

A Study Of Factors Influencing Writing Techniques Style Of Walt Whitman

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ABSTRACT: *Whitman's work breaks the boundaries of poetic form and is generally prose-like. He also used unusual images and symbols in his poetry, including rotting leaves, tufts of straw, and debris. He also openly wrote about death and sexuality, including prostitution. He is often labeled as the father of free verse, though he did not invent it. As a political movement, this reaction was reflected in the new democratic ideals that opposed monarchy and feudalism. In art, it meant a turning away from Neoclassicism and the ancient models of Greek perfection and classical correctness. Romanticism asserted the power of the individual. Romanticism marked an era characterized in the idealization of the individual. Walt Whitman had a strong belief that nature was the root of all beautiful things, whether it was the smell of a flower, or the light of the moon anything that was natural had internal beauty and thereby had the possibility to make humanity beautiful. Walt Whitman's writing were all in themselves different styles of Romanticism though they all used common themes of nature, and solitude. Whitman's goal in his writing was to get the people of the world to change in their belief.*

KEYWORDS: Romanticism, neoclassicism, philosopher, Revolution, idealistic, hermit

INTRODUCTION: Whitman claimed that after years of competing for "the usual rewards", he determined to become a poet. He first experimented with a variety of popular literary genres which appealed to the cultural tastes of the period. As early as 1850, he began writing what would become *Leaves of Grass*, a collection of poetry which he would continue editing and revising until his death. Whitman intended to write a distinctly American epic and used free verse with a cadence based on the Bible. At the end of June 1855, Whitman surprised his brothers with the already-printed first edition of *Leaves of Grass*. George "didn't think it worth reading". Walt Whitman was a great Romantic poet. From the late eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century, in both Europe and the United States, an artistic and intellectual movement called Romanticism became a dominant force in politics, religion and the arts. Although the term 'Romanticism' means different things to the poets, minister, philosopher, political theorist, or artist yet some basic principles apply to them all. Romanticism was a reaction against convention. As a political movement, this reaction was reflected in the new democratic ideals that opposed monarchy and feudalism. In art, it meant a turning away from Neoclassicism and the ancient models of Greek perfection and classical correctness. Philosophically, romanticism would contend with rationalism – the belief that truth could be discerned by logic and reason. Romanticism asserted the power of the individual. Romanticism marked an era characterized in the idealization of the individual. Politically the movement influenced democratic ideas and the revolutionary principles of social equality. Philosophically, it meant that the idea of objective reality would give way to subjective experience; thus all truth became a matter of human perception. In the art world Romanticism marked a fascination with the individual genius, and elevated the artist, philosopher, poet and scholar above all other people.

“Song of Myself” is referred to as “Song” henceforth: Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" (1855) modernizes the vision of a powerful American poet on human universal self and individual identity. Its poetic identity and self are presented in a fresh condensed discourse directly related to the realities of the American people. Poetically, Whitman captures the sight and soul of the cosmopolitan self and defines his nation as his own self by referring to daily life ideals and rituals, using a new surprising poetic way. “Song” also explores how Whitman adapts a poetic motif of metamorphosis by using the image of nature and society as two driving forces for his transformation. It presents intimacy in self-expression and privacy in association with the relationships with modern humans in various aspects of life. Moreover, "Song" presents a set of the most prominent features of Whitman's poetics: the open form of free verse, prose-like language, and musicality, all of which are derived from the language of everyday speech with a sort of internal harmony. In this light, Josep Armengol (2013)

argues that Whitman is a new born American hero qualified with “American ideological values of independence, autonomy, individualism, and self-sufficiency”.

Poetic theory

Whitman wrote in the preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, "The proof of a poet is that his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it." He believed there was a vital, symbiotic relationship between the poet and society. This connection was emphasized especially in "Song of Myself" by using an all-powerful first-person narration. As an American epic, it deviated from the historic use of an elevated hero and instead assumed the identity of the common people. *Leaves of Grass* also responded to the impact that recent urbanization in the United States had on the masses.

Leaves of Grass: Whitman paid for the publication of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* himself and had it printed at a local print shop during their breaks from commercial jobs. A total of 795 copies were printed. No name is given as author; instead, facing the title page was an engraved portrait done by Samuel Hollyer, but 500 lines into the body of the text he calls himself "Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos, disorderly, fleshly, and sensual, no sentimentalist, no stander above men or women or apart from them, no more modest than immodest". The inaugural volume of poetry was preceded by a prose preface of 827 lines. The succeeding untitled twelve poems totaled 2315 lines—1336 lines belonging to the first untitled poem, later called "Song of Myself". The book received its strongest praise from Ralph Waldo Emerson, who wrote a flattering five-page letter to Whitman and spoke highly of the book to friends. The first edition of *Leaves of Grass* was widely distributed and stirred up significant interest, in part due to Emerson's approval, but was occasionally criticized for the seemingly "obscene" nature of the poetry.

During the first publications of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman had financial difficulties and was forced to work as a journalist again, specifically with Brooklyn's *Daily Times* starting in May 1857. As an editor, he oversaw the paper's contents, contributed book reviews, and wrote editorials. He left the job in 1859, though it is unclear whether he was fired or chose to leave. Whitman, who typically kept detailed notebooks and journals, left very little information about himself in the late 1850s.

Technical Innovations in Whitman's Poetry: In the above passage the length of the poetic lines varies. The march of the lines in his free verse resembles the ocean waves with their sonority and liquid grandeur. The natural fluidity, largeness, ease and spontaneity perpetually run throughout his verse. Parallelism is one of the conspicuous techniques which Whitman has employed throughout his poetry. This technique conveys a greater sense of equality based on spiritual relationship, which connects “fish, fowl and flower” in his poetry—making the whole cosmos highly valuable and meaningful even to the extent of a “grain of sand and the egg of the wren”. The image of a spider that symbolizes connectivity in the following poem helps us realize that instead of building walls between us we need to make bridges in order to connect humans into interlocking relationship and bonds so essential for a peaceful and healthy society. He says:

A noiseless patient spider,
I mark'd where on a little promontory it stood isolated
Mark'd how to explore the vacant vast surrounding'
It launch'd forth filament, filament, filament out of itself,
Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them.
And you O my soul where you stand,
Surrounded, detached, in measureless ocean of space,
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres to connect them,
Till the bridge you will need be form'd, till the ductile anchor hold,
Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my soul.
("A Noiseless Patient Spider")

Similarly the sound patterns, alliteration, assonance, and onomatopoeia are used so effectively as integrating literary devices to produce music in his verse. For instance, in his "Song of Myself" there is alliteration of the letter "b" and "t" respectively: "At eleven o'clock began the burning of bodies/ That is the tale of the murder of the four hundred and twelve young men" (895-96). At another place the same device has been very effectively used in "Song of Myself": "The houses and rooms are full of perfumes, the shelves are crowded with perfumes".

Cataloging is one of the prominent characteristics of Whitman's poetry, though it was used in epic poetry as a prerequisite. Whitman employed this method effectively particularly in the "Song of Myself", coordinating his material as if to reflect equality of all things or the complex miscellaneity of modern life. His listing and cataloging of things, people or attributes draw the reader to peep in and to discover the true meaning behind his words. He weaves a web of things in such a way that it impels the reader to feel that all things of the cosmos are the diverse faces of one being, and that essentially we are different parts integrating one another into one bigger whole. One of his most impressively extended catalogues makes the Section 15 of the "Song of Myself". Following are the last lines of this section which show the poet's movement from individual to a cosmic or holistic vision as if making a bridge between the self and the other:

The city sleeps and the country sleeps,
The living sleep for their time, the dead sleep for their time,
The old husband sleeps by his wife and the young husband sleeps by his wife;
And these tend inward to me, and I tend outward to them,
And such as it is to be of these more or less I am,
And of these one and all I weave the song of myself

Civil War years

As the American Civil War was beginning, Whitman published his poem "Beat! Beat! Drums!" as a patriotic rally call for the North. Whitman's brother George had joined the Union army and began sending Whitman several vividly detailed letters of the battle front. On December 16, 1862, a listing of fallen and wounded soldiers in the New-York Tribune included "First Lieutenant G. W. Whitmore", which Whitman worried was a reference to his brother George. He made his way south immediately to find him, though his wallet was stolen on the way. "Walking all day and night, unable to ride, trying to get information, trying to get access to big people", Whitman later wrote, he eventually found George alive, with only a superficial wound on his cheek. Whitman, profoundly affected by seeing the wounded soldiers and the heaps of their amputated limbs, left for Washington on December 28, 1862, with the intention of never returning to New York.

In Washington, D.C., Whitman's friend Charley Eldridge helped him obtain part-time work in the army paymaster's office, leaving time for Whitman to volunteer as a nurse in the army hospitals. He would write of this experience in "The Great Army of the Sick", published in a New York newspaper in 1863 and, 12 years later, in a book called *Memoranda During the War*. He then contacted Emerson, this time to ask for help in obtaining a government post. Another friend, John Trowbridge, passed on a letter of recommendation from Emerson to Salmon P. Chase, Secretary of the Treasury, hoping he would grant Whitman a position in that department. Chase, however, did not want to hire the author of such a disreputable book as *Leaves of Grass*.

The Whitman family had a difficult end to 1864. On September 30, 1864, Whitman's brother George was captured by Confederates in Virginia, and another brother, Andrew Jackson, died of tuberculosis compounded by alcoholism on December 3. That month, Whitman committed his brother Jesse to the Kings County Lunatic Asylum. Whitman's spirits were raised, however, when he finally got a better-paying government post as a low-grade clerk in the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the Department of the Interior, thanks to his friend William Douglas O'Connor. O'Connor, a poet, daguerreotypist and an editor at *The Saturday Evening Post*, had written to William Tod Otto, Assistant Secretary of the Interior, on Whitman's behalf. Whitman began the new appointment on January 24, 1865, with a yearly salary of \$1,200. A month later, on February 24, 1865, George was released from capture and granted a furlough because of his poor health. By May 1, Whitman received a promotion to a slightly higher clerkship[81] and published *Drum-Taps*.

Effective June 30, 1865, however, Whitman was fired from his job. His dismissal came from the new Secretary of the Interior, former Iowa Senator James Harlan. Though Harlan dismissed several clerks who "were seldom at their respective desks", he may have fired Whitman on moral grounds after finding an 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass*. O'Connor protested until J. Hubley Ashton had Whitman transferred to the Attorney General's office on July 1. O'Connor, though, was still upset and vindicated Whitman by publishing a biased and exaggerated biographical study, *The Good Gray Poet*, in January 1866. The fifty-cent pamphlet defended Whitman as a wholesome patriot, established the poet's nickname and increased his popularity. Also aiding in his popularity was the publication of "O Captain! My Captain!", a relatively conventional poem on the death of Abraham Lincoln, the only poem to appear in anthologies during Whitman's lifetime.

FRENCH REVOLUTION ON ROMANTICISM: The French Revolution of 1789 created a torrent of romantic ideals across Europe. Unlike the American Revolution and the struggle for independence from an outside, imperial power, the French Revolution marked an internal struggle within one of Europe's great nations. The conflict was over social class and competing political ideologies, ideas that were indeed threatening and revolutionary. Because of the French Revolution, all the principles of Romanticism suddenly became a basis of government. The cry of the French Revolutionaries for fraternity, equality and liberty shook the foundations of European monarchies. Common people had come to believe in the rights of man. The European world tried to understand the causes of the French Revolution and what its greater implications for the human kind. The French Revolution inspired many romantic writers to think of history as an evolution to a higher state. The French Revolution seemed to herald a rebirth of human possibility. In the old way of thinking, history was a static pyramid. It was a hierarchy, a great chain of being, that flowed from God, down to kings, to common people and then to the natural world. It was viewed as a purposeful, moral voyage. It told the story not of kings and heroes, but of democracies, the will of the people, and the triumph of the individual.

The romantic viewpoint, a particular way of looking at the relations among God, man and Nature, manifested itself in European literature, music, painting and sculpture. In the visual arts, the English artists such as J. M. W. Turner (1775-1851) and John Constable (1776-1837) established the visual romantic genre through their landscapes of sea and countryside. Using rich, almost impressionistic colours and tones, they painted with a deep appreciation of the beauties of Nature. Turner, for example, explores the interplay between sea and sky with great romantic feeling. Both reflected the contemporary literary and romantic movements in Europe. Their art conveyed the romantic ideal; that is, they supported the romantic belief that reflections of the beauties of Nature could initiate the heightened personal awareness of the senses, and thus approach the spirit of the divine. In literature, the Romantic Movement was dominated by English poets William Wordsworth and Coleridge. In 1798 they published *Lyrical Ballads* and in so doing launched the English Romanticism. Romanticism had a great effect of the imagination and sensibilities of thinking men in America. While Western Europe had always celebrated America as the new world, nineteenth century Americans began to realize the potential their newness held for achieving a great society. Walt Whitman had a strong belief that nature was the root of all beautiful things, whether it was the smell of a flower, or the light of the moon anything that was natural had internal beauty and thereby had the possibility to make humanity beautiful. In many of his poems Whitman depicts that nature is what depicts the true soul of a man and has the power to both display it and control it. These aspects of nature were large parts of the American Romantic movement, which shows Whitman's relationship to the American Romantics.

O powerful, western, fallen star!
O shades of night! O moody, tearful night!
O great star disappear'd! O the black murk that hides the star!
O cruel hands that hold me powerless! O helpless soul of me!
O harsh surrounding cloud that will not free my soul! [13]

This illustrates the power that Whitman believed the natural world had over him and the rest of humanity. It also shows the dark and sinister thought that he had as a Romantic writer. The sun falls in the west, and the darkness of the night takes over. It is because of the blackness of nature that comes with night which holds the soul of a human. Aspects of solitude are also common in Whitman's writings. Very often do they go hand in hand with dark aspects showing the relation between the darkness where they provoke the exploration of self and the ability to find one's true soul? Having studied the mocking-bird's tones and the flight of the mountain-hawk,

And heard at dawn the unrivall'd one, the hermit thrush from the swamp-cedars,
Solitary, singing in the West, I strike up for a New World.
Victory, union, faith, identity, time,
The indissoluble compacts, riches, mystery,
Eternal progress, the kosmos, and the modern reports.
This then is life.

This makes it abundantly clear that some man, presumably Walt Whitman himself, has spent some amount of time in a dark and somber swamp, a place in which people do not usually live, the gloomy and dark aspects are expressed by the sheer fact that it is a swamp. During his time there he studies nature, plants and animals helped

him unravel himself. With this new sense self he immerses to head for the real world. Under his belt the knowledge of victory, union, faith, time, and most importantly, identity, since identity is the soul of a human and everything about it. Common in not only to Whitman's writing but to writings forms of this time was the belief in the natural goodness of man, that man left by himself would be good, moral, and fair. The aspects of civilization and the influence of one human on another is what change this for each individual. Behold, the body includes and is the meaning, the main concern and includes and is the soul; Whoever you are, how superb and how divine is your body, or any part of it.

The body is everything that involves a human, including the soul. Since the body is something which is naturally good, and incorporates soul, then the soul is good as well. If the soul is what represents human nature, or a human's way of being then by nature the soul is good. It is not until the corruption of civilization that changes the good nature of the mind.

As stated before there are other elements of Romanticism, used by Whitman: the use of nature solitude, and darkness the most however he did sometimes use the aspect of art as a part of humanity and life. Art represents creation of man, nature is what man is trying to create, and so without one another they are all nothing.

Musical renditions and audio recordings

Whitman's poetry has been set to music by a large number of composers; indeed it has been suggested his poetry has been set to music more than that of any other American poet except for Emily Dickinson and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Those who have set his poems to music have included John Adams; Ernst Bacon; Leonard Bernstein; Benjamin Britten; Rhoda Coghill; Ronald Corp; George Crumb; Frederick Delius; Howard Hanson; Karl Amadeus Hartmann; Hans Werner Henze; Paul Hindemith; Ned Rorem; Robert Strassburg; Ralph Vaughan Williams; Kurt Weill; and Roger Sessions. Crossing, an opera composed by Matthew Aucoin and inspired by Whitman's Civil War diaries, premiered in 2015.

In 2014, German publisher Hörbuch Hamburg [de] issued the bilingual double-CD audio book of the Kinder Adams/Children of Adam cycle, based on translations by Kai Grehn [de] in the 2005 Children of Adam from Leaves of Grass (GalerieVevais), accompanying a collection of nude photography by Paul Cava. The audio release included a complete reading by Iggy Pop, as well as readings by Marianne Sägebrecth; Martin Wuttke; Birgit Minichmayr; Alexander Fehling; Lars Rudolph; Volker Bruch; Paula Beer; Josef Osterndorf; Ronald Lippok; Jule Böwe; and Robert Gwisdek. In 2014 composer John Zom released On Leaves of Grass, an album inspired by and dedicated to Whitman.

Works

- Franklin Evans (1842)
- Life and Adventures of Jack Engle (serialized in 1852)[35]
- Leaves of Grass (1855, the first of seven editions through 1891)
- Manly Health and Training (1858)[37]
- Drum-Taps (1865)
- Democratic Vistas (1871)
- Memoranda During the War (1876)
- Specimen Days (1882)

CONCLUSION: For Walt Whitman, the complete 'self' is both physical and spiritual. The self is man's individual identity, his distinct quality and being, which is different from the selves of other men, although it can identify with them. The self is a portion of the one Divine Soul. Whitman's critics have sometimes confused the concept of self with egotism, but this is not valid. Whitman is constantly talking about 'I,' but the 'I' is universal, a part of the Divine, and therefore not egotistic.

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