not be their common referee so much as their poets shall" (*Leaves of Grass* 399). Presidents are elected only to serve citizens. Whitman gives only one way to unite a nation; the way that goes through the poets. It is not worth enough to hold the subjects via power; the nation needs the poet more than the presidents because the nation's veins are full of "poetical stuff":

By them [poets] all native and grand, by them alone can these States be fused into the compact organism of a Nation to hold men together by paper and seal or by compulsion is no account. That only holds men together which aggregates all in a living principle, as the hold of the limbs of the body or the fibres of plants. (Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* 399).

Based on Heidegger's philosophy, Whitman calls to follow new heroes, namely the poets, because there is a "possibility that Dasein may choose its hero" (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 347). People need poets because their poetic language is "the saying of truth"(Heidegger, *Poetry* 73). As the nation needs to "hold its men together" and hold the "limbs of its body", truth, which is revealed in the "saying" of poets, can be a refuge and a shelter for the nation. Whitman's idea of following poets as heroes is, according to Heidegger, a kind of constituting a "fundamental aspects of ... [the people's] identities" (Thomson115). Whitman urges his people to listen to the poets who are "their common referee." This call comes under



Heidegger's umbrella that "The voice of thought must be poetic because poetry is the saying of truth, the saying of the unconcealedness of beings." (Heidegger, Poetry 73). Generally, referees use language as a tool for judgment in revealing truth. This tool, which Heidegger agrees to be "the most dangerous good" (Heidegger, Elucidation 52), is similar to the poetic tool used by the poets. As such, poets and referrers use the same tool to reveal truth. Moreover, Whitman goes further to put poets as the only "arbiter" of the nation (*Leaves of Grass* 399).

Based on Heidegger's view that art is the "the saying of truth, the saying of the unconcealedness of beings" (Heidegger, Poetry 73), Whitman declares that his poems give the reader the value of things where one can understand the value of things as the poet wants to disclose the being of things:

I bring what you much need yet always have,
Not money, amours, dress, eating, erudition, but as good,

I send no agent or medium, offer no representative of value, but offer the value itself. (LG 240)

The poet presents something great to his readers; he does not present materialistic things, but s/he presents "the value itself". In the 1855 Preface of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman says, "folks expect of the poet to indicate more than the beauty and dignity which always attach to dumb real objectsthey expect him to indicate the path between reality and their souls" (24). Thus, the function of poetry tends to be more than disclosedness of beauty and dignity of the objects in the world where this role is related to the ornament function of poetry, rather people need the poet to diagnose the reality.

One of the greatest role of the poet is to show reality of thing's being and explains the existential experience; "Need I that you exist and *show* yourself any more than in these songs"(LG 139); "What can be answer'd he [the poet] answers, and what cannot be answer'd he shows how it cannot be answer'd"(LG 200). Stevenson notes that the most important point in Whitman's poetry is that Whitman writes about his thoughts that reflects the readers' own thoughts; the poet is one of the society. In this vein, Whitman writes, "The poet is individual—he is complete in himself: the others are as good as he; only he sees it, and they do not."(LG 1855,7); Whitman's poems depicts the "the average population of America [. . .] as it is" (Stevenson 94) because the function of poetry is, similar to the human law; it is "declaratory". This feature of declaration reflects the role of art in Heidegger's thoughts that the main purpose of art is "revelation." Stevenson states, "the poet must study his fellow-countrymen and himself somewhat like a traveller on the hunt for his book of travels" (94).



Although technology and modern occupations receive a good treatment in Section 15 of "Song of Myself," such as the "Steamboat pilot, the spinning girl, the policeman travels his beat, sewing machine, the factory and the mill," Whitman still believes that the great cities are built with orators and poets. Hence the central tool of building the nations will be the language. Whitman catalogs many manmade aspects of modernity and technology in the society. However, he still prefers the metaphorical aspect and the organic nature to the technological ones. In section four of "Song of the Broad Axe" Whitman asks, "Do you think a great city endures. Or a teeming manufacturing state? Or a prepared/ constitution? Or the best built steamships" (*Leaves of Grass* 219-220). After that, Whitman answers, "A great city is that which has the greatest men and women/ it is the city that stands with the brawniest breed of orators/ and bards" (*Leaves of Grass* 220). The great city needs great poets and orators to help people to connect with nature and divinity within themselves.

Based on Heidegger's thought of the power of poetry to "awaken the readiness" and bring God forth thinking (The Interview 58), the only possibility to stimulate this readiness for the appearance of the God "is that by thinking and poetising" (The Interview 58). In *Democratic Vistas*, Whitman calls up for a "copious race of superb American men and women"(181) to lead the expanding America. In a question presented in *Democratic Vistas* about who must lead such a great nation after the expected expansion of its states and population, Whitman answers, "the mightiest original non-subordinated SOUL [...whose] other name, in these Vistas, is LITERATURE"(192). The exponents of this literature will be the composers of poems; the elite of "orbic bards"(189) who will be the "sweet democratic despots of the west"(189).

Evoking Heidegger's thought that poets are the only mortals who can trace the remains of gods, politicians and priests are no longer authentic leaders. As a result, Heidegger claims that "only poets and thinkers speak a new world into being (Zimmerman 114). Whitman trusts poets only to be authentic leaders and the only mortals among the other leaders can be a hero. In his poem "Song of the Answerer," Whitman argues that the poet is the answerer of the different questions in the world regardless of the field of the subject or the people who need the answer; the poet will be pleased and accepted to give the answers. The poet can give all the signs to anyone presents a request because he (the poet) has the decisive final answer for all the questions:

"Him [the poets] all wait for, him all yield up to, his word is decisive and final, Him they accept, in him lave, in him perceive themselves as amid light, Him they immerse and he immerses them"(Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* 199).

Another heroic task for the poet is to register the truth and the events of the nation for the future generations especially during and after the war. Whitman writes:

Adieu dear comrade,
Your mission is fulfilled—but I, more warlike,
Myself and this contentious soul of mine,
Still on our own campaigning bound (Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* 380)

Whitman compares poets, who register the events of the war and shoulder others' responsibilities, with soldiers who fight in the battle. The soldier's job ends when the war runs out, but the poet's duty continuous in order to register the true events and reveal what lies behind the scene of war. The poet has to reveal the truth of the bad sequence of the war; he shows the sequel of the war. For Whitman, a new kind of battle is on now; it is the poet's battle of expression and writing poetry to the next generations: "With war and war's expression./ Adieu dear comrade, / Your mission is fulfill'd -- but I, more warlike,/ Myself and this contentious soul of mine,/ Still on our own campaigning bound" (*Leaves of Grass* 380). Whitman thinks that the poet must linger to "give expression" to battles yet to be fought, battles against forgetting too soon the horrors of the war (Oliver 23). The battle of the expression is harder and weightier than the front battle. It is the job of the poet to give suitable expression to such fiercer, weightier battles. Whitman writes, "Spell of all brave and manly hearts, the trains of time through you and like of you all fill'd, /With war and war's expression (*Leaves of Grass* 380). Whitman's idea of the war of expression finds its place in Heidegger's philosophy when Heidegger agrees that human beings have been a "conversation" (Elucidations 57), in a sense that "Man's being is grounded in language; but this actually occurs only in *conversation*. Conversation, however, is not only a way in which language takes place, but rather language is essential only as conversation" (Heidegger, *Elucidations* 57). Heidegger depicts people as a conversation where there are two aspects in any conversation: speaking and listening. Both of them people use language to express themselves. People not only use a conversation, rather they live *in* it. People are united in language and expression. Departing from this idea, one can understand the power of "expression" in Whitman's job, which surpasses the soldiers' one. Whitman's expression will subscribe in the future conversation.

In his poem, "To a Historian," Whitman gives a new role to the poet. The poet reveals the events of history in a new way different from the ordinary historian. The poet is projected as a historian and/or a prophet. The same sense that he feels while writing this poem at that time will be presented to the future reader of the poem. To focus light on such Heideggerian idea about the function of poetry, J. Gleen Gray remarks, "it is the never-ending task of poets and thinkers to retrieve truth from the void of forgetfulness, to bring it again into the light of the word" (418). Most of time, people forget the events of the history. They need someone to remind them and explain the reality of those events. The importance of registering the true

events of history comes clear in Heidegger's thoughts about function of poetry. For Heidegger:

Poetry is not merely an ornament accompanying existence, not merely a temporary enthusiasm and certainly not excitement or amusement. Poetry is the sustaining ground of history, and therefore not just an appearance of culture, above all not the mere "expression" of the "soul of a culture. (Elucidations 60)

Building upon Heidegger's above view, Whitman describes the function of poetry that it is not merely words arranged in a poem; the true poetry organises people's life in peace and war, in politics and simple life. Whitman writes:

The words of the true poems give you more than poems,
They give you to form for yourself poems, religions, politics, war,
peace, behavior, histories, essays, daily life, and everything else,
They balance ranks, colors, races, creeds, and the sexes. (*Leaves of Grass* 202)

Whitman's "To a Historians" outlines the future of America and explains how Whitman himself, as a poet, tries to project the history of the future of his nation. Whitman states:

Chanter of Personality, outlining what is yet to be,
I project the history of the future. (*Leaves of Grass* 18)

The poet is given the rank of a prophet; both, the poet and the historian will interpret modern democracy to the reader as a new religion. Whitman himself declares, "I...inaugurate a religion"(Leaves of Grass 43). Like a prophet, Robert Louis Stevenson claims, Whitman woke readers to the marvels of creation, bidding them return to the experience of life itself (Blooms 53). The poet should explain the idea of democracy in the same way a prophet explains religion and God for people. Charles M. Oliver remarks:

[Whitman] believed that one of the functions of poet-prophets throughout history had been to explain phantom ideals to listeners or readers. Greek poets explained the illusive thoughts and actions of immortal gods and goddesses to believing mortals; modern poets explain the ideals of their own times. (79)

Heidegger rhymes with Holderlin's thoughts about the position of the poet as a mediator between gods and people. In his elucidation of Holderlin's poetry, Heidegger infers that, "The poet himself stands between the former—the gods—and the latter—the people. He is the one who has been cast out—out into that between, between gods and men" (*Existence and Being* 312). The poet intermediates between gods and mortals; he/she receives the signs of gods and

hands them down to the people. For Heidegger the poet receives the “hints” (the language of gods) and passes them to people (Elucidations 62). Poets will construe these signs poetically and intuitively. Poets observe the existence and interpret what they see creatively. In this way, the poet shares the prophets of their job for his intercepting between god and people, then poets are closer to god and truth than other people are. Thus, poets have great knowledge of the truth than others. This knowledge makes poets spell the essence of being more clearly than all mortals are. This position of the poets makes them prophets of the modern trends in society including the new religion of democracy announced by Walt Whitman who indicates his receiving of such hints and refers to his prophetic power in these lines:

Prophetic spirit of materials shifting and flickering around me,
Living beings, identities now doubtless near us in the air that we know not of,
Contact daily and hourly that will not release me,
These selecting, these in hints demanded of me. (*Leaves of Grass* 45-44)

In more than one occasion, Whitman declares his poems to be the new religion of America that appropriate for the scientific and democratic culture of the nation. Whitman writes, "Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or am touch'd from" (*Leaves of Grass* 73). Whether Whitman succeeded in his prophetic mission or not, Whitman's friends pronounce such prophetic position to Whitman and they declare his book a new Gospel (Kuebrich197). Watching the disunity in his nation, Whitman argues that politicians and rulers do not have the ability to "hold men together"; only poets can bring together the nation in a "living principle" that can hold men like the "limbs of the body" or like the boughs of the plants. Since his nation's veins are "full of poetical stuff," the political readers "shall not be their common referees so much as their poets shall" (*Leaves of Grass* 399). Whitman claims that the great role for the poet in his nation is to be an equalisers and a judge: the poet is the "equable man, the arbiter of the diverse" (*Leaves of Grass* 400). The poet has a role in each field of life. In peace, the poet encourages agriculture, arts, commerce, lighting the study of man, the soul, health, immortality, government," (*Leaves of Grass* 400) whereas in war, the poet is "the best backer" and his words are like bullets that "draw blood" (*Leaves of Grass* 400). Furthermore, the poet is "the leader of leaders" because he is the best who articulates the great idea "of perfect and free individuals" (*Leaves of Grass* 400). Whitman does not declare clearly his situation about the presence or absence of gods; he keeps "silent if there is dispute in God and eternity" (*Leaves of Grass* 400). This situation towards the eternity and the fugitive of gods in Whitman's thought is less frank than Heidegger's thought about the fugitive of gods that is mentioned openly in his essay "What are poets for." Definitely, Whitman finds the remains of gods and he avows that the poet "sees eternity less like a play with a prologue and denouement, /He sees eternity in men and women, he does not see men and women as dreams or dots " (*Leaves of Grass* 400). Because the job of the priests is related to the dead people, time of their greatness will shortly disappear; instead, poets will

lead time of life. Whitman slightly hints for the fugitive of divinity in the following line: "There will shortly be no more priests, I say their work is done, / Death is without emergencies here, but life is perpetual emergencies here" (*Leaves of Grass* 403). Death is related to the priests while life is related to the poet whose existence is a perpetual emergency to human's life.

One of the great issues in Whitman's time was slavery and race discrimination which were periods when the country was in a state of destitution and reach the abyss. So the poet's role is to adjust the disorder of the cast system; the poet "cheers up slaves and horrifies foreign despots. Without extinction is Liberty, without retrograde is Equality" (*Leaves of Grass* 400). In his preface to *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman writes, "Obedience does not master him [the poet], he master it" (*Complete Prose Work* 261). The poet is not subjugated to any norms and convictions imposed upon him; the poet "is not one of the chorus- he does not stop for any regulation- he is the president of regulation" (*Complete Prose Work* 261). The poet stands against the social diseases and works as a social reformer through his words. Wojciech Majka argues that, "poetry for Whitman is similar to religion in the sense that he thinks that it has the potential to solidify the American nation. The poet, in Whitman's opinion, is the 'divine literatus' as he calls him in *Democratic Vistas*" (70). Although his disillusionment about the problems of new age and the loss of spirituality in the nation, new artists and writers, by a new style, can restore America's distinct culture and spiritual identity. (*Complete Prose Work* 202).

Whitman argues that America, in 1871, had accomplished two stages of its way, and it needs to accomplish the third stage of its existence. "Democracy has passed successfully through two stages – first the establishment of a government and second the securing of 'material prosperity' for the great majority of common people" (Killingsworth 91). The great role of achieving the third phase of the democratic culture will fall on the intellectuals such as poets and authors, "to be evidenced by original authors and poets to come, by American personalities, plenty of them, male and female and by native superb tableaux and growths of language, songs, operas, orations, lectures, architecture – and by a sublime and serious Religious Democracy" (71). Following Heidegger in "What are Poets For?" where poets stand as the only mortals who traces the remains of gods, M. Jimmie Killingsworth writes, "Whitman takes the responsibility for the soul's development away from the church and places it squarely in the hands of the poet: The priest departs, the divine literatus comes" (91). Because of the social problems and the civil war, the American nation, at the time of Whitman, was shattered and its people were tormented. Accordingly, the nation looks for a salvation. Only a bard of democracy, Whitman thinks, is entrusted with the task of linking together the diverse individuals who can make up this young "nation announcing itself" (*Leaves of Grass* 394), by celebrating the greatness of their daily life.

Whitman relies on the role of the poet in stirring up the spirituality of his nation. After the effect of many destructive issues in America such as the civil war (from 1861 to 1865) and the crushing change caused by the industrial revolution, Whitman reclaims the role of the poets again. The poet has to help people in enriching their spiritual life. Although his disillusionment, new artists and writers, by a new style, can reveal America's distinct culture and spiritual identity:

...a single new thought, imagination, abstract principle, even literary style, fit for the time, put in shape by some great literatus, and projected among mankind, may duly cause changes, growths, removals, greater than the longest and bloodiest war, or the most stupendous merely political, dynastic, or commercial overturn. (*Prose Works* 239)

Whitman declares that what America needs, at that time, to surpass its problems, is poetry. The nation needs poets more than politicians. Whitman believes that "Of all races and eras these States with veins full of poetical stuff most need poets, and are to have the greatest, and use them the greatest, their Presidents shall not be their common referee so much as their poets shall" (*Leaves of Grass* 399). Therefore, the power of poetry of healing the problems of the nation is more effective than the power of the governments. Poets are the new heroes of the nation. In addition, the authenticity and reliability of the poets as referees are more than presidents.

Whitman hails science and scientists, and produces his supports to the modern science. In section 23 of "Song of Myself," Whitman writes, "Hurrah for positive science!.../This is the lexicographer, this the chemist, this made a grammar of the old cartouches,/These mariners put the ship through dangerous unknown seas./This is the geologist, this works with the scalper, and this is a mathematician" (*Leaves of Grass*, 71). Although these inventions, professions, and modern discoveries are useful, one cannot parallel them to the words of the poets and the spiritual role of the poetry. Scientists cannot be the heroes of the society. In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger makes a difference between science and philosophy, and he equalizes poetry to philosophy. He considers philosophy and poetry as belonging to a higher order than mere sciences. Heidegger states, "Philosophy stands in a completely different domain and rank of spiritual Dasein. Only poetry is of the same order as philosophical thinking" (*Introduction to Metaphysics* 28). This superiority of poetry over the mere science comes from the "essential superiority of the spirit holds sway in poetry. Because of this superiority, the poet always speaks as if beings were expressed and addressed for the first time" (*Introduction to Metaphysics* 28). Based on Heidegger's view about sciences, Whitman address the scientists that, "Your facts are useful, and yet they are not my dwelling, /I but enter by them to an area of my dwelling" (*Leaves of Grass* 72). The real dwelling, according to Heidegger, is by means of the poetic language; "to dwell poetically on earth is to

find in the simple and homely things of every-day experience the divine and the holy.” (Gray 420). In the Preface of 1855 *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman shows the difference between roles among the occupations that "chemist astronomer geologist phrenologist spiritualist mathematician historian and lexicographer are not poets, but they are the lawgivers of poets and their construction underlies the structure of every perfect poem" (*Prose Works* 447), poets have a higher status than scientists because they make the spiritual connection between the senses and technology. According to Heidegger, "Poetry first of all admits man's dwelling into its very nature, its presenting being. Poetry is the original admission of dwelling ... Authentic building occurs so far as there are poets, such poets as take the measure for architecture, the structure of dwelling" (Poetry, 225). The language of the science helps man to dwell in the earth but the poetic language is essential to make man dwells authentically. For Whitman, the world needs the poets in addition to the modern scientists because poets link the rational physical being of people with forms of nature (*Prose Works* 221). In addition, poets can "absorb whatever science indicates" (*Prose Works* 221). The view of Whitman regarding the importance of the poets in the new technological world was displayed at the beginning of the scientific revolt where the passive side of technology was not as clear.

Conclusion

Since people are immersed in the idle talk of the everydayness, and engaged in the materialistic life of modernity, they need special models or heroes to lead them authentically to understand the meaning of their existence. The poetic language of the poets can help people to live authentically because poetry, according to Heidegger, is the discovery of being and it is a way of revealing reality. A modern nation needs poets to restore the position of the high culture of a society after it is changed to a mass culture and to find out the truth of its being. Poets can play an essential role more than presidents and priests in the modern era. Although the time of technology brings with it many problems, poetic language can be a suitable remedy for these problems and restore the meaning to the nihilistic technological world. Through reading the poetic theory of Whitman through the lenses of Heidegger, the study finds that poets alone are able to play the role of the modern hero, or the Christ-like characters, who can reach the abyss and restore the order. Whitman hails the position of the positive science and technology, but he thinks that the new technological aspects could not replace the power of poetry. Poets have the higher rank over other kind of people because they represent the spiritual link between senses and technology and they stand as mediator between gods and people. By means of poetic language, man can dwell on earth. Whitman annexes a new and fresh signification of the very notion to the function of poetry. Thus, the poet has the prophetic role of bringing back the truth of the nation's being. Following Heidegger's thoughts of the heroic and guiding role of poets, Whitman's work reveals great interest of using poetic language as a cure for the ontological concerns. The call of Whitman for following the poets can be read through the spectacles of Heidegger whose theory of the



hero suggests the possibility of repeating the authentic life of heroes. As we see in the body of this essay, Heidegger turns to poetic language as a way to reveal reality and discover the being of things. The study concludes that poets can be heroes; poets can replace the heroic role once played by priests and political leaders.



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