**Walt Whitman. Philosophical basics of his work**

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**Introduction**

When having to think about the philosophy of Americanness, who else could come to one's mind other than Walt Whitman. One of the most read, most enjoyable writers of American Literature so much debated and gossiped about, preceding his own folk's and the world's age by light-years ahead, throwing himself in the face of his contemporary readers, at last knocking down all the remains of the long-suffered puritan establishments and values that the country has carried as a burden for far too long. One simply cannot exclude Whitman without having to make a comment about his poetry – his art – he simply cannot be ignored, for he and his art does not allow that.

The aim of our work is to analyze features of Walt Whitman’s style. We will study his literary techniques, such as alliteration, anaphora, «free» verse etc. In our work we will try to show philosophical basics of his works.

Our tasks are:

* To investigate the uniqueness of his style
* To analyze some of his works in order to characterize his poetic techniques
* To conduct a detailed analysis of philosophical basics of his works

We will also propose some of his poems because we wanted to show peculiarities of his style.

**«Leaves of Grass»**

If we want to talk about philosophical basics of Walt Whitman, we should analyze them all in common because they are all connected and you can find several of them in one poem at the same time.

First of all we will start our investigation with one of his greatest poems «Leaves of Grass».

The title «Leaves of Grass» is used by Whitman to symbolize the immortality of the soul, the mechanical universe, and that all things are in a state of flux Whitman says in the last chapter:

«I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love»

He loves the grass so much as part of nature, assimilates himself to nature, and considers the immortality of the soul in nature because of his belief and his own inspiration and individuality.

Whitman's idea of nature can be accepted concerning the world of death since nature is inextricably linked with mortal beings and in harmony with the mind. That greatest harmony is thought to be the immortality of the soul in nature. In other words, its harmonization is based on the medieval idea that «The will of God creates nature».

He thought that this is a dark mysterious world, and that human beings contribute to the world of death by their domination of nature. The world of human being is a lonely creature in a chaotic universe. Firm in this belief, Whitman in his philosophical approach to Nihilism described himself as the immortality of the soul in the great universe. He said in his first chapter:

«I celebrate myself, and sing myself,

And what I assume you shall assume,

For every atom belonging to me as God belongs to you.» (P. 1).

This is the liberation of the mind from the philosophy of a controlling God, which was current in the plantation period of J. Edwards (1703–1758). To expound this theme, Whitman wrote his poem, in which he propounded his ideas.

«The atmosphere is not a perfume,

It has no taste of the distillation, and it is odorless,

It is for my mouth forever, I am in love with it,

I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked,

I am mad for it to be in contact with me.» (P. 2).

Whitman's nature is good, not evil. The stream of this idea is accepted by J. Rousseau (1712–1778) «As a human nature is good in nature» which is an absolutely optimistic and ever frontier spirit.

Whitman pursues each personal develop – meant by showing how people relate. For example: looking forth on pavement and land, or outside of pavement and land, «Belonging to the winders of the circuit of circuits.» (P. 78).

From this point of view, he looks over the natural phenomenon of circuits, and God is defined by the relationship of human nature to the circuits.

Whitman thought that inspiration was equal to the dualism of the soul and the personality, and wrote:

«Apart from the pulling and hauling stands what I am,

Stand amused, complacent, compassionating, idea, unitary,

Looks down, is erect, or bends an arm on an impalpable certain rest.

Looking with side-curved head curious what will come next.

Both in and out of the game and watching and wondering at it.

Backward I see in my own days where I sweated through fog with linguists and contenders.

I have no mocking or arguments, I witness and wait.» (P. 6).

Whitman considered the relation of phenomenon and the personality. His mind was not closed to the realities in which his personality asserted the method of the audience and passive state condition and tried to contact the refusing phenomenon.

«Leaves of grass» belongs to no particular accepted form of poetry. Whitman described its form as «a new and national declamatory expression.» Whitman was a poet bubbling with energy and burdened with sensations, and his poetic utterances reveal his innovations. His poetry seems to grow organically, like a tree. It has the tremendous vitality of an oak. Its growth follows no regular pattern: «Song of Myself», for example, seems at first almost recklessly written, without any attention to form. Whitman’s poetry, like that of most prophetic writers, is unplanned, disorganized, sometimes abortive, but nevertheless distinctively his own.

**Walt Whitman’s Poetical Techniques**

In his poems he used some special poetical techniques.

**Alliteration**

«Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking»: «'And thenceforward all summer in the sound of the sea.' This use of alliteration of the creates a sound of the sea… which is very effective. This is by no means the only use of alliteration in the poem. Other groupings such as 'sterile sands,' 'briers and blackberries, ' 'Listened long and long,' 'sweetest song and songs,' and 'singer solitary' occur throughout the poem» (Kimmel 9/16/96).

**Anaphora**

Anaphora: repetition of words or phrases at beginnings of lines.

«Crossing Brooklyn Ferry»: «'Others will enter… / Others will watch… / Others will see' and also 'Just as you feel… / Just as you are refresh'd… / Just as you stand… / Just as you look…'» (Barham 9/17/96).

«One of the first cases in which he uses anaphora extensively in *Drum-Taps* is in the section titled «Poet,» in which the first four lines begin with 'I hear, ' and lines 8–12 begin with 'I see, ' while the entire first 13 lines begin with 'I.' He is creating one large audio and visual image in those lines, with each line being a separate image, but all tied together by their common beginning. In this case, lines all beginning with the same word also help to set up a rhythm, as the reader is inclined to read all of the 'I's with the same amount of stress, like reading off items on a list. Through the use of anaphora in this way, Whitman can express one theme in several different lines, with several different ideas, while having a definite link between each thought. In the first section of 'Give Me the Splendid Sun, ’ Whitman begins the first eleven lines with 'Give me.' Although in each line he is asking for a different thing, the entire thought expressed in the lines together is his desire for 'nature's primal sanities.' With the common beginning in these lines, he is expressing all of his values at once in eleven lines, with eleven different ideas» (Minis 9/17/96).

**«Free» verse**

Definition: verse that, while free of rhyme and a consistent rhythm, may employ other structural and sound elements, such as anaphora and chiasmus.

Whitman may have picked up on Emerson's line in «The Poet»: «For it is not meters, but a meter-making argument that makes a poem.»

But he also may have found models in «Proverbial Philosophy,» a free verse poem that Tupper published in 1838, and in a poem by George Lippard (Reynolds).

**Catalogs**

«In many of Whitman's poems, like *Children of Adam*, he lists many things at once. In *Children of Adam*, section 9, he lists over 80 parts of the body, both male and female. He does this listing technique again in *Song of the Open Road*, when he tells of all the things he passes and sees on his journey» (Baldwin 9/17/96)

They show a childish joy in naming things (Matthiessen 518).

Perhaps they also betray a desire to incorporate everything in a poem, as Melville tried to do in *Moby-Dick*.

Whitman may have borrowed the idea from contemporary travel literature, including books called *Mississippi in Gobs* and *New York in Chunks* (Reynolds).

«In 'Drum-Taps' the smaller passages which make up the whole poem seem to give all different perspectives of the war. The perspective of the mother, father, child, wound dresser, slave woman, and even a banner are all given. In turn, the reader is fed a catalog of various feelings about war. Also, in 'Drum-Taps' and particularly in the passage 'First O Songs for a Prelude, ' there is a catalog. Whitman lists and lists all different people with varying occupations and how they are getting ready for war. Thy lawyer, the mechanic, and salesman are all mentioned. It would be easy to see Whitman’s use of the catalog as simply 'show[ing] childish joy in naming things' (Matthiessen 518). However, I see it as Whitman's way of presenting universality. Everyone is going through this same event, and everyone is feeling emotions about the war. The catalog shows common links among humans» (Plonk 9/19/96).

**Chiasmus**

Definition: a mirror pattern in words, sounds, or other elements.

See «Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking,» lines 71–74: «SOOTHE! Soothe! Soothe!» / CLOSE on its wave soothes the wave BEHIND / And again another BEHIND embracing and lapping, everyone CLOSE, / But my love SOOTHES not me, not me.»

See «By the Bivouac's fitful flame»: «By the Bivouac's fitful flame… / A procession… / A solemn and slow procession… / By the Bivouac's fitful flame» (Daigneault 9/20/96).

See Psalm 124:7: «Our soul is ESCAPED as a bird out of the SNARE of the fowlers: the SNARE is broken, and we are ESCAPED.»

**Circles and Cycles**

*Drum-Taps*: «He begins the poem with a short prelude and then begins telling of the year 1861 and how all the men were having to leave their jobs and wives to go fight in the war. Then he starts telling about the war itself. He describes cavalries crossing fords and army corps marching to battle. In one section, he speaks of a soldier who watches his friend get fatally wounded. The soldier holds a vigil all night for his friend and then buries him when he dies. In another section, he describes a soldier's family–his mother, father, and sister–when they receive a letter telling them that he has been injured in battle. Whitman brings out the true emotion of the families during this time. After describing all of the different parts to the war, at the end of the poem, Whitman comes full circle as he does in all his works by declaring that the war is over and that there is peace throughout the country. In this manner, Whitman completes his poetic story, and the reader is fulfilled» (Jake man 9/19/96).

**Envelope**

«Passage to India»: «O…Of you…Of you…Of you…O»

Psalm 70:1–5: «Make haste…. Let… Let… Let… Make haste.»

**Genre**

Whitmanhad written sensational stories; visionary works, nationalistic works, biblical stories, and works on social issues.

«If *Leaves of Grass* was the era's most expansive poem, continuing the largest variety of voices and topics, it was largely because it was written by one who had unabashedly tried his hand at virtually every genre that had been popularized by previous American writers» (Reynolds 106).

**Grammatical mood**

Section 9 of «Crossing Brooklyn Ferry» is a mirror image of Section 3, except that mood of Section 9 is imperative, and that of Section 3 is indicative.

**Imagery**

Still pictures suggest immortality of images, as on Grecian Urn, and may reflect interest in photography. Whitman uses unpoetic objects and makes them poetic.

He also uses outrageous analogies: «the cow crunching with depressed head surpasses any statue» resembles Thoreau's description of the «cheap and natural music of the cow» in *Walden*.

*Drum-Taps*:» Whitman uses [phrases] like 'the young men falling in and arming, / The mechanics arming, (the trowel, the jack-plane, the blacksmith's hammer, toast aside with precipitation).' This use of imagery allows Whitman to make descriptive scenes that the reader can attach himself to and see» (Aron 9/19/96).

«Another technique Whitman makes use of is that of imagery: 'We primeval forests felling, we the rivers stemming, vexing we and piercing deep the mines within… we the virgin soil up heaving…' The extensive use of imagery serves to widen the reader's scope of comprehension for the picture that Whitman is painting. The content is driven by the images like still photographs coming together to form a film» (Premakumar 9/17/96).

**Line length**

Lines in «Crossing Brooklyn Ferry» suggest tides.

Length of lines in Section 1 suggests flood tide because each is longer than the one preceding it.

Sections also suggest flood tide because they grow longer in groups of three: a, a+b, a+b+c, d, d+e, d+e+f, g, g+h, g+h+i

Elsewhere, Whitman often achieves an aural effect by writing increasingly longer lines, suggesting expansion of thought.

«In most of Whitman's poems, the pattern is not rhythmic, yet the pattern lies in the length of the lines. In one verse, the first line is of typical length, and the second line is extended a little longer than the first. The pattern continues with the third and fourth lines each becoming longer than their predecessor. The reason seems to be to build up a climax in each of Whitman's verses, and the fifth and final line is the conclusion of the verse. This style puts a greater emphasis on each verse and provides the reader with various miniature climaxes» (Atkinson 9/12/96).

**Musicality**

Whitman was inspired by opera.

He portrays himself as a bard, singing for the common people.

**Onomatopoeia**

«Beat! Beat! Drums!»: «Throughout the poem, he not only repeats, 'Beat! Beat! Drums! – Blow! Bugles! Blow!' but he uses the words in the stanzas that incorporate some kind of sound. He uses words like 'burst, ' 'pound, ' 'rumble, ' 'rattle, ' and 'thump.' I can associate sounds with each of these words. I can hear the drums drumming and the bugles blowing» (Patterson 9/17/96).

«One example of this can be seen in 'Song of the Banner at Daybreak' when the flag expresses its voice by 'Flapping, flapping, flapping, flapping…'» (Daugherty 9/19/96).

**Oratory**

Whitman lived at a time of great orators, such as Daniel Webster.

He may have been influenced by grass-roots reformers' oratory (Reynolds).

**Parallels**

Definition: variations on a theme, often linked by anaphora (the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of lines).

«Song of Myself»: «Have you reckoned a thousand acres much? have you reckoned the earth much? Have you…»

«Crossing Brooklyn Ferry»: «I see… I see… I see…»

See Ecclesiastes 3:2 – …: «A time to be born, and a time to die: a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted…»

**Persona**

«'Persona, ' as defined by *A Handbook to Literature*, is a mask created by an author and through which a narrative is told. Intrinsic in the concept of persona is that the author's own views are masked by the implied author through which he/she speaks (385). Another interpretation of 'persona, ' the Jungian view, is that persona is a set of attitudes adopted by an individual to fit himself for the social roles he sees as his (Simpson 598)…. Both of these explanations of persona are applicable to Whitman's works» (Hundley 1).

**Punctuation**

«Section 9 of «Passage to India» includes 29 lines. Twenty-five of these lines end either in a question or exclamation mark. The effect of this punctuation is that Whitman depicts the deep emotion that he pours into his writing» (Lasher 9/17/96).

Whitman «uses exclamation points frequently, creating extra emphasis on lines. The beautiful things in life become magnificent, and sad become tragic» (Minis 9/17/96).

Whitman believed that poetry should be spoken, not written, and this basic criterion governed the concept and form of his poetry. He used repetition and reiterative devices (as, for example, in «Out of the Cradle Endlessly rocking,» the lines «Loud! Loud! Loud!» and «Blow! Blow! Blow!») He also employed elements of the opera (the aria and the recitative) in his poems.

He also was a master of exuberant phrases and images: «The beautiful uncut hair of graves» («Song of Myself,» section 6) is extraordinarily descriptive. Conversely, another description of the grass in the same section of the same poem, where it is described as «the handkerchief of the Lord,» is trivial.

Whitman brought vitality and picturesqueness to his descriptions of the physical world. He was particularly sensitive to sounds and described them with acute awareness. His view of the world was dominated by its change and fluidity, and this accounts for his frequent use of «ing» forms, either present participle or gerund.

Whitman’s language is full of his eccentricities: he used the word «presidential» for presidency, «pave» for pavement, and he spelled Canada with a K.

«Leaves of grass» contains archaic expressions – for example, betimes, betwixt, methinks, haply, and list (for listen). Whitman also employs many colloquial expressions and technical and commercial terms. Words from foreign languages add color and variety to his style.

**Peculiarities in Whitman’s Rhythm and Verse**

Whitman’s use of rhythms is notable. A line of his verse, if scanned in the routine way, seems like a prose sentence, or an advancing wave of prose rhythm. Yet his work is composed in lines, not in sentences as prose would be. The line is the unit of sense in Whitman.

Whitman experimented with meter, rhythm, and form because he thought that experimentation was the law of the changing times, and that innovation was the gospel of the modern world. Whitman’s fondness for trochaic movement rather than iambic movement shows the distinctive quality of his use of meter. An iamb is a metrical foot of two syllables, the second of which is accented. A trochee is a metrical foot consisting of an accented syllable followed by an unaccepted one. The iambic is the most commonly used meter in English poetry, partly because of the structure of English speech. English phrases normally begin with an article, preposition, or conjunction which merges into the word that follows it, thus creating the rising inflection which is iambic. Why, then, did Whitman prefer the trochaic to the iambic meter? It was partly due to the poet’s desire for declamatory expression and oratorical style, since the trochee is more suitable for eloquent expression than the iambic meter. Whitman also liked to do things that were unusual and novel.

**Imagery – a Special Technique of Walt Whitman’s**

Imagery means a figurative use of language. Whitman’s use of imagery shows his imaginative power, the depth of his sensory perceptions, and his capacity to capture reality instantaneously. He expresses his impressions of the world in language which mirrors the present. He makes the past come alive in his images and makes the future seem immediate. Whitman’s imagery has some logical order on the conscious level, but it also delves into the subconscious, into the world of memories, producing a stream-of-consciousness of images. These images seem like parts of a dream, pictures of fragments of a world. On the other hand, they have solidity; they build the structure of the poems.

**The Use of Symbols in Whitman’s Works**

A symbol is an emblem, a concrete object that stands for something abstract; for example, the dove is a symbol of peace; the cross, Christianity. Literary symbols, however, have a more particular connotation. They sometimes signify the total meaning, or the different levels of meaning, which emerge from the work of art in which they appear. A white whale is just an animal–but in Melville’s Moby Dick it is a god to some characters, evil incarnate to others, and a mystery to others. In other words, it has an extended connotation which is symbolic.

In the mid‑1880s, the Symbolist movement began in France, and the conscious use of symbols became the favorite practice of poets. The symbolists and Whitman had much in common; both tried to interpret the universe through sensory perceptions, and both broke away from traditional forms and methods. But the symbols of the French symbolists were highly personal, whereas in Whitman the use of the symbol was governed by the objects he observed: the sea, the birds, the lilacs, the Calamus plant, the sky, and so on. Nevertheless, Whitman did have an affinity with the symbolists; they even translated some of his poems into French.

Whitman’s major concern was to explore, discuss, and celebrate his own self, his individuality and his personality. Second, he wanted to eulogize democracy and the American nation with its achievements and potential. Third, he wanted to give poetical expression to his thoughts on life’s great, enduring mysteries–birth, death, rebirth or resurrection, and reincarnation.

**The Self**

To 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.

**The Body and the Soul**

Whitman is a poet of these elements in man, the body and the soul. He thought that we could comprehend the soul only through the medium of the body. To Whitman, all matter is as divine as the soul; since the body is as sacred and as spiritual as the soul, when he sings of the body or its performances, he is singing a spiritual chant.

**Nature**

Whitman shares the Romantic poet’s relationship with nature. To him, as to Emerson, nature is divine and an emblem of God. The universe is not dead matter, but full of life and meaning. He loves the earth, the flora and fauna of the earth, the moon and stars, the sea, and all other elements of nature. He believes that man is nature’s child and that man and nature must never be disjoined.

**Time**

Whitman’s concept of the ideal poet is, in a way, related to his ideas on time. He conceives of the poet as a time-binder, one who realizes that the past, present, and future are «not disjoined, but joined,» that they are all stages in a continuous flow and cannot be considered as separate and distinct. These modem ideas of time have given rise to new techniques of literary expression–for example, the stream-of-consciousness viewpoint.

**Cosmic Consciousness**

Whitman believed that the cosmos, or the universe, does not consist merely of lifeless matter; it has awareness. It is full of life and filled with the spirit of God. The cosmos is God and God is the cosmos; death and decay are unreal. This cosmic consciousness is, indeed, one aspect of Whitman’s mysticism.

**Mysticism**

Mysticism is an experience that has a spiritual meaning which is not apparent to the senses nor to the intellect. Thus mysticism, an insight into the real nature of man, God, and the universe, is attained through one’s intuition. The mystic believes in the unity of God and man, man and nature, God and the universe. To a mystic, time and space are unreal, since both can be overcome by man by spiritual conquest. Evil, too, is unreal, since God is present everywhere. Man communicates with his soul in a mystical experience, and Whitman amply expresses his responses to the soul in *Leaves of Grass*, especially in «Song of Myself.» He also expresses his mystical experience of his body or personality being permeated by the supernatural. Whitman’s poetry is his artistic expression of various aspects of his mystical experience.

**Bardic Symbols**

No one, even after the fourth or fifth reading, can pretend to say what the «Bardic Symbols» symbolize. The poet walks by the sea, and addressing the drift, the foam, the billows and the wind, attempts to force from them, by his frantic outcry, the the [sic] true solution of the mystery of Existence, always most heavily and darkly felt in the august ocean presence. All is confusion, waste and sound. It is in vain that you attempt to gather the poet's full meaning from what he says or what he hints. You can only take refuge in occasional passages like this, in which he wildly laments the feebleness and inefficiency of that art which above all others seeks to make the soul visible and audible:

O, baffled, lost,

Bent to the very earth, here preceding what follows,

Terrified with myself that I have dared to open my mouth,

Aware now, that amid all the blab, whose echoes recoil

upon me, I have not once had the least idea who or

what I am,

*But that before all my insolent poems the real one still stands untouched, untold, altogether unreached,*

Withdrawn far, mocking me with mock-congratulatory

signs and bows,

With peals of distant ironical laughter at every word I

have written or shall write,

Striking me with insults till I fall helpless upon the sand.

If indeed, we were compelled to guess the meaning of the poem, we should say it all lay in the compass of these lines of Tennyson–the saddest and profoundest that ever were written:

Break, break, break,

On thy cold gray stones, O sea!

And I would that my tongue could utter

The thoughts that arise in me! 1

An aspiration of mute words without relevancy, without absolute signification, and full of «divine despair 2 .»

We think it has been an error in Whitman to discard forms and laws, for without them the poet diffuses. He may hurry forward with impulses, but he is spent before he reaches the reader's heart through his bewildered understanding. Steam subject, is a mighty force; steam free, is an impalpable vapor, only capable of delicate hues and beauty with the sun upon it. But O, poet! there is not a sun in every sky.

**The theme of love**

Themes of sex and sexuality have dominated Leaves of Grass from the very beginning and have shaped the course of the book's reception. The first edition in 1855 contained what were to be called «Song of Myself,» «The Sleepers,» and «I Sing the Body Electric,» which are «about» sexuality (though of course not exclusively) throughout. From the very beginning, Whitman wove together themes of «manly love» and «sexual love,» with great emphasis on intensely passionate attraction and interaction, as well as bodily contact (touch, embrace) in both. Simultaneously in sounding these themes, he equated the body with the soul, and defined sexual experience as essentially spiritual experience. He very early adopted two phrenological terms to discriminate between the two relationships: «amativeness» for man-woman love «adhesiveness» for «manly love.» Although Whitman did not in the 1855 Preface call direct attention to this element in his work, in one of his anonymous reviews of his book («Walt Whitman and His Poems,» 1855) he wrote of himself and the 1855 Leaves: «The body, he teaches, is beautiful. Sex is also beautiful…. Sex will not be put aside; it is a great ordination of the universe. He works the muscle of the male and the teeming fibre of the female throughout his writings, as wholesome realities, impure only by deliberate intention and effort» (Poetry and Prose 535).

Whitman added other sex poems to his book in 1856, including «Poem of Procreation» (now «A Woman Waits for Me») and «Bunch Poem» («Spontaneous Me»). At the end of the volume he included, without permission, Emerson's letter praising the 1855 Leaves (its «great power,» and «free and brave thought»), and alongside it he published his own letter in reply. He may have been misled by the nature of Emerson's praise to emphasize the centrality of his themes of adhesiveness and amativeness: «As to manly friendship, everywhere observed in The States, there is not the first breath of it to be observed in print. I say the body of a man or woman, the main matter, is so far quite unexpressed in poems; but the body is to be expressed, and sex is» (Poetry and Prose 529).

It was not until the 1860 edition of Leaves that Whitman gathered the poems celebrating sexuality into the cluster «Enfans d'Adam» («Children of Adam») and the poems celebrating «manly love» into «Calamus.» When Whitman came to Boston to see his book through the press there, Emerson tried to persuade him to withdraw the sex poems, but Whitman refused. He probably understood that if he really desexed Leaves it would be like self-castration. Although Emerson never publicly withdrew his endorsement of Whitman, he passed up opportunities to repeat it. Emerson's silence together with Whitman's loss of his job at the Interior Department in 1865, charged with writing «indecent poems,» were early warning signs that he and his Leaves were embarked on a difficult road ahead.

In subsequent editions of Leaves, Whitman revised and shifted his poems of amativeness and adhesiveness, but by and large his dominant themes became not the body but the soul, not youth but old age–and death. His experience in the Civil War hospitals seems to have provided a turning point for Whitman's focus. He even claimed, in «A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads» (1888), that the war revealed to him, «as by flashes of lightning,» the «final reasons-for-being» of his «passionate song» (Poetry and Prose 516). In his Civil War poems, Drum-Taps (1865, later included in the 1867 Leaves), the «Calamus» theme runs throughout – «cropping out» as Whitman himself said of it in his 1876 Preface to Two Rivulets (Prose Works 2:471). Whitman critics have not failed to notice in «Drum-Taps» the poet's theme of adhesiveness–the joy in the physical transmuted by the war into pain and anguish–in such poems as «The Wound-Dresser,» «Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night,» and «A March in the Ranks Hard-Prest, and the Road Unknown.»

In 1868 W.M. Rossetti published a British edition of Whitman's poetry, Poems by Walt Whitman. In effect, this was an expurgated Leaves, with «Song of Myself,» «Children of Adam,» and «Calamus» omitted, except for a few poems of the «Calamus» cluster placed in a section entitled «Walt Whitman.» In spite of Rossetti's gutting of the book, it established Whitman's reputation in England and attracted many ardent admirers. Some, when they became familiar with the poems purged by Rossetti, became even more ardent, while others turned hostile. The former included Anne Gilchrist, who fell in love with Whitman and wrote an article «An Englishwoman's Estimate of Walt Whitman» (Boston 1870), especially praising Whitman's sex poems. Algernon Swinburne wrote a poem in praise of Walt Whitman in Song Before Sunrise (1871), but loudly reversed himself in his 1887 essay, «Whitmania,» after encountering all of Leaves. John Addington Symonds read Whitman's poems as a young man, and, bowled over, found his way to the whole of «Calamus.» He would later strike up a correspondence with Whitman in Camden, pressing him on the real meaning of his «Calamus» poems, leading Whitman ultimately to reply in a notorious letter in 1890 claiming to have had six illegitimate children during his «jolly» «times south» (Poetry and Prose 958).

Although in the fifth edition (1871–1872) of Leaves, Whitman seemed temporarily to lose his way in shaping Leaves to contain his new work («Passage to India» and related poems), some ten years later, in the sixth edition (1881–1882), he adopted his earlier practice of integrating the poems of a lifetime into a single structure. Before the book could be distributed by its publisher in Boston, however, it was found to be immoral by the Society for the Suppression of Vice; because Whitman refused to remove the offensive parts, the book was withdrawn and published in Philadelphia. The Boston censors found offensive not only the whole of «A Woman Waits for Me,» «The Dalliance of the Eagles,» and «To a Common Prostitute,» but also passages vital to the life of a number of Whitman's greatest works, including «Song of Myself.» But the «Calamus» cluster with its songs of «manly love» was left intact!

In «A Backward Glance,» Whitman made his final assessment of the sex poems that had given him so many problems. Writing a bit after the most recent attempt to censor his book, whitman affirms boldly–» Leaves of Grass is avowedly the song of Sex and Amativeness, and even Animality…. Of this feature… I shall only say the espousing principle of those lines so gives breath of life to my whole scheme that the bulk of the pieces might as well have been left unwritten were those lines omitted» (Poetry and Prose 518). A similar claim might have been made for the «Calamus» poems of adhesiveness; that no such claim was made was attributable, surely, to the fact that they had never inspired public controversy as had the sex poems.

**The theme of death.**

Whitman deals with death as a fact of life. Death in life is a fact, but life in death is a truth for Whitman; he is thus a poet of matter and of spirit.

Whitman’s view on death is reflective of his belief in Transcendentalism. In «Song of Myself», Whitman uses the scientific principle of Thermodynamics to assert that there is life after death, because energy cannot be destroyed; only transformed. In stanza six, he writes «And what do you think has become of the women and children? / they are alive and well somewhere, / The smallest sprouts shows there is really no death». Death contends that life remains long after death, and to find him now all one must do is look «under your boot-soles».

Lincoln’s death influenced Whitman’s works a lot too.

The death of Abraham Lincoln had a profound impact on Walt Whitman and his writing. It is the subject of one of his most highly regarded and critically examined pieces, «When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed» (1865–1866) and one of his best-known poems, «O Captain! My Captain!» (1865–1866). Whitman also delivered (sporadically) annual public lectures commemorating Lincoln's death beginning in April 1879. Although the two never met, Whitman and Lincoln, both deeply committed to the Union, remain intertwined in Whitman's writing and in American mythology.

Whitman intensely admired Lincoln from the late 1850s onward, remarking at one point, «After my dear, dear mother, I guess Lincoln gets almost nearer me than anybody else» (Traubel 38). On the Friday of 14 April 1865, when John Wilkes Booth shot Lincoln at Ford's Theater in Washington, D.C., Whitman was in New York and read about the assassination in the daily newspapers and extras.

His first poem responding to Lincoln's death came only a couple of days later when he added to Drum-Taps (1865), already in press, a short piece titled «Hushed Be the Camps To-day» (1865). Although it ends solemnly with «the heavy hearts of soldiers,» this public commemoration of Lincoln's funeral–spoken to the poet by and for Union soldiers–asks us to «celebrate» his death as it remembers «the love we bore him.» «Hushed Be the Camps To-day» is not one of Whitman's best-known poems, but it is significant not merely because it was his first poetic word on Lincoln's death, but also because it exemplifies the primary features that generally characterize Whitman's poetic treatment of Lincoln's death: as in «Lilacs,» the poem mourns for the dead but celebrates death; it identifies Lincoln's death with the coming of peace; and it remembers Lincoln not because he was a great leader or conqueror but because he was well-loved. The poem also associates Lincoln with the war's ordinary soldiers, an association that prefigures «Lilacs» and its treatment of Lincoln's death as a metonymy for all the war dead.

«Hushed Be the Camps To-day» and the other Lincoln poems («Lilacs,» «O Captain!,» and «This Dust Was Once the Man» [1871]) never mention Lincoln by name. As some critics have noted, Whitman had no need in the postbellum era to refer directly to Lincoln because his readers would easily recognize these poems as elegies for President Lincoln. Later, after the immediacy of Lincoln's death had faded into historical memory, Whitman identified the subject of these poems by grouping the four of them together, first in a cluster titled «President Lincoln's Burial Hymn» in an annex to Passage to India (1871) and later in the «Memories of President Lincoln» cluster in the 1881 edition of Leaves of Grass. Other critics believe that the lack of direct reference to Lincoln indicates the poet's attempt to address universal themes.

Whitman does, of course, use Lincoln's death to talk about subjects beyond the events at Ford's Theater, including the subject of death itself. In «Lilacs,» Whitman reconciles himself and the nation to Lincoln's death and death in general by fashioning the historical fact of the assassination and burial into a spiritual embrace of death in which death becomes both a personal and a national regeneration and cleansing. The treatment of Lincoln's death in «Lilacs» is famous for its symbolism and its formal, musical qualities. Indeed the poem relentlessly transforms its historical content into symbols. Lincoln as a person disappears only to reappear as a «western fallen star» and as the evoked metonymic associations of the poems other symbols and images–coffin, lilacs, cloud, and the hermit thrush's song.

Whitman's handling of Lincoln's death in the lectures diametrically reverses the musical, ethereal, often abstract, heavily symbolized style of «Lilacs.» In his lecture on the» death of Abraham Lincoln» (1879), Whitman depicts the scene of the murder with dramatic immediacy, as if he were an eyewitness. The narration is suspenseful, detailed, and focuses on specifics (sometimes minutiae). Although Whitman was not an eyewitness, his close companion, Peter Doyle, was at Ford's Theater, and Whitman made impressive use of Doyle's story in his imaginative retelling. In the lecture, the president's murder is not a bizarre denouement to an inevitable war but rather the culmination of and solution to all the historic, national conflicts of the Civil War era. Lincoln's death becomes a metaphor for the bloody war itself and the climax of a lofty tragic drama that redeems the Union. Whitman's lecture turns Lincoln's assassination into the ceremonial sacrifice that gives new life to the nation.

Whitman's Lincoln possessed an undeniably heroic stature. Whitman called him «the grandest figure yet, on all the crowded canvas of the Nineteenth Century» (Prose Works 2:604). Still, the poet did not merely apotheosize the dead president; he also transformed Lincoln and his death into a symbolic referent for thoughts on the war, comradeship, democracy, union, and death. Perhaps best exemplified by the «Lilacs» elegy, Lincoln's death became the event around which Whitman twined so sadly and beautifully his understanding of death's affiliation with love.

**The theme of war**

If to begin discussion of the war poems, we should see how the experience of fratricidal war might affect Whitman as the poet of national union. This will lead to reflections on the tragedy of the Civil War. The poems of *Drum-Taps* – which proceed from militant exultation, to the actual experience of war, to demobilization and reconciliation–might be read as an attempt to place the butchery of the war within a poetic and ultimately regenerative design. Ask the students to compare Whitman's war poems with his earlier poems. They are at once more formally controlled and more realistic–stylistic changes that are linked with the war context. «A March in the Ranks Hard-Prest, and the Road Unknown» and «The Artilleryman's Vision» are proto-modern poems in which the individual appears as an actor in a drama of history he no longer understands nor controls. Whitman's ambivalence about black emancipation is evident in «Ethiopia Saluting the Colors.» «Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night» and «As I Lay with My Head in Your Lap Camerado» are particularly effective in suggesting the ways the wartime context of male bonding and comradeship gave Whitman a legitimate language and social frame within which to express his love for men.

**Transcendentalism**

Transcendentalism, which originated with German philosophers, became a powerful movement in New England between 1815 and 1836. Emerson’s Nature (1836) was a manifesto of American transcendental thought. It implied that the true reality is the spirit and that it lies beyond the reach or realm of the senses. The area of sensory perceptions must be transcended to reach the spiritual reality. American transcendentalism accepted the findings of contemporary science as materialistic counterparts of spiritual achievement. Whitman’s «Passage to India» demonstrates this approach. The romanticist in Whitman is combined with the transcendentalist in him. His quest for transcendental truths is highly individualistic and therefore his thought, like Emerson’s, is often unsystematic and prophetic.

**Personalism**

Whitman used the term «personalism» to indicate the fusion of the individual with the community in an ideal democracy. He believed that every man at the time of his birth receives an identity, and this identity is his «soul.» The soul, finding its abode in man, is individualized, and man begins to develop his personality. The main idea of personalism is that the person is the be-all of all things; it is the source of consciousness and the senses. One is because God is; therefore, man and God are one–one personality. Man’s personality craves immortality because it desires to follow the personality of God. This idea is in accord with Whitman’s notion of the self. Man should first become himself, which is also the way of coming closer to God. Man should comprehend the divine soul within him and realize his identity and the true relationship between himself and God. This is the doctrine of personalism.

**Conclusion**

Walt Whitman’s achievement as a poet and prophet is truly monumental. He exercised a deep influence on his immediate successors in American letters, and even on modern poets, although he himself was a highly individualistic poet. As a symbolist, his influence was felt in Europe, where he was considered the greatest poet America had yet produced. His high style and elevated expression found echoes in Emily Dickinson, Hart Crane, Marianne Moore, and others. Whitman as a stylist is the culmination of the sublime tradition in America, and even Allen Ginsberg, so different from Whitman in so many respects, follows the Whitman tradition of using invocative language. Whitman, though a man of his age, an essentially nineteenth-century poet, exercised a profound influence on twentieth-century poets and modern poetry in the use of language, in the processes of symbol and image-making, in exercising great freedom in meter and form, and in cultivating the individualistic mode. In many ways Whitman is modern because he is prophetic; he is a poet not only of America but of the whole of mankind. He has achieved the Olympian stature and the rare distinction of a world poet.

In our work we analyzed features of Walt Whitman’s style. We tried to study his literary techniques and also showed philosophical basics of his works.

We think that we have done all our tasks rather well. We achieved a deep analyze of some of his works and viewed the poetical techniques of Walt Whitman and the uniqueness of his style.

**List of Literature**

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