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The Art and Literature of Democracy: Walt Whitman and Robert Henri | Demokrasinin Sanatı ve Edebiyatı:
Walt Whitman ve Robert Henri

Yazar

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ABSTRACT

Walt Whitman (1819–1892) was a highly influential poet and essayist whose works influenced many poets, writers and even painters. The most important feature that distinguished him from his contemporaries was that he wrote for and about marginalized people. He has contributed to literature by addressing people of different ethnic backgrounds, classes and cultures. He favored simplicity in language and expression, since he aimed to make his works readable by everyone. His work *Leaves of Grass*, which describes his understanding of democracy, was subjected to intense criticism when it was published. However, his visionary literary understanding inspired some artists and allowed them to follow him. One of his most important followers was Robert Henri, and he focused on ordinary people in his works like Whitman. The understanding developed by Whitman and Henri became a cornerstone in the democratization of art and literature against the widespread understanding of art centered on the rich, aristocrats and elites. By examining their main works and philosophies, the present article aims to demonstrate how Whitman and Henri contributed to the democratization of art and literature.

Keywords: Walt Whitman, Robert Henri, Art and Literature, Democracy

ÖZ

Walt Whitman (1819–1892) eserleri pek çok şair yazar ve hatta ressamı etkilemiş olan oldukça etkili bir şair ve yazardı. Onu çağdaşlarından farklı kılan en önemli özellik marjinal insanlar hakkında ve onlar için yazmasıdır. Farklı sınıf, kültür ve etnik kökenlerden insanlar hakkında yazılar kaleme almak suretiyle edebiyata katkıda bulunmuştur. Eserlerinin herkesçe okunabilmesini amaçladığı için dil ve anlatımda sadeliği tercih etmiştir. Demokrasi anlayışını ortaya koyduğu *Leaves of Grass* eseri yayınlandığında yoğun eleştiriye maruz kalmıştır. Lakin onun ileri görüşlü edebi fikirleri bazı sanatçılara ilham olmuş ve onu takip etmelerine neden olmuştur. En önemli takipçilerinden biri de Robert Henri olmuştur ve o da Whitman gibi eserlerinde sıradan insanları konu almıştır. Whitman ve Henri tarafından geliştirilen bu bakış demokratikleşmede bir mihenk taşı olmuş ve zenginlere, aristokratlara ve elitlere yönelik sanat ve edebiyat anlayışına karşı durmuştur. Bu makale adı geçen sanatçıların temel eserlerini ve felsefelerini incelemek suretiyle Whitman ve Henri'nin sanat ve edebiyatın demokratikleşmesine sundukları katkıyı ortaya koymayı amaçlar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Walt Whitman, Robert Henri, Sanat ve Edebiyat, Demokrasi

Introduction

Walt Whitman (1819–1892) had an undeniable effect on the idea of multiculturalism. Whitman's understanding of democracy is wider in perspective, calls for plurality and defies the idea of otherness. For Whitman, every individual is

very precious regardless of sex, race and sexual orientation. He did not classify or separate people as rich or poor, white or black, male or female. Whitman saw America as a whole consisting of various components such as white or black, mainstream or marginal, heterosexual or homosexual. The so-called binary opposites were not clashing ideas for Whitman; on the contrary, they constituted the cultural richness of the society. He was a democratic and an egalitarian poet who embraced all types of people in his works. He considered himself as a part of America in which people from various backgrounds live. This egalitarian attitude of Whitman affected many artists and one among these artists is Robert Henri. Robert Henri (1865-1929) has broken the tradition of portraying noble people and he has included every kind of people from all walks of society in his portraits. The democratic and egalitarian attitude of Henri stemmed from the influence of Whitman on his art. The feature that makes Whitman and Henri different from his contemporaries is that both artists had a pluralistic, democratic and egalitarian concept of art and literature. That is to say, they put forth a new understanding of art.

Both artists are the founders of their own schools of thought and, in this sense, they are unique. Whitman is the founder of a new and more pluralistic democracy that embraces each and every individual. Throughout his life, Walt Whitman struggled so that his thoughts could be understood. Another very important characteristic of Whitman is that he wanted to make his art public. His addressees were mostly common people and he aimed at reaching them. However, although common people were favored, upper-class people were not excluded from his art either. That is arguably the reason for his uniqueness. A kind of art which favored the poor had so far seen the upper-class as hostile. On the other hand, high art was elitist and ignored the common people. However, Whitman aimed at establishing the perfect American unity by embracing everyone unconditionally. Robert Henri is the founder of The Ashcan School.¹ Robert Henri and his fellow artists came together to found The Ashcan School. Robert Henri is known as the founder of the school and the school was founded in 1891 in Philadelphia. The Ashcan School consisted of a group of urban realist painters in America creating work around the early part of

¹ The information about The Ashcan school was obtained from the web site <http://www.artmovements.co.uk/ashcanschool.htm>.

20th century. Robert Henri and his fellow artists founded the school which would later be called the Ashcan School (Weinberg, “The Ashcan School”). Luks, John Sloan, William Glackens, and Everett Shinn were the artists invited by Henri to the new artistic movement (“Ashcan School”). The main interest and concern of the movement was to portrayal of real life and urban life (“Ashcan School”). This was revolutionary for its time as they considered the everyday lives of common people worth including in art. The Ashcan School artists believed that urban life, the lives of poor people and their meaningful struggle constituted art. The Ashcan School developed their own style. As Whitman did in literature, The Ashcan artists also abstained from an elaborate style. They applied thick brush strokes, the paint was applied heavily and the style was not ostentatious (“Ashcan School”).

The fact that the school attached less importance to style than subject matter is also an influence of Whitman. Whitman was more interested in what he had to say than saying it elaborately. Another very important deed of the Ashcan artists in democratizing art was to protest the exhibition monopoly. A group of artists in The Ashcan School, which is known as the fraction named “The Eight”, protested the restrictions of exhibitions. As a protest to the artistic hierarchy, The Eight organized their own exhibition in 1908. The exhibition became a symbol in American Art because they resisted the hierarchy and established their own exhibitions where no juries were invited. Hence, they fought against convention as Whitman did (“Ashcan School”).

1. Walt Whitman and His Understanding of Democracy

Jason Frank argues the Walt Whitman calls for a unique type of democracy which he combines with aesthetics. Frank states that :

For Whitman, the popular commitment to democracy requires an aesthetic evaluation, and he aimed to enact the required reconfiguration of popular sensibility through the poetic depiction of the people as themselves a sublimely poetic, world-making power...Whitman's conception of aesthetic democracy illuminates three regions of inquiry usually neglected in contemporary democratic theory: the relationship between aesthetics and politics, the invariably poetic construction of

the people, and the people themselves envisioned as a poetic, world-making power. (2007: 403-404)

As Frank mentions, Whitman`s democracy was a unique type of democracy and should be interpreted not only as a literary current but also as a political movement. He created his art for his people and he did not follow the idea that art is for the sake of art. Also he called for a perfect combination of aesthetics and politics, which makes him unique. This combination would give way to the world Whitman was missing; the poetic world where all kinds of people would be able to express themselves effectively. In that sense, Whitman became the voice of *the other* because this act of self expression was valid and necessary for everyone. He saved poetry, which is known as the rhetoric of the elite, from the monopoly of WASP voices, thus, Whitman liberated and democratized poetry.

Walt Whitman had a mystical concept of religion. He had religion as part of his philosophy; however, his religious ideas were different from a traditional religion. He was in favor of a religion in which literature has a say. Herrero-Brasas explains Whitman`s understanding of religion as follows:

Whitman consciously attempted to infuse that peculiarly religious emotion in his poems, and was concerned that it should be found in them. It is this principle that brings about the identification of literature with religion, an essential feature in Whitman`s religious conception. In the first preface to *Leaves of Grass* we find Whitman`s conviction clearly spelled out that literature is, indeed, to be one with religion. Furthermore, the new and true Religion. (2010: 26)

Whitman talked about how traditional concept of religion falls short in meeting the needs of people. For Whitman, a new understanding and reinterpretation of religion is obligatory.

The time has certainly come to begin to discharge the idea of Religion, in the United States, from mere ecclesiasticism, and from Sundays and churches and church-going [. . .]. It must be consigned henceforth to Democracy *en masse*, and to Literature. It must enter into the poems of the nation. (Whitman Qt. in Herrero-Brasas, 2010: 26)

Literature had a profound place in Whitman's philosophy. This meant that literature would mostly replace religion and/or become part of it. It could only be through literature that people would be able to understand each other, express themselves and embrace each other. The unity of literature and religion is expressed as follows by Whitman: "in view of that progress and of evolution, the religious element, the most important of any, seems to me more indebted to poetry than to all other means and influences combined. In a very profound sense religion *is* the poetry of humanity"(Whitman Qtd. in Herrero-Brasas, 2010: 26).

Frank summarizes the socio-political situation in which Walt Whitman wrote his works as follows:

The social and political crisis of the 1850s was marked by widespread political corruption, a widening gap between rich and poor, rising immigration and corresponding anti-immigrant feeling, high urban death rates, and a fragmented political system in the wake of the death of the old party system. Overwhelming all these factors, of course, was the expanding power of Southern slavery. (2007: 406)

Arguably, the political unrest and the tumult in the society necessitated Whitman's outspoken philosophy. His philosophy was born out of an obligation and as a conscious man of thought, Whitman could not stay neutral.

Whitman saw himself as a member of common people and embraced people from all walks of society. Whitman did not intend to carry out the mission of educating people. Instead of educating people, Whitman chose to love people and instead of speaking for people, Whitman chose to speak like them. Frank expresses how Whitman spoke from an egalitarian stance in his works.

As a poet engaging with, and situated within, this surging poetic and democratic power of the people, Whitman does not attempt a usurpation of popular voice, nor does he simply play the role of ventriloquist. Rather than speaking for the people, Whitman aims to speak to and among them... Whitman notes that "literature, strictly speaking, has never recognized the people."(2007: 425-426)

By saying literature has never recognized people, Whitman objects the mainstream elitist stance of art. Whitman rejected the idea of high art and created an

egalitarian art. The same aspect applies to Henri as he defied the elitism of the tradition of portraiture. Whitman brought a new understanding of democracy which embraced those who had been considered marginal before. Under the influence of what I want to call “Whitmanian Democracy”, Robert Henri would later create works of art which embraced what had been considered “the other” before. Willcox describes Whitman’s understanding of democracy and equality by stating that:

Whitman's vision carried at once beyond any such small matter. He uttered the word en masse, realizing that humanity was in reality one and a totality, and that no man can reach very much higher than the whole to which he belongs, any more than a chain can be stronger than its weakest link. To every man who should be drawn to him he desires to assert two things. That the possibilities of growth and goodness are infinite, and that evil is not fatal. (1906: 283)

From the words of Willcox one can infer that Walt Whitman had a very positive, constructive and optimistic attitude and he believed wholeheartedly in the possibility of the establishment of an unconditional democracy. Whitman’s understanding of democracy is a sacred democracy. Whitman and Henri were two great artists that became the voices of the people from all walks of society. They never looked at their people from atop. Although poetry and portraiture were traditionally accepted as elitist arts, they drew their own way and rejected an elitist convention. They created the art of their people. According to Fletcher, Whitman’s democracy was unprecedented. Fletcher states that:

Whitman was the supreme, the only democratic poet the world has ever possessed. In the hierarchy of art he stands alone in denying that art has a hierarchy. One need only read a page of his writings, and to institute a comparison with the technique displayed therein with the technique shown by any other competent writer, in order to see that in reality Whitman had no technique. To a writer whose aim is distinction in utterance, it is not so much the substance of what he says that is offensive, as his way of saying it. (1924: 355)

As Whitman refused hierarchies, he automatically rejected the elitist structure of literature. He purposefully abstained from elaborateness in writing. This

enabled the readers to focus more on the meaning rather than the style. What Whitman had to say was more important than his way of saying things.

2. *Leaves of Grass* as a Democracy Manifesto

Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* was produced in a period of 37 years, which shows its importance of Whitman's maturation as a philosopher and a poet. Within this life span, Whitman's understanding of democracy has been shaped. The congruent aspect of the collection is that in nowhere of the work is there any idea contradicting Whitmanian democracy. That is to say, Whitman's ideas have been shaped within these thirty-seven years, however, this shaping was an act of developing not changing. Whitman was consistent in his attitude that there should be a new form of democracy because the current democracy rhetoric fell short in including and embracing every individual of the society. The American democracy was a democracy of the white people. No need to mention that The United States of America has always been a place where severe infringements of human rights have been exercised. Racism was at its peak in Whitman's time. Therefore, it is not surprising that Whitman called for a new democracy. This new democracy was meant to re-institutionalize American public components. It called for a new understanding of religion, art and literature. The traces of Whitman's new understanding of literature are evident in his writing style. Poetry, which had always been associated with rhythmical patterns, metrical arrangements and rhyme, seems to change in Whitman's style. In fact, Whitman rejected these patterns of poetry writing. The reason why he rejected these patterns was that he was against an elaborate style in poetry writing because an elaborate poetical style is supposedly elitist. Another important factor is that, focusing on and paying too much attention to the form might reduce the importance the poet would attach to the meaning. However, Whitman concentrated on the meaning he wanted to convey. He wanted to make his art available to everyone and he wanted his words to be clearly understood because his words carried a socio-political mission. Thus, Whitman defied pattern and focused on the meaning. He wanted to form a new movement in American Literature. He wrote in free verse so that his meaning would be clear. The long process enabled the poet create his masterpiece collection and the work was fed by turbulent changes and traumas in American history. He struggled for the shaping

of the new identity of Americans. His democracy naturally included everyone regardless of whether they were black or white, homosexual or heterosexual or rich or poor. In addition, his poetry was very sensitive toward nature. Nature was also seen as a part of the American entity. Of course, this idea came from transcendentalism and/or romanticism (in Britain). Nature was seen as not only as a living entity that is part of the environment but also it was seen as a deity.

In *I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing*, Whitman used the oak figure as a living entity through which the poet contemplates and enters into a state of meditation. In Whitman's poetry, nature is alive and is an individual like human-beings and, in addition, is mystical. Therefore, Whitmanian democracy did not only cover the othered individuals but also nature. In the poem, Whitman observed the oak tree in Louisiana. The oak tree is presented as a weary tree. It is rough, alone, and its leaves are dark.

I saw in Louisiana a live-oak growing,

All alone stood it and the moss hung down from the branches,
Without any companion it grew there uttering joyous leaves of dark green,
And its look, rude, unbending, lusty, made me think of myself,

But I wonder'd how it could utter joyous leaves standing alone there... (150)

It is clearly seen that the poet associates himself with the oak tree because he sees himself in the tree. The tree becomes a meditation, a state of trance and a medium upon which to contemplate. His "rude, unbending, lusty" (150) characteristics are also found in the tree, which means that he and nature share common features. One can infer from this quotation that Whitman included nature as part of his democracy. Whitman also referred to the importance of love in his utopia. Love is also part of his democracy because Whitmanian democracy is based on love. Whitman is surprised to see that the oak tree is standing there friendless.

For all that, and though the live-oak glistens there in Louisiana solitary
in a wide in a wide flat space,

Uttering joyous leaves all its life without a friend a lover near,

I know very well I could not. (150)

Thus, companionship is a very significant theme in Whitman's poetry. In *To A Stranger*, the idea of companionship is apparent. Walt Whitman saw every American as a brother and sister and embraced them. Although they might not have become acquainted, people had a common feature in their collective American identity. Whitman expressed this familiarity as follows:

Passing stranger! you do not know how longingly I look upon you,

You must be he I was seeking, or she I was seeking, (it comes to me as of a dream,)

I have somewhere surely lived a life of joy with you,

All is recall'd as we flit by each other, fluid, affectionate, chaste, matured,

You grew up with me, were a boy with me or a girl with me,

I ate with you and slept with you, your body has become not yours only nor left my body mine only,

You give me the pleasure of your eyes, face, flesh, as we pass, you take of my beard, breast, hands, in return,

I am not to speak to you, I am to think. (Whitman 151)

The poet describes somebody he misses in association with the stranger and the stranger becomes highly acquainted because Whitman saw the world from a perspective in which people are seen as equal. Whitman's democracy was not a national democracy it was a universal democracy. He wanted to embrace every person from different countries, cultures and religions. He saw the world as a whole and believed in the unity of all people. This is seen clearly in the poem *This Moment Yearning and Thoughtful*.

This moment yearning and thoughtful sitting alone,

It seems to me there are other men in other lands yearning and thoughtful,

It seems to me I can look over and behold them in Germany, Italy, France,
Spain,

Or far, far away, in China, or in Russia or talking other dialects,

And it seems to me if I could know those men I should become attached to
them as I do to men in my own lands,

O I know we should be brethren and lovers,

I know I should be happy with them. (152)

Whitman's empathy is very wide. While sitting alone in a thoughtful manner, he feels that there could be other people in different parts of the world feeling the way as he does. It is clearly understood that Whitman thinks about and tries to develop empathy with people from other countries as well. This shows the universal dimensions of Whitmanian democracy.

The Song of Myself is another very important poem in *Leaves of Grass*. Walt Whitman talks about himself, his ideas and feelings; however, the poet does not talk merely about himself but he talks about himself in relation to his people.

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,

And what I assume you shall assume,

For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you. (52)

In this section, the poet refers to the unity of Whitman with the people with whom he associates himself. As mentioned above, the speech is not merely concerned in the individual poet but the universal Whitmanian thought. Whitman relates the microcosm with the macrocosm in his poem. He likens the houses to perfumes and he likens the atmosphere to an odorless entity. Hence, the houses are the individual components of Whitman's world and the atmosphere stands for the general and universal. That is to say universality is a predominant feature of Whitman and Whitman's philosophy is not limited to America but it is universal. Whitman calls his reader to gain insight. He calls for an intuition and contemplation. He invites his reader to contemplate and "possess the origin of all poems" (53). Also, the greatness of Whitman's democracy comes from his attitude against didacticism.

Whitman did not try to be didactic. He wanted his reader to establish their own ways of thinking. We see this clearly at this part of the poem:

You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look through
the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the spectres in books,
You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,
You shall listen to all sides and filter them from your self. (53)

3. Robert Henri's Democracy: The Artist of His People

As this essay has been arguing, it is apparent that Robert Henri was highly influenced by Walt Whitman and his pluralistic and egalitarian understanding of democracy. This is seen clearly in his works since he chose to portray urban life and the lives of poor people. Hence, he was the artist of "the others". He also struggled just as Whitman did, to make his thoughts understood by people. About the struggle of Henri and the influence of Whitman on Henri, Kwiat states the following ideas:

Throughout his life as teacher, lecturer, and author of numerous articles, as well as in his letters and in his journal, Robert Henri gave vigorous expression to attitudes and ideas which exerted a pervasive and significant influence upon his contemporaries...these ideas were ultimately linked with the great intellectual tradition of American transcendentalism whose leading exponents-Emerson, Thoreau, Alcott, Hawthorne, Melville, and Whitman explored, among other problems, the persisting cultural dependence of America on Europe and the individual, social, political, and artistic implications of the new democracy. (1956: 617)

Kwiat also draws a parallel between Walt Whitman and Robert Henri in terms of their art and tradition. The features which are valid for Whitman were also valid for his follower Henri. That is to say, Henri was fed in his art by Walt Whitman's ideas. Kwiat expresses Whitman's process in his democratic art as follows:

It seems to me that before a man tries to express anything to the world he
must recognize

in himself an individual, a new one, very distinct from others. Walt Whitman did this, and

that is why I think his name so often comes to me. The one great cry of Whitman was for a

man to find himself, to understand the fine thing he really is if liberated. (Henri Qt. in Kwiat, 1956: 620)

As Kwiat mentions above, these artists struggled within themselves for liberation. It must have been difficult for them to speak out democracy in such a hierarchical world. The collaboration of the artist with common people was revolutionary in Henri's time. It meant to do away with hierarchy and elitism. Hence, Henri's art was a public art. Henri himself expresses the necessity of such a collaboration as follows:

To have an art in America...will not be to sit like a pack rat on a pile of collected art of the past. It will be rather to build our own projection on the art of the past, wherever it may be, and for this constructiveness, the artist, the man of means, and the man on the street should go hand in hand. And to have art in America like this will mean greater living, a greater humanity, a finer sense of relation through all things. (Henri Qt. in Kwiat, 1956: 626)

As argued before, Henri has made a long way in democratizing art. As was mentioned in the Introduction, Henri objected to the artistic hierarchy and opposed the monopoly. Henri's art had a political mission and socio-political stance and his art was an art for the public. About this Morgan makes the following statements.

Painting had a general social mission, but was primarily an individual interpretation of the world. Henri opposed academies, juries, and medals that circumscribed subject matter and style, but he did not reject training and the study of past art. Intellectually, his circle upheld individualistic expression. Artistically, their modified realism, especially in cityscapes, reflected concern for pluralism and vitality. (1970: 1533)

According to Chambers, Henri's art had a mission. He drew for a purpose. This idea is against the art for art's sake principle; thus, Henri was an artist of his

people. He was not an elitist artist; on the contrary, he has always portrayed people whom mainstream ideology would call the others. As Whitman had done before, Henri embraced all the components of the pluralistic, multicultural America. About Henri's mission in art, Chambers states that:

Henri began to perceive that if the aim of the painter was not to mimic reality, but was instead to recreate it with the tools and methods reserved to art, then it might follow that the work of art was the result, not of representation and narrative, as the Academy taught, nor of the exploration of the fleeting passage of light, as the Impressionists seemed to suggest, but rather of recollection and idea. (1986: 34)

This fact is highly apparent in Henri's portraiture. He never chose to portray, noble, elite, rich people. The birth of portraiture was arguably as an elitist art in which nobility is praised. However, Henri turned portraiture into an art which embraces common people. He gave room for common people in his art and saved the tradition of portraiture from its elitism. In doing so, he was influenced by Walt Whitman and Whitmanian understanding of democracy. Just like Walt Whitman, Henri's democracy included people from all walks of society. Again as Whitman did, Henri chose to look from the perspective of common people. Chambers also makes a very meaningful statement about Henri's identification with his subjects of art. According to Chambers, "Henri's own preference of subjects should have come down on the side of those he called 'my people,' individuals whose character, vitality or nobility of spirit was self-evident in their pose and expression" (1986: 39). The expression shows how heartily Henri was attached to his people. Henri, as argued before, did not see himself superior to common people; on the contrary, just like Whitman did, he saw himself as one of the people he portrays.

4. People From Everywhere in the Country: Henri's Portraiture Embracing Every Individual

An analysis of some of Robert Henri's works enables one to see how egalitarian in his art Henri was. In his portraiture Henri portrayed people from all kinds of backgrounds. Henri himself talks about the joy he feels in discovering new worlds and getting to know new people from different backgrounds. His frequent visits in Santa Fe enabled Henri to gain experience with Indian people. Henri

mentions the following sentences about the Indian experience in his book *The Art Spirit*: “I am looking at each individual with the eager hope of finding something of the dignity of life, the humor, the humanity... I do not wish to explain these people...I only want to find whatever of the *great spirit* there is in the Southwest. If I can hold it on my canvas I am satisfied”. (Henri Qt. in Leeds, “Robert Henri: American Icon” <http://www.tfaoi.com/aa/2aa/2aa588.htm>).

*Indian Girl*² by Robert Henri is one of the Indian girl portaitures he drew. He worked with the same model while creating the various portaitures. The beauty ,the splendor and the pride of the girl portrayed is profound. The portrayal of the Indian girl celebrates the beauty of her. Henri recognizes Native American culture and purposefully portrays the girl in traditional Indian clothes.

*Gypsy with Cigarette*³ is another portaiture of Robert Henri which celebrates non-white cultures. The young gypsy man is dressed in gypsy clothes. He looks handsome and proud with his blue jacket and white hat. His cigarette gives him a proud look. As has been argued in this essay, Henri celebrates the people identified as others by mainstream white culture.

In *Dieguito Roybal*⁴, Robert Henri portrays an old, wise Pueblo Indian man. His way of portraying the Indian man is glorious. The man has got gray hair and he is dressed in traditional Indian clothes. In the portrait, the wisdom, the age and the background of the man is praised. The portaiture is a celebration of the Indian reality. The man holds his drumstick upright. The complexion of the man is determined. The feeling that the spectator gets is a reverence for the Indian man. In that sense, the tradition of portaiture an elitist art has been shaken by Henri. Sweney describes the posture of Dieguito Roybal as follows:

² *Portrait of Indian Girl* , 1916 oil on canvas, 24 x 20 in.

³*Gypsy with Cigarette* 1906 oil on canvas, 32 x 26 in.

⁴ *Portrait of Dieguito Roybal, San Ildefonso Pueblo*, 1916 oil on canvas, 67 x 40 in. *Gift of Robert Henri*, 1916 353.23P

His seated pose, reminiscent of the dignified stature of a monarch, shows the Native American against a monochromatic deep brown background, accented in the yellows and tans of his buttoned, collared shirt. With drumstick in hand, the Tesuque chief prepares to strike the rhythmic beat of the ceremonial instrument tilted comfortably between bent legs, softened by a brightly colored blanket of red accentuated with black and white details.(1922: Chapter 1)

As Sweney mentions, the portrayal of Dieguito is a celebration of the Native American culture. Robert Henri celebrates their Native Americanness and embraces them. Considering the the Henri drew this portraiture, the work was revolutionary because the portrayal does not reflect the stereotypical Indian image because the stereotypical image did not celebrate Indian reality; on the contrary, the Indians were others. In that sense, what Henri achieved is very Whitmanian.

Sweney states that this portraiture was created as a result of Henri's visits to Santa Fe (1922: Chapter 1). Henri's visiting the people in their own place shows how much importance he gave to people. Henri was a true democrat as an artist and cared for every individual and he recognized their identities. Even only the fact that Henri portrayed the Indian man in a positive and celebrating manner shows Henri's notion of democracy.

Henri shared his experience with his fellow artists Mary and Bill Roberts about the portraiture. Henri stated that "the painting of the drummer chief Dieguito gave so much pleasure to the old warrior that when I presented it to the Museum [of New Mexico] he would sit by it for hours every day enjoying without a smile or a sense of awareness the attention of the visitors in the Gallery" (Henri Qt. in Sweney, 1922: Chapter 1). Henri cared for the feelings of people. For Henri, every individual was precious. His way of seeing people was very Whitmanian. He embraced the people whom mainstream ideologies othered. His love for the othered people is expressed by Karen Wilkin as follows: "[Henri was] attracted like an irresistible magnet, through the power of its extremes and otherness. It was a place of astonishing contrasts: apparently untouched but possessed of a long and diverse history, seemingly empty but culturally rich, superficially austere but profoundly sensuous" (Wilkin Qt. in Sweney, 1922: Chapter 1).

Conclusion

The tradition of democratizing art has started with Walt Whitman and this movement was followed by Robert Henri in American art and literature. Both artists cared for the people who the mainstream ideology considered as others. The development of thoughts of both artists, as has been argued in this essay, was a long procedure. Both Whitman and Henri trod a long way until they had achieved their goals. Whitman's ideas were shaped in long years, Henri's school of thought was shaped with his visits to several regions. It is certain that Henri was influenced by Whitman. The common characteristic of the two artists is that they did not separate people; they embraced every individual unconditionally. Needless to mention, art and literature were dominated by white Anglo-Saxon male writers and artists and their representations of characters in their works were portrayals of these people. What mainstream ideology supported high art as it was a type of art which was the voice of the elite. Of course there had always been abolitionist, anti-fascist and egalitarian works but they were very rare. It was not very common before Whitman and Henri that marginalized people had been represented in art and literature very often. Even if they existed in the works, they were represented as the other. However, Whitman put these people in the center of his works and achieved the democratization of literature and Henri followed Whitman's ideas and democratized art.

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