

Poetry Group Report October 2022 by Annie Clouston

This month's theme was Walt Whitman which dragging my mind to how we chose it, I remember it was because when Meg Peacocke was our guest, she said he was one of her favourites. Our group on closer inspection certainly couldn't echo Meg's enthusiasm. Indeed, Liz admitted that she had ceremonially burned her Collected Works when studying for her degree in Eng. Lit. Whilst the rest of us didn't quite share her animosity, we were left cold and highly likely to rank him in our least favourite poets.

There's a sententious religiosity about his work exemplified by this extract from a lengthy poem ***Song of Myself*** (often regarded as his best work):

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,
The first I graft and increase upon myself, the latter I translate into a new tongue.

Born in 1819 in New York, he received little recognition for his poetry in his lifetime. A great supporter of Abraham Lincoln, and the emerging political system after the horrors of the American Civil War, in which he seemed to envision democracy as invincible and a route to a brave new world. I wonder what he would think of Q Anon?

Here is his vision:

For You O Democracy

Come, I will make the continent indissoluble,
I will make the most splendid race the sun ever
shone upon,
I will make divine magnetic lands,
With the love of comrades,
With the life-long love of comrades.

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.

For you these from me, O Democracy, to serve you
ma femme!
For you, for you I am trilling these songs.