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## Walt Whitman and Si Mohand Ou M'hand: Free-Folk Voices

**Fadhila Boutouchent- Sidi Said<sup>1\*</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> University of Tizi Ouzou, Algeria

### Abstract

The comparative study of Walt Whitman (1819-1902) and Si Mohand Ou M'hand (1845-1902) is significant for several reasons. Firstly, Whitman applies a new form of poetry in American literature that is free verse poetry without affixed beat or regular rhyme scheme. It is as if Whitman speaks to the reader. Si Mohand's poetry is known as 'Asfrou', an oral poetry based on personal inspiration. Both are the ones to whom we listen to. Moreover, the quest for liberty by both poets can be seen as a universal analogy where the right to be 'free' is a natural human attitude. So, the Kabyle bard, as Si Ammar Ben Said Boulifa calls him: "*Si Mohand Ou M'hand, le barde populaire de la Grande Kabylie*" (1990:45) can only be compared to the American bard, Walt Whitman .

**Keywords:** free verse poetry- oral poetry- the Kabyle bard - Asfrou- Walt Whitman- Si Mohand Ou M'hand

### Introduction

The comparative study of Walt Whitman (1819-1902) and Si Mohand Ou M'hand (1845-1902) is significant for several reasons. Firstly, Whitman applies a new form of poetry in American literature: for many it is neither epic, nor lyric, nor ode, nor verse. It is free verse, poetry without affixed beat or regular rhyme scheme. It is as if Whitman speaks to the reader. Si Mohand's poetry is known as 'Asfrou', an oral poetry based on personal inspiration. Both are the ones to whom we listen to. Secondly, the message in Whitman's poetry is that America is totally representative of the divinity and humanity of men and women in countries around the world. In fact, his poetic vision is not limited to Americans but extended to men, women and children around the globe. This is seen clearly in his later poems. He declares in *Leaves of Grass*: "Of every hue and caste am I, /of every rank and religion". Si Mohand's poetry is one of the most challenging literary works in Kabyle literature. In the same way Whitman's major work *Leaves of Grass* is considered as one of the most challenging literary works not only in the history of American literature but in world literature. Thirdly, the quest for liberty by both poets can be seen as a universal analogy where the right to be 'free' is a natural human attitude. So, the Kabyle bard, as Si Ammar Ben Said Boulifa calls him: "*Si Mohand Ou M'hand, le barde populaire de la Grande Kabylie*" (1990:45) can only be compared to the American bard, Walt Whitman .

The theory of Oral-Formulaic Composition and Performance in its traditional conception as proposed by Milman Parry (1902-1935) and enunciated by Albert Lord (1912-1991) is rather restricted, since it applies only to the poetic genre looked at strictly from a formal literary perspective. It can even be considered as a surface-structure-oriented theory with meager

intellectual yield. Jack Goody (1919), Walter Ong (1912-2003) and others have tried to broaden this theory. They have introduced the anthropological and psychological implications of the theory to include not only an oral mode of composition but also an oral mode of thinking and the processes of oral discourse in general. The discussion since then, have shifted to focus on the oral stage versus the writing stage of culture and what effects the introduction of script has on the individual and on the society as a whole.

The emphasis now is on the examination of the structure and working of the human memory and cognition and the means through which oral societies store, organize, and retrieve knowledge, pass on their traditions, and maintain cultural continuity through successive generations. What started as an insular theory of Textual Criticism is now turning into an interdisciplinary enterprise. The scholarship of oral literature has crossed academic boundaries to straddle many disciplines, ranging from aesthetics to linguistics to communication to psychology to anthropology and many more. This broadening of the academic base has been fruitful in bolstering the theories and methods of the field. Specialists such as Ong keep alluding to the encyclopedic of oral literature: information on their history, world view, cultural values, and entire way of life. In other words, oral literature is embedded with the rest of culture in traditional societies. Thus, we can extract many derivatives from oral literature. In this case a poem from oral literature may have a serious intent- to defend a case, lay a claim, exhort to action, declare war (Bedouin oral poems) celebrate a victory , etc.

In this oral work we find aesthetics, ethnographic, psychological, sociological and historical analyses blended together to illuminate the true significance of the poetic texts and to determine their proper place and function in the intricate web of the total culture. The object of this work is to look at Si Mohand's poetry from a wider perspective and to treat it with the seriousness it deserves as a social, political and ideological literary text, and draw a parallel with Whitman's poetry. This study investigates the common tenets of Whitman and Si Mohand in relation to the notion of 'liberty' despite their geographical distance, language differences and historical divisions.

Both poets' work can be seen as an act of rebellion; Whitman considered himself the bard of American Democracy and his long poem "*Leaves of Grass*" can be read as an epic poem dealing with the 'American New Nation'. The poem is based on an important theme, 'Liberty'. Liberty is expressed first in the way he wrote his poetry, in free verse. For him, the truly American and democracy base on which to build a new poetry is a new language. He speaks naturally using the standard metered line, discards the obligatory rhyme scheme, and freely expresses himself in the living vernacular of American speech. (1990) Si Mohand's poetry like Whitman's expresses 'liberty' and even a step further since Si Mohand lived during colonization. Mouloud Feraoun considers the poet as a mirror that reflects the Kabyle's soul and describes him as follows:

Si Mohand apparait ainsi comme un miroir où se reflète l'âme de son pays, d'une génération en plein désarroi, brutalement arrachée aux traditions, dont les structures sociales ont éclaté... il n'est pas un déclassé, mais le mage d'un peuple vaincu, le spectateur impuissant qui assiste le cœur meurtri à toutes les déchéances... les plus émouvants de ses poèmes et aussi les plus nobles, ce sont ceux qui pleurent les temps révolus où la Kabylie était libre (1960 :44-45)

Hanotaux, a French thinker, describing the Kabyle society refers to this notion of liberty as a racial distinction to the Berber. He says:

Cette passion d'égalité et d'indépendance, qui anime la société berbère, est trop générale et trop vivace pour être de date récente. Elle a dû constituer, à toutes les époques, le caractère distinctif et le mobile dirigeant de la race (1893 : 3)

We consider that the quest for liberty in both poetries is important. For Jerome Loving “Whitman declared not only independence from his past as a journalist, freelance writer, and poetaster but his literary independence from the conventions that made ‘literature’ something of an anachronism in the democracy he celebrated” (1990). Both poets transgressed rules in their choice of the topics dealt with in their poems. They freed themselves from any barrier that would prevent them to express themselves, first about themselves, then about Man; i.e., man and woman. Whitman’s poetry was described by a contemporary critic as follows:

The poems, twelve in number are neither in rhyme nor blank verse, but in a sort of excited prose broken into lines without attempt at measure or regularity. He (poet) adopts words, usually banished from polite society which are here employed, without reserve and with perfect indifference to their effect on the reader’s mind. The book is one not to be read aloud to a mixed audience.

Some of Si Mohand’s poems too can’t be read loudly to a mixed audience, even nowadays! In this investigation, we shall dwell on some aspects of Whitman’s and Si Mohand’s life experience and their socio-political contexts, because they are further evidence of the two poets’ literary affinity.

## **W. Whitman’s and Si Mohand’s Biographies and Backgrounds**

Whitman was the second of eight children born to an alcoholic father. The family was often in economic difficulty and moved several times between the city of Brooklyn and the country around Huntington, Long Island. Whitman joined the work force early, no doubt to assist the care and feeding of his large family. The poet’s eldest brother spent his last years in an asylum. The youngest brother spent his life mentally retarded and physically handicapped. A third brother died early of alcoholism and tuberculosis.

*Leaves of Grass* in its final rendering is structured to reflect the poet’s life, beginning with ‘One’s –Self I sing’ and ending with ‘Good-Bye My Fancy’. These are strategically placed between poems reflecting two traumatic periods in Whitman’s personal life, the loneliness of the years 1857-60 when he sought personal love, and the Civil War, when the poet witnessed the carnage of his ‘divine average’. He states:

I went down to the war fields in Virginia (end of 1862), lived thence forwards in camp - saw great battles and the days and the nights afterward – partook of all the fluctuations, gloom, despair, hopes again arous’d, courage evoked – death readily risk’d – the cause, too – along and filling those agonistic and lurid following years, 1863 – ’64 – ’65 – the real parturition years (more than 1776 – ’83) of this hence forth homogenous Union. Without these three or four years and the experiences they gave, “Leaves of Grass” would not now be existing. (1990: 434)

As a poet he emerged in the 1850 to assert a truly American voice, one that celebrated the American landscape, the American people, their speech and democratic form of government. In 1848, he took a trip to the southern city of New Orleans, at the mouth of the Mississippi River, that great waterway flowing through the heart of the country. There Whitman gained a new vision of America and began writing poetry that would embody this vision. In 1855, he published a ground-breaking book called *Leaves of Grass*.

Mohand - Ou – Mhand Ait Hamadouch was born in 1840 or 1845, in Ichariouen next to Tizi-Rached in the Arch of At-Iraten (nowadays called Larba Nath Iraten in Tizi-Ouzou, Algeria). At that time the Kabylia region was not yet colonized by the French. In 1857, when Si Mohand was a child, the General Randon started to colonize this region, and the village of Ichariouen was a strategic one for the French army. So, the latter destroyed it and confiscated the villagers' land to build a Fortress, Fort-Napoleon. This traumatic event had thrown down his peaceful childhood. In 1871, he witnessed another dramatic event. His father, Mohand Amezian At Hmadouch, was executed by the colonial army because he was suspected to have taken part in the Kabyle insurrection against the French administration. His life as a rover started and his poetry would express this distress. Mouloud Mammeri in his book *Les Isefra de Si Mohand* (1982) notes :

Il en restera dans ses vers des échos de révolte, d'indignation, de lamentation, de mépris, d'autant plus profonds qu'ils sont contraints. Mohand est du clan des vaincus. Il le constate chaque jour un peu plus... A la nouvelle société née de la colonisation Mohand ne peut ni adhérer ni se soustraire. Il finira par s'installer tant bien que mal, et plutôt mal que bien, dans cet écartèlement qui sera pour lui une source intarissable d'inspiration (1982 : 19-20)

Colonialism had destroyed his life. No home, no family; he became an exile in his own country.

Both poets lived as lifelong bachelor where poetry was a vital element in their life. Like Whitman, and even a step further, Si Mohand was a rover, a person moving from one place to another. This roving movement supplied both poets with materials that would be used in the poetry. In the case of Whitman, it was a quest for 'nationality'. Whitman considered his trip round the States as a revelation for him as an American. His trips to New Orleans, Chicago and the Western frontier gave him a new vision of America. It was the first time that he saw the American Continent. This experience provided him with a sum of visual and auditory memories, pictures and emotions that fed his imagination and were later expressed in his work. So, he began writing poetry that would embody this new American vision. The experience was regenerative for him. Thus, the Whitman who returned was no longer a mere newspaper editor but he was the poet of *Leaves of Grass*.

Some critics such as Mouloud Mammeri, referred to Si Mohand's poetry as a divine one. Whitman too considered himself as a seer and a prophet; he was convinced that he had revelation from God. He describes himself in one of his poems entitled "So long":

"Screaming electric, the atmosphere using  
.....  
Curious envelop'd messages delivering;  
.....  
Myself Unknowing, my commission obeying, to question it never daring"

As he considered himself as God's voice, his poems were just songs that showed his wonder towards the magnificence of the world. His 'Cosmic Spirit' gave him the ability to see things as part of the whole universe. This Spirit can be detected in all his poems especially in "*Song of Myself*". This Spirit can also be detected in Si Mohand's poetry and some critics consider it as prophecy poetry. Both poets rebel against the authorities and the social order. They espouse the cause of the nationalists, and Si Mohand, he even took open side with the oppressed colonial administration. Both adapted a frank language in their poetry.

## Themes in Whitman's and Si Mohand's Poetry

### *Theme of Religion*

Whitman and Si Mohand refer to God in their poetry but their task is to transform the traditionally unknowable images of the Divine into a humanistic and mystic one; God is addressed as "the Divine Beloved" by Si Mohand and "the Great Camerado" by Whitman. So both poets introduce the notion of 'liberty' in their relation with God. Some critics did not understand the relationship between Si Mohand and God. The poet is, sometimes, seen as a profane. Dr Hamza Ben Aissa notes: « *toute cette détresse intérieure et extérieure, exacerbée par la colonisation, la FOI de SI MOHAND OU M'HAND ne peut être remise en cause, même si elle est obscure et passive (1997:69)* Both poets have been influenced by Mysticism. The latter is not a religion in itself, but is rather the most vital element in all religion, rising up in revolt against old formality and religious torpor. The aim of most mystics is to establish a conscious relation with the Absolute, in which they can find the personal object of Love.

Whitman was influenced by transcendentalism, i.e., the sacred in nature and in humanity, and Si Mohand by Sufism. In fact, the latter spent his early childhood learning the Koran in Zaouia Sidi Abderahman, which is known for its Sufism. As Transcendentalism and Sufism both espouse the view that the Divine permeates all objects (animate/inanimate) and the purpose of human life is union with God, we can then draw a parallel between the two poets in relation to Mysticism. The title of the book "*Leaves of Grass*" has its importance in symbolizing 'universality' and 'eternity' of life. As he said in *Song of Myself*:

*"Or I guess it is Uniform Hieroglyphic  
And it means, Sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow zones.  
And now it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of graves  
The smallest sprout shows there is really no death..."*

The plant 'Grass' symbolizes life, so for the poet his book has this power of eternity which is expressed through the vivacity and the freshness of his poetry. According to Whitman, man is a part of the universe. Man is eternal because life is endless. *Song of Myself*:

*My embryo has never been Torpid, nothing could overlay it.*

*Vast vegetables gave it sustenance...*

The poet speaks about the divine and miraculous character of life using natural exhibitions. This can be seen in section 6 to section 9 of "*Song of Myself*". For Whitman, God is synonymous with life, an irresistible and indestructible power that animates the universe. Everything is God; and God is everywhere even in the smallest inanimate object. *Song of Myself*: "*They are but parts, anything is but a part*". Everything is eternal, composed of

unchangeable atoms that produce all the varieties in the substances constituting "*the great material whole, of which we form a part*". The atoms may form part of a vegetable today, and an animal tomorrow, which in perishing form other vegetables and animals. This is the same doctrine the poet of *Song of Myself* voices near the end of the poem:

*"I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love, if you want me again look for me under your boot-soles".*

No separation between the soul and the body. Man exists now and forever and his body is just a part of the universe. He declares: "*My faith is the greatest of faiths and the least of faiths, enclosing worship ancient and modern and all between ancient and modern*". The originality of his faith is that the 'body' is equally important than the 'soul'. The word body is worshiped and loved in his poems. The reader discovers the beauties of the physical world and life is a miracle: "*Seeing, hearing, feeling are miracles, and each part and tag of me is a miracle*", *Song of Myself*. He continually oscillated from 'body' and 'soul', from 'visible and invisible'. His poetry is a tentative reconciliation between 'spirit' and 'matter'. *Song of Myself*: "I am the poet of the body and I am the poet of the soul." His mystic and sensual egotism made him feel this duality and express it in his poetry: "The pleasures of Heaven are with me and the pains of Hell are with me".

Like Whitman, Si Mohand asks God as if he addresses a friend.

*Txil-ek a Rebb' ar k-ensal  
Af-fin ur nuklal  
Izga-d afrrbeh isqattee*

.....  
*L'awal di tegmat la sswal  
A lfahmin bbwawal  
Tabbwed s-ahdid tenneqrae (1990: 93)  
Je te prie, Ô Dieu, de me laisser T'interroger  
Au sujet d'un indigne qui, sans avoir mérité  
Accapare et détient tous les bonheurs*

.....  
*Des frères je n'ai eu ni parole de consolation, ni nouvelle  
O Toi qui comprends et saisis le sens des mots  
Sache que je suis acculé à un obstacle infranchissable*

The image of the Divine in Islam and Christianity are presented with certain human emotions such as kindness, affection, and mercy. In other words, there are many passages in the Bible as well as in the Koran in which God is described in terms of human emotions in order to be more understandable to humanity. It is clear that the relation between human beings and God is the main concern in these Holy Books. Moreover in the Koran God is given 99 names which is a classical list of Allah, the Muslim name for God; Merciful, Kind, Compassionate, Forgiving and so on and so forth. Si Mohand and Whitman employ such an image of God, mostly in a mystical and transcendental way.

Therefore, the noble task of Si Mohand and Whitman is to transform the traditionally unknowable images of the Divine into a humanistic and mystic one; God is addressed as "Alhanin"; i.e., "Divine Beloved" and "the Great Camerado". Both poets, in their poems, use such images to show the fraternal relation between human beings and God.

Si Mohand:

*Alhanin kecc d rrahim  
Sebhan-ek a lea dim  
A mul lyaci bla edad (Ibid: 98)*

.....  
*O Généreux, ô Miséricordieux  
Sois loué, ô très élevé  
Toi, dont le nombre des adorateurs est incalculable*

Si Mohand believes on the idea that God is everywhere in Human kind and Nature; in other words, God has an omnipresent reality

*Subhan-k a Rebbi Ixaleq  
Kulci yer-k isbeq*  
.....  
*Sois loué, ô Dieu le créateur  
Qui, dans la nature, as tout prévu*

For Whitman it is the “central urge” in everything as he says in *Song of Myself*:

*Allah is all, all, all – is imminent in every life and object  
It is the central urge in every atom  
(Often unconscious, often evil, down fallen,)  
To return to its divine source and origin, however distant,  
Latent the same in subject and in object, without one exception (1990: 419)*

### ***Theme of Political Protest***

The Civil War is another theme in Whitman’s poetry. He produced his volume of war poems in 1866. In these poems, ‘Beat! Beat! Drums!’ to ‘Vigil Stranger I Kept on the Field One Night’ and ‘A Sight in Camp in the Day break Gray and Dim’, he reflects on both the war’s early excitement and its ultimate pathos.” (1990: xvii). He speaks about the American Civil War. His experience came through the war’s bloody consequences, which he mainly encountered in the wartime hospitals where he served as a volunteer male nurse.

*Beat! beat! drums! - blows! bugles! blow!  
Make no parley-stop for no expostulation,  
Mind not the timid-mind not the weeper or prayer,  
Mind not the old man beseeching the young man,  
Let not the child’s voice be heard, nor the mother’s entreaties,  
Make even the trestles to shake the dead where they lie awaiting the hearses,  
So strong you thump O terrible drums - so land you bugles blow*

When Whitman learned that his beloved brother George was wounded and was in an army hospital, he went to care for him, and then for the others who were stricken by the war. There is a mood of depression and resignation in the new poems of the second edition where the poet added the poems referring to the American Civil war. With the coming of sorrow, love for his fellows became more and more an impersonal bond with humanity, a principal of life closely associated with death. In the poem “Come up From the Field father”:

*Come up from the field father, here’s a letter from our Pete  
And come to the front door mother, here’s a letter from thy dear son.*

.....  
*Cool and Sweeten Ohio's villages with leaves fluttering in the moderate wind,  
Where apples ripe in the orchards hang and grapes on the trellis'd vines,*

.....  
*Down in the field all prospers well,  
While they stand at home at the door he is dead already,  
The only Son is dead. (1990: 237)*

Whitman builds a strong contrast between the peacefulness of the prosperous farm and the peace-breaking news of the letter. With simple words, the poet shows death as a consequence of war, we even share the emotion that the soldier's death has on his family. The mother's despair and dignity in this poem can be applied not only to an American mother but also to all mothers who have lost a child because of war. We can make a parallel with Si Mohand's poem where he cries his beloved who has been killed by the French army in the 1857 revolt.

*Themouth thezizth our nemzir  
Elmouth athetsekhethir  
Rebbi ithedou addegg enouqma*

*Aiakkal oursets gheillir  
mlaioun nettir  
Thafoumthas a el moulaka*

*Dda Zaouali our tehqir  
Ddiellis nel khir  
Merhoumath si djahnama*

.....  
*Elle est morte loin de moi :  
La mort choisit ses victimes  
Et Dieu pousse à la révolte.*

*O terre, ne profane pas  
Sa beauté incomparable,  
O anges, pardonnez-lui.*

*Fille de sang généreux,  
Elle n'a pas dédaigné le pauvre :  
Qu'elle soit préservée de l'enfer ! (1960 : 61)*

This poem can be considered as an elegy where Si Mohand expresses his sadness of having lost his friend. He begs dust not damaging the beauty of his beloved. Through this poem, we feel the suffering of people when losing a beloved person. In the death of Lincoln, Whitman too has found the symbol for the suffering and death he has seen in so many forgotten soldiers. In giving his love to the dead leader in *The Requiem for Lincoln* "When Lilacs last in Dooryard", he has given it to mankind. In this lament poem, he shows the Symbolic importance for America of Lincoln's sudden death. Indeed, in death Lincoln came alive to signify the terrific cost the American people had paid for the institution of slavery.

*I saw battle-corpses, myriads of them*



*And the white Skeletons of young men, I saw them,  
I saw the debris and debris of the slain soldiers of the war*

As in any great elegy the poet reconciles the personal death of Lincoln with the public life his subject now represents.

*Ever-returning spring, trinity sure to me you bring,  
Lilac blooming perennial and drooping star in the west,  
And thought of him Love. (1990: 255)*

The whole poem is like a strong symphony built around the intersection of three symbols: “Lilac and star and bird twined with the chant of my soul” (1990:262). This technique has the ability to arise emotions from the reader.

Si Mohand’s poetry reflects the rejection of the Kabyle to the colonial system. With a Sarcastic style, he denounces the control of the French over the kabylia Region .In this sense, his poetry expresses the two distinct periods of time: Before colonization when the traditional system was peaceful and organized, and after 1871 when the whole country was under the colonial system, the one that perverted the social values, the essence of the identity of the people. So, the past for the poet means ‘liberty’ whereas the present means negative change: since the native must submit to colonialism. Mouloud Mammeri notes:

*Après la répression de 1871, Mohand va vivre avec tout le peuple algérien les péripéties de l’installation du nouveau régime... ce qui caractérise au premier chef la société nouvelle qui se crée ainsi, c’est son instabilité. A tout les points de vue. (1982: 19)*

Some of his poems show his rejection to the colonial administration. He criticizes harshly the representatives of the political and military being in ‘High Kabylia’. He treats the ‘Kaïd’<sup>(1)</sup>, in the second verse line as a bastard. More than that, in this poem, Si Mohand shows his belonging to the Muslim community. He stands as the defender of the values and customs of his society. Whenever he has the opportunity to criticize the colonial system he uses his verses to do it.

*A Muhnd Ayudem ntlam  
A miss L’hram  
Ayahezaz n Fanca  
Thbbuid d yellik yelhmam  
Astrayee il hkam  
Thezwarded yer thukssa L’harma  
L’kumissar vuyme thman  
Uryechlie di lislam  
Dwardiya kan guwala (Oral Literature Collection)*

In the above poem, he treats the Kaïd as a vulture and a dog. The use of animals symbolizes treachery, perfidy, and ferocity of these authorities towards the natives. There are also powerful and sensitive poems where Si Mohand mourns the ‘happy’ time when the ‘Kabylia’ was ‘free’. These poems express first his personal regret of his tranquil and easy life. He swarms:

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1- Kaïd refers to the native used by the coloniser as an official administrator in the villages.

*Ggulley seg Tizi-Wuzu  
Armi Akeffadou  
Urhkimen deg-(i) akken iLan*

*AnnerreZ wal' anneknu  
Axir daeussu  
Anda tqe wwiden ccifan*

*J'ai juré que de Tizi-Ouzou  
Jusqu'à Akfadou  
Nul, tant qu'ils sont, n'aura à me commander  
Je préfère être brisé que de me plier  
Commettre un sacrilège à en être maudit plutôt  
Dans un pays où les chefs jouent le rôle d'entremetteurs*

The power of this poem reflects the Berber tenacity to be 'free'! The verse line of the second Stanza: "Annerrez wal' anneknu" means 'better break than bend' (translation mine) becomes the leitmotiv of other generation of the Kabyle after Independence. In fact, this verse line becomes a revolutionary tag that the Kabyle youth used in the 1980 'Berber Spring' and in the "Black Spring" to ask for more 'Liberty' in Algeria!

### ***The Theme of Women in Si Mohand's and Whitman's Poems***

Both poets refer to women in their poetry. The 'Man Kind', Whitman, celebrated specifically included women. He insisted that,

*I am the poet of the woman the same as the man, And I say it is great to be a woman as to be a man.*

A number of women of the poet's day responded with enthusiasm for *Leaves of Grass*. What is interesting in these poems about woman is the poet's lifting of the veil of lady hood to reveal their womanly vitality, their desire to become co-equal lovers and 'partners' of man instead of objects of male sexual (and social) utility. He says in 'children of Adam':

*The furious storm through me careering, I passionately trembling.*

*The oath of the inseparableness of two together, of the woman that loves me an whom I love more than my life, that oath swearing,*

*(O I willingly stake all for you,*

*O let me be lost if it must be so!*

*O you and I! What is it to us what the rest do or think?*

*What is all else to us? Only that we enjoy each other and exhaust each other if it must be so;)*

*From the master, the pilot I yield the vessel to the general commanding me, commanding all, from him permission taking, (1990:80)*

Whitman's egalitarian attitude towards woman stemmed from his Jacksonian background in politics, the election of Andrew Jackson to the presidency (1828) marked the beginning of a

new era. It was the age of the Common Man. This can also be explained for his Love to democracy, or what he called the 'good cause'. Sara Willis, an American author (1811-1872), wrote: "I confess I extract no poison from "Leaves" – to me they have brought only healing". He voices in his poem 'I Sing The Body Electric' the physiology of the woman's body

*This is the female form,*

*A divine nimbus exhales from it from head to foot,  
It attracts with fierce undeniable attraction,  
I am drawn by its fierce undeniable attraction,  
I am drawn by its breath as if I were no more than a  
helpless vapor, all aside but myself and it,  
Books, art, religion, time, the visible and solid earth,  
and what was expected of heaven or fear'd of  
hell, are now consumed*

Si Ammar Ben Said Boulifa refers to the respect of the Kabyle for women. He notes that in the ancient times, the Berber woman played an important role in her community. '*La femme Berbère n'a pas seulement tenu son rang dans la société par son autorité morale; le côté intellectuel a eu également des types de femmes vraiment remarquables*' (1990: 53). M. Duveyrier is another writer who acknowledges us in his book *Les Touareg du Nord* that the Berber language and even the ancient written language were preserved thanks to women. Hanoteau, a French writer, describes the kabyle woman as:

Aux yeux de ces barbares, la femme est un être respecté, sacré. Malheur à celui qui attenterait à sa personne, à sa réputation ou à son honneur. Une tentative de violence à l'égard d'une femme, de simple propos malséants, un geste indécent, suffisent pour faire couler le sang de celui qu'elle désigne aux siens comme coupable de lui avoir manqué de respect. (Ibid: 54)

Yet the Berber community had undergone some transformation because of the different invasions at different period of times. This new state brought changes to the society and to the role of women in it. The French intrusion too (from 1857 to 1871) brought changes to this conservative society where traditions and customs were the essence of this community. This traditional mode of living made the woman to play a female role:

Sont en effet privés de la parole, donc de pouvoir, les enfants, les adolescents, les femmes... Les hommes sont chargés de la gestion des affaires publiques... les femmes, chargées principalement de la fonction vitale de reproduction, sont cantonnées dans la gestion des affaires domestiques. (Ibid: 16)

Si Mohand's poetry expresses what the others feel and can't say. On this context, Younes Adli, in his book *Si Mohand Ou\_Mhand Errance et Révolte* (2001) describes Si Mohand's poetry as a poetry of resistance. He notes:

*Entre son éducation - versée autant dans le moule religieux que dans celui du confort familial – et ses propres convictions, le jeune Mohand avait choisi de briser le carcan des mœurs rigides qui avaient entouré sa jeunesse et son corollaire, la femme* (2001: 24)

Like in Whitman's poetry, the woman is sung by Si Mohand. His poems can be seen as an audacious act of 'liberty' in a conservative society. His poetry is full of sexual references; he celebrates the woman's body as the following poems show:

*Dmm timmi taεkef am laqwas*  
*TamZurt ar ammas*  
*Tibbcin-is difelfel*  
*Melt-iy' anda Ihara-s*  
*Ard rzuy Fell-as*  
*Ma εa(ey-as ad-ayi taεqel (p. 78)*

.....  
*De celle, aux beaux sourcils arqués*  
*Aux cheveux tombant jusqu'aux hanches*  
*De celle, aux petits seins carminés*  
*Que l'on me montre la demeure*  
*Afin que j'aïlle m'informer d'elle*

Si oublié que je sois, elle saura bientôt me reconnaître

Si Mohand too, describes the beauty of the body, and refers to it as a source of joy and pleasure.

*Ihubb Rebbi tulawin*  
*Yefka-yasent tibbucin*  
*yetted ulad umeqwran*

*Dieu a béni les femmes*  
*En les gâtant de beaux seins*  
*Que même les adultes sucent.*

In the above poem, the woman's body is sacred since in the first verse line, he refers to the body as a divine gift. So, as in Whitman, the body and physical love is something natural. Sensuality in relation to the body is another important notion in Si Mohand's poems. He declares:

*Walay-t tebdd ger tebbura*  
*Tazzi-d s twenZa*  
*Dahbiya tin aZiZen*

*Itij yeccercer ṛruba*  
*trekkeb- iyi tawla*  
*ma drus aymiiwen*

*Mer wahdes I tella*  
*at - nur ar Ihara*  
*ad rwuy degs asuden*

.....  
*Elle est debout d'entre les portes*  
*Je la vis debout au seuil de la porte*  
*Son visage orienté vers moi*  
*Dahbia ma bien aimée*

*Le soleil fait de sa robe un tamis*

*Je me suis senti enivré  
Devant tant de belles jambes*

*Ah ! Si nous étions seuls  
Je l'aurais abordé  
Et la couvrirais de baisers. (p.102)*

The woman in Si Mohand's poetry is sensual, her body is a saved gift and, like in Whitman's poetry, she is a 'partner' that reveals her womanly vitality! Both poets sang the physical Love, they also write beautiful love poems. The following are wonderful love poems.

### **Whitman:**

*Or if you will, thrusting me beneath clothing  
where I may feel the throbs of your heart or  
rest upon your hip,  
  
carry me when you go forth over land or sea;  
for thus merely touching you is enough, is best,  
and thus touching you would I silently sleep and be carried eternally.*

### **Si Mohand:**

*A w'iqwlen d aman n tala  
Yetudumen t-timeqwa  
F umayeg n Tassadit  
Abuqual teqqed l ⬠afya  
Yesqittiren t-tiregwa  
Ar yimi lewhi ntmeddit*

*Ziy zzher-iw t-tirga  
ul-iw yulwa  
ass ad I iwed talalit*

.....  
*Je voudrais devenir eau de fontaine  
Pour m'égoutter et ruisseler  
Le long des douces joues de Tassadit*

*La cruche, cette terre cuite  
D'où suintent des ruisseaux d'eau  
Le soir, vers la commissure des lèvres*

*Je sursaute de mon rêve  
Avec un cœur étreint de savoir que les soirs renaissent chaque jour. ( p.90)*

### **Conclusion**

Like Whitman, Si Mohand is a rebel. They both express their sensibilities through anti-conventional patterns. In Whitman's poems, there are no rhymes and no metrical patterns. What matters is the rhythm and what he called "Vocalism": conveying the impression of a

human voice which unites body and soul. Like Whitman's poetry, Si Mohand's poetry addresses the common man. His poetry is Lyrical or Satirical and depends on the poet's mood, he chants both his sadness and happiness; his poems bless or curse, he expresses both his love and hate, he wonders or raises his voice towards God to implore His Clemency, and he sometimes refers to the 'Saints' of Kabylia to help him. He revolts against all: himself, the other, the century, his misery and poverty. Despite his suffering and adversity he never ceases to sing Love. He says: "*anyone stricken with Love will be blessed by God*". This can compare to Whitman's saying "*we know that Sympathy or Love is the law over all laws, because in nothing else but love is the soul conscious of pure happiness which appears to be the ultimate place and point of all things*" (1990)

Both poets' honesty and passion shape their poems and express easily their emotions. This, results in an oratical effect which gives their poetry a power to be fresh and immortal. Both of them too, express the eternal balance between hope and despair; optimism and pessimism; Love for life and death fascination; 'Soul' and 'body'; the 'individual' and the 'mass'; 'liberty' and 'government'. These contradictions give not only vitality and freshness to their poetry but also universality where the poets are not limited to a specific time or space, as Whitman says: "*the true emotional, moral, and aesthetic natures of humanity have not radically changed*" (1990: 433) Both poetries can also be seen as auto biographies since these poems speak first about the poets themselves. By celebrating his own 'personal nature', Whitman celebrated the American and human nature in practically all its aspects. By revealing his passion, frustrations and misery, Si Mohand speaks not only about himself but also about man; the one that he met in his trips. As Mammeri notes :

[Mohand] *cet eternel voyageur... a côtoyé toute les sociétés... a parlé des Kabyles, des Arabes, des Tunisiens, des Noirs, des Juifs, enfin de tous les hommes qu'il lui a été donné de connaître...* (1982: 72)

Critics still work and analyze Whitman's poetry. The latter is studied both in American and foreign universities. It is not the case for Si Mohand whose poetry has been transmitted orally from generations to generations. Yet, there can be no doubt about their power and influence on succeeding generations of poets and in the case of Si Mohand for singers too. Their verses have a certain magnetic force and a passionate quality that excite the imagination and earn a strong response, whether positive or negative. The new freedom of form and breath of subject matter that Whitman modeled his poetry, and the freedom of speech Si Mohand used in expressing himself without restraints or taboos make them be the poets of their 'Nations'. The condition that Whitman set down: "the proof of a poet is that his country absorbs him as affectionately as he absorbed it" is well fulfilled for both poets!

Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* celebrates not only the American spirit but the spirit of all of mankind. He declares:

*Here is not merely a nation  
but a teeming nation of nations...  
here the crowds,  
equality, diversity, the soul Loves"* .

Whitman dwelt on himself simply because he saw himself as a prototype of "The Americans".

Like Whitman, Si Mohand can be considered as a prototype of “The Kabyles”; “The Algerians” and even “The Mediterranean”, the voice of the oppressed people, those who suffered from exclusion, despotism, and misery. Ben Said Boulifa describes him in his book *Receuil de Poesie Kabyle* as:

Il est le type du véritable poète errant... Amant passionné de l'espace et de la liberté, il va où son étoile le conduit. Le paysage ou le site lui plaisent-ils, il s'y arrête et les contemple ; et, sous l'influence du tableau qu'il admire, sa corde sensible se met à vibrer (1990: 46)

Through these poets, one can see all the citizens of the world seeking liberty . Whitman, throughout the rest of his life; kept rewriting and republishing editions of *Leaves of Grass*, Si Mohand spent his life roving. This roving movement allows him to be ‘free’; we can even say that his perpetual move from one place to another is his way to challenge the colonizer. He refuses to accept his laws because he has established his own code. Younes Adli notes:

Il demeura jusqu'à la fin de ses jours, aussi fort et inébranlable dans sa liberté de mouvement qu'il n'avait jamais troqué dans les moments de disette, ni abandonnée pour un quelconque heur de stabilité . (2001: 36)

Then the quest of the rover stands both as an individual quest but also as a collective one, since his poetry can be considered as a vivid testimony to an overturning period in history of the colonized countries all over the globe For Whitman man's duty on earth is to enjoy life to the fullest extent, guided only by the “Deity planted” intuition of one's own soul”. Si Mohand is the one who has lived his life intensively. His itinerary could be seen as a perpetual quest for an impossible happiness. He was indure to drugs, alcohol and women . Mammeri states: « Il [Mohand] était plus friand de tenter les expériences les plus insolites qu'attentif à se conformer à la norme ou à éviter la réprobation, voire le scandale ». (1982: 51) However, this excess in everything couldn't fulfill his deepest wish, which was to recover the lost objet; i.e. his land, family, security and stability. He lived and died as an exile, but he was buried in a peaceful land as he wished in “Asekif-n-Ettemana”<sup>(1)</sup>

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